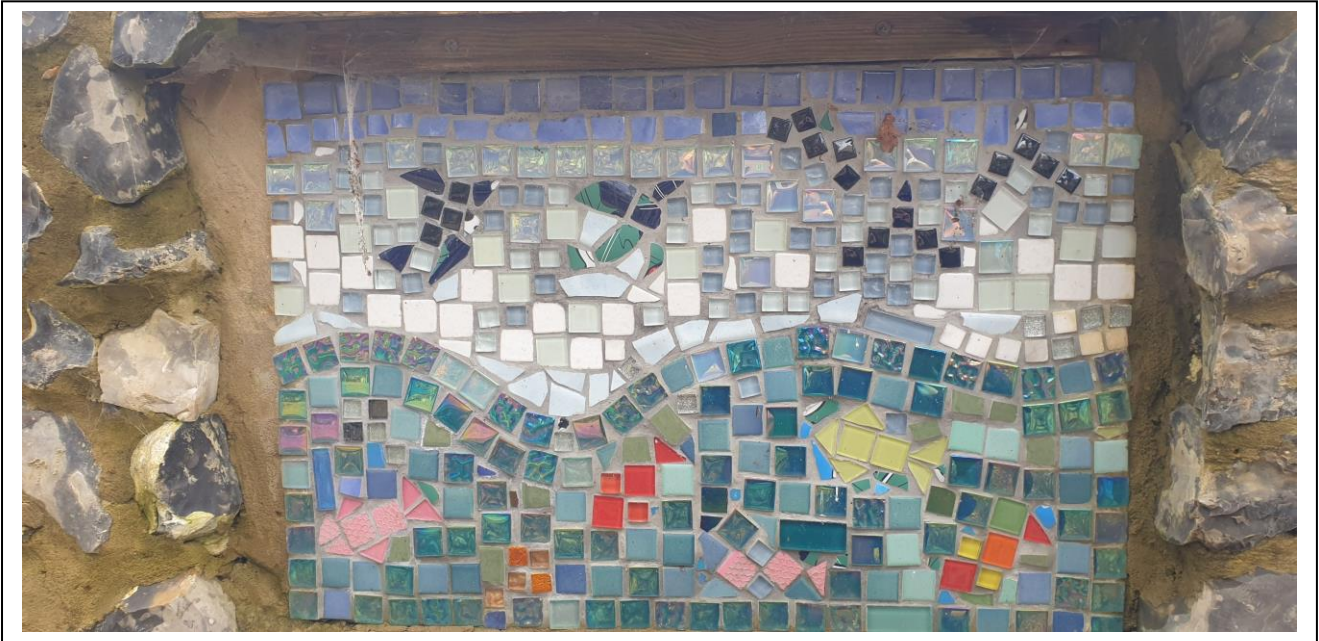


Circuit Service – 5th Sunday of Lent
21st March 2021

Let the waters teem with living creatures and let birds fly...



Welcome to worship on this 5th Sunday of Lent – the first Sunday of Passiontide. We begin these final two weeks of Lent gathering in worship together from our homes. Whether you are alone or with others, may you know God’s presence and peace as you worship.

In our service today we continue our focus on the Genesis account of creation in Genesis 1 that we have been following with the help of Ruth Valerio’s book ‘Saying Yes to Life’. We sing to the One who gives life to all, in our first hymn “Come let us sing.”

[Hymn STF 2 Come let us sing \(CCL 4107640\)](#) Alternative from H&P 15 Praise the Lord you heavens adore Him (STF 86)

- 1 Come, let us sing to the One,
to the Father of life,
whose light fills the earth like the sun ;
come, tell of the wonders he’s done.
Great is the world he has made,
are the myst’ries untold,
is his measureless power of old ;
come, come let us sing to our God.
- 2 Come, let us sing to the One,
to the Saviour of life,
find the fullness of God in the Son ;
come, tell of the wonders he’s done.
Wild is the mercy of Christ,
is the richness of grace,
is the unending life we embrace ;
come, come let us sing to our God.
- 3 Come, let us sing to the One,
to the Spirit of life,
leading us in the way of the Son ;
come, tell of the wonders he’s done.
Strong is the Spirit within,
is the boldness to speak,
is the power to run when we’re weak ;
come, come let us sing to our God.

*To our God, who is able
to strengthen us in his grace
beyond all we imagine,
be all glory and praise,
be all praise.*

Keith Getty (b. 1974) and Kristyn Getty (b. 1980)

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Almighty God, we come before you this morning to offer you all the praise, all the worship, all the glory and all the honour due your name. We come before you as the Creator of all that is, seen and unseen, our creator, our life-giver, the One who loved and loves us so much you sent your only Son, Jesus Christ to be our Saviour.

You call us to life – abundant life. Forgive us Lord we pray for those times when we have, through our thoughts, words, and deeds, diminished the lives of others – when we have hurt others, hurt ourselves and hurt you. Thank you for the wildness of your mercy and the richness of your grace. By your Holy Spirit, continue to change and transform us we pray that we may be bold in speaking, in thinking and in acting in ways that demonstrate your love for all. Strengthen us that, in all things, we may tell of your wonders. To you be all glory and praise, this day and forever more. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer.

Reflection 1

Last week, I went to sit in the garden at Silchester Methodist Church. The birds were singing, the wind was blowing (quite hard!) and the flowers were blooming. It was glorious. I particularly spent some time sitting in the sunken garden where I was able to admire the beautiful mosaics that were created when that part of the garden was developed a few years ago. Each depicts a different day in the Genesis 1 account of creation. The one at the top of this order of service depicts the ocean teeming with living creatures and birds flying.



It is quite a few years ago now when I was 9 or 10 years old, that a family friend bought me my first pair of binoculars. Since then, I have loved watching birds. I'm fascinated by them and their ability to fly, to hunt, to pick up speed, to feed whilst in flight. It is fascinating to watch birds and I have been really privileged to see many different species all over the world.

We're reminded in Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 6 about birds, when Jesus says, "Look at the birds of the air. They do not reap, or sow, or store away in barns and yet your heavenly Father feeds them" (Matthew 6: 26 (NIV)). There is a reminder there as we think about God's care for creation of how much God calls us to be not simply good, but great, stewards of God's creation and how much God cares for us and, indeed, as the hymn says – "Our God is a great big God, and he holds us in his hands". The God of all creation loves us to the uttermost and in that love, sent Jesus that we might have life and have it in all its fullness.

Hymn STF 61 Our God is a great big God (CCL 3373437) Alternative from H&P 334 I Sing the Almighty Power of God (STF 107)

*Our God is a great big God,
our God is a great big God,
our God is a great big God,
and he holds us in his hands.*

*Our God is a great big God,
our God is a great big God,
our God is a great big God,
and he holds us in his hands.*

He's higher than a skyscraper,
and he's deeper than a submarine.
He's wider than the universe,
and beyond my wildest dreams.
And he's known me and he's loved me
since before the world began.
How wonderful to be a part
of God's amazing plan !

Jo Hemming and Nigel Hemming

Readings

Psalm 104: 24-35

Genesis 1: 20-23

Reflection 2

I wonder what the longest journey is that you have ever made? As a child, I was terribly travel-sick and had to always have something to distract me from focusing on the motion of the car. Thankfully, the sickness wore off as I got older and I've been fortunate to travel by car, by boat, by train, and by aeroplane to many parts of the world. If you're someone who struggles with a long journey – spare a thought for salmon and for the arctic tern – the two fish and bird species that migrate the furthest – that have the longest journeys to make. It is appropriate that we think about them today as we reflect on those words in Genesis – let the waters teem with living creatures and let birds fly.

Atlantic salmon are fascinating fish, partly because they are one of only a few species that can live in both freshwater and saltwater. They hatch in freshwater in small rivers and once they have passed their juvenile stage they migrate to the ocean. They spend at least a year in the ocean, before returning to where they were born to spawn. In a complete migration salmon can travel almost 4000km- that's almost 2500 miles!

In the bird world, the top migrator is the Arctic tern. This tiny bird begins its travel from the Arctic in early autumn, flies all the way to the Antarctic, spends a few months there then flies home at the end of the winter, covering a total distance of approximately 71000km – about 43500 miles.... every year! Hats off to these amazing migrators.

But like so many other species of fish and birds, these amazing creatures are under threat. Overfishing, pollution, and climate change are just a few of the factors affecting salmon. Rising sea-water temperatures as a result of climate change can affect their survival and the availability of their food sources. Climate change presents perhaps even more of a problem for arctic terns, who could lose up to half their natural habitat if temperatures continue to rise. These 'survivors' who cope with such long journeys in varied conditions over many months may not survive much longer...and new threats appear all the time. Only 10 days or so ago I was shocked to read a news article about disposable facemasks being found in quantity on coral reefs in the Philippines – an up-to-date pandemic related example of humanity's contribution to

plastic pollution that can have devastating effects on those species we are aware of – and those we may never see....

Today is the fifth Sunday of Lent, and the beginning of what we know as Passiontide. Here too we focus on journeying – most especially the journey of Jesus as he travels to Jerusalem. Today however, as we consider the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and the amazing journeys of our epic migrators I believe we are called to stand back in awe and recognise not just this part of Jesus' journey but the fact that Jesus made the greatest journey anyone has ever made. Yes, humanity has journeyed into space – but, as the words of the hymn 'The Servant King' remind us "Hands that flung stars into space to cruel nails surrendered". Jesus made the greatest journey the world has ever known journeying from heaven to earth. And that journey once on earth was full of threat and danger from the very beginning. Come with me as we recall Jesus' journey. No sooner was Jesus born than Mary, Joseph and Jesus were on the move – a refugee family, forced to flee their homeland for Herod was looking for them. Only once Herod died were the family able to return home. But following his baptism by John in the River Jordan Jesus was led into the desert by the Devil and, on returning to Nazareth was rejected by those in his own hometown. We read this account in Luke 4: 18-21 when Jesus shares these words from the prophet Isaiah –

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind.

To release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour".

"Today", says Jesus, "this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing..." and they drive him out of town, with the intention of throwing him off the cliff.

Jesus goes to Galilee where he preaches, heals, performs miracles, continues to speak of freedom, of justice and peace and seeks to root out, expose and demolish anything that would pollute or prevent the ushering-in of God's kingdom. Jesus challenges those who seek to create or continue a 'them and us' culture, to exploit others – instead, sharing the wondrous love of God. And just as in Nazareth, the result, over the next few years, is trouble....

"He eats with tax collectors and sinners".

"He turned over the tables of money changers and those selling in the Temple – I saw him".

"We cannot explain what he is doing".

"He is dangerous".

"He must be stopped...."

And as we travel this Passiontide we will remember again, how those in authority tried to stop Jesus –and, as he died on the cross, they thought they had. But love won, the one who came for our freedom, burst open the tomb, love won, death was conquered and Jesus who came from heaven to earth in the greatest journey ever made, returned to heaven. And one day he will return to earth.

God looked at God's creation and each day saw that it was good. And yet, with our action and inaction, humanity has plundered and exploited the earth's resources. Jesus came to bring freedom and yet, with our action and inaction, humanity has misused power and abused position, leaving people captive in so many ways. Our task as Jesus' followers now is to live out our calling that in our words, thoughts, and actions we may share the good news of freedom, hope, peace, justice, and joy that Jesus brings. And that

calling includes looking after the earth God loved into being and ensuring that all God's creation can flourish. Let the water teem with living creatures and let birds fly – may we good stewards of all that has been entrusted to us and may we journey on, looking to God as our guide, fixing our eyes on Jesus and living and moving in the Holy Spirit's power. AMEN

[Hymn 700 God weeps at love withheld](#) (CCL 4135997) Alternative from H&P 402 For the Healing of the Nations (STF 696)

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| 1 God weeps at love withheld, at strength misused, at children's innocence abused, and till we change the way we love, God weeps. | 3 God cries at hungry mouths, at running sores, at creatures dying without cause, and till we change the way we care, God cries. |
| 2 God bleeds at anger's fist, at trust betrayed, at women battered and afraid, and till we change the way we win, God bleeds. | 4 God waits for stones to melt, for peace to seed, for hearts to hold each other's need, and till we understand the Christ, God waits. |

Shirley Erena Murray (*b.* 1931)

Prayers of Intercession

Gracious God, we bring your world before you this day. You created your world and saw that it was good. We thank you for all the good things we see in your world, but we are mindful today of the way in which we have not cared for your world as we should. We pray for those across your world who are hungry and thirsty this day. We pray for those whose homes are threatened by habitat loss, by climate change, those whose homes have been destroyed by flood or fire, those whose life is spent on the move with nowhere to call home. We pray for all who work for agencies that seek to safeguard nature's resources for us and for future generations to enjoy. Help us to change the way we care we pray.

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

We bring before those who are afraid this day, fearful of others and fearful for the future. We pray for those who are fearful of speaking out and those who are the victims of injustice. We pray for all who hold positions of authority across our world, that they may use the power of their positions wisely, act with integrity and seek justice, peace and good for all. Help us to change the way we win we pray.

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

We pray for those who need your healing this day, especially those who need healing because of the actions or inactions of others. We pray for all who suffer in body, mind, or spirit, praying for your peace, your healing and your hope. We pray for the lonely and the broken. Help us to change the way we love we pray.

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

We pray for ourselves Lord, as your church and as individuals. May we be those who look to the needs of the other before our own; may we be justice-seeking peacemakers and may we daily grow more and more in our discipleship and our love for you.

In Jesus' name we pray.

AMEN.

Hymn STF 117 Sing praise to God who reigns above (CCL 7061649) H&P 511

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| 1 Sing praise to God who reigns above, the God of all creation, the God of power, the God of love, the God of our salvation ; with healing balm my soul he fills, and every faithless murmur stills : to God all praise and glory ! | 3 The Lord is never far away, but, through all grief distressing, an ever-present help and stay, our peace, and joy, and blessing ; as with a mother's tender hand, he leads his own, his chosen band : to God all praise and glory ! |
| 2 What God's almighty power has made that will he ever cherish, and will, unfailing, soon and late, with loving-kindness nourish ; and where he rules in kingly might there all is just and all is right : to God all praise and glory ! | 4 O you who name Christ's holy name, give God all praise and glory : O you who own his power, proclaim aloud the wondrous story. Cast each false idol from its throne : the Lord is God, and he alone : to God all praise and glory ! |

Johann Jakob Schütz (1640–1690), Frances Elizabeth Cox
(1812–1897) and Honor Mary Thwaites (1914–1993)

May the God of all peace grant you His peace as you journey this Passiontide.

May the love of Jesus fill your heart and mind.

May the power of the Holy Spirit strengthen you for all that lies ahead.

AMEN.