

Environmentalism, global warming, climate change, sustainability.

I don't know how you feel about these words – they might be causes close to your heart, they might be a broken record that you hear on the news but that seems distant. You might think they are 'fake news' drummed up by people wanting to sell new products to gullible people. You might just be fed up with the whole thing. Maybe there are more pressing issues for you – maybe things going on in your own life, maybe the global pandemic, issues of social justice, public health or crime in the area.

Perhaps this week's rather creation focused mailing makes you want to switch off and dump the whole thing in the bin (or hopefully the recycling?).

It is all I can ask you to do to bear with me, and hopefully there will be more to this season of 'Creationtide' than a push to veganism, or zero-waste, or travel-bans.

I hesitated in the covering letter to say that care for the whole of creation is as much a part of Christianity as reading the Bible, prayer or even receiving the Eucharist. However, I think there is a grain of truth in this. The command to *'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.'* (Genesis 1:28) comes well before any of the other ways of worshiping God were instigated. Human beings might be the pinnacle of creation – which is one way to read the first chapter of Genesis – but they are not alone in that creation.

Perhaps, though, the chapters and verses of our Bibles disguise the real 'jewel in the crown' of this creation epic. After all, there is only one thing in all of creation that God blesses and *hallows* (makes holy) and that is the seventh day, the sabbath and the day of rest. Perhaps the pinnacle of creation is not humanity at all but that holy rest, which becomes the Jewish 'sabbath', which forms the pattern for the 'year of jubilee' (or the sabbath year) and our own Sunday or Sabbath practices.

This idea of Jubilee forms the 'theme' and inspiration for the Season of Creation celebrated ecumenically this year.

These days the idea of sabbath rest seems lost – shops are open on Sundays, children go to football clubs and the news cycle continues unabated. This wasn't always the case, you may well remember stricter Sundays where the time after Church was filled with Sunday School, reading the Bible, sitting quietly or playing with a few select and special toys. I have to confess that my only interaction with such Sundays comes from reading books like 'Little House in the Big Woods' (although I know that Laura's childhood in those woods was well before anyone reading this was born!)

The idea of 'stopping' or 'waiting' permeates two of our readings this week. In Psalm 130 the author finds themselves waiting expectantly and hopefully for the Lord. The long quiet waiting of 'those who watch for the morning' where there is no bustle and business to distract only the long dark silence of night and gazing expectantly at the horizon for the grey light of dawn.

We also see it in the reading from Matthew where the storm goes from being 'so great that the boat was being swamped by the waves' to 'dead calm' in the space of a few words. The winds and the sea that a moment ago were so busy are suddenly completely, and eerily still.

This is similar to what so many of us experienced during lockdown – one day we were going about our lives almost as normal and the next we found the streets deserted and our lives curtailed. Even if we were going out to work, or to take care of friends and family or if we had children at home there

was something strangely...still about the whole experience. The pattern of life we knew had been shattered.

This enforced rest has brought many remarkable stories – of towns and villages knowing peace for the first time in decades as flights cease and roads empty, of national parks where the animals are more free to roam and live out their lives without the daily bustle of tourists to disturb them. I saw it in the rivers of Durham so much clearer without the daily flotilla of college rowing boats training dawn to dusk.

It has brought people back to their gardens, back to their local hills and woodlands. Children who found school a place of anxiety and dread report feeling happier in lockdown despite all the confusion.

But it has also been hard, it has kept families apart and children from school. It has isolated those who were already feeling distant. For some it has brought financial worries, while for others it has revealed their dissatisfaction with their old work-life balances.

The 'ceasing' of lockdown has been like the ceasing of the storm, enforced by external authorities and almost complete. It has been healing in a painful kind of way – like the bedrest prescribed by doctors where some parts of the body suffer to allow others to recover.

We have stood in the midst of this dead calm and said 'everything will be different when we're out the other side' and imagined great, sweeping changes. But the truth is more complicated. In reality as a nation, if not a world, people have flocked to the beaches the moment that restrictions were lifted, we see litter now that includes not only sweet wrappers and coffee cups but masks and rubber gloves.

We have leapt up from our bedrest and continued to rush around, we have ceased storming for a moment only to resume with equal power.

How, instead, can we carry this waiting forward? How can we know balance in our lives like '*the balancings of the clouds*' (Job)? How can we '*stop and consider the wondrous works of God*' (Job)? How can we acknowledge God not only as forgiver of sins and healer but as the one *who 'created all things'* and by whose '*will they existed and were created*' (Revelations)?

God who made the heavens and the earths stopped and rested at the end of the busyness of creation, surely we who have only a small part to play in its thriving should do so too? Like a field that lies fallow and produces more abundantly the next year we need to find ways to allow the earth to breathe. To cease demanding that it springs forth, that it creates and shapes and moulds. To cease our storming on its surface and make space to allow the 'dead calm' to do its healing work.

- Jo Burden