

Third Sunday in Lent – His hands have moulded the dry land (Psalm 95)

The popular perception of Lent is still one of a season in which we “give things up”, and the Jesus we meet in the wilderness has fasted for 40 days. Today, we might not simply explore the spiritual virtues of doing without, but recognise that our unhalted consumption is raising questions about the sustainability of our planet.

The desert landscape is a stark reminder of what can happen, even to fertile places when they are exploited and over-consumed. The discipline of fasting and sacrifice invites us to consider what we might manage to curtail on a more permanent basis. It invites us to remember that this earth is not ours, and we have no more claim on its resources than any other generation - past or future.

You call us to the desert
And in its vast and barren landscape
We recognise this earth's true fragility
When parched and hungry, we inhabit a land that cannot sustain us

Confronted by the emptiness of this scorched and ravaged place
We learn to be thankful again for the bounty,
That too lightly we dismiss as routine expectation,
And recognise more deeply the sufficiency of knowing you.

Teach us to loosen our grasp
On what the habits of privilege have taught us to call essential
Set us free from the tyranny of consumption
That even in the wilderness, contentment might be found.

For at the dawn of time
You did not simply breathe out the life of your Spirit
But breathed it into the dust of the earth
We are yours; yet belong in, and are sustained by your creation.

And so we come to recognise
How easily we have forgotten the privilege of being its guardians;
The desert places become a stark foretaste
Of what can become, and is becoming, when we neglect this planet's care

You did not come to exploit and consume the resources of this world
But to redeem and reclaim – to reconcile all things
Pointing us to that full salvation, for which all creation groans
Help us walk in its direction, casting the light of hope across this ravaged earth.

Biblical challenge:

This week's lent reflection builds on the words of Psalm 95, which depicts God as the one who is above and within all of creation. The Biblical narrative of creation gives central place to relationships. Genesis 2 shows us the relationships that God desires; with God; with each other; and

with creation. Genesis 3 describes the 'Fall' through which human rebellion and the human desire to play God leads to a breaking of these relationships.

God's first covenant is with the whole of creation (Genesis 8:22-9:17) Isaiah proclaims that breaking the covenant leads to the destruction of creation (Isaiah 24:4-5).

Jesus sums up the whole of the Law in two commands, to love God and to love neighbour (Matthew 22:37-40). What is Jesus calling us to do in repairing these relationships? Paul affirms that creation 'groans' as it waits for us to get our relationship with God fixed - to behave in a Christ-like way towards God's world (Romans 8:18-23).

Revelation 16-18 reveals that following the alternative lordship of power and wealth leads to the destruction of the environment and ultimately of our own lives. Who are we following? (Mark 8:34)

Many of these themes and realities echo through this week's lent reflection. But what practical steps can we take as churches and individuals to respond to its challenge?

Here are some ideas for you to consider:

Consider switching your electricity supplier to one that provides power from totally renewable resources through the Big Church Switch – to find out more visit

http://www.tearfund.org/en/2016/02/the_big_church_switch/

Conduct an Eco Church survey, which will help you to express God's care for the world through worship and mission - go to <http://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/> to find out more.

Some papers that may help with further discussion are available from the John Ray Institute, these include

Is Fracking good for us? <http://www.jri.org.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/Weaver-JRI-Briefing-30.pdf>

The Big Church Switch <http://www.jri.org.uk/blog/the-big-church-switch-another-window-of-opportunity-by-rev-dr-john-weaver/>

The Pope's welcome environmental contribution <http://www.jri.org.uk/blog/the-popes-welcome-environmental-manifesto-rev-dr-john-weaver/>