



## **Reflections & Prayers for the Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity**

13<sup>th</sup> September 2020

This week is the beginning of a three week series for Creationtide, a season in the church calendar when we join with churches around the world considering God's creation and our place within it. It is great to have Tim Lomax, the Diocese's Director of Mission write the sermon for us this week on the theme of trees. Many thanks to him. As part of this season, each week the St John's Eco Church team will make a simple lifestyle suggestion to help us all engage lovingly with the world. This week is the simple encouragement, for those who are able, to walk or cycle more and to drive less. We understand that this isn't possible for everyone, but for all who can, please consider the impact of our transport. Perhaps we can spot more of God's beauty travelling at a slower pace too. We hope this service sheet finds you well. Be assured of our continued prayers. With love from James and all the ministry team.



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## Reading for this Sunday

### Genesis 2. 4b-9

In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground— then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

## Reflection from Tim Lomax

### Trees

#### Genesis 2:4b-9

May I speak in the name of the Living God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

I've always loved trees. When I was a child my aunt gave me a lovely book about trees - with fantastic photos and descriptions.

So when we were on a family trip to Australia in 2013, I was thrilled to visit the world's oldest rainforest in Queensland.

We did so by travelling on the ecotourism SkyRail over the trees of the forest to Kuranda Village and then returned by the scenic steam railway.

It was a fantastic way to explore and to learn about the vast array of life within the rainforest - including over 2800 species of trees and plants, a quarter of which cannot be found anywhere else on earth.

This example of one tiny pocket of the earth, gives a smidgeon of perspective into the great gift of life described in today's reading from Genesis chapter two.

So much of our life and work (our homes, offices, factories, shops, and cars) can form a barrier between us and the natural world, which can deter us or prevent us from fully appreciating the gift of life out there in this amazing world of ours.

And yet as I viewed the rainforest through the glass bottom of the Skyrail I was reminded again that we live alongside this beautiful natural world, and that we are formed within it.

Humans and the natural world are all part of God's creative work. Surely then we should aim to be at one with the natural world, to see it afresh as God's gift of life, through which we receive God's goodness and generosity.

In Genesis, Eden the garden in the East is described as a gift from our generous God. In other parts of scripture it is described as an oasis of trees.

Trees form an important part of God's abundant provision. Trees described here in Genesis demonstrate diversity, beauty and rich provision of food. Trees produce a vast array of resources to meet our everyday needs. But they are also amazingly beautiful and 'pleasing to the eye' as the writer of Genesis puts it.

As a young boy, I loved climbing trees, particularly a large willow tree in our garden, not too dissimilar to this one here in our garden in St Albans. I used to hide in the tree and surprise people walking on the pavement

nearby by speaking to them - some of them would jump out of their skins! I built a tree house and would pull up supplies on a bucket and rope.

One day I did a stupid thing - I tied the rope to a branch (not too high up but much taller than me as a 7 year old) and tied the rest of it around my waist. I jumped and ended up suspended with my feet about 3 inches off the floor and the rope tight under my armpits.

Fortunately my older sister came to my rescue and told me off. That day that tree was a place of learning for me.

In verse 9 of Genesis chapter two we read how creation is a place of growth and challenge, and trees play a crucial role in this. Two trees in particular - the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They symbolise the choice between life in God and life in our own wisdom, apart from God.

Trees mature with age - they gain rings we gain wrinkles. They encourage us to mature with age too, and to grow as we are weathered by life. And the state of our trees provides us with an opportunity to grow and be challenged at this time.

Wisdom apart from God and the understanding that creation is an expression of God's generous gift of life, can lead to the destruction and abuse of the natural world, including our precious trees.

The beauty in the maturity of trees, challenges us to mature in our approach to creation and the environment. As Christians and as God's church we have an opportunity to plant and protect trees. When done well, tree planting is recognised as one of the most environmentally friendly activities that people can take part in to better the planet. This way we can literally choose the tree of life.

Within the role of growth and challenge that trees occupy within creation, is the ability of trees to help us encounter the living God. Scripture is littered with examples - here's just a few:

Elijah, at a point of desperation sat down under a broom tree and there an angel touched him and nourished him.

In his encounter with Christ, Nathanael is told that he was seen under the fig tree.

But my favourite of all God-encounters written in scripture involving trees is the encounter Abraham and Sarah had with the three holy visitors at the great trees of Mamre.

This scene of the 3 visitors was depicted by the Icon painter Rublev in the 15th Century and reveals an incredible theology of the Trinity. But it is also described as the hospitality of Abraham, which turns out to produce an amazing life event for him and Sarah.

And this episode of the Genesis story encapsulates again God's wonderful gift of life that we see throughout all creation.

There under the great trees of Mamre, Abraham hosts the Holy Trinity and they host him. They give nourishment to one another. Abraham gives them an invitation 'do not pass your servant by' and in return, from the Holy Three Abraham receives the promise of a blessing - a Son from whom the saving purposes of God will grow and produce great fruit.

The Son of God himself will be his descendent who will give all of himself for all people. In the giving of his life the wood of the cross on which he died became the tree of life.

So be encouraged to see in trees God's generous and abundant gift of life - perhaps enjoy them afresh by seeing how pleasing they are to the eye.

Trees are a precious part of God's creative work which includes his saving purposes.

Just as roots reach down into the ground and branches reach up to the sky, so the gift of life reaches out to each of us. So why not spend some time sitting under a tree perhaps in desperation like Elijah, in wonder like Nathanael or playing host to the Holy Three like Abraham and Sarah and be open to being touched by an angel, called by Christ or nourished by the Living God.

Amen.

## Prayers

Let us pray.

Lord, we pray to you knowing that you will hear our prayers and answer them in your way.

We pray for all who seek to follow your way in their lives. Let your church speak your word of truth with confidence and in unity so that those who are searching and listening will be able to see and hear clearly your message of love and peace.

We pray for Berkeley's recovery and for James as he prepares to move to his exciting new role.

**Lord, in your mercy: hear our prayer**

Lord, we thank you for the abundance of life in our world and for our beautiful surroundings here in Harpenden. We thank you especially today for trees, for the essential role they play in ensuring we have oxygen to breathe, in providing homes for wildlife and at this time their glorious harvest of fruit.

We remember that Jesus' father on earth was a carpenter and we pray for all who create with wood.

We pray that the leaders of the world act in accordance with your will in all matters and in particular to end deforestation.

**Lord, in your mercy: hear our prayer**

Lord we ask you to lead us into the coming week. Help us to believe that you are close by us, keep us from making unwise choices and guide us to learn from our mistakes. When we face hard decisions or difficult work, when we enjoy ourselves and have fun with others, may we know that you share these times with us.

**Lord, in your mercy: hear our prayer**

Now as our Saviour taught us, so we pray:

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,  
your will be done, on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and for  
ever. Amen.

### Parish Prayers for the week ahead

#### **In the Anglican cycle of Prayer:**

Sunday	The Anglican Church of South America
Monday	Otukpo (Nigeria); Central Busoga (Uganda); Kisangani (Congo)
Tuesday	Owerri (Nigeria); Central Ecuador (The Episcopal Church); Kita Kanto (Japan)
Wednesday	Owo (Nigeria); Central Florida (The Episcopal Church)
Thursday	Oxford (England); Central Gulf Coast (The Episcopal Church); Central Melanesia (Melanesia)
Friday	Oyo (Nigeria); Central New York (The Episcopal Church)
Saturday	Pacong (South Sudan); Central Newfoundland (Canada); Kitale (Kenya)

#### **In our Diocesan Cycle of Prayer:**

Sunday	Parish of Streatley (Deanery of Luton)
Monday	Parish of Sundon (Deanery of Luton)
Tuesday	Parish of Woodside, St Andrew (Deanery of Luton)
Wednesday	Parish of Bovingdon (Deanery of Rickmansworth)
Thursday	Parish of Chipperfield (Deanery of Rickmansworth)
Friday	Parish of Chorleywood, Christ Church (Deanery of Rickmansworth)
Saturday	Parish of Chorleywood, St Andrew (Deanery of Rickmansworth)

#### **For the homes and families in:**

Sunday	Crabtree Lane, Cranbourne Drive
Monday	Cravells Road, Croftwell
Tuesday	Cross Lane, Dark Lane
Wednesday	The Deerings, Dellcroft Way

Thursday	Dickinsons Field, East Common
Friday	Eastcote Drive, Eastmoor Park
Saturday	Ennis Close, Fairmead Avenue

**The Sick:**

Berkeley, Emily, Amy Smart, Claire, Jo, Sue, Christine Strohm, Hermione, Karen, Sue Holt, Enid Giles, Jo Young and all whose names are entered on our St Luke's Cell Prayer List.

**For the recently deceased:**

Hien Bagott, Pat Morris

**In their year's mind:**

Nancy Simpson, Joseph Barnard, Beatrice George, Winifred Binning, Kenneth Cross, Hugh Dickins, Cyril Fowler, Susan Scrivener

[A reminder... of this phone service:](#)

**Daily Hope** – dial 0800 804 8044 for prayer, reflection, music and worship services from the Church of England. A weekly service is available from 9 am every Sunday.