**Sunday Service -12 Sept**

**Introduction**

Last Sunday afternoon there was a national service open for all Christians concerned with our responsibility of caring for God’s earth and its climate. We are all being called in this run up to Harvest time and the November Global Conference on Climate Change to devote a service thanking God for his creation and asking for forgiveness for our abuse of it. A call to prayer that we and our national leaders work for its sustainability so that there is justice in the world that all may benefit from the resources you have given us.

**Hymn 99**

A hymn written by St Francis of Assisi

**All creatures of our God and King (omit verse 6)**

All creatures of our God and King,

Lift up your voice and with us sing,

Alleluia, alleluia!

O burning sun with golden beam,

And silver moon with softer gleam:

*O praise him, O praise him,*

*Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia*

O rushing wind that is so strong,

And clouds that sail in heaven along,

O praise him, alleluia!

O rising morn, in praise rejoice;

And lights of evening, find a voice:

*O praise him, O praise him,*

*Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia*

O flowing water, pure and clear,

Make music for your Lord to hear,

sing ‘Praise him, alleluia!’

O fire, so masterful and bright,

Giving to all both warmth and light:

*O praise him, O praise him,*

*Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia*

Dear mother earth, who day by day

Unfolds rich blessings on our way,

O praise him, alleluia!

The flowers and fruits that bloom and grow,

Let them his glory also show:

*O praise him, O praise him,*

*Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia*

And all who are of tender heart

Forgiving others, take your part,

Sing ‘Praise him, alleluia!’

All who long pain and sorrow bear,

Praise God and on him cast your care:

*O praise him, O praise him,*

*Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia*

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:

*O praise him, O praise him,*

*Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia*

*St Francis of Assisi*

*Translated by William Henry Draper*

*License No.*

**Leviticus Chapter 25 , verses 1 – 10**

The Lord spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai and commanded himto give the following regulations to the people of Israel. When you enter the land that the Lord is giving you, you shall honour the Lord by not cultivating the land every seventh year. You shall plant your fields, prune your vineyards, and gather your crops for six years. But the seventh year is to be a year of complete rest for the land, a year dedicated to the Lord. Do not plant your fields or prune your vineyards. Do not even harvest the grain that grows by itself without being planted, and do not gather the grapes from your unpruned vines; it is a year of complete rest for the land. Although the land has not been cultivated during that year, it will provide food for you, your slaves, your hired men, the foreigners living with you, your domestic animals, and the wild animals in your fields. Everything that it produces may be eaten.Count seven times seven years, a total of forty-nine years. Then, on the tenth day of the seventh month, the Day of Atonement, send someone to blow a trumpet throughout the whole land. In this way you shall set the fiftieth year apart and proclaim freedom to all the inhabitants of the land.

**A reflection by an ecumenical group of international church leaders**

The book of Leviticus says: “You shall thus consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim a release through the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you”. This year, the global reach of the coronavirus revealed our shared human nature and the inter-connectivity of our economies, political structures, health care systems, food production chains, energy and transportation systems in devastating ways. The pandemic also demonstrated that the entire web is rooted in the Earth and limited by the Earth’s capacity to sustain our economic and ecological demands. The unjust effects of climate change are a consequence of our inability to find a sustainable balance of this web. From September 1 to October 4, the Christian family celebrates the good gift of creation. This global celebration began in 1989 with recognition of the Day of Prayer for Creation and is now embraced by the wide ecumenical community. During the Season of Creation, we unite as one family in Christ, celebrating the bonds we share with each other and with “every living creature on Earth.”

The Christian family celebrates the season by spending time in prayer, considering ways to inhabit our common home sustainably, and lifting our voices in the public sphere. The scriptures begin with God’s affirmation that all of creation is “very good.” As co-creatures and caretakers of God’s creation, human beings are called to protect and nurture its goodness. Our vocation to protect and nurture life relates to the sustainability of ecological, economic, social and political systems. A just balance between these aspects of life must be maintained for the health of the Earth and all creatures. According to this wisdom the Law of Moses included provisions for the Sabbath. On the seventh day of each week, God’s people were free from the need to produce or consume. The rest was extended to animals, and the land itself, honouring the Creator by allowing creation to rest. Following the seventh, seventh (that is the 49th) year, God’s people were to dedicate a year to this ecological, social and economic restorative justice. A Jubilee for the Earth. 2020 marked 50 years since the first Earth Day when the environmental movement was born. As we live into a post-COVID-19 world, can we imagine new just and sustainable ways of living that give the Earth the rest it requires?

**Prayer**

Creator of Life, at Your word, the Earth brought forth plants yielding seed and trees of every kind bearing fruit. The rivers, mountains, minerals, seas and forests sustained life. The eyes of all looked to You to satisfy the needs of every living thing. And throughout time the Earth has sustained life. Through the planetary cycles of days and seasons, renewal and growth, you open your hand to give creatures our food in the proper time. In your Wisdom, you granted a Sabbath; a blessed time to rest in gratitude for all that you have given; a time to liberate ourselves from vicious consumption; a time to allow the land and all creatures to rest from the burden of production. But these days our living pushes the planet beyond its limits. Our demands for growth, and our never-ending cycle of production and consumption are exhausting our world. The forests are leached, the topsoil erodes, the fields fail, the deserts advance, the seas acidify, the storms intensify. We have not allowed the land to observe her rest, and the Earth is struggling to be renewed. During this Season of Creation, we ask you to grant us courage to observe a Sabbath for our planet. Strengthen us with the faith to trust in your providence. Inspire us with the creativity to share what we have been given. Teach us to be satisfied with enough. And as we proclaim a Jubilee for the Earth, send Your Holy Spirit to renew the face of creation. In the name of the One who came to proclaim good news to all creation, Jesus Christ, Our Lord, Amen

**Lord’s Prayer**

**Psalm 104** *(alternately with congregation)*

Bless the Lord, O my Soul!

**All creatures look to you to give them their food at the proper time.** **When you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things.**

You have made the moon to mark the seasons; the sun knows its time for setting. You make darkness, and it is night, when all the animals of the forest come creeping out.

**All creatures look to you to give them their food at the proper time. When you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things**.

The lions roar for their prey and seek their food from God; The sun rises, and they steal away; they return and lie down in their dens. Then people go out to their work, to their labour until evening.

**All creatures look to you to give them their food at the proper time. When you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things**.

From your lofty abode you water the mountains; You make springs gush forth in the valleys; they flow between the hills, giving drink to every wild animal;

**All creatures look to you to give them their food at the proper time. When you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things**.

You cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for people to use, to bring forth food from the Earth, wine to gladden the human heart, oil to make the face shine, and bread to strengthen the human heart.

**All creatures look to you to give them their food at the proper time. When you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things**.

The Earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.

**All creatures look to you to give them their food at the proper time**.

When you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things.

**May the glory of the Lord endure forever!**

**Romans 8, verses 19-21**

All of creation waits with eager longing for God to reveal his children. For creation was condemned to lose its purpose, not of its own will, but because God willed it to be so. Yet there was the hopethat creation itself would one day be set free from its slavery to decay and would share the glorious freedom of the children of God.

**Hymn 102 For the beauty of the earth**

For the beauty of the earth,

For the beauty of the skies,

For the love which from our birth

Over and around us lies:

*Gracious God, to you we raise*

*This our sacrifice of praise.*

*For the beauty of each hour*

*Of the day and of the night,*

*Hill and vale, and tree and flower,*

*Sun and moon and stars of light:*

*Gracious God, to you we raise*

*This our sacrifice of praise.*

For the joy of ear and eye,

For the heart and mind’s delight,

for the mystic harmony

linking sense to sound and sight:

*Gracious God, to you we raise*

*This our sacrifice of praise.*

For the joy of human love,

Brother, sister, parent, child,

Friends on earth and friends above,

Pleasures pure and undefiled:

*Gracious God, to you we raise*

*This our sacrifice of praise.*

For each perfect gift and sign

Of your love so freely given,

Graces human and divine,

Flowers of earth and buds of heaven:

*Gracious God, to you we raise*

*This our sacrifice of praise.*

*Folliott Sandford Pierpoint*

*License No.*

**Sermon written by Rev Kathy Galloway.**

Kathy is currently one of the Leadership Team of the Iona Community and former head of Christian Aid Scotland.

Deep peace of the running wave to you

Deep peace of the flowing air to you

Deep peace of the quiet earth to you

Deep peace of the shining stars to you

Deep peace of the Son of peace to you

This traditional Gaelic blessing comes from a time when people could believe with all their hearts in the deep peace of the creation. Humankind might rage and contend across borders and continents, empires might rise and fall, men and women might flower and die, to be blown away like grass in the wind, but the running wave, the flowing air, the quiet earth, the shining stars, these things would endure unchanging, promising deep peace in their stability, their beauty and their purity. They were elemental things, they were part of the substance of the universe. Even further back are these words, adapted from St Patrick’s Breastplate, that great hymn of encompassing.

I bind unto myself today the virtues of the starlit heaven,

The glorious sun’s life-giving ray,

The whiteness of the moon at even,

The flashing of the lightning free,

The whirling wind’s tempestuous shocks,

The stable earth, the deep salt sea

Around the old eternal rocks.

The Celts used to talk about the little book - that was the Bible - and the great book - that was creation, and they read God in both. The instinct to worship in response to the beauty and mystery of the universe is as old as the human story itself. The Psalm we read just now is a reminder that for thousands of years, people have looked at the world around them, and seen God as creator of heaven and earth, of the sea and all that is in them. The passionate outpouring of the Psalmist, in this, and in so many of the psalms, is a song of praise to God the Creator which echoes down the centuries and still resonates today. (It is identical, word for word with the script of a prayer written by the rebel Pharoah, Akhenaton who believed in a one almighty God, whom he called the Aten, several hundred years before the books of the Old Testament were written).

But other psalms also remind us of the limitations of humankind. It says… don’t put your trust in human leaders; no human being can save you. When they die, they return to the dust; on that day, all their plans come to an end. This doesn’t mean that we can’t trust anyone; we live to a large extent by trusting in other people. We trust the good faith of our friends and family. We put our trust in doctors, teachers, even our politicians, to do their best within the limitations of their knowledge, their training and their own human frailties, and mostly they do remarkable things within these limitations. But all of them, if they are wise, recognise their own limitations; that must operate within certain constraints. The psalm is saying that we too have limits, that in the end, we, full of potential as we are, are created, not creator. It’s a timely reminder, because as a species, we have not been very good at recognising our limitations with regard to creation, to the earth we inhabit, and share with other species and life-forms. It is one of the most painful lessons of adulthood, realizing how little we really know, and how much less we can command. The struggle to impose our will on everything around us, including the earth, causes grave damage to the environment, to other people and to ourselves. The need to get our own way, especially with regard to energy over-consumption, is really something that belongs to the ‘terrible two’ stage of infant development. Our tendency to assume that the universe is at our disposal, that it has no intrinsic worth other than its usefulness to the human species has made us careless to the point of extreme culpability.

According to a recent study the world’s 7.6 billion people represent just 0.01% of all living things. Yet since the dawn of civilisation, humanity has caused the loss of 83% of all wild mammals and half of plants. We are learning the hard way that our actions have consequences; the destruction of rainforests leads to global warming; the pollution of lakes destroys localised eco-systems, the earth resists soil erosion and the loss of biodiversity with floodwater; but the floods drown and bring diseases in their wake. It is a kind of blasphemy. How can we pray to God the Creator with integrity when we are so cavalier with God’s creation? In the gospel, we hear the greatest of all the commandments; to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength; and to love our neighbours, as we love ourselves. For most of us, the word ‘God’ is an abstract concept, too mysterious to grasp hold of. So we seek to love God revealed in God’s creation, and in those for whom people of faith are asked to have a particular care – the hungry and oppressed, the prisoners and the strangers in our land, the widows and orphans – all those who are most vulnerable, most at risk. In our time, the earth our home is vulnerable, is at risk. To love it and care for it is an expression of our love of God.

There are three things in particular about care for the earth worth noting because they are firmly rooted in love of God and love of neighbour. First, they’re about starting where we are, and that means starting with the small things. Sometimes the scale of the problems seems so great that it hardly seems worth bothering. Jesus told a story of how the kingdom of heaven was like a mustard seed. He described how it was the smallest of all seeds but grew to become the largest of plants. The mustard seed was proverbial in Palestine for the smallest possible thing. Nowadays, we might refer to the atom. The possibilities for great change in what seems small can be huge. And starting where we are means being close enough to really see things. Keen birdwatchers are knowledgeable about all sorts of birds. But that knowledge is based on hours of waiting and watching. In the close and patient observation of creatures in the wild, human beings discover the nature of them, their particularities, their strengths; the ways in which our createdness is similar and yet different. It is the start of a conversation with all the different life-forms we share the planet with.

And second, though we start where we are, we also need to go on to make the connections to a wider world. We are all part of extraordinary eco-systems, and our actions have consequences, not just for the natural world but for people and places far away-for example, in the way we shop, so buying locally and working for trade justice, are an important part of caring for the earth. So many people living in poverty need that kind of justice so they are not forced to drain the resources of their own environments. Ultimately, unless we all have a home, a place of belonging, all of our belonging is endangered. If one part of the body suffers, all the other parts suffer with it.

But thirdly, we have also demonstrated the truth of the second part of Paul’s saying, that when one part of the body rejoices, all the other parts rejoice with it. Because what all our activities have in common is that they really demonstrate the art of sharing. In recognising that we have to share this earth more equitably and gently, be responsible for clearing up after ourselves and not fouling anyone else’s patch, we’ve also found ourselves sharing lots of other things – creativity in music and the arts, sharing ideas, sharing across the generations, sharing resources, sharing with people in other parts of the world, sharing friendship and enjoyment. We’ve been revaluing during this last year or so the communal joys that so many people in our society have lost. And all of that leads to building community. People sometimes get the notion that living within limits is restrictive, that it takes away freedom. But in fact, the opposite is true. When we take responsibility for our actions, we gain a different kind of freedom. We may have less things but we make less waste – and we have more room for imagination, creativity, discovery. We go deeper into our spirituality. May being an Eco Church deepen our understanding of what it means to love God, to love our neighbour and to care for the creation. Amen.

**Video (by Methodist Justice & Public Issues Team)**

**The Challenge**

The Season of Creation is a time to acknowledge that tipping points are being reached, threatening the lives of the most vulnerable and putting the lives of future generations in jeopardy. As people of faith, we are being called to stand up against climate injustice in prophetic ways. The autumn of 2021 will also be an important moment for the Christian family to raise a united voice for rapid and radical ambitious action ahead of the 26th annual United Nations Conference of the Parties to address the climate crisis. This conference is particularly significant, as parties are due to announce how they will implement the Paris Climate Agreement (and whether they will fall short). It is a time when faith communities are

called to support and challenge their countries’ leadership to implement visionary and significant goals. It is also a time when we must listen to the prophetic voices of young people. Then you shall have the trut sounded loud; on the tenth day of the seventh month—on the Day of Atonement—you shall have the trumpet sounded throughout all your land.

**Prayers of Intercession**

***(prayer of John Bell – Hymn 724 )***

As if you were not there,

The skies ignite and thunder,

Rivers tear their banks usunder,

Thieves and nature storm and plunder:

All beware

As if you were not there.

As if you were not there,

Famine and flood together

Usher death, disease and terror;

Stricken mothers wonder whether

God heeds prayer,

As if you were not there.

As if you were not there,

We televise the dying,

Watch helpless victims crying,

Salve our consciences by sighing,

‘Life’s unfair!’

As if you were not there.

As if you were not there,

Your Son, when faith defied him,

Faced a crowd which crucified him,

Leaving friends who had denied him

In despair,

As if you were not there.

Because he rose again

And showed God’s love is vaster

Than the ultimate disaster,

We entreat you now to master

Strife and pain,

Because he rose again.

**Extempore prayer for Afghanistan, Haiti, our own nation, our community and our members**

**Hymn 727 God in his love for us lent us this planet**

God in his love for us lent us this planet,

Gave it a purpose in time and in space:

Small as a spark from the fire of creation,

Cradle of life and the home of our race.

Thanks be to God for its bounty and beauty,

Life that sustains us in body and mind:

Plenty for all, if we learn how to share it,

Riches undreamed-of to fathom and find.

Long have our human wars ruined its harvest;

Long has earth bowed to the terror of force;

Long have we wasted what others have needed,

Poisoned the fountain of life at its source.

Earth is the Lord’s: it is ours to enjoy it,

Ours, as God’s stewards, to farm and defend.

From its pollution, misuse and destruction,

Good Lord, deliver us, world without end!

*Fred Pratt Green*

*License No.*

**A Closing Prayer from South Africa**

You asked for our hands that you might use them for your purpose, we gave them for a moment, then withdrew them, for the work was hard. You asked for our mouths to speak out against injustice. We gave you a whisper that we might not be accused. You asked for our lives that you might work through us. We gave a small part that we might not get too involved. Lord, forgive our calculated efforts to serve you only when it is convenient for us to do so, only in those places where it is safe to do so, and only in those who make it easy to do so. Lord, forgive us, renew us, heal us, nurture us, empower us, send us out as an instrument of your peace and justice that we might take seriously the meaning of servant-leadership. Amen.