

+ Crowe Hill + Fordingbridge + Horton Heath + Ringwood +

## Sunday Service 19<sup>th</sup> July 2020

### Welcome to this Sunday's Service

#### Lectionary Texts:

Wisdom of Solomon 12:13, 16–19 or Isaiah 44:6–8   Psalm 86:11–17   Romans  
8:12–25   Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43

Theme: 'Creation Groans'

#### Keeping in Touch

This service was prepared a week ago, so there is no fresh 'keeping in touch' news today.

#### Call to Worship

Have you not known? Have you not heard?

The Lord is the everlasting God

The creator of the ends of the earth.

He does not faint or grow weary

His understanding is unsearchable.

Isaiah 40:28

Hymn: O worship the King (R+S 47, STF 113, SOF 1/456)

*A traditional hymn of praise to begin.*

<https://youtu.be/NOnOAxIhGeU>

1. O worship the King, all-glorious above;  
O gratefully sing his power and his love:  
our Shield and Defender, the Ancient of Days,  
pavilioned in splendour, and girded with praise.

2. O tell of his might, O sing of his grace,  
whose robe is the light, whose canopy space;  
his chariots of wrath the deep thunder-clouds form,  
and dark is his path on the wings of the storm.

3. The earth with its store of wonders untold,  
Almighty, your power has founded of old;  
established it fast by a changeless decree,  
and round it has cast, like a mantle, the sea.

4. Your bountiful care what tongue can recite?  
It breathes in the air, it shines in the light;  
it streams from the hills, it descends to the plain,  
and sweetly distils in the dew and the rain.

5. Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail,  
in you do we trust, nor find you to fail;  
your mercies how tender, how firm to the end,  
our Maker, Defender, Redeemer, and Friend.

6. O measureless Might, ineffable Love,  
while angels delight to hymn you above,  
your ransomed creation, though feeble our praise,  
in true adoration our voices we raise.

Words: Robert Grant (1779-1838)

## Prayer: Creator God

Creator God, You made an awesome world,  
Stars beyond our imagination in size and distance  
Infinitesimally small particles of immense power.

You entrusted the care of the world and all it contains to us, Your human children.  
Through greed and over-consumption we have taken more than our share,  
abused and destroyed the animals, plants and land.  
And we have broken the trust that You gave us.

We have ridden roughshod over the needs of  
our local and global neighbours,  
the wonderful wildlife which is all around us and which we see on our TVs,  
and future generations including our own children and grandchildren.

We want to say that we are Sorry.  
Sorry for the bad decisions we have made,  
for the hurt we have caused,  
for the damage we have done.  
We ask for Your forgiveness and for Your help to change.

Thank You that Your powerful Christ-life still flows in all Creation to heal and to make  
anew.

Thank You that even in this time of a global pandemic  
we have rediscovered that healing power.  
We can now hear the birds and see the mountains and the stars.  
Help us to work with You to bring healing to Your world and to all our neighbours,  
those nearby and those in distant lands.

Your world is a creative, abundant and beautiful home.  
Help us to work with You to be as creative and abundant  
and to produce the good fruit of Your Holy Spirit in our lives.

As the trees share their resources for the benefit of all their neighbours,  
may we share all of the blessings we receive with gratitude. Amen

Words: Les Parker

## Poem: God's Grandeur

*Read by the poet in this video.*

<https://youtu.be/MfpCDmgrKbg>

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.  
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;  
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil  
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?  
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;  
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;  
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil  
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;  
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;  
And though the last lights off the black West went  
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —  
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent  
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

Words: Gerald Manley Hopkins

## Prayer for Understanding

Grant us a quietness that heals and listens. Open wounded hearts to the balm of  
your Word. Speak to us in clear tones. May our spirits leap for joy and skip with  
hope. Amen

## Bible Reading: Romans 8:12-25 (ESV)

<sup>12</sup> So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.  
<sup>13</sup> For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death

the deeds of the body, you will live. <sup>14</sup> For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. <sup>15</sup> For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” <sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

<sup>18</sup> For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. <sup>19</sup> For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. <sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup> For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. <sup>23</sup> And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. <sup>24</sup> For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

## Song: ‘On Tiptoe’ (Fresh Sounds 84)

*A song from my past. Happy memories. But it directly and beautifully refers to our reading from the letter to the Romans. No video here, just the original recording by the Fisherfolk.*

<https://youtu.be/B6-buS7ZnNw>

I walk with you my children, through valleys filled with gloom;  
In echoes of the star-light and shadows of the moon  
In the whispers of the night-wind are gentle words for you  
To touch you and assure you it’s my world you’re walking through.

### *Chorus*

*And all creation’s straining on tiptoe just to see  
The sons of God come into their own.*

I made the mottled stickleback to hide in crystal streams,  
The staring owl to scan the night, the candle’s gentle beams;  
I made the silly camel to roam the desert sands,  
But you I made, my children, to walk and hold my hand.

If life were filled with bubbles, they’d glisten and they’d burst;  
If life were filled with jewels, they’d line a rich man’s purse;  
But life is filled with water that flows from depths of love,  
It flows to fill your weariness with blessings from above.

My love for you, my children, puts rainbows in your hand,  
Born of clouded sorrows in a sun-burst morning land;  
They arch above the smiling eyes where tears can still be seen,  
And adorn with gentle trembling touch the bride who is my own.

Words: Maggie Durran

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# Sermon

## Introduction

Sunday by Sunday I usually let the lectionary guide my worship themes and sermon writing. Sometimes the lectionary takes me to passages I wouldn't naturally be attracted to, which is probably a healthy discipline for me, but this Sunday it offers me two of my favourite Bible passages; two readings which combine theology with environmentalism. Hooray! I have preached on the parable of the 'wheat and the weeds' in two of my churches already, so I don't want to bore some of you with a repeat. But I haven't preached on the reading from Romans since moving here. So here we go ...

## Romans 8

This passage is much beloved by environmental Christians everywhere. Almost every book on Christian environmentalism will quote this text. I even helped write one: 'Hope in God's Future' (2009), a report adopted by the URC and by the Methodist Church and by the Baptist Union as a statement on our journey towards adopting more challenging environmental policies and actions in our churches. And of course we also quoted from Romans 8!

The apostle Paul writes that everything is 'groaning' together. All creation groans (v.22), God's people groan (v.23), even God's Spirit groans (v.26). We all groan because we are suffering (v.18) and we are subjected to frustration (v.20) and we are trapped in decay (v.21) and we have to wait (v.22-25).

God's plan for creation was that humankind would be God's stewards of creation, God's gardeners of the world he made. But if humanity fails to follow God's purposes, then everything suffers, and everything has to wait for humankind to come back to their proper place. "The creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed." And whilst creation waits, it is frustrated, it is held back, it is in bondage, God's plan is for all of creation, humans and everything else to make progress together, if humanity is not ready and willing to make progress, then God ensures that everything is held back together. But actually, lacking the required stewards and gardeners, it is no wonder that the rest of creation is in some way held back. And until the time is right, everything has to wait.

A story: the minister of a church was making a pastoral visit to a house with a lovely front garden. Seeing the householder out in the garden the minister felt obliged to offer a suitably appreciative religious comment: "Isn't it wonderful to enjoy the beauty of God's creation," he said. And the slightly grumpy gardener replied: "Well you should have seen it when he had it to himself!" He probably remembers the weeds and brambles which filled the land before he bought it and turned it into a delightful garden. You can't have a garden without a gardener. And it would seem, you can't have a beautiful world if humans are not willing to act as caring environmental stewards of all life on earth. And worse than that, we are not merely failing to act as we should, we actively behave badly, we consume, we destroy, we pollute.

But here is the interesting thing – when Paul says that everything is sharing in the groaning, he doesn't explain the pain by look back to the existing environmental problem and the historical story of human destruction of the planet. Instead Paul transforms the groaning into a future hope, it is a groaning 'as in the pains of childbirth,' (v.22) it is a groaning about the future, about something desired and anticipated and expected, which is coming into being. The children of God will be revealed in their true nature, and then everything will be liberated and freed together. Creation is groaning not in its death-throes because it is destined to be destroyed, but in its birth-pangs as it awaits renewed life.

This is why this is not just a Bible reading about 'groaning', it is also a reading about 'hope' and 'eager expectation'. God has plans, something good for all of creation is coming. Whatever we humans have failed to do, God is putting right in and through Jesus Christ. If you read the rest of Chapter 8 you will read how great is the central redeeming role of Jesus Christ as Paul understands it to be. Christ opens the way and leads the way, humanity is welcomed as rightful joint divine heirs by our divine Father, and finally humankind as glorious heirs in their rightful place then release the rest of creation into its true freedom.

### **Examples**

It is as if a major orchestra is lacking a significant lead instrumentalist. Imagine playing and listening to a piano concerto without a pianist. But worse than that, imagine the same orchestra with an unruly child in the midst of them bashing away at the piano. The orchestra can't escape and play a piece without the piano. And the conductor (God) asks the orchestra to be almost endlessly patient until the child is mature enough to play their part. The glorious piece of music will one day be played, but until then the orchestra 'waits in eager expectation'.

Many of us lack the patience of the divine conductor. We want a quick solution. Perhaps even a destructive solution. We might say: 'Let us sweep the slate clean, let us bring in the demolition bulldozers.' In religious circles some people hope for an apocalyptic Armageddon of destruction and annihilation, followed by a belief that God will offer us humans something different, perhaps a heavenly re-start, somehow

pure and different to what went before. Non-religious people also have their own versions of this dream. There are certain kinds of eco-warriors who hope for (and prepare for with significant stashes of survival gear) a pandemic which will kill 99% of all those infected. (Unlike our current coronavirus pandemic which seems to have an average overall death rate of 1% of all those infected.) In the world of science fiction there is a theory that one day humans will be able to terraform alien worlds and turn them into earth-like paradises so that humans can escape from planet earth which we are successfully trashing. No-one seems to realise that if we can't even successfully care for this wonderful earth which God has given us, then we certainly won't be any better at managing any other world we ever make.

### **Conclusion**

In the book of Revelation God says: "Behold I make all things new." (Rev 21:5) And we should note that God does not say: "Behold I make all new things." There is a difference. God promises to restore and renew everything. God does not promise to annihilate everything and rebuild brand new things. The language of God is always about the salvation, redemption and restoration of the one and only creation which God unreservedly already and always loves so much. Thanks be to God.

## **Song:** Creation Sings (SOF 5/2255)

<https://youtu.be/JyED26ggRrA>

1. Creation sings the Father's song;  
He calls the sun to wake the dawn  
And run the course of day,  
Till evening falls in crimson rays.  
His fingerprints in flakes of snow,  
His breath upon this spinning globe;  
He charts the eagle's flight,  
Commands the newborn baby's cry.

### *Chorus*

*Hallelujah! Let all creation stand and sing,  
'Hallelujah!' Fill the earth with songs of worship,  
Tell the wonders of creation's King.*

2. Creation gazed upon His face;  
The ageless One in time's embrace  
Unveiled the Father's plan  
Of reconciling God and man.  
A second Adam walked the earth,  
Whose blameless life would break the curse,  
Whose death would set us free  
To live with Him eternally.

3. Creation longs for His return,  
When Christ shall reign upon the earth;  
The bitter wars that rage  
Are birth pains of a coming age.  
When He renews the land and sky,  
All heaven will sing and earth reply  
With one resplendent theme:  
The glory of our God and King!

Words: Keith & Kristyn Getty & Stuart Townend  
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## Offertory Introduction and Prayer

*I invite and encourage you to remember churches and charities and all those in financial need at this difficult time.*

Let us not selfishly hold the blessings we receive,  
But lovingly share, so that blessings and thankfulness may abound. Amen.

## Prayer of Confession

When sadness triumphs over joy:  
Creation groans.  
When darkness threatens to put out the light:  
Creation groans.  
When fear knocks at our door:  
Creation groans.  
When despair threatens to destroy our hope:  
Creation groans.  
When we hurt each other:  
Creation groans.  
When our words pull down rather than building up:  
Creation groans.  
When our actions do not speak of the love of God:  
Creation groans.  
When our lives fail to reflect the life of the Creator:  
Creation groans.  
We long for the day when creation is restored  
and creation's groaning comes to an end,  
when there will be no more sadness, darkness, fear or despair,  
when our lives will speak of you and we see you face to face.  
Until then Lord,  
please forgive us, strengthen us and help us,

to live a little more for you,  
and to care for your creation today and in the days ahead.  
Amen.

Words: Dave Hopwood

## The Lord's Prayer

*A modern translation of the Lord's Prayer, clearly reminding us that our prayer is that things should be done 'on earth as in heaven.'*

Our Father in the heavens,  
    May your name be honoured,  
    May your kingdom come,  
    May your will be done,  
        On earth as in heaven.

Give us today our bread  
    for the coming day.

Forgive us our debts,  
    as we have forgiven our debtors.

Save us from the time of trial  
    and save us from evil.

For the kingdom, and the power, and the glory  
    are yours, now and for ever. Amen

## Prayers of Intercession

Liberating God,  
your Spirit sighs as creation groans,  
you hear the cries of the poor and afflicted,  
you deliver those in distress and set captives free:  
God, in your mercy,   **Hear our prayer.**

Hear us as we cry to you,  
as earth heats, and weather changes,  
and habitats become inhospitable:  
for animals and plants struggling to survive,  
for refugees from drought, flood, and heat,  
for every soul seeking a home  
where they can flourish in peace:  
God, in your mercy,   **Hear our prayer.**

Hear us as we cry to you,  
as costs rise and prices fall  
and those who work the land are squeezed by injustice:

for farmers and producers at the mercy of market forces,  
impoverished, but wanting to do their best  
for the land and the creatures in their care:  
God, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

Hear us as we cry to you,  
as changes in nature and society out-pace conventional wisdom:  
for leaders of Government and business,  
for buyers and voters,  
for justice and peace for the poor, the disregarded,  
and all the Little Ones of Creation:  
God, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

Hear us as we cry to you,  
as disciples of Jesus seek his path  
of faithfulness and loving service:  
for Churches and Christian agencies  
as we embody the love of Christ for all Creation:  
God, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

Hear us as we cry to you  
for those we carry in our hearts today  
(silence)  
God, in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

Hear us, merciful God;  
hear the cries of every tribe and language  
and people and species,  
that all Creation might be set free,  
and all things made new in Christ.  
In that glorious hope,  
in the unity of the Spirit,  
and in his name we pray. **Amen.**

Words: Alex Mabbs

## Hymn: From life's beginning

*A lively new worship song to end our service in praise of our Creator. (Not in any common word books.)*

<https://youtu.be/yLXnaMQRtUQ>

1. From life's beginning  
to all eternity,

there is a song to be sung;  
in deepest oceans,  
across the galaxies,  
in every nation and tongue.

*Chorus*

*Let praise resound,  
let praise resound, all around.  
Creation, sing with one voice  
to the glory of the maker of all things:  
let praise resound.*

2. Come, every creature  
alive at his command,  
join the eternal refrain.  
Sing, joyful mountains,  
you rivers, clap your hands;  
all nature, breathe out his name.

Chorus 2

Sing together: holy, holy, holy is the Lord.  
Glory to the one who lives and reigns for evermore.  
Sing together: holy, holy, holy is the Lord.  
Glory to the one who lives and reigns for evermore:  
let praise resound.

3. So join the anthem,  
let every voice be heard,  
come lift your praises up high  
as songs of worship  
ring out across the earth,  
as heaven sings in reply.

Words: Marcus Pagnam

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## Blessing

Now may you know God's blessing:  
The Creator's blessing on that that has been made,  
The Saviour's blessing on all that is loved,  
The Spirit's blessing active in and over all.  
As you have been blessed, so may you bless. Amen.