

### WELCOME AND NOTICES:

Stewards still needed for the Lightshow  
31<sup>st</sup> October, please see Mark.

Hope Café meeting: Tuesday 19 October,  
11am.

### CALL TO WORSHIP:

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth,  
burst into jubilant song with music...  
Let the sea resound, and everything in it,  
the world, and all who live in it.  
<sup>8</sup> Let the rivers clap their hands, let the  
mountains sing together for joy...  
(Psalm 98:4, 7-8)

### SONG(S): ALL CREATURES OF OUR GOD AND KING

**All creatures of our God and King  
Lift up your voice and with us sing:  
Hallelujah, hallelujah!  
Thou burning sun with golden beam,  
Thou silver moon with softer gleam:  
O praise Him, O praise Him,  
Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah!**

**Thou rushing wind that art so strong,  
Ye clouds that sail in heaven along,  
O praise Him, hallelujah!  
Thou rising morn, in praise rejoice,  
Ye lights of evening, find a voice:  
O praise Him, O praise Him,  
Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah!**

**Thou flowing water, pure and clear,  
Make music for thy Lord to hear,  
Hallelujah, hallelujah!  
Thou fire so masterful and bright,  
That givest man both warmth and light:  
O praise Him, O praise Him,  
Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah!**

**And all ye men of tender heart,  
Forgiving others, take your part,  
O sing ye, hallelujah!**

**Ye who long pain and sorrow bear,  
Praise God and on Him cast your care:  
O praise Him, O praise Him,  
Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah!**

**Let all things their Creator bless,  
And worship Him in humbleness,  
O praise Him, hallelujah!  
Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son,  
And praise the Spirit, Three-in-One:  
O praise Him, O praise Him,  
Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah!**

### OPENING PRAYER

Lord of all creation, we come to worship  
and adore you for the wonder of all you  
have made:  
the land with its mountains and islands,  
signs of your great wonder;  
the seas with their roaring and bounty,  
signs of your great strength;  
the nations with all the varieties of  
language and culture,  
signs of the wealth of gifts we share;  
Lord of all creation, we come to worship  
and adore you for the wonder of all you  
have made; through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

### CONFESSION

In a world whose web of life is intricate  
and beautiful,  
**save us, Lord, from carelessness and  
blindness.**  
In a world whose creatures are so varied  
and vulnerable,  
**save us, Lord, from plundering and  
cruelty.**  
In a world whose waters are fresh and  
whose oceans should cleanse,  
**save us, Lord, from wanton pollution.**  
In a world whose forest protect our air  
and wildlife,

**save us, Lord, from the systems that drive us to destroy them.**

In a world whose fruits are rich and plentiful,  
**save us, Lord, from waste and greed.**

**Forgive us, Father, for the sake of all life on earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

#### **ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

The Lord is patient and kind, and offers to all who truly repent his pardon from all our sins and his strength to make a difference in the world; in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

#### **SONG: MERCIFUL GOD**

**Merciful God, O abounding in love,  
Faithful to all who draw near You;  
Hearing the cries of the humble in heart,  
Showing the cross they may cling to.  
Helpless I come, broken in sin,  
Found at the feet of Your mercy.  
Father, forgive,  
May my sin be remembered no more.**

**Merciful God, O abounding in love,  
Faithful through times we have failed  
You –  
Selfish in thought and uncaring in deed,  
Foolish in word and ungrateful.  
Spirit of God, conquer our hearts  
With love that flows from forgiveness;  
Cause us to yield  
And return to the mercy of God.**

**Merciful God, O abounding in love,  
Faithful to keep us from falling;  
Guiding our ways with Your fatherly  
heart,  
Growing our faith with each testing.**

**God speed the day struggles will end,  
Faultless we'll gaze on Your glory;  
Then we will stand  
Overwhelmed by the mercy of God.**

#### **OFFERTORY PRAYER**

Abundant God, we offer you all we are and all we have that the world may know that everything is yours and live to the glory of your name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

#### **PRAYER FOR SUNDAY CLUB**

##### **READING: JEREMIAH 29:4-14 –**

<sup>4</sup>This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: <sup>5</sup>'Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. <sup>6</sup>Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. <sup>7</sup>Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.' <sup>8</sup>Yes, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: 'Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have. <sup>9</sup>They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them,' declares the Lord.

<sup>10</sup>This is what the Lord says: 'When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfil my good promise to bring you back to this place. <sup>11</sup>For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. <sup>12</sup>Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I

will listen to you. <sup>13</sup>You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. <sup>14</sup>I will be found by you,' declares the Lord, 'and will bring you back from captivity. <sup>[a]</sup>I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,' declares the Lord, 'and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.'

This is the Word of the Lord  
**Thanks be to God**

### REFLECTION: ECO CHURCH (3) Act 3 – Land

Today we come to the third of our five acts in the Bible: land. Last week Mike looked at the Fall, and next week he will take the fourth act, Jesus. A lot of people jump from the Fall to Jesus, without so much as a thought for what went inbetween. The Old Testament scholar, Walter Brueggemann, argues that 'Land is a central, if not the central theme of biblical faith' (*Land* p3). Whether you agree or disagree with him, land plays a vital part of the story. As well as creation and the fall, the story of the Old Testament has Abraham leaving his homeland and travelling a thousand miles to an unknown land. Through Abraham God raises up for himself a people and promised them a place, the Promised Land. Because of famine, God's people moved to a foreign land, Egypt, where they became slaves. Then 400 years later Moses led the people out of slavery where they wandered the land for forty years, where they received the Law of the Lord. The Law connected the land and its welfare to obedience to the Lord. After Moses' death Joshua took the Israelites into the land

flowing with milk and honey. King David was a man after the Lord's heart and the land flourished, but when the people turned to idolatry they were exiled from the land. Can you see just how much land is linked to God and his people?

In an era where an ecological crisis threatens not only human beings and animals but also the land itself, maybe we should rethink God's command to 'take care of [the land]' (Genesis 2:15), remembering that the land belongs to God. His people are to model a right relationship between themselves and God and the land. The books of Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy may not be the most riveting of reads but they clearly show that there is a relationship between the health of the land and the God whose land it is. God gave clear instructions about looking after the land and its creatures. This touched on farming practices, from caring for your livestock to not harvesting at the edges of your field for the sake of the widows, the poor, and the animals. Just this week I read about a farmer in Cornwall who does just that, he doesn't plough six metres on the edge of his field for the sake of wildlife.

Any good farmer will tell you that the land needs rest just as people do. In Leviticus 25 the LORD commanded Israel to observe a sabbath rest for the land every seven years and a jubilee every fifty years, when land that had been sold would be returned to the original owner's family. By doing this God reminds the people that the land is his and they are merely tenants (Lev. 25:23).

This sense of tenancy in Israel was different from the surrounding nations. In those societies the king or chief owned most of the land, but in Israel the land was divided up as widely as possible into multiple ownership by extended families. Those families were inheritors of the land, which is why Naboth wouldn't sell his land to King Ahab (1 Kings 21). He was tied to the land, just as many farmers are today.

We talk about putting down roots, but we know the effects of being uprooted from the land, displaced, as we see with so many refugees and migrants today. It was Russ Parker who wrote in his book 'Healing Wounded History' that 'One of the strongest and most basic needs of the whole human race is to belong, and to belong in the place or on the land where we can connect, be rooted and grow.'

We can be cut off from the natural world, especially in cities. I remember when I lived in East London, and we travelled out to a supporting church in St. Albans. I still remember the feeling of seeing fields and crops and woods. It was almost like I could breathe again. I had become disconnected to the land. The people of Israel knew the value of being connected to a place, and experienced a time of dislocation and uprootedness in exile in Babylon. Even when in exile they were reminded about the value of place. And that's where Jeremiah's letter to the exiles comes in. God's call is to a disconnected people to settle. God says they were to get on with life. One day the LORD would return them

to the Promised Land, but in the meantime they were to settle.

There are dozens of nationalities within Bowthorpe. Home for them and their families may be far away, and like the people of Israel in exile to whom Jeremiah is writing, many wish they could be somewhere else. Some have no desire to put down roots but to go home. Yet the LORD says clearly through the prophet that God wants us to put down roots wherever we are, even if it is not somewhere we would have chosen. Having roots in a place is good for our wellbeing as people and is essential if we are to have a healthy relationship with the natural environment around us.

Faith is closely connected with place. Jesus came to a particular place and time and made it his home. Dave Bookless in his book 'Planetwise' contends, 'We cannot have a completely healthy relationship with God unless we treat the land in a godly way.' Sadly, this hasn't happened for far too long. We have farmed land to the point that it is unproductive. We have cut down virgin rainforest to farm cattle, but within a short while the land is barren and more rainforest is cut down, and so the destruction goes on! We have fished the oceans to the point where some species will never recover, and we have poisoned our waters with plastic and other pollutants.

The Bible shows the constant flux of Israel's relationship with God and the resulting effects on creation. Feast or

famine, rootedness or exile, all this is linked to our relationship with God and with the land he has placed us in. The land is not just the backdrop of the great Bible story, but an important part of the story. The land is invited to praise God as we heard as we began our service (Psalm 98).

But the land also suffers when we fail to keep God's commands. Jeremiah declared, *'How long will the land lie parched and the grass in every field be withered? Because those who live in it are wicked, the animals and birds have perished.'* (Jeremiah 12:4). Jeremiah made a link between God, his people and the land. In many ways the land acts as a spiritual barometer. When we fail to walk in God's ways the land suffers, and this is not just a matter of poor stewardship or ecological mismanagement, although it is both these things, the land is also affected when there is moral failure on our part. Idolatry, bloodshed and broken promises all effect the land (Jer. 3:6-10; 16:18; Num. 35:33-34; Isa. 24:5-6). When we sin against God it has a knock-on effect, the land suffers.

Remember that Jeremiah was writing to the exiles in Babylon, they may well have remembered Leviticus 18:28 which says, *'And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you.'* That's exactly what happened, and is a sobering thought for us. Yes, there may be poor farming practices, bad stewardship of the land and unfettered greed, but some of what we are looking at in regard to climate change is that we are

reaping what we have sown in regard to not keeping God's commands. Sadly we have taken the land for granted and acted as though it can be exploited without consequences. But those who deny the God whose land it is also fail to understand the link between the land and the Lord.

So what can be done to heal the land? The phrase 'healing the land' only occurs once in the Bible, at the dedication of the new temple by Solomon. God's glory came down and filled the temple, and God said, <sup>13</sup>'When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, <sup>14</sup>if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.' (2 Chron. 7:13-14).

What is significant here is not the healing of the land by recycling or better resource management, although those are important, but by repentance and returning to God. The land can only be healed when its inhabitants recognise whose land it is and repair their broken relationship with God. If we think this is far-fetched and don't believe repentance can benefit the natural environment then we fail to understand how everything is connected in God's world.

As I conclude I want to tell you a story about a place in Guatemala called Almolonga. The community was hell-bent on crime and immorality and the land was almost sterile. However, the people turned to Christ and their fields were transformed in fertile places which yielded huge vegetables. Land, people and God are

interconnected. If we wish to help the climate emergency, then we need to consider our own lives and the use of our own resources. In our society as a whole we need to consider the ways we produce food and manage our natural environment. But alongside all that, if we want our relationship with the land to be healed then we must ensure our relationship with God is healed first. And of course our relationship with God is healed through Jesus, and it is that part of the story which we will look at next week.

#### PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION – Louise

##### SONG: THE RISING SUN

The rising sun that fills the sky,  
The starry host that lights the night,  
Reflecting Your glory.  
The mountain heights forever stand,  
The rain that falls to soak the land  
Respond to Your glory.

*Almighty God, in every way  
You are above and beyond  
understanding.  
If we did not praise,  
the rocks would cry out;  
Glorious God, high above understanding.*

The vast expanse of earth and sea,  
Held by You in harmony,  
Speaks of Your glory.  
All You've made since time began,  
Life itself Your perfect plan;  
And it's all for Your glory.

Creation joins as one to sing,  
'Glorious God',  
So far above all earthly things.

#### CLOSING PRAYER AND BLESSING

May the God who created all things and put us in this land, give us the wisdom to care for the land, give us the willingness to change our lives for the sake of the land, and give us the strength to confront those who misuse the land; for his glory's sake. **Amen.**

And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be with you and all whom you love, now and for evermore. **Amen.**

**Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.  
In the name of Christ. Amen.**