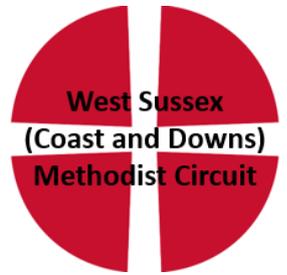


Worshipping Together

West Sussex Coast and Downs Circuit

September 2021



SEASON OF CREATION

September 5th marks Climate Sunday and the start of 'Season of Creation', a period when churches are encouraged to focus on creation. With COP26 in November and increasing focus on the effects of climate change, we focus this month on God as creator and a Christian response to God in caring for creation.

We invite you to use **Worshipping Together** at a time that suits you, in whatever way works for you, to spend time with God knowing that you are **Worshipping Together** with others across the circuit family.

As you worship and draw closer to God, may God draw close to you, speak to you and journey with you beyond the words of these pages, strengthened by the ever present Holy Spirit.

Please share these resources with others.

Also available at: www.westsussexcoastanddownscircuit.co.uk

GATHERING

As you prepare to worship, you may like to prepare with a period of quiet, or light a candle. As you prepare, become aware of God's already present presence.

Gathering Scripture: Psalm 24:1-2; 9-10

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it;
for he has founded it on the seas and established it on the rivers.

Lift up your heads, O gates, and be lifted up, O ancient doors!

That the King of glory may come in.

Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory.

Sing the following hymn of praise, or a favourite of your own:

Sing of the Lord's goodness¹

1. Sing of the Lord's goodness,
Father of all wisdom,
come to him and bless his name.
Mercy he has shown us,
his love is for ever,
faithful to the end of days.

*Come then, all you nations,
sing of your Lord's goodness,
melodies of praise and thanks to God.
Ring out the Lord's glory,
praise him with your music,
worship him and bless his name.*

2. Power he has wielded,
honour is his garment,
risen from the snares of death.
His word he has spoken,
one bread he has broken,
new life he now gives to all.

3. Courage in our darkness,
comfort in our sorrow,
Spirit of our God most high;
solace for the weary,
pardon for the sinner,
splendour of the living God.

4. Praise him with your singing, praise him with the trumpet,
praise God with the lute and harp;
praise him with the cymbals, praise him with your dancing,
praise God till the end of days.

Prayers of praise²

Lord God, our creator, we praise you,
not only for the power you displayed when you created the world out of nothing,
but also for the love with which you continually hold your creation in caring hands.

We praise you for the way you have demonstrated your sovereign will,
not only through your creation, but also through the continuing re-creation of all
things through your Son, Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.

We add our praises to those who, down the centuries and all across the world,
have seen your glory, recognised your purpose, and responded to your love.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, transform them into praise that brings you glory.
We ask this through Jesus Christ,
through whom we offer all our praises. Amen.

¹ Sing of the Lord's goodness by Ernest Sands, Singing the Faith No.65

² Adapted from 500 Prayers for all Occasions by David Clowes, p35-6, No.70.

Below are readings and reflections for each week through September. This month we reflect on our relationship with creation.

These reflections are mere starting points, and you are encouraged to ponder and pray through and beyond what is written, as you listen and respond to God.

Caring for Creation

Week beginning Sunday 5th September



Reading: Genesis chapters 1 & 2

The first two chapters of the bible offer two accounts of creation. In chapter 1 we read a creation poem, each part of the poem begins with God speaking, and ends with 'and there was evening and morning'. Except when we get to day 7 – when God does not speak, does not create, does not work – but rests.

In chapter 2 we read a different creation account. Instead of a step-by-step account, we meet a more fluid one, where streams rise up, God plants a garden and causes trees and food to grow.

In both accounts, God creates human life, in 'our' image and likeness (1:27), receiving life by the very breathe of God (2:7). Human life lived in harmony with God's creation to nurture and care for it (1:28-31; 2:15).

From the beginning of time, we have been made in the likeness of God. Created with a capacity to be signs and symbols of God on earth – demonstrating God's character of goodness, faithfulness, compassion and love in our earthly living and care for creation.

Today, and elsewhere in scripture, we might see these qualities spoken of as being exercised in our relationships with other people. But in these creation accounts these qualities are to be evidenced first and foremost in our care for creation. In this light, care for creation is a fundamental calling for God's people.

Reflect: How does being 'made in the likeness of God' make you feel?
How is God calling you to care for creation today?

Act: Read Genesis 1 & 2 again, listening to what God says to you through the text.

Praising our Creator

Week beginning Sunday 12th September

Reading: Psalm 148

The Psalms (as well as other parts of scripture, e.g. Revelation 4; Colossians 1) are full of praise for our creator and creation, and as Christian people we are tasked with the purpose of praising God as creator.

In praising God as our creator, and creation's creator, we affirm and acclaim that God is creator. That may seem obvious, but it's an important point to make, because believing in God as creator is not a universal belief for all humanity.

Some do not believe any divine/higher 'being' exists. Others believe in some sort of divine being but may or may not attest to them as creator, and likewise, may or may not call them God – nor affirm a Christian understanding of God. To be a Christian and acclaim God as creator is to testify that our faith and trust is in God.

In placing faith and trust in God, we enter a relationship with God, and in that relationship, God entrusts us to seek to live distinctive and Godly lives, serving as signs of God's goodness to the world.

Praising God as creator is a distinctive act of faithfulness which we undertake as Christian people. Through praising God, we demonstrate to the world that creation has both a creator and a purpose - it does not simply exist for our self-interest and exploitation. In affirming that, we care for creation, through giving God the glory God deserves.

*“Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted;
his glory is above earth and heaven.” (Psalm 148:13)*

Reflect: What leads you to praise God?

Act: Take time this week to look at other Psalms of praise.

What about writing your own Psalm? Here's a template you could follow...

- 1. Address God, God's character and goodness**
- 2. Say why you want to praise God**
- 3. State something(s) you are grateful to God for**
- 4. Commit to praise and trust God in the days to come**

Salvation for all creation

Week beginning Sunday 19th September

Reading: John 3:16-17

John 3:16 is often quoted as the most famous verse in the Bible. However, what is interesting is that the verse is often used as a call to individuals to believe in Jesus as Saviour, or perish.



But the verse does not say for God so loved the **individual**, but that God so loved the **world**. Indeed verse 17 goes on to say that God sent Christ to the world to save the world.

There is much other material in scripture that calls for personal response to God, for us as individuals to choose to believe in God and trust in Christ as Saviour. But in our focus on creation, it is helpful to remember that the purpose of Christ was not merely to offer salvation to individual people. Christ came to save the world. All creation is offered redemption and salvation.

We now live in an in-between time, Christ has come and offered salvation to the world, but yet its full realisation is yet to be made fully know to us. We are still living the story, (e.g. read Revelation 21) and don't fully know what God's plan to make everything new is. What we do know, is that God is interested not only in human lives, but in all the world, and that gives us cause to care for creation, because God cares for creation.

Reflect: What does God saving the world mean for you and your faith?



Act: Give thanks today

Give thanks for Christ's life, death and resurrection.

Thank God for salvation

*Give thanks that despite not knowing what the future renewal of the world will be,
God is interested in us, our world and our lives today.*



Creation groans

Week beginning Sunday 26th September

Reading: Romans 8:18-25

We are regularly met with news items about climate change; extreme weather, rising sea levels. When I read Romans 8:22 I am always drawn to think about climate change and wonder if that is our modern day 'groan' of creation.

In week 1 we remembered how God made this world in its beauty and perfection, yet now it has been exploited and uncared for in a way that many experts are challenging all humanity to change the way we live on earth, because how we are living today is not sustainable for the future.

In being called to care for creation, we must be listening for God's voice. How as Christians should we be responding to the climate crisis with faithfulness and distinctiveness? How can our response to creation's groaning reveal God's glory?

As we come to the end of our 'Season of Creation', these words from Romans remind us that God's story is one of redemption – for while creation groans, we still have hope, because Christ has come and freed us from all that limits us. As we live on earth, we live in the knowledge that we are not limited to earthly life, but as children of God have the hope of eternity with God to cling to. While creation groans, and we strive to care for it, we need not ourselves groan, because hope is ours and nothing can stand in its way. For God is God, and God is always good.

Reflect:

Spend time listening to God asking how you can respond to the climate crisis.

Act: Commit to make a change to your lifestyle that will help care for the planet.

e.g. Stop buying fruit and veg in plastic bags, recycle more, or commit to purchase less single use plastic.



Hymn for Reflection: For the beauty of the earth³

1. For the beauty of the earth,
for the beauty of the skies,
for the love which from our birth
over and around us lies :

*Gracious God, to you we raise
this our sacrifice of praise.*

2. For the beauty of each hour
of the day and of the night,
hill and vale, and tree and flower,
sun and moon and stars of light :

3. For the joy of ear and eye,
for the heart and mind's delight,
for the mystic harmony
linking sense to sound and sight:

4. For the joy of human love,
brother, sister, parent, child,
friends on earth, and friends above,
pleasures pure and undefiled:

5. For each perfect gift and sign
of your love so freely given,
graces human and divine,
flowers of earth and buds of heaven:

Prayers for the world⁴

Creator God, giver of life,
You sustain the earth and direct the nations.
In this time of climate crisis:

grant us clarity to hear the groanings of creation and the cries of the poor;
challenge us to change our lifestyles;
guide our leaders to take courageous action;
enable your church to be a beacon of hope;
and foster within us a renewed vision of your purposes for your world;

Through Jesus Christ our Lord,
by and for whom all things were made. Amen

Prayers for others

Name before God people, places, and situations around the world in need today.

Gracious God, who is creator, redeemer and sustainer,
hear these prayers, yearnings and desires of our hearts.

We thank you that you hear us, and we pray your will be done: ***Our Father...***

Amen

³ For the beauty of the earth by Folliott Sandford Pierpoint (1835–1917), Singing the Faith No.102

⁴ Prayers by Dave Bookless, written for COP26.



Sing the following hymn, or a favourite of your own:

Let all the world in every corner sing⁵

1. Let all the world in every corner sing: my God and King!
The heavens are not too high,
his praise may thither fly;
the earth is not too low,
his praises there may grow.

Let all the world in every corner sing: my God and King!

2. Let all the world in every corner sing: my God and King!
The Church with psalms must shout,
no door can keep them out;
but above all, the heart
must bear the longest part.

Let all the world in every corner sing: my God and King!

Closing Prayer⁶

Lord, we thank you for the beauty and wonder that can be seen in all of creation. As you breathed life into this world and into our beings, we ask you to breathe life into us once again.

We pray for you to give us the strength to respond to creation in a way which reflects your loving care and concern for all things.

As we breathe in your love, help us to breathe out your love.

As we breathe in your grace, help us to breathe out your grace.

As we breathe in your beauty, help us to breathe out your beauty.

May we reflect your nature in all that we do. Amen.

Acknowledgements

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Bible texts from NRSV unless otherwise stated, www.biblegateway.com

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for resources and ideas that have inspired some material.*

⁵ Let all the world by George Herbert, Singing the Faith No.57

⁶ From resources for Worship on Climate Sunday, collated by the Salvation Army