

Lent2021



A gentle Lenten journey from
the Diocese of Chester

Week 2

24 February: Revd Dr Margaret Jones, Sale

25 February: Revd Josh Askwith, Hazel Grove

26 February: Revd Emma Speake, Grange

27 February: Philip Alston, Marple

01 March: Revd Debbie Dalby, Grange

02 March: Revd Emma Handley, Stalybridge

Mini challenge  Keep it local

This Lent the Diocese of Chester, led by the diocesan Environment Forum, is inviting you to join in with a Lenten journey. Leading the way are 40 individuals from around our diocese who will each reflect on God's word and God's world. They will delve into scripture and share inspiring personal stories about the small ways in which they are moved to cherish the gift of life.

So, are you up for joining in?

Daily reflections

Follow the daily reflections below. They've been organised into weekly booklets to share with others via email, and printer-friendly versions are also available to print and post to those who might prefer the reflections in a physical format.

Mini challenges

Take up our 7 mini challenges throughout Lent. Set by the diocesan Environment Forum, these 7 mini challenges will stretch you to live your life differently for the season of Lent (and beyond). So, instead of *giving up* something for Lent, why not try *taking up* one or all of these mini challenges?

Ian Bishop

Archdeacon of Macclesfield

24 February Revd Dr Margaret Jones

Lent2021

"You are the Lord, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you."

Nehemiah 9:6

During this pandemic, many of us have started to look afresh at the natural world around us. Month after month nature puts on an amazing display and in this last year, we've started to see its wonder and its intricacies with new eyes.

We live on an amazing planet, yet we're also part of something so much bigger. Maybe, like me, away from the light pollution of our towns and cities, you've looked up at a night sky, and, seeing the myriad of twinkling lights, been struck by the vastness of the universe. How small Earth is in the scale of things.

Last December there was a rare conjunction of the planets Jupiter and Saturn, a phenomenon that some think originally led the astrologers to undertake their search for a new king. I wanted to see this spectacle myself and, after two cloudy nights, on the third headed for a bridge over the M60. One end of the bridge disappears into some woods and looking west, there were the planets, together, shining brightly. It was a mystical moment – one of awe and wonder.

When we look at and reflect on the splendour of nature and of this immense universe, we cannot help but praise and worship God, the creator, preserver and sustainer of everything.

Today, try to notice something in the natural world, and thank and praise God for it.

Revd Dr Margaret Jones , Sale

Information Point

The Church of England website contains masses of information about achieving net zero carbon by 2030. Check out this link for more information.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/practical-path-net-zero-carbon-churches>

A prayer

Dear Lord,

We live in an amazing world. Help us to be more aware of the wonder of your creation and to be more thankful for it.

Amen.

25 February Revd Josh Askwith

Lent2021

"You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas."

Psalm 8:6-8

There is something awe-inspiring about the idea that we have been asked to partner with God in looking after the planet. Think about it for a moment. Think about the complexity of the tiny baby or the biodiversity of a rainforest. Our God, who created that, calls us into partnership.

I wonder if the psalmist had the imago dei in mind when he wrote that humankind is as "a little lower than the angels" and "crowned with glory and honour" in verse 5. It is tempting to think that we have authorship and ownership of nature, that as God gives us dominion so we are given ownership. This is not the case. How could we have ownership over something as complex as that?

I ministered for a time in Toronto. While there I was encouraged to spend time with the indigenous peoples. While listening and talking I learnt a lot about partnership. I learnt about their respect and reverence for the land, of their thanks for the world around them, and their desire to not subdue or own land.

Today, as you ponder what it means to have dominion over God's creation reflect upon our call into partnership and challenge yourself to make a small step to respect their earth we are called to protect.

Revd Josh Askwith, St Thomas Norbury, Hazel Grove

Information Point

The Church of England has a series of webinars that you can access to learn more about becoming net zero carbon by 2030. Find out more about them at the link below.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/about/policy-and-thinking/our-views/environment-and-climate-change/webinars-getting-net-zero-carbon>

A prayer

Dear Lord,

We lament the times we have misused your creation, exerting ownership over it. Please remind us that we are called to be partners with you and help us to reassess the way we interact with your creation.

Amen.

26 February Revd Emma Speake

Lent2021

"The disciples went and woke Jesus, saying, 'Master, Master, we're going to drown!' He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm. 'Where is your faith?', he asked his disciples. In fear and amazement, they asked one another, 'Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him.'"

Luke 8:24-25

Watching the latest TV programmes by David Attenborough has worried me: the threat is real, global warming will damage our planet if we don't act immediately.

The implications for the most vulnerable people in the world are severe, and for species of animals like polar bears, who as the planet warms, and the ice caps melt, will lose their natural habitat. What worries me is that I feel powerless to do anything to help. It's massive, and I'm so small. Maybe I feel like the disciples in the story; there was nothing they could do to stop the storm raging all around them. They were just little men, in a big storm. We might feel powerless... but Jesus isn't. Jesus could tame the wildest of seas and still the noisiest of winds. And why? because the God who spoke the world into being is in control and was working in and through Jesus.

If we believe that we are Christ's physical body on earth today, then we need to believe that through the Holy Spirit God works in and through us too. We might not necessarily rebuke the wind and the waves, but in faith, we can collectively calm the storm that is headed towards us, if we act together to prevent the planet from warming further.

In faith, as the people of God entrusted with the precious gift of creation, we can make an incredible difference together: through sacrifice, through the love of our neighbours, and through honouring our creator with better lifestyle choices each day.

So maybe this Lent the question is not 'where is our faith'.... but 'how will we put our faith into action?'

Revd Emme Speake, St Andrew's, Grange

Information Point

Has your Church discovered its Energy Footprint yet? Use the simple Church of England Energy Footprint tool to make the calculation. Follow the link to find out more.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/about/policy-and-thinking/our-views/environment-and-climate-change/about-our-environment/energy-footprint-tool>

A prayer

Lord Jesus,
We sometimes have problems that seem bigger than we are!
We sometimes feel too small to make a difference, so we don't do anything at all.
But we are your church and you fill us with power.
Might we use this power in the small decisions of our days
To change the world,
transform ourselves, and build your kingdom.
We pray in the name of the one for whom no storm is too big.
Amen.

27 February Philip Alston

Lent2021

"But ask the beasts, and they will teach you; the birds of the heavens, and they will tell you; or the bushes of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind. Does not the ear test words as the palate tastes food?"

Job 12:7-11

From the very beginning, the beauty and wonder of the world around us has inspired people to think of God. Whether it is the sight of a delicate flower hiding deep in the undergrowth or the strength of a wild storm sweeping across a barren coastline, we experience creation and it acts as a reminder of the beauty and greatness of our creator God. Our Bible verses today remind us that the creation around us can teach about our almighty God and declare truth about His character.

When I have the opportunity one of my greatest delights is to get out and walk through woody areas. An expanse of parkland dotted with individual giants and close-growing copses of smaller trees brings me great joy. I appreciate, even more, the chance to wander through densely knitted woodland, pushing through the low branches and picking my way through freshly forming saplings. As I make progress through this setting, I often imagine that the branches towering above me are being raised in praise to our common Creator. Frequently I will join in that praise, raising my arms, listening to the worship in the bird song, glorifying God in partnership with my surroundings. Can I encourage everyone to make time to spend some of the day actively joining with His creation in praise of His name as the neighbouring flora and fauna points us towards our creator God.

Philip Alston, All Saints', Marple

Information Point

Operation Noah is a Christian charity working with the Church to inspire action on the climate crisis. Why not follow the link and find out what they're doing?

<https://operationnoah.org/>

A prayer

Heavenly Father,

We thank You for the world that surrounds us.
We thank You for its beauty and for all it teaches us about You Lord.
As we see Your majesty through Your creation, may we help others see You too.
We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, Your Son.

Amen

01 March Revd Deborah Dalby

Lent2021

"For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."

Romans 8:19-23

Walking alone during the first national lockdown, I stood still for a moment, faced tipped to the sun and closed my eyes. I was struck by something overwhelming – the sound of nature. Not obscured by voices, traffic or airplane noise, with no hum or alerts from technology, I like others heard birdsong like never before. I recognised the scuttle of mammals in the hedgerow and caught the commotion of insects. We were all delighted by worldwide reports of diverse wildlife moving into urban spaces.

A crisis, whose negative impact was singularly felt by humans, reminded us of the impact we have on our planet. For a short while the groan of nature turned to a riot of rejoicing, as we were pushed back into our restricted habitats, the natural world seemed set free!

Jesus is our pivot, allowing us to turn our lives around and be set free from the bad that we think, say, and do. This redemption, however, is not ours alone but for all of creation. During the pandemic, we have come to recognise that our neighbours are also animals and plants. The importance to love all our created neighbours as ourselves couldn't be more clearly illustrated than when we share the disaster of forest and fell fires, floods and drought.

Good news from the pandemic is that we can change behaviour and experience the benefits - allowing the harmony of nature to emerge frees us all. The starting point for change, as always, is to sit back, open our hearts and listen.

Revd Deborah Dalby, St Andrew's, Grange

Information Point

Do you struggle to know how to pray powerfully and constructively for the Earth. Try this website Pray and Fast for the Climate.

<https://prayandfastfortheclimate.org.uk/>

A prayer

Loving God,

Help me to love your creation and give me the wisdom to stop and hear what you are saying through the wonder of nature today.

Amen

02 March Revd Emma Handley

Lent2021

"The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain,' says the Lord."

Isaiah 65:25

The relationship between my church and the local council has been adversarial for many years. The point of contention all hinges around whose responsibility it is to maintain our huge, closed graveyard. Years of wrangling plus a disastrous landscaping scheme have left it in a state of neglect and diminished biodiversity, a literal dead zone surrounding the church – a wasteland, and testament to the combined effect of two institutions shirking their responsibility and not working together.

This is not the vision held out to us of God's kingdom. The vision of Isaiah gives us a glimpse of unity and peace, the wolf lying down with the lamb, lines of enmity dissipating, and a healing and blossoming of our land and ecosystems as a consequence.

Challenged by our calling to bring in God's kingdom in the here and now my church has sought to engage with our council, and we are embarking on an ambitious tree-planting scheme with City of Trees. Our aim is to increase biodiversity, introduce more trees to our city and through community involvement make God's acre a local resource rather than a no-go area. It's a necessity that has been highlighted by Lockdown. People need green spaces. We need Eden, but Eden also needs us to live up to our calling and responsibility and steward.

Revd Emma Handley, St Paul's, Stalybridge

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A prayer

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Amen.

Lent2021 ...7 mini challenges

This Lent the Diocese of Chester, led by the diocesan Environment Forum, is inviting you to join in with a Lenten journey and to think about how we might all play our part in living more sustainably. Let's think about what we might change in our daily lives to show our love for God's creation and the environment.



Keep it local

Cut back on packaging and food miles by shopping at local greengrocers, butchers and farm shops.