

Hope for Creation

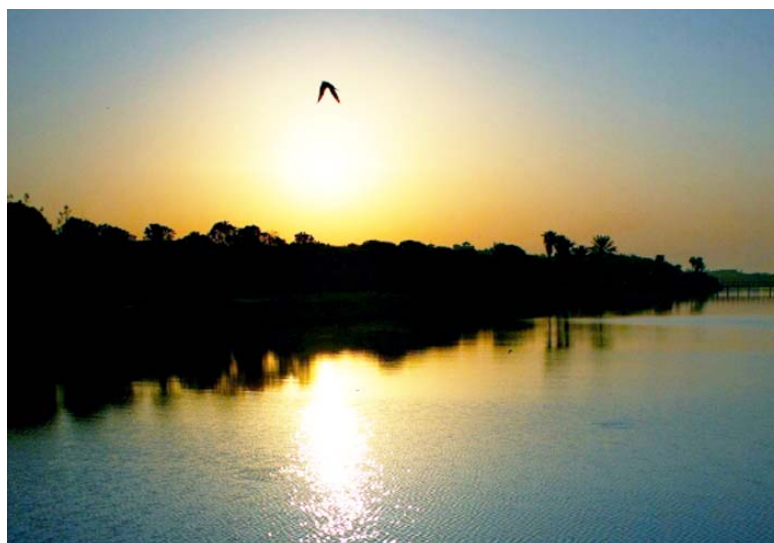



Photo: ED :-) 

A Time for Worship and Action

A 5 week framework for Creation Time 2008 based on the Lord's Prayer

*Prepared by Revd Dave Bookless, National Director, A Rocha UK,
for Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, Creation Time resources 2008*

Hope for creation is a vital theme today. Scientists and campaigners sometimes paint such an apocalyptic image of a future dominated by Climate Change that many are near to losing all hope. Some believe our hope lies in technical innovation, in new regulatory frameworks, or in political action. All of these are important, but they do not change human nature. Today it is being recognised increasingly that we also need a deeper and more profound change.

These materials are based on the hope that we have as Christians, based ultimately in God's good plans for his creation, in the cosmic scope of Christ's saving work, and in the Spirit's renewing power at work within and through human beings. Hope begins in creation, is guaranteed through the cross and resurrection, and is to be worked out in our responses today. Let us rediscover a biblical vision that, because of Christ's work, people can be changed, communities can be transformed, and creation can be renewed. Let us seek to put that into practice with actions that speak louder than words.

These Lord's Prayer materials are flexible and suitable for a less formal, or all-age setting. The five Sundays cover:

Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be your name

- Thankfulness and praise for God's creation

Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven

- God's purposes for creation, and our place within those purposes

Give us this day our daily bread

- Justice for people and for all creation

Forgive us our sins as we forgive

- Our need to confess our failure and be transformed

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for yours is the Kingdom

- Hopeful action based on God's future

Week 1: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be your name

Theme

Thankfulness and praise for God's creation



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Suggested Readings

Genesis 1:26-2:15

(God's charge to humanity to care for the earth)

Psalms 148 (All creation praising God)

Matthew 6:5-15 (Jesus teaches his disciples to pray)

Sermon suggestions and ideas

- Display images (pictures, acetates, PowerPoint slides, video clips) of the wonder of creation (ideally from vast landscapes, seascapes, night sky through to particular creatures large and small, including human beings).
- Involve children and adults in suggesting what they find 'amazing' about the world (e.g. particular creatures, places, views). This could be prepared beforehand or done impromptu.
- Reflect that the first thing Jesus teaches us to do in prayer is to 'hallow' God's name. What does this mean? It means to proclaim God's holiness – his awesome power and wonder.
- In the Psalms (the hymn-book of the Jewish people and the early church), God's power and character displayed in creation is seen as the most obvious way in which to worship. We see God's works and are led into worship – to hallowing God's name.
- The rest of creation worships God too – in Psalm 148, sun, moon, stars; sea-monsters, rain, hail, mountains and hills; wild and domestic animals, reptiles and birds, and people of all kinds are urged to praise the name of God.
- Creation is the first and clearest witness to God's nature and power. Our worship, like that of the Psalmist, needs to include an awareness of worshipping along with the whole of creation (e.g. of Orthodox worship, also of Celtic worship and the possibility of worshipping outdoors).
- How does the non-human (and even non-animate) creation worship? Through fulfilling its God-given role. How do we worship? By fulfilling our God-given role too ... which is first and foremost to bear God's image by ruling over creation for him in a godly way (Genesis 1:26-28).

Week 2: Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth, as in heaven


Theme

God's purposes for creation and our place within those purposes

Suggested Readings

Psalm 19 (the works of God and the word of God)
Colossians 1:15-20 (Christ's lordship over creation)
Matthew 21:33-end
(The parable of the tenants in the vineyard)



Photo: Laura Woolf 

Sermon suggestions and ideas

- See 'Creation Time Lectionary Sermons' notes for Sept 21st for material on the Kingdom of God.
- See 'Creation Time Lectionary Sermons' notes for October 5th for material on Matthew 21:33-end.
- The Kingdom of God - When Jesus talks about the Kingdom of God / Kingdom of Heaven, he is not speaking about something up in the sky or in the far distant future. In Jesus, God's Kingdom has broken into this world, this space-time continuum. God's Kingdom is 'amongst you' or 'within you'; not somewhere out there but here and now. It is not a Kingdom with borders and armies but about God's rule being re-established where it has been usurped. It is about God's rule in our relationship with him – the Kingdom is within us. It is about God's rule in our relationships with each other – in churches, communities, societies – God's Kingdom is amongst us. Yet it is also about creation – about the environment – Jesus clearly teaches us to pray for God's will to be done and his Kingdom come *on earth* as in heaven. God's kingdom is about the earthing of heaven.
- Professor Hans Kung: "God's Kingdom is creation healed".
- The Bishop of Durham, Tom Wright, in his book 'Surprised by Hope' argues that the Christian hope is not about 'going to heaven when you die', but about the joining of heaven and earth – as God's heavenly rule is re-established here on earth. "What you do in the present – by painting, preaching, singing, sewing, praying, teaching, building hospitals, digging wells, campaigning for justice, writing poems, caring for the needy, loving your neighbour as yourself – all these will last into God's future ... They are part of what we may call building for God's Kingdom."¹
- A sermon may be based on Colossians 1:15-20, showing God's purposes for the whole of creation in Jesus:
 - Source of Creation 'all things made by him' v.16
 - Supreme over Creation 'all things made for him' v.16
 - Sustainer of Creation 'all things hold together in him' v.17
 - Saviour of Creation 'all things reconciled to God' through his death on the cross v.19-20
- Our place within God's purposes – if Jesus is 'the image of the invisible God' (Col. 1.15) and we are made in God's image to look after creation (Genesis 1.26), then Jesus' life and work show us perfectly how we can recover God's image in caring for creation.


¹ Wright, N. T., 'Surprised by Hope, SPCK, London, 2007, p.205.

Week 3: Give us this day our daily bread

Theme

Justice for people and for all creation



Photo: matze_ott 

Suggested Readings

Micah 6:1-8 (God requires justice and mercy)
Matthew 25:31-46 (The parable of the sheep and the goats)

Sermon suggestions and ideas

- God hates injustice. Remind people of God's passion for 'righteousness' (= justice) in rescuing the Israelites from Egypt, in sending the prophets (such as Micah) to rebuke Israel when injustice threatened God's plans, in Mary's words in the Magnificat (rescuing the poor and needy, sending away the rich), in Jesus' words in his Nazareth manifesto (Luke 4) ... the list could carry on and on.
- Today we live in a world where in many ways injustice is increasing rather than decreasing. We cannot separate our lifestyles in the UK from the problems that Climate Change is already causing in the developing world.
- See 'Creation Time Lectionary Sermons' notes for September 14th on 'Love does no harm to its neighbour' (Romans 13:10). In our inter-connected, relational world, the lifestyle I lead, the energy I consume, the pollution I cause, the waste I discard can indeed cause harm to my neighbour. Plastic bags thrown away in England can be found in the stomachs of Albatrosses in the Pacific. Acid rain from Britain can harm forests in Scandinavia. Carbon emissions from the west can cause extreme weather, and even sea-level rise in Bangladesh or Malawi. Here in the UK our average emissions are approximately 9.5 tonnes of carbon dioxide per person per year. In Malawi the average emissions are about 0.1 tonnes and in Bangladesh about 0.2.² As the UK Government's Stern Review on the economics of Climate Change puts it: "The impacts are inequitable: poor countries will be hit hardest and earliest, when it is the rich countries which are responsible for ¾ of Greenhouse Gases currently in the atmosphere."³
- In terms of 'daily bread' we are living in a time when the prices of basic foods on which most of the world depends are rocketing. Between March 2007 and March 2008, prices rose as follows:
 - Corn – up 31%, rice – up 74%, soya – up 87%, wheat – up 130%⁴
- Although global population growth is a factor, the main causes appear to be:
 - increasing appetites for meat as societies become richer (it takes 10x as much water to produce 1kg of beef, as to produce 1kg of maize)
 - the growth of maize and other crops for biofuels to replace fossil fuels
 - the growing impact of Climate Change, causing erratic weather patterns leading to droughts, floods and famines. Christian Aid partner Nazmul Chowdhury from Bangladesh says: "Forget about making poverty history. Climate change will make poverty permanent."⁵
- The parable of the sheep and the goats is a strong challenge to us. We need to see the face of Jesus in every starving person, every victim of Climate Change. We also need to recognise the links between our over-consumption in the West, and the continuing poverty and suffering of much of the world. What would Jesus say to us today? Would he place us with the sheep or the goats?

² Figures from Tearfund's 'Carbon Fast' materials

³ Sir Nicholas Stern - www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/A/8/stern_speakingnotes.pdf

⁴ From BBC News website; source Bloomberg / Jackson Son & Co.

⁵ Christian Aid website – www.christianaid.org.uk/stoppoverty/climatechange/facts/index.aspx

Week 4 - Forgive us our sins as we forgive


Theme

Our need to confess and be transformed

Suggested Readings

Hosea 4:1-3 (Creation's suffering and humanity's failure)
 Luke 6:20-26 (Blessed are the poor ... for theirs is the kingdom)



Photo: -Zoe- 

Sermon suggestions and ideas

- We live today in a world where the gap between rich and poor is growing. In 1960 the world's richest 20% (including all Britons) had incomes 30x greater than the world's poorest 20%. By 1997 the gap had grown, and the world's richest 20% had incomes 74x greater than the world's poorest 20%.⁶
- Jesus in Luke 6 is very clear that God takes the side of the poor and hungry, rather than the rich and complacent. What would he have to say to us today? How do you think he would advise us to change?
- As well as increasing human suffering, our lifestyles and over-consumption are damaging the whole of God's creation. According to scientists, the extinction rate today is 100-1000 times greater than the natural rate, with up to 1 in 4 mammal species and 1 in 3 amphibians and reptiles threatened with extinction.⁷ According to Hosea 4, our sin against God causes suffering to birds and animals, and leaves even the land itself in 'mourning'.
- Today we need to acknowledge our guilt (both deliberate and unconscious) in having lifestyles that contribute to the suffering of others (see last week's notes for details).
- Our guilt is both individual (give examples of the daily choices we make e.g. driving where we could walk, buying produce we know harms others) and also corporate (we sometimes have no choice about driving / can't tell where our food has come from etc). We therefore need to repent both individually and representatively on behalf of our society.
- Receiving God's forgiveness is only possible when we admit our wrongdoing. Repentance is about 'metanoia', a complete turning around both in attitude and in practical outworking. Give examples of how we can begin to show this repentance in terms of our lifestyles (e.g. ethical shopping, energy saving, cutting down on unnecessary polluting travel).
- Receiving forgiveness must lead to offering forgiveness to others. There is no room for bitterness and grudges. See 'Creation Time Lectionary Sermon' notes for September 14th for comments on Matthew 18:15-20 (the unmerciful servant) and the links between forgiveness, debt relief and the Old Testament principle of Jubilee for land and people.
- If we are to have a vision of God's Kingdom of justice and peace – the biblical concept of 'shalom' – the healing of every relationship, then giving and receiving forgiveness, cancelling debts, and making restitution for wrongs is vital. There cannot be 'shalom' without this.
- In terms of sustainable lifestyles that embody God's vision of 'shalom', we are a long way from where we need to be, but we have to start here and now, with small but decisive steps to change our behaviour and our lifestyles. There are lots of resources that can help, e.g. A Rocha's Living Lightly 24-1 (www.livinglightly24-1.org.uk), CAFOD's Live Simply (www.livesimply.org.uk), Tearfund (<http://www.tearfund.org/>), Christian Aid (<http://www.christianaid.org.uk/>), Trocaire (<http://trocaire.org/>) and elsewhere.

⁶ 1999 UN Human Development Report (along with a lot of other useful data, this can be found at www.globalissues.org/TradeRelated/Facts.asp)


⁷ According to the World Conservation Union / IUCN - <http://cms.iucn.org>

Week 5: Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for yours is the Kingdom

Theme

Hopeful action based on God's future



Photo: Arttu Manninen 

Suggested Readings

Romans 8:18-23 (Creation longing to be set free)

Matthew 6:25-33 (Don't worry about money and clothes; seek God's kingdom first)

Sermon suggestions and ideas

- See 'Creation Time Lectionary Sermons' notes for October 5th – section on 'Hope for Creation in Christ' for material on Romans 8 and the future hope for creation.
- In Romans 8, we are told creation is waiting for two things:
 - To be set free from its bondage to decay – in other words that there is a tangible future for this material world
 - For the children of God to be revealed – this suggests a link right back to Genesis 1 and an opportunity for God's redeemed people to recover our very first human calling, to care for creation in a just and godly way.
- In Matthew 6:33, Jesus challenges us to 'Seek first God's Kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.' 'These things' refer to all our everyday preoccupations, such as food, money, clothing etc. – not evils unless they become our focus in their own right – unless they become 'gods'.
- The challenge of Matthew 6 is to opt out of the materialist and consumerist obsessions of our society. To do this we have to draw our values from another place – we are invited to focus on God's priorities – his Kingdom of justice and peace for all creation.
- Seeking God's Kingdom means a change of heart, a change of priorities – so that our 'ultimate goal' is not our own comfort and prosperity but to seek signs of God's future Kingdom in the here and now – amongst us and within us. That may lead us to living in very counter-cultural ways from those around us. It may lead us taking risks, to 'being different', but is that not how changes in society always begin – with a small number who have a different vision and seek to follow it? Is that not the calling of the church in every generation?
- Here is a vision of seeking God's Kingdom: "Every act of love, gratitude and kindness; every work of art or music inspired by the love of God and delight in the beauty of his creation; every minute spent teaching a severely handicapped child to read or to walk; every act of care and nurture, of comfort and support, for one's fellow human beings, and for that matter one's fellow non-human creatures; and of course every prayer, all Spirit-led teaching, every deed which spreads the gospel, builds up the church, embraces and embodies holiness rather than corruption, and makes the name of Jesus honoured in the world – all of this will find its way, through the resurrecting power of God, into the new creation which God will one day make. That is the logic of the mission of God. God's recreation of his wonderful world, which has begun with the resurrection of Jesus and continues mysteriously as God's people live in the risen Christ and in the power of his Spirit, means that what we do in Christ and by the Spirit in the present is not wasted. It will last all the way into God's new world. In fact, it will be enhanced there."⁸

⁸ Wright, N. T., 'Surprised by Hope', SPCK, London, 2007, p.220