

Readings for the Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost, First Sunday in the Season of Creation

31st August 2025

First Reading: Jeremiah 2:4-13

Hear the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel. Thus says the LORD: What wrong did your ancestors find in me that they went far from me, and went after worthless things, and became worthless themselves? They did not say, 'Where is the LORD who brought us up from the land of Egypt, who led us in the wilderness, in a land of deserts and pits, in a land of drought and deep darkness, in a land that no one passes through, where no one lives?'

I brought you into a plentiful land to eat its fruits and its good things. But when you entered you defiled my land, and made my heritage an abomination. The priests did not say, 'Where is the LORD?' Those who handle the law did not know me; the rulers transgressed against me; the prophets prophesied by Baal, and went after things that do not profit.

Therefore once more I accuse you, says the LORD, and I accuse your children's children. Cross to the coasts of Cyprus and look, send to Kedar and examine with care; see if there has ever been such a thing. Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods? But my people have changed their glory for something that does not profit.

Be appalled, O heavens, at this, be shocked, be utterly desolate, says the LORD, for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water.

Second Reading: Hebrews 13:1-8,15-16

Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured. Let marriage be held in honour by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge fornicators and adulterers. Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, 'I will never leave you or forsake you.' So we can say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?'

Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever. Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

Gospel: St Luke 14:1,7-14

On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely. When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honour, he told them a parable.

‘When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honour, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, “Give this person your place,” and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, “Friend, move up higher”; then you will be honoured in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.’

He said also to the one who had invited him, ‘When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbours, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.’

A Reflection for the Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

Today we are marking the beginning of the Season of Creation. This Season is an ecumenical initiative started by the Eastern Orthodox Churches in 1989 and now led and supported by a global partnership of churches across the world, including the World Council of Churches and the Anglican Communion of which we are a part.

The theme of this year’s Season of Creation is ‘Peace with Creation’ and, in the Celebration Guide published by the organising committee, it says: ‘Creation is God’s sacred gift, entrusted to our care. Christians are called to protect and nurture Creation in peace, working in partnership with others and passing this responsibility on to future generations. Its deep interconnectedness makes peace both essential and fragile.’ The peace referred to here is much more than simply the absence of war. The Hebrew word ‘Shalom’, often translated as ‘peace’ has a much wider meaning to do with wholeness, wellbeing and restoration of relationships, encompassing our relationships with God, ourselves, the wider human family and all of creation.

With this in mind, I was immediately struck by second paragraph of today’s passage from Jeremiah where God says through the prophet: ‘I brought you into a plentiful land to eat its fruits and its good things. But when you entered you defiled my land, and made my heritage an abomination. The priests did not say “Where is the Lord?” Those who handle the law did not know me; the rulers transgressed against me; the prophets prophesied by Baal and went after things that do not profit.’ God doesn’t really mince his words here, does he? Despite God’s faithfulness to the people and his abundant provision, the priests, the prophets, and the people have turned away from God to false gods; the land is defiled, and there is no justice.

Jeremiah is clear that God promises the very best. God brought the people into a beautiful land to eat of its good things. Creation is a blessing of abundance and fruitfulness, and appreciation and enjoyment of all that God has given us should motivate us to care for the Earth, to cherish and protect all that we have been blessed with, and to do all in our power to live and work for its flourishing.

‘But’ God says, ‘when you entered, you defiled my land and made my heritage an abomination.’ Here, and elsewhere in Scripture, it is clear that there is a connection between our relationship with God and our relationship with the Earth. The flourishing of the Earth is linked to our faithfulness to God and also to our commitment to justice. For, to my mind, we don’t have to look very far to see clear links between unjust and exploitative practices and damage to

both human beings and the Earth, particularly in countries which don't enjoy the same legal protections we have here.

In his Canticle of Creation, St Francis of Assisi refers to 'Sister Earth, our mother who nourishes and sustains us.' The Earth can't do that if we don't care for the Earth in return.

We could say that this is nothing new. After all, Jeremiah was writing at the end of the 7th century or the beginning of the 6th century BCE, so some 2700 years ago. It may be nothing new, but the difference is that, whereas the damage done by the people in Jeremiah's day was local, the damage we do today, especially in the wealthier parts of the world, tends to be global in its impact. And I don't suppose God has change his opinion on our attitude to God's Creation and our relationship with God, each other and the Earth since Jeremiah's time.

In our Gospel reading today, we hear Jesus challenging the religious leaders and the people about their behaviour, their attitudes and injustice, in particular towards one another. The social system of Jesus' day set value on wealth and power. At the wedding banquet, or any other big occasion, everyone wanted to be in the most important seats at the top of the table because it would reflect their social standing. Jesus tells them that God's kingdom values will turn this system on its head: 'For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humbled themselves will be exalted.'

Today, by an accident of birth, we have the places if not at the top of the world's table, then pretty close to it. Perhaps not so dissimilar to the wealthy of Jesus' day for whom their privileged position was often a result of their birth. On average, in this country, we have access to much of the best that the world has to offer, to more than our fair share of the world's resources. And here, Jesus warns us too that the tables will be turned eventually. So, Jesus encourages his hearers, instead of trying to get the best for themselves, to focus on inviting those on the margins, those who are looked down on by society; to challenge systems that accord honour to some and exclude others.

How do we challenge those systems? Who do we invite to our banquets? What is the impact of our materialism and consumerism on others and on the Earth? The passage from Hebrews speaks of love and hospitality, of doing good, and urges us to keep our lives 'free from the love of money'. It's familiar stuff that, surely, is important not only for the sake of other people but also for the Earth itself.

As Christians, we are called to model ways of humble living, with generosity to share what we have. As Gandhi is reported to have said, we are called to 'Live simply, that others may simply live'. As Jesus tells us, if we don't make the effort to turn things round, God will.

Of course, some are bigger offenders than others, and it can be tempting to feel that they should change first, but our place is not to judge. Our task is to do what we can to bring about justice, to bring about healing of relationships, to bring about peace in its most sacred sense.

This Season of Creation is an invitation to try again, to do the right thing by God's world. We will never get it all right, for we are human, but we can all make tangible changes in our lives that restore relationships and bring peace and wholeness to the earth.

Tomorrow, 1st September, is designated by many churches as the World Day of Prayer for Care of Creation. Maybe that is a good place to start, to pray and ask God what next step he is calling us to for the sake of Creation.

