

Creation Time Resources 2014



God, Whose Farm is All Creation

Week Four – 28th September 2014

Bible readings

Leviticus 25.1 - 7

Leviticus continues the sabbatical cycle of relating holiness to persons, things, places and festivals, so now land is set to rest, lying fallow in the seventh year, after crop rotation in the previous six. The Hebrew term for sabbath means “to cease, stop, desist or to be idle”. Land and labour receive the benefit of this respite care, a chance for the land to regenerate and for the people to catch their breath.

The idea is also extended to include the Deuteronomic principle of giving relief to the poor and freedom to the wild creatures by leaving fields and vineyards freely available in the sabbath year so that the whole community of God’s creation benefits.

Psalm 95

The psalm celebrates God’s role as Creator, probably used in procession to the Temple. It recalls Genesis with its references to the “sea” and the “dry land”. The shepherd motif has the sense of guiding or giving a particular direction, rather than in the Near East cultural sense of ‘kingly’ shepherding, commanding and ruling.

The sheep are supposed to listen to the voice of the shepherd and to obey for their own well-being and safety such as when they are being moved to new pasture or penned for the night. Obedience therefore is more about attentiveness towards God.

God invites obedience because God knows that the consequences of disobedience will be severe, so we should rely on our Creator God for sustenance by way of the natural processes and seasons of life.

Hebrews 4.1 - 11

The writer picks up the theme of obedience and exhorts once again the idea of “rest”. God laid the foundations of the world, with its times, seasons and provisions, and rested on the seventh day. Joshua led the Israelites out of the wilderness into the land of Canaan, the ‘promised land’ where they could rest, that is, settle. The

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author promises a future rest but adds the warning to take care that no one should fail to enter into this rest in the land which is at present in God's own part of creation. We are beginning to move from the idea of land as rest into a different kind of rest whereby we participate in God's providence to the ultimate destination in the promised future.

The writer reminds us of the baleful tale of the disobedient Israelites who lost sight of the blessings in Genesis, liberation in Exodus and liturgical thanksgiving in the Psalms and, as we know from Matthew's Gospel for example, lost confidence in God's divine ordering and developed their own burdensome regulations, inter alia, those attached to the idea of sabbath. It required the new 'Joshua', the Hebrew name for Jesus, to provide the central truth that eternal rest would be found in the blessings attendant on the presence of God. Rest is both present and future. We are on a pilgrimage and we must not repeat the mistakes of the Israelites in the wilderness.

John 6.1 - 15

The story that is common to all the Gospels, with subtle differences, is the feeding of 'about five thousand in all' hungry people (we're not sure if John is including women and children in this number).

Philip is put on the spot to provide a solution and becomes flustered. But Jesus already knows the answer and is challenging the disciples to evaluate the available resources however meagre. Whatever they have, God will transform. It suddenly dawns on Andrew that the possibility of a solution is in front of their noses, "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish."

The miracle, evoking echoes of the divine action in the Exodus story, is that God's bounty, in this event the gift of five loaves and two fishes, is multiplied into a quantity that was not only sufficient to feed all who were present but with some left over, twelve baskets in all, of broken pieces.

However we interpret this story, whether literally, sacramentally, rationally or symbolically, there are clear lessons to be drawn. What we have from God is a gift, which we cultivate and harvest sustainably, contributing to the common good. All that was required was a sufficiency for everyone's needs (the crowds were hungry), not wants (this was not 'fast food on demand' to satisfy a whim). Distribution was equitable, according to need and was orderly (according to Mark and Luke) and disposal of the excess was handled with care (which we might interpret today as 'no

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litter') so that nothing was wasted, as in Exodus 16.20 when an excess gathering of manna allowed worms to breed and the food to become foul.

Sermon Starter Thoughts

Today's readings demonstrate that sustainable farming and ecological integrity are not separate matters but interrelated with responsible agricultural practice and food consumption. Modern agriculture in the developed world is increasingly practised on an industrial scale beyond the scope of the family farmer and food has been reduced from a valuable cultural asset to nothing more than a commodity. (For a report from Christian Aid on the benefits of sustainable agriculture in Africa and Asia see *Healthy Harvests* <http://www.christianaid.org.uk/images/healthy-harvests-report.pdf>)

Yet more than half of the world's agricultural production is the responsibility of over 500 million family farms, most of whom are to be found in the topographically challenging and ecologically fragile areas of the planet. The land of Canaan typifies these landscapes with its *adom*, the reddish-brown thin layer of loamy but stony soil, steep slopes, and erratic rains. The Leviticus sabbath-jubilee style of economic inter-relationships between humans and nature is built into the productivity cycle, where livestock are raised alongside crops and the waste from one enterprise is recycled to create resilient self-sufficient businesses.

The Psalmist reminds us of our vocation to God, as sheep of his pasture. The life of a shepherd is not easy, making sure that his sheep do not get lost. The Shepherd keeps alert to what we are doing and we need to listen to his voice giving wise counsel. We should obey the Genesis commission to 'till and keep the land' and not 'harden our hearts', by obsessively cutting costs and getting the lowest quality produce to consumers at the lowest possible price.

The solutions lie in the scale and diversity of farming practice. Less resource dependent monoculture and more resilient methods of farming and livelihood diversity are required, capable of dealing with erratic climate change, providing improved food security, better health and the relief of poverty. The required complex ecosystems can only be provided through a web of checks and balances allowing self-regulating equilibrium to set in. Jesus disapproved of waste and we should be mindful of the scarcity of the planet's resources.

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Prayers

Opening Prayer

O come, let us sing to the Lord,
for the good gift of the land and the seas,
for the fruits of the Earth and its countless provisions.

For the cycle of life with its tissues and cells, molecules and atoms;
swarms of living creatures and birds of the air,
Sheep and cattle and creeping things
and fish that swim in the seas.

For the food we eat
and for those whose skill brings your gift to us.

For the life we have been given,
and the communities in which we live and share.

Blessed be our Creator God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit
Blessed be God for ever.

Preparation for repentance

I passed by the field of one who was lazy,
by the vineyard of a stupid person;
and see, it was all overgrown with thorns;
the ground was covered with nettles,
and its stone wall was broken down.

Then I saw and considered it;
I looked and received instruction.

A little sleep, a little slumber,
a little folding of the hands to rest,

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and poverty will come upon you like a robber,
and want, like an armed warrior. [Proverbs 24.30-34]

(Silence)

Kyrie

Forgive us for dishonouring your covenant to care for your creation,
Lord have mercy

Lord have mercy

Forgive us for not sharing the wealth of your created bounty,
Christ have mercy

Christ have mercy

Forgive us for our lack of humility and our ignorance of nature
that exceeds our knowledge,

Lord have mercy

Lord have mercy

Prayers of intercession

Creator God, by wisdom you founded the earth,
you established the heavens on your own understanding;
enlarge within us the sense of fellowship with other creatures,
help us to find a way of safeguarding scarce resources,
of protecting the land from erosion and pollution,
managing water more carefully
and preserving habitat and diversity.

Give us hearts to understand that if we care for the earth
she will care for us.

Lord of all creation, **hear our prayer**

God of Wisdom, shine your light into the darkness of our minds,
draw us back from the abyss of self-wisdom,
so that we do not rely on our own understanding.
Help us to honour the flourishing of human life within the whole of creation.
Instruct us by local memory and affection to determine,
and by reverence and humility to discover,
how we may become better stewards.
Open the dark soil of our minds, harrow and level,
to receive your good seed, so that our wisdom will grow.

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Lord of all wisdom, **hear our prayer**

God of Justice, help us to exercise righteousness
in the way that we reap the land's fruitfulness;
in the feeding of the city,
and in the sharing of the world's resources,
to provide for the common good, not to confine in the hands of a few.
Help us to keep your covenant in our daily lives,
to encourage well functioning markets;
to promote access to best practice in farming methods,
and eliminate all unfairness in work conditions.

Lord of all justice, **hear our prayer**

Collect

Almighty God

you have charged us with the care of your creation,
grant us wisdom to nurture the world's resources.

We have confessed

that we have been complacent about living sustainably,
but we have expressed our willingness to listen to you
and commit ourselves to behaving more responsibly and acting justly.

You have called us into action,

let us go forward in the name of Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Children's Talk

Sustainable farming - leaf cutter ant style

Go to the ant, you lazybones;

consider its ways, and be wise. [Proverbs 6.6]

the ants are a people without strength,

yet they provide their food in the summer; [Proverbs 30.25]

Leafcutter ants are found mainly in Latin America living on the forest floor. Here they build underground chambers where they farm and harvest their main food obtained

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from a form of fungus. They have been doing this for over 50 million years so they are kind of experts in farming.

Each ant is chosen to do a job they are best at, so some defend the colony, some defend their mates from attacks by other insects while others cut pieces of leaf from trees and other plants. They are careful not to damage their habitat by taking too much, or go to an area too often. When they cut the little pieces of leaf they take them back to the colony where ants acting as gardeners prepare the leaf cuttings for the fungus. The ants cultivate the fungus by feeding it with freshly cut plant material and the fungus breaks down the leaf cuttings to provide a special food. The ants also keep the food free from mould by using a special fluid within their bodies; but they are careful not to overdo this, otherwise the mould has a chance to build up a defence.

The fungus food grown by the adults is used to feed the ant larvae, and the adult ants feed on on a liquid in the leaf called sap. The ants are very careful about waste. Special ant workers take waste food to a waste heap far away from the ant colony where other ants working in the heap shuffle it around to break it down into crumbly pieces. A leaf cutter ant fact file can be found at <http://www.nhm.ac.uk/kids-only/naturecams/antcam/ant-facts/>

Open source pictures of leaf cutter ants can be found at

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leafcutter_ant

An activity might be framed around this story with children cutting up green coloured pieces of paper and re-enacting the story of the ant colony.

Musical Suggestions

Hymn Books Used

BBC Songs of praise (SoP) Church Hymnary 4 (CH4) Common Ground (CG)

Hymns Ancient & Modern: New Standard Edition (AMNS)

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New Century Hymnal (NCH) Rejoice and Sing (RS) Sing Praise (SP)
Singing the faith (StF)

All creatures of our God and King (CH4, RS, SoP, StF, AMNS)

Come, ye thankful people, come (CH4, RS, SoP, StF, AMNS)

Fill your hearts with joy and gladness (CH4, SP)

For the beauty of the earth (CH4, RS, SoP, StF, AMNS)

For the fruits of all creation (CH4, SP, CG, SoP, AMNS)

For your generous providing (CH4, CG)

Forgive us when our deeds ignore (SP)

God, whose farm is all creation (CH4, RS, SoP, StF, AMNS)

Great shepherd of thy people hear (RS, AMNS)

Help us, O Lord, to learn (AMNS)

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds (CH4, RS, SoP, StF, AMNS)

I hunger and I thirst (CH4, RS)

I, the Lord of sea and sky (CH4, SP, CG, SoP, StF)

Long ago you taught your people (CG)

Look and learn from the birds of the air (CG)

Lord of creation, to you be all praise (CH4, RS, StF)

Lord, teach us how to pray aright (CH4, AMNS)