

LENT COURSE WEEK 3 – LAND AND PLANTS

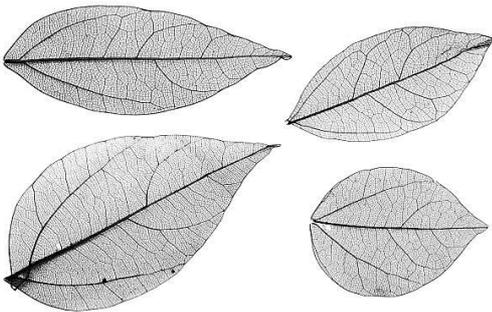
Last week we thought about the waters of the world, and how essential they are to creation.

This week we consider the third day of creation when God drove back the seas and allowed dry land to appear. Land that spouted forth all kinds of vegetation & seed-bearing plants.

Read Genesis 1: 9-13

This phase of creation was so important that not once but twice does God see that **“it was good!”**

Have you ever really looked at the details of a plant or flower and seen the effort God put into every single species? Think of the patterns in a single leaf or the spiral arrangement of leaves and flowers that have left mathematicians baffled as they realise how perfect is the formation!



God does not just do this with one or two plants, but he provides an abundance of plants in innumerable varieties to populate the earth and provide all the food we need! Each plant has within it the capacity not just to reproduce itself, but to reproduce multiple times. **Read the Parable of the Sower - *Matthew 13: 1-9*** and look especially at verse 8; seed produces 30/60 even 100 times more than that planted.

Trees feature widely in the Bible from *Genesis 2:9* the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good & evil right through to *Revelation 22:2-3* where tree of life features again.

Can you think of other examples of trees in the Bible?

Trees can be symbols of righteousness

See *Isaiah 61:3* and *Proverbs 11:30*

Abundance

See *Ezekiel 47:12*

Judgement

See [Ezekiel 17:22-24](#) and [Luke 13:6-9](#)
[Matthew 7:15-20](#).

Trees are “*truly wonderful things*” to quote Ruth Valerio, apart from aesthetic pleasure, they are source of wood, protect soil from erosion, absorb carbon dioxide provide habitats for myriad of wildlife. Trees in ancient forest even have the ability to communicate through exchange of nutrients in the soil, and it is thought by making sounds that can be detected by other trees, or even as in the African Savannah, producing ethynylene as a warning gas to other trees in the vicinity which can then protect themselves by pumping giraffe-repelling toxins into their leaves, so that giraffes cannot feed on them.

Yet, deforestation has decimated the number of trees on this planet, a report last year suggests that the world is losing an area of forest equivalent to the size of the UK every year, a figure that is still increasing despite pledges to cut down the rate of deforestation made in 2014. Here in Canalside Benefice, we may think that this doesn't effect us; after all much of the destruction of forests takes place in Asia, Africa and Latin America, yet an academic in environmental science and policy at the University of Bristol, said: “Deforestation, mostly for agriculture, contributes around a third of anthropogenic CO2 emissions. At the same time, forests naturally take up around a third of anthropogenic CO2 emissions. (Report in The Guardian 12 September 2019). [anthropogenic = environmental pollution originating in human activity].

Forests also have a big impact on rainfall patterns, water and soil quality and flood prevention, and their loss has devastating impacts locally and globally. The demands of agriculture for increased production of palm oil, land for animals for meat production and growth of soya for feeding animals for meat production are the key reasons why forests are being destroyed.

So, what can we do to protect the land and plants?

In the Lent booklets we are encouraged to plant trees, either in the churchyard or to contribute to planting projects such as those organised by the Woodland Trust. Just as we were thinking about water, and possible Toilet Twinning last week, could we also consider something that would enhance our environment around the church?

Can you think of anything else we can do practically and simply to improve our environment, and reduce our impact on the land and on vegetation?

Ideas might include:

- Reduce use of paper (or use recycled paper where possible – including toilet rolls!)
- Reduce the number of items of clothing we buy, recycle or take to charity shops any we do not use.
- Where possible buy locally grown fruit and vegetables in season.
- Buy organic or sensitively grown products, where the use of agro-chemicals has been reduced

Rowan Williams inspires us to act with his words “Receive the world God has given you. Go for a walk. Get wet. Dig the earth.”

As I write this, I am fully aware that the impact of the latest advice on Coronavirus, may limit what we can do at this precise moment, but that does not mean that the needs of the planet, and our responsibility for creation can be ignored.

LECTIO DIVINA

Jesus often used images of plants and the land in his teaching, so for our Lectio Divina reading we will look at one such use:-

- Pause before the first reading, so you are quiet and ready to listen to God.
- Read the passage slowly, and listen to what God is saying to you,

John 15: 1-9

“I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn’t produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. ³ You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. ⁴ Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.

⁵ “Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. ⁷ But if you remain in me and my words remain

in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted!⁸ When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father.

⁹ “I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love.

- Reflect on a significant word or phrase.
- Read the passage again, how does that word or phrase speak into your life, why has it connected with you. Ponder it carefully. Can you think why this word, or phrase speaks to you?
- Read the passage a third time and as you do, ask yourself what is God calling you to do? Pray for the grace of the Holy Spirit to plant this word or phrase into your heart.



paint the world
SUPER
COLORING

Celtic Tree of Life to colour or contemplate.