

SAYING YES TO LIFE - MATERIAL FOR LENT GROUP 1, 2 & 5 March 2020

Preliminaries - do we know each other? Sessions at Clive & Gareth's Mondays at 2.30, Vicarage Thursdays at 7.30 (though Peter and Julie away evening of Thursday 26) - material will be posted on Church website few days beforehand, also links to additional material - book is *Saying Yes to Life*, Ruth Valerio (published SPCK 2020), available from Cathedral shop and other book providers. It will be helpful if you can read the relevant chapter before the session.

Read Genesis 1.1-2.3 (copies will be provided)

Peter has an interesting relationship with this passage - on the one hand I have been in churches where, because I don't believe in the literal truth of "Seven Days", I am not a proper Christian - on the other hand I have friends who think I'm strange/deluded/mad/irrelevant because I do believe in a Creator God and find much of value in this story - we could reflect how/why it is that so many people are being Green in our churchyards, but have no desire to come inside the building to worship the Christian God.

Read Genesis 1.1-5 again - we start at the beginning with the creation of light - "we will see where and how light features in the Bible and will look at light today, exploring some of the extraordinary creatures who use it in extraordinary ways, and the importance of light in the form of electricity for people. This will lead to thinking about energy and issues of poverty and climate change and the urgent need for all of us to take action" (Valerio, page 1).

But first, "we need to take a broad look at the significance of seeing God as creator and how that relates to our understanding of salvation" (page 1).

Read the first part of the Mesopotamian creation poem called *Enuma Elish*, dating to about 1800 BC from page xiii (Mesopotamia is the area between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, modern day Iraq) - there were many similar stories about how the world came into being that originated with Israel's neighbours, stories older than the book of Genesis (which was probably not written (or at least finalised) until the Israelites were in captivity in Babylon) - *Enuma Elish* has a story of a sea monster called Tiamat, slain by other gods (the whole story is on pp xv-xvii of Valerio's book) - the notion of 'the deep' (tehom in Hebrew) links to name of this monster. In *Enuma Elish* and other similar stories, there are many gods and demons and it is a battle between them all as they jostle for position - in Genesis there is one supreme God, "confirming the foundational Israelite assertion called the Shema: 'Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one' (Deut. 6.4)" (page 2) - there is no conflict in the Genesis account of creation - Psalm 33.6-9 (read it from page 2) declares this truth, and Job 38.1,4-7 (read it from page 3) puts humans in their place.

- how do we see God in creation?
- is the idea of God the Creator important to our belief?

The most vital topic in all this is our God "the only one who in his very being is life and love, the uncreated one who is the source of all goodness, the one who made all things" (page 3)

- how do we proclaim this truth without causing conflict?

- how do we work with those who do not see the idea of a Creator God as relevant?
- how do we work with those who want to leave the future in God's hands, or think that the church's priority is not really the green agenda?

"If we do neglect the doctrine of creation in our churches and in our own thinking, it is often because we have developed an understanding of salvation that does not hold salvation and creation together" (page 4)

- how do we define "salvation"?
- does Colossians 1.15-20 help?

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

Genesis 1.1

- how do we imagine "the deep"?

"Light is the life force of the world" (page 7)

- plenty of bible imagery - go round the room quickly to collect people's favourite 'light' verses
- symbolism of light in worship - on page 9 Valerio reminds us that in the Southern Hemisphere Easter comes as the summer days give way to autumn (I'd never thought about that)
- symbolism of light in our lives

Consider the illumination around us - you might (if time allows) to think about the spectroscope, which splits light into the different bands (see page 10) - or just think about how completely dependent we are on light

Creation is dependent on light - examples are given of deciduous trees (page 11), birds (page 12), bioluminescence (page 12)

- do people have their own favourite examples? (something from a David Attenborough programme)

NASA imagery of the earth at night - I'll print these pictures onto some A3 sheets - this is light from humans - images showing humanity's footprint on the earth

But electricity is good! - perhaps read one example, eg United Missions to Nepal (bottom page 14)

“Energy is the golden thread that connects all the sustainable development goals” (Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary General, page 15) - people need clean, affordable energy to get out of poverty - 89% of the world’s population has access to electricity (but 840 million people don’t) (page 16)

Consider the source of the energy (page 17)

65.1% from fossil fuels

16.6% from hydroelectric plants

10.4 % from nuclear plants

5.6% from geo-thermal, solar, wind and tide

2.3% from biofuels and waste

- do these figures surprise you?
- our country has benefitted hugely from fossil fuels (and we see the decline in areas which were once mining areas) - yet we see the dangers in Global Warming (see the information on page 18)

Read the passage from David Nussbaum on page 19 about why we should be turning to other sources of power

- does that inspire us?
- can we start to think about the actions we can take (as individuals and as churches) to heal and renew Creation? (we don’t need all the answers today, but can start thinking about what those answers may be)

“Leading atmospheric scientists Canadian Katharine Hayhoe says, ‘For Christians, doing something about climate change is about living out our faith - caring for those who need help, our neighbours here at home or on the other side of the world, and taking responsibility for this planet that God created and entrusted to us. My faith tells me that God does want people to understand climate change and do something about it. And that is a very freeing thought: I don’t have to change the world all by myself, I just need to partner in the work God wants us to do’” (page 22).

Peter Barham
28 February 2020