

For Such a Time as This

(What have Christians got to offer?)

Week 2. 'The Earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws'

(Isaiah 24.5)

Introduction to Week Two

In Study 1, we looked at the crisis facing the world and recognised that our selfishness and greed are largely to blame. This raised the question: was it meant to be like this? Was this the Creator's intention? What do you think?

Opening Prayers

O Lord open our lips
And our mouth shall declare your praise

Let us pray together:

Creator God, breathing your own life into being, you gave us the gift of life: you placed us on this earth with its minerals and waters, flowers and fruits, living creatures of grace and beauty. You gave us the care of the earth. Teach us, Creator God of Love, that the earth and all its fullness is yours, the world and all who dwell in it. Call us yet again to safeguard the gift of life.

Amen

Lord, thank you for bringing us together for this session. We know you are with us as we join together in your name. Help us to make the best use of the time available tonight. We realise that some of the discussions may be uncomfortable, but we pray that you give us the willingness and enthusiasm to fully engage and join in the discussions. We also pray that we continue after the session to contemplate and explore the thoughts and lessons we can take away from this evening.

Amen

PSALM 19:1-6 1

The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

**Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.**

There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;

**yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.**

In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun,
which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy,
and like a strong man runs its course with joy.

**Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them;
and nothing is hidden from its heat.**

Discussion: For such a time

A VIEW FROM THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN THE PHILIPPINES By the Most Rev'd Renato Abibico, former Prime Bishop, the Episcopal Church in the Philippines (ECP)

The mission work of the Episcopal Church in the Philippines is historically concentrated in and continues to grow among the indigenous communities in the northern and southern parts of the Philippine Islands. This has been a blessing and a gift as these communities continue to shape the theology of the ECP with their indigenous worldviews that are more attuned with the Biblical command for humanity to care for, and be stewards of Creation. To generations of indigenous Cordillera and Lumad persons, human beings share the Earth with spirits of the trees, rivers, rocks, hills and mountains.

This belief inspires holy fear and deters the believers from committing any abuse or harm on nature - because any such act is an invitation for divine retribution in the form of illness, misfortune, or disaster. This can then only be satisfied by appropriate rituals and sacrifices to the offended spirits. These worldviews are embodied in the Igorot concept of Inayan. This concept determines that one must do to others (and to nature) what he or she wants to be done to themselves or the bad that is done will return to the doer. The Church's theology and mission work continue to be informed by this concept, although it has been adapted into a Christian understanding that it is God with whom humanity shares the Earth. Furthermore, the spirit of these communities' cleansing rituals and sacrifices have been affirmed in Jesus Christ's sacrifice of himself to redeem the world and to show the way to a life of love and righteousness. But as humanity continues to turn its back against the Creator, the warning of Inayan is affirmed by Isaiah 24:4-6:

'The Earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers; the heavens languishes together with the Earth. The Earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws; violated the statutes; broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore, a curse devours the Earth, and its inhabitants suffer.'

The price of completely ignoring Inayan and Isaiah's prophecy of the Earth's doom is unfolding now in many parts of the Philippines. This includes the ancestral domains of indigenous communities, where commercial interests are pursuing extractive and development industries which strip trees from forests, mine the mountains, poison agricultural lands, and pollute rivers and lakes. Unfortunately, it is these communities and the majority of Filipinos who are suffering from the catastrophic effects of this, while those who are responsible for the harm are reaping tremendous economic benefits. Thus, the mission of the Church to safeguard the integrity of Creation and renew the life of the Earth has become urgent and of the utmost significance. The Church's work in denouncing these destructive practices is complemented by its work among communities for the pursuit of livelihoods and development measures. This helps people to cope with the destruction caused by others while at the same time upholding the sanctity of Creation

Discussion Questions:

1. When you compare the image of Creation in today's Psalm, to the story from the Philippines, how does that make you feel about the way we have damaged the Earth?
2. As Christians, how can we learn from other worldviews?
3. How do we ensure that indigenous worldviews and voices are heard and not lost?
4. Where in our own countries are there perspectives that are more "attuned with the Biblical command for humanity to care for and be stewards of Creation"? How do they influence our understanding?

Closing Prayers

Heavenly Father, we thank you that we can come together again, to discuss views and listen to each other's experiences. As we near the end of this evening's session, help us to keep the thoughts and ideas we have encountered tonight, alive in our hearts.

Amen

A prayer for our Earth - Laudato Si (Pope Francis)

All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures. You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty. Fill us with peace, that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one. O God of the poor, help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this Earth, so precious in your eyes. Bring healing to our lives, that we may protect the world and not prey on it, that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction. Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain at the expense of the poor and the Earth. Teach us to discover the worth of each thing, to be filled with awe and contemplation, to recognise that we are profoundly united with every creature as we journey towards your infinite light. We thank you for being with us each day. Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle for justice, love and peace.

Amen.

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

The Lord bless us and watch over us;
the Lord make his face shine upon us and be gracious to us;
the Lord look kindly on us and give us peace.

Amen.

Let us bless the Lord

Thanks be to God.