



Climate Change and the Purposes of God

Session two: How can I better celebrate creation as God's gift?

Notes for group leaders

Purpose of this session

The purpose of this session is to 'find joy in creation', to recognize that all we have comes to us a gift, and to celebrate the wonder and diversity of God's earth.

Ice breaker for a larger group

Copy the four questions below (or design your own) and distribute them. Form two concentric circles and walk around in opposite directions to suitably inspiring music (for example; the Four Seasons, Beethoven's 6th).

When the music stops, face someone in the other circle. One person reads out a question which they discuss with their partner till the music starts again:

- 1. What do you see when you open the front door in the morning?*
- 2. With which of your senses do you relate best to nature?*
- 3. What grieves you most about what is happening in relation to climate change?*
- 4. What faith resources help you to live simply with creation?*

Usually people get deep into conversation and you have to move them on! Try and make sure people talk with someone different each time.

Session two: How can I better celebrate creation as God's gift?

1. How do you see the world?

- (a) What do you see when you open the front door in the morning?
- (b) With which of your senses do you relate best to nature?
- (c) What affects you most about what is happening to our changing climate?
- (d) What faith resources help you to live simply with creation?

2. What comes to mind when you hear the word 'nature'?

Do we as Christians think differently from the secular world about what 'nature' means?

How we see the world affects our attitude to it. As Alister McGrath says, some people see 'nature' as a mindless force causing inconvenience - something to be tamed. For others, 'nature' means an open-air gymnasium offering leisure and sports facilities. Yet others use 'nature' to describe a wild wilderness, associated with scuba-diving and hiking and hunting. Or as a supply depot producing minerals, water and food to sustain human life. Nature can be homely, as in 'nature study' at school. Or it can be awesome, as when seeing for the first time the Grand Canyon, or terrifying, as when facing the earthquake and tsunami on the coast of Japan. We all see nature as something. Christians have always seen nature as God's creation.

Christians think of nature as 'God's creation'. In this they are following in the footsteps of some of the poets who wrote the psalms (e.g. Psalm 8, Psalm 19, Psalm 104).

Reflection on Psalm 104 (*There is a DVD with the words of Psalm 104 from The Message version of the Bible, produced by A Rocha, which can be downloaded from the ON website). This is best read in small sections, with time for reflection between each section, asking ourselves what this psalm implies about how we should treat Nature as God's creation).*

- *The opening paragraph (v1-4) celebrates God's majesty within the whole celestial world. The world was created to serve his purpose and reveal his glory.*
- *In verses 5-9 we are back on earth, with a celebration of God as creator. There is wonder at God's creative power and His trustworthiness.*
- *Verses 10 – 18 speak of God's sustaining providence as life-giver, providing habitation and food for animals and human beings. Life -and the means of life - come to us as gift.*
- *Verses 19 – 23 reflect on the moon and the sun, which mark the seasons. Here is the importance of time as well as space. Time, too, is given by God.*
- *The sea monsters are also part of God's providence (v 24-26). The sea is sometimes used in the Bible as a symbol of disorder, chaos and fear.' But in this psalm, the sea is fruitful as well as frightening. The chaotic, overwhelming aspects of life, are none the less held in the hands of the Creator and life-giver.*
- *Verses 27-30 illustrate how God preserves all life through the life-giving power of his Spirit. Here is a religious interpretation of the rhythm of living and dying, which characterises all the natural world.*

- *The climax of the poem (verses 31 – 34) is the psalmist meditating, praising, worshipping. There is a point of silence and waiting - from which to contemplate God, the giver of all things.*
- *Then, strangely, in the middle of this context of worship, there is a jarring note about sin (v 35). There is no cheap optimism that shuts its eyes to the dark side of life. The psalmist is not unaware that there is misery, struggle and injustice in the world. He even speaks of God's thunder (v 32). But he does so in the context of awe and worship.*
- *It is the psalmist's desire that God's joy in the creature, and the creature's joy in God should come together (v 34) which leads to his strong plea that everything which stifles thanksgiving and dims God's glory should be removed (v 35). Nothing should get in the way of worship.*

3. Climate Change and the Purposes of God says:

FIND JOY IN CREATION!

'How many are your works, Lord! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures..... May the Lord rejoice in his works.' (Psalm 104:24, 31)

According to the witness of our Scriptures, everything that we have, life and the means of life, comes to us as gift. This is the ground of our worship. The beauty and harmony of God's creation is for all cultures a source of human wellbeing, spiritual nourishment and joy. Christians understand God's relation to creation in three ways. All reality comes from God the Father; the flourishing of the earth and its future are foundational to the mission of God (and therefore to the Church's mission). God embraces material reality in Jesus in whom all things hold together (Colossians 1:17). God the Spirit gives life to all reality at all times and in all places. 'The love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit,' (Romans 5:5) overflows in our love and care for all God's creatures.

'Life and the means of life, comes to us as gift'.

? Think about one or two phrases from this Declaration in relation to your own lifestyle and priorities. Maybe discuss this with others.

? What implication does 'life and the means of life comes to us as gift' have for our attitude to the earth and everything we "own"?

? When we reflect on Christian mission in today's world, what is the most important thing for the Church to take from this Declaration?

If you have time.....

If you have time, you can read Genesis chapter 1 of which Psalm 104 is a sort of commentary. This wonderful Genesis poem, probably written when the people of God were in exile in Babylon, is patterned on six days leading to a seventh - the climax is the seventh day: a day for re-creation and worship.

Read Genesis 1:1 – 2:3

Day 1 is about the separation of light from dark; Day 4 is about the sun and moon which 'rule over' the day and the night.

Day 2 is about the separation of the clouds in the sky and the waters on earth; Day 5 is about the birds in the sky and the fish in the sea.

Day 3 is about dry land on earth and fruitful vegetation; Day 6 is about cattle and insects and wild animals and eventually human beings - to 'rule over' everything else as God's representative ('in his image'). The phrase 'rule over' has sometimes been taken to mean exploitative dominion. It really means acting in God's royal service with God's care for all creation.

Everything has its place in God's purpose. Humanity has a role in God's purpose for the whole world. This would have been a strong word of reassurance for God's people in exile.

This picture of an emergent creation leads to its climax in Day 7 - the Sabbath on which God 'rests' - and which God's people are to keep holy (Exodus 20:8 onwards, Deuteronomy 5:12 onwards). The whole of creation points humanity towards worshipping God.

Looking in more depth:

- *Creation is by God's Word ('and God said') and by God's Spirit ('sweeping over the face of the waters');*
- *Creation includes the principle that God creates things that remake themselves ('trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it');*
- *Creation evokes a sense of both majesty and mystery;*
- *All the other creatures are there for God's delight, long before humanity came on the scene;*
- *Creation is beautifully ordered (a pattern of six days) and also 'contingent' (it didn't have to be this way - it derives from God's gift). Order and contingency are basic assumptions of modern science.*