

First Sunday of Lent: Circuit Service 21/02/21

“Let there be light” Prepared by Revd Andy Moffoot

Lent is a season associated with both light and darkness. If you live in the Northern hemisphere of planet earth the days are getting longer and the nights shorter, we see light bringing new life as new growth appears. I have seen daffodils flowering already, the promise of Easter and resurrection is already growing. In the southern hemisphere it is different, summer days give way to autumnal darkness, life begins to retreat underground, the Lenten focus on repentance perhaps comes easier, where we have walked in darkness without reference to God's place in our lives, a reminder to put to death our old way of life that is damaging and destructive to ourselves and creation. Thinking globally, as we will be doing through Lent this year, both aspects of light and darkness become part of our journey and our worship.

God asks us... “Where were you when I laid the earth's foundations? Tell me if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know. Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid it's cornerstones while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?” (Job: 38)

We gather in the morning or the evening, in the light or the dark, we gather on planet earth, the world that God created and we join with stars and angels in worship...

Hymn StF 15 The Splendour of the King (How Great is Our God/How Great Thou Art)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pCtqvFL0cc8>

1. The splendour of the King, clothed in majesty; Let all the Earth rejoice, All the Earth rejoice. He wraps himself in light And darkness tries to hide, And trembles at His voice, And trembles at His voice.	2. Age to age He stands And time is in His hands Beginning and the end Beginning and the end The Godhead Three in One Father Spirit Son The Lion and the Lamb The Lion and the Lamb
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***How great is our God, sing with me,
How great is our God, and all will see
How great, how great is our God!***

Name above all names, worthy of our praise
My heart will sing how great is our God.
You're the name above all names, you are worthy of our praise
And my heart will sing how great is our God

Chorus

Then sings my soul, my Saviour God to Thee;
How great Thou art, how great Thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God to Thee;
How great Thou art, how great Thou art!

Chorus

Prayer

Dear God, thank you for breath taking landscapes and tranquil oceans, for expansive tropical rainforests and stunning beaches, for majestic mountains and kaleidoscopic coral reefs. Please forgive the mistakes we have made in caring for your world. Forgive us for all the fossil fuels we are burning that lead to high temperatures, awful forest fires and other disasters.

We are sorry for changing the climate so much that the ice caps are melting. We are sorry for polluting your once-glittering ocean with vast expanses of plastic waste. Please forgive us our trespasses on your world.

Help us to find different ways and resources to solve the problems we are causing and give us the strength to make a positive difference to your world. Amen.

(Year 6 Pupil, Trinity and St Michael's C of E/Methodist Primary School, Croston)

The Lord's Prayer

Bible Reading: Psalm 33: 1-9 (The Message Version)

Good people, cheer God! Right-living people sound best when praising.
Use guitars to reinforce your Hallelujahs! Play his praise on a grand piano!
Compose your own new song to him; give him a trumpet fanfare.

For God's Word is solid to the core; everything he makes is sound, inside and out.
He loves it when everything fits, when his world is in plumb-line true.
Earth is drenched in God's affectionate satisfaction.

The skies were made by God's command; he breathed the word and the stars popped out.
He scooped Sea into his jug, put Ocean in his keg.

Earth-creatures, bow before God; world-dwellers—down on your knees!
Here's why: he spoke and there it was, in place the moment he said so.

Activity:

Spend a few minutes going around your house finding and counting how many lights you have. I was amazed that where I live there are over 50 ceiling lights, wall lights or lamps! I then started counting all the smaller lights, those that tell you something's on, or small LED screens that give off light and I lost count at 73! How many did you find?

Like me, you might have enjoyed making pancakes this week, or enjoyed eating them! As I was making my pancakes one evening and thinking about light I wondered how different it would be if I had no lights or power. Can you imagine it? I wouldn't be able to see what I was doing or have heat to cook my pancakes. It would be very messy and a complete disaster! (Sometimes it is very messy even with the lights on!)

However many lights you found in your home, spend a moment being thankful that you have light and power. All these lights use electricity to make them work. During Lent, why not take up the challenge to turn off some of those lights you've found and use less power? If we all do this, not just for Lent but always, then we can help look after the amazing world that God has created for us to enjoy.

Song: "Creator God" Nick & Becky Drake

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GM4IVZuljEI>

1. You put the stars in outer space,
You popped the freckles on my face,
And all the fish that swim and all the birds that fly
Were made from your incredible imagination...

CHORUS

Creator God, we're singing to the
Creator God of all the world
Creator God, we celebrate You!
We celebrate You!

2. You spread the ripples through the sea,
You painted stripes on every bee,
And all the grass that grows and all the
leaves that fall
Are part of Your amazing plans for this
creation....

3. You placed the heat into the sun,
You placed a heart in everyone,
And all the music played and all the
dancing done,
Reminds us that we're made to be creative
like...

Bible Reading: Genesis 1: 1-5 (NIV)

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

Talk 1: Welcome to the first of our themed services for Lent in the Basingstoke and Reading Circuit this year. We are going to be using Ruth Valerio's book, "Saying Yes to Life" as the basis for our services between now and Easter. There are six chapters in the book, a chapter for every day of the Creation story that we find in Genesis.

And as we journey through Lent towards Easter, when we focus on God as the redeemer, we will be encouraged and challenged to also think of God as the Creator.

As people made in the image of God we are entrusted to look after what God has created, to share in God's joy and ingenuity in making a difference for good.

This reflective season of Lent gives us the opportunity to think about those things that separate us from God. What gets in the way of us being in a better relationship with God than the one we already have? If we're honest with ourselves, we could all probably identify several things quite quickly, but the way we live that mistreats and abuses God's creation might not be one of the things we come up with first, or even second, or think of at all.

Lent is a time for acknowledging and reflecting on the distance that has come between us and God and to contemplate our part in creating that distance, asking ourselves, what might we stop doing, or do less of, that contributes towards climate change? What might we start doing that can point towards signs of restoration, hope, even resurrection? There is a need for all of us to re-build our relationship with the earth, and in so doing, we might rediscover or rebuild our relationship with its creator. God the creator! The Hebrew word "Bara", "to create" is only used of God in all the Hebrew Scriptures and the Genesis account of creation, whilst having origins going back much further, was probably written while the Israelites were in Exile in Babylon and so exposed to the creation stories of other cultures and traditions. Most of those stories involved creation coming about through conflict or a battle for supremacy amongst competing other gods.

The God of Israel was described as the creator who spoke all things into being. Yahweh didn't need a battle with other gods to make creation happen. The Israelites were encouraging themselves with their understanding, our God is better than theirs!

God said, let there be light and there was light and God saw that the light was good.

Re-discovering that God is our Creator, the one so powerful, awesome and indescribable, that God created and sustains all things, gave the Israelites, and may give us more confidence that the same God is also our saviour.

God the creator and God the redeemer are one. No more so is this seen as in the person of Jesus Christ, the one through whom God reconciles all things (not just humanity but all things, all creation) to himself. "In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God, he was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made, without him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life and that life was the light of everyone. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it." (John 1: 1-5)

Hymn: Indescribable StF 48

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8FIIchSJoOA>

1. From the highest of heights to the depths of the sea
Creations revealing your majesty
From the colours of fall to the fragrance of spring
Every creature unique in the song that it sings
All exclaiming... (Chorus 1)

*Chorus 1: Indescribable, uncontainable,
You placed the stars in the sky and
You know them by name.
You are amazing God!
All powerful, untameable,
Awestruck we fall to our knees
as we humbly proclaim
You are amazing God!*

2. Who has told every lightning bolt where it should go
Or seen heavenly storehouses laden with snow
Who imagined the sun and gives source to its light
Yet conceals it to bring us the coolness of night
None can fathom... (Chorus 1 X 2 + Chorus 2)

*Chorus 2: Indescribable, uncontainable,
You placed the stars in the sky and
You know them by name.
You are amazing God
Incomparable, unchangeable
You see the depths of my heart and
You love me the same
You are amazing God!
You are amazing God!*

Talk 2: "And God said, "Let there be light, and there was light, and God saw that the light was good." Light is a powerful symbol throughout the Bible and consequently in many of our hymns and worship songs, like some of those in our service today. It is a symbol so ingrained in our culture it finds its way into literature and cinema, such as Tolkien's The Lord of The Rings or the Star Wars movie franchise. In the Bible light symbolises God, and God's presence and God's guidance, "You are my light and my salvation" declares Psalm 27. "Your word is a light to my feet and a lamp to my path" (Psalm 119) In the New Testament light is a symbol of holiness and purity. We are called to live as children of the light, to walk in the light and not the darkness. There is warning and judgement for those who want to hide their rebellion from God in the dark.

Jesus Christ, the word made flesh, comes to us as Light of the world, stepping down into our darkness, as the song Paddy chose to open our service with last week declares. That same power of God that spoke in the power of creation, that brought order out of chaos is revealed in the Living Word, Jesus, the Author of Creation.

The Apostle Paul deepens our understanding further, "For God who said let light shine out of darkness, made his light shine in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ. (2 Cor 4: 6)

As we are created in God's image, as, through Christ, God has revealed his light to us, we too can see the light and join God in saying that it is good.

Back in our Genesis account when God saw that the light was good we read, “God separated the light from the darkness and he called the light “Day” and the darkness he called, “night”.

One of the many fascinating things that Nasa has produced in recent years are photographs of the earth at night. It reveals the impact of human civilisation on our planet. In most places where there is light, there is better quality of life, less poverty, better education and employment, greater opportunity and healthcare. The same photographs reveal inequalities in the distribution of that life-enhancing light, between North and South Korea for example, or the startling statistic that 56% of the population of sub-Saharan Africa remains without electricity.

Electricity is the power source for this light and its introduction into a community is literally transformational, whether it is hydro-electricity in a Nepalese village or solar panels in Tanzania. But this light is only “good” light if it is powered by sustainably produced electricity and is clean energy. I discovered in reading this book that air pollution caused by our reliance on carbon based fuels, dirty energy, is the cause of more deaths each year than HIV and Malaria combined!

So, if the God we believe in is the creator of light; if we recognise the saving, redemptive action of God in the life of Jesus Christ who came as the light of the world; and if we seek to be children, walking in the light, then we cannot just say what we believe, we are obliged to include in our discipleship, the living out of our faith, lives which demonstrate we take seriously our role to be stewards of God’s good creation, all of God’s creation. There is no space for human flourishing outside of the flourishing of all creation.

The Earth At Night: NASA Video

https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=OTHM5gyA_fQ

Talk 3: Affordable and clean energy has been identified as one of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals recognising that traditional methods of generating light by burning carbon fuels is a direct and ongoing cause of the climate emergency we are facing.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in 2018 stated that the world needed to keep global warming within 1.5 degrees Centigrade of pre-industrial levels and that it had already increased by 1 degree.

This decade, from 2020 to 2030 will be a decisive decade when it will be essential that we reduce carbon emissions by 45% or the consequences of climate change will see an additional 100 million people in poverty and the extinction of all coral reefs and the disappearance of low-lying islands.

An integral part of our worship of God as our creator and our redeemer is to respond to the needs of people in poverty and the needs of wider creation. All of us are required to act. Here are some suggestions as to how we can do this.

1 Learn. Be better informed. Just listening to this Lent season of services will hopefully be a start.

2 Act. Reduce our own carbon emissions. We can do this by choosing less polluting means of transport, or by switching our energy supplier to a greener one, and by reducing the amount of energy we use. But I was surprised to learn when I read this book that the most effective way of reducing my carbon footprint is by changing my eating habits, cutting out meat and having a predominantly vegetable or grain based diet. We can act as individuals, we can act as a church family by seeking to become an eco church and eco-circuit, and we can act as a community. The Co-op food-share scheme that TMC is involved in reduces food waste and is a witness to our community that the church family cares about people and the planet. The Church is seen doing something really positive, so it is missional and environmentally friendly!

3 We can influence change by using our voices and using our spending power. We can hold governments and businesses to account and use our money to support agencies that are promoting change or helping those communities most affected by climate change or by being consumers who consume less and when we do spend money, make sure we buy environmentally sustainable products as much as we can.

God’s creative word is ceaseless and enduring, imparting vitality to all creation. As we walk through Lent this year, may God shine a light on those things that separate us from him, let us keep in step with the creator by caring for creation.

“God said let there be light and there was light, and God saw that it was good.”

Hymn: Shine Jesus Shine (StF 59) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J3iB30gCqAc>

1. Lord the light of your love is shining
in the midst of the darkness shining;
Jesus, Light of the World, shine upon us,
set us free by the truth you now bring us.
Shine on me, shine on me.

*Shine, Jesus, shine,
fill this land with the Father's glory,
blaze, Spirit, blaze, set our hearts on fire;
flow, river, flow,
flood the nations with grace and mercy,
send forth your word, Lord, and let there be light.*

2. Lord, I come to your awesome presence
from the shadows into your radiance;
by the blood I may enter your brightness,
search me, try me, consume all my darkness.
Shine on me, shine on me.

3 As we gaze on your kingly brightness,
so our faces display your likeness;
ever changing from glory to glory,
mirrored here may our lives tell your story.
Shine on me, shine on me.

Prayer: Offer your own prayers for others, then end with this statement of hope that we might be light.

Leader: You are the light of this world.

This world where increasing inequality threatens to leave many in the darkness of powerlessness and fear.
This world where the changing climate is a violence enacted on those who have benefitted little from use
of the earth's resources.

This world where those with power decide who is seen and who remains invisible.

What does it mean to be light in such a world as this?

All: May we be light that brings safety and security to those who need it.

May we be light whose presence demands all people deserve to be seen.

May we be light that does not further scorch this earth, but shines with cleansing and healing power for all.

May we be light and bring light, until all are seen in equal splendour. **Amen.**

Hymn: You're The Word of God the Father (Author of Creation)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mVpkR4gYTIg>

1. You're the Word of God the Father
from before the world began;
every star and every planet
has been fashioned by your hand.

All creation holds together
by the power of your voice.

Let the skies declare your glory,
let the land and seas rejoice!

2. Yet you left the gaze of angels,
came to seek and save the lost,
and exchanged the joy of Heaven
for the anguish of a cross.

With a prayer you fed the hungry,
with a word you stilled the sea,
yet how silently you suffered
that the guilty may go free.

***You're the Author of creation,
you're the Lord of everyone
and your cry of love rings out
across the lands.***

3. With a shout you rose victorious
wresting victory from the grave,
and ascended into Heaven
leading captives in your way.
Now you stand before the Father
interceding for your own;
from each tribe and tongue and nation
you are leading sinners home.

Blessing By Desmond Tutu:

“Good is stronger than evil, love is stronger than hate, light is stronger than darkness, life is stronger than death, victory is ours, through him who loves us”. In that knowledge may we be carriers of light. **Amen.**

Alternative Hymns

H&P 9: Immortal Invisible

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4oGuGzCFEWI>

1 Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
In light inaccessible, hid from our eyes,
Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
Almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.

2 Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
Nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might,
Thy justice like mountains high soaring above
Thy clouds, which are fountains of goodness and love.

3 To all, life thou givest, to both great and small.
In all life thou livest, the true life of all.
We blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
And wither and perish, but naught changeth thee.

4 Great God of all glory, great God of all light,
Thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight.
All praise we would render; O help us to see
'Tis only the splendor of light hideth thee.

H&P 329: All Creatures Of Our God And King

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kJRqM45Y8Gk>

1. All creatures of our God and king,
Lift up your voice and with us sing
Alleluia, alleluia!
Bright burning sun with golden beam,
Soft shining moon with silver gleam,

*O praise him, O praise him,
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!*

2. Thou rushing wind that art so strong,
Ye clouds that sail in heaven along,
O praise him, alleluia!
Thou rising morn, in praise rejoice,
Ye lights of evening, find a voice;

3. Thou flowing water, pure and clear,
Make music for thy Lord to hear,
Alleluia, alleluia!
Thou fire, so masterful and bright
That givest us both warmth and light,

4. Let all things their creator bless
And worship him in humbleness,
O praise him, alleluia!
Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son,
and praise the Spirit, Three-in-One,

StF 106: God Whose Almighty Word

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y6G3vhBVPM4>

1. God, whose almighty word,
chaos and darkness heard,
and took their flight:
hear us, we humbly pray,
and where the gospel-day
sheds not its glorious ray,
let there be light!

2. Christ, you have come to bring
on your redeeming wing
healing and sight,
health to the sick in mind,
sight to the inly blind:
O to all humankind
let there be light!

3. Spirit of truth and love,
life-giving, holy Dove,
speed forth your flight;
move on the waters' face,
bearing the lamp of grace
and in earth's darkest place
let there be light!

4. Blessed and holy Three,
glorious Trinity,
Wisdom, Love, Might,
boundless as ocean's tide
rolling in fullest pride
through the earth, far and wide,
let there be light!