

Readings for the Second Sunday before Lent

8th February 2026

First Reading: Genesis 1:1-5

In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void, and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And God saw that the light was good, and God 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.

Second Reading: Romans 8:18-25

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God, for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now, and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Gospel: St Matthew 6:25-34

Jesus said to the crowd, "I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For it is the gentiles who strive for all these things, and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.

A Reflection for the Second Sunday before Lent

from Rev'd David Higgon

I first preached on today's Gospel over 25 years ago when serving as a curate in a rural parish in North Derbyshire. It was around the time of the Kyoto Agreement on greenhouse gas emissions, when the nations of the world seem to be waking up at last to the dangers of climate change. It was also around the time that James Lovelock's Gaia

Hypothesis was beginning to gain currency in the media. The Gaia Hypothesis argues that the natural world is a complex of relationships in which the existence of organisms is dependent on the existence of other ecosystems, and that non vital human interference with the natural world is a threat to all organisms that make up the natural order, including humans.

My sermon then was about the climate crisis, and I have to confess that it was met with a deal of scepticism about the very existence of climate change. The church congregation was mainly farming families and people commuting to work in Sheffield, Nottingham and Derby. It was also a very biblically literate parish with I think four or five bible study groups meeting each month, who understood that our reading from Matthew is a call on people of faith to live a life of faith, to trust in God's providence and to prioritise their spiritual lives over material things. They did not recognise the climate crisis as being in anyway a spiritual crisis.

I'm pleased to say that the church has moved on over the past 25 years, and that it recognises the climate emergency as being as much a spiritual issue as it is an environmental issue. The world has also moved on over the past 25 years and attitudes to climate change have changed, and most people today accept there is a crisis. However, Governments and politicians blow hot and cold over the issue, and while there have been dramatic shifts in the use of renewable energy for instance, the commitment to lower greenhouse gases seems less of a priority today than it was 25 years ago.

Now I have to say that when I was preaching 25 years ago to that congregation in Derbyshire, I used today's readings to draw attention to the need to act on climate change, and as an endorsement of our concern for creation. On reflection, my approach does overlook the content and intention of the scripture, in that salvation in the New Testament is focused on individual humans and communities, and it is questionable that this reading from Matthew expresses any deeper ecological concern. In a sense we can over gild the lily – excuse the pun!

In our reading from Paul's letter to the Roman's, Paul speaks of creation being subject to futility and groaning in labour pains until it can be freed from its labour pains. yet the language of the passage is deeply mixed with the hopes of human beings for their own redemption. Our readings from Matthew and Romans, are more concerned with human and national salvation than environmental issues.

But that is not to say that the bible is not concerned with environmental and ecological issues. It speaks powerfully about the wonders of God's creation, the goodness of the earth and of God's care for creation, with words of praise for God as creator and sustainer of the earth, especially in the Book of Job and in the Psalms. For me there is an injunction in the teachings of the bible that covers all our ecological and environmental responsibilities and that is the injunction to love God and to love our neighbour. We can see that the people most affected by climate change, the plants and animals we share this planet with on every part of the earth, are our neighbours and are in need of our practical love.

The 9th cent theologian John Scottis Euigena writes about seeing the divine in every aspect of the natural created world; there are two books that reveal the divine, the Bible and the other is the book of nature. Perhaps we need to look at what nature itself as to say to us about the care of creation as much as looking to the bible.

The other week I was walking Broc on the side of the River Dundonnell; the trees were bare and I was taken by the beauty of the lichen and mosses on the leafless trees. Lichen and trees have what's called a symbiotic or mutual

relationship that is benign. It is a sliver of an eco-system that works in balance, where the lichen lives on the tree without harming it, but also it benefits other wildlife like birds and insects. Lichen is an example of what our relationship with the rest of creation should be like, to live in a mutual relationship with the lightest impact possible on the planet.

At times we place a lot of guilt on the impact of humankind on the environment, but we like lichen are part of an ecosystem that is designed for growth and mutuality, where our impact should benefit the earth and that we can walk hand in hand with God to care for God's creation. I read something recently by the theologian Colin Bell, who said that our work is not so much as to save the planet, or to bring about the kingdom of God, our role as people of faith, is to be an example to others, through our lives and actions, on how to live in communion with the creation that we are part of, and to be a resistance movement against all that would destroy God's creation, trusting in the grace of God. Trusting in God is not about sitting back and waiting for God, it is working alongside God in God's task of redeeming creation. Lichen is a very small part of a woodland ecosystem, and so are we in relation to the planet. But if we do what we can when we can, we shouldn't feel guilty that what we do seems so little. To put that into context, I read this week that just 32 fossil fuel companies were responsible for half the global carbon dioxide emissions driving the climate crisis.

See yourselves then as akin to lichen in relationship to the people and systems we interact with. Like lichen, we are all part of systems albeit relatively small systems. We may be part of the education system, we are members of a church, and we are all members of the local community, these are all systems that we have a relationship with and with whom we can interact to influence to care for creation. We can speak into the systems we are part of and help them to carry the weight of caring for creation.

Lichen are very small but they are a valuable part of a woodland; they don't harm trees as they get their nutrients from the air, but woodlands that are rich in lichen support more wildlife than woodlands that have no lichen; we too, if we act in faith by loving our neighbours can also enrich our communities as lichen enrich a woodland.