



The Maker's instructions

The Bible opens with the Creation story - a theme that is woven into the whole book. The Earth is the Lord's. A loving God created the Earth and all its eco-systems and saw that it was good - full of harmony, peace, justice and wisdom.¹ He created an interdependent world, climate, creatures and humans, in relationship with God and with each other.

"The Word was first, the Word present to God, God present to the Word. The Word was God, everything was created through Him; nothing - not one thing - came into being without Him. What came into existence was Life, and the Life was Light to live by."
John 1:1-4 (The Message)

"To the Lord belong the earth and everything in it, the world and all its inhabitants. For it was He who founded it in the seas and planted it firm on the waters beneath". Ps 24

"And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good." Genesis 1:31
"The world is filled with the glory of God" Isaiah 6:3

Do we behave as if the Earth belongs to God? Does this challenge the principles of ownership that have developed in western economics. The native Americans and other Aboriginal peoples had the wisdom to understand that the Earth does not belong to us, rather we depend on the Earth. But do we realise it? Do we recognise the awesome power of God who made the sun, wind, fire, waters, volcanoes, earthquakes, and the climate system over which we humans have no power? Have we taken the Earth's ecosystems for granted without acknowledging God's all-mighty power?

God is "the one who by His strength established the mountains, being girded with might; who stills the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples, so that those who dwell at the ends of the earth are in awe at your signs" Psalm 65: 5-8

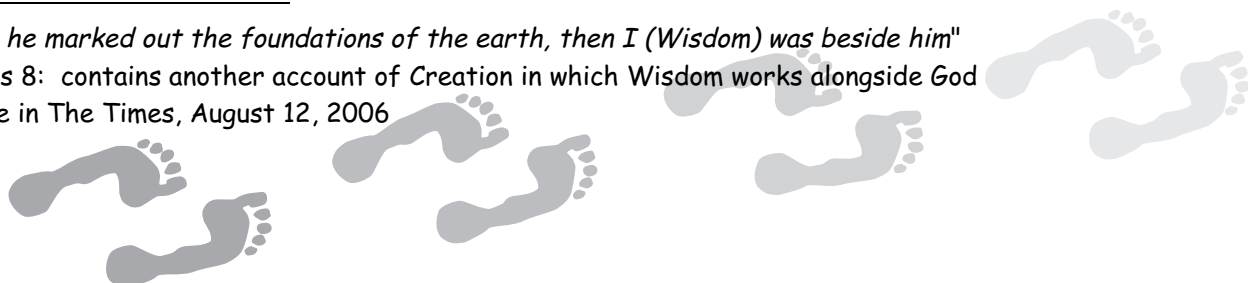
And after creating Earth, God purposefully created the great creatures of the sea and the land, in all their diversity and peculiarity. *O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.* Psalm 104:24. All are part of God's purpose, painstakingly defended at the time of the flood and subject of the unique covenant between God and "all the creatures". It must be a matter of great concern that climate change is likely to destroy thousands of species.

After creating animals, God made humans 'in His own image' to share in His purpose on Earth and in heaven. Man was given "dominion over every living thing that moves on the earth" Gen 1:28 and put in the Garden of Eden "to work it and keep it." Gen 2:15.

"There is a highly significant phrase in the second chapter of Genesis that gets lost in translation." writes Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks,² "It says that God "took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. In the original Hebrew, these two verbs are technical terms designated specific types of responsibility. The word translated as "to work" in fact means "to serve". It is the term the Bible uses elsewhere

¹ "when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I (Wisdom) was beside him"
Proverbs 8: contains another account of Creation in which Wisdom works alongside God

² Article in The Times, August 12, 2006





to describe the relationship between humanity and God. It means that within the created world we are servants not masters. The verb translated as "take care of" has the legal sense of guardianship. We do not own the world, nor yet have freeholder rights but those of caretakers. God has temporarily placed it in our care as trustees for the benefit of future generations."

We humans are tenants and stewards, responsible to our Maker for our stewardship. We have to recognise that its resources are finite and hand it on to the next generation in life-sustaining order. Have we been good stewards of creation? Let's admit it - on our watch we have lived more and more comfortable lives without realizing that our use of carbon fuels was creating global warming.

And God concluded his creating by establishing the Sabbath as a holy day of rest, all part of the pattern of creation. One day in seven is for the Lord. It is a theme throughout the Old Testament, included in the Ten Commandments. "Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you." Deut 5:12. And Christ carried forward that important commandment by declaring that he is the Lord of the Sabbath (Luke 6:5, Matthew 12:8, Mark 2:28, Hebrews 4:9-10). The Sabbath sets a limit on our endeavours. It is a day to take time out, to rest and recover and let the Earth recover too. Can we challenge our Sabbath-less society to make time for spirituality and renewal?

From the Fall to the Covenant.

Adam and Eve refused to acknowledge the sovereignty of God and so with an act of disobedience, the state of harmony in creation was shattered. The consequences of disregarding the Maker's instructions were disastrous, and remain so today. Just a few short chapters later the Creator "grieved" over the evil, corruption and violence of human behaviour. Does God grieve at these today?

"The Lord saw that the world was corrupt and full of violence; God said to Noah "I am going to bring the whole human race to an end, for because of them the earth is full of violence. I am about to destroy them." Genesis 6:11,13

But then He planned to rescue and redeem the Earth and Noah acted on God's instruction even while the storm and flood were still distant (Hebrews 11:7), without realising that his momentous endeavour was to preserve life on Earth. The ark and rainbow remain powerful symbols of survival and renewal. In making a covenant with Noah and **every living creature** and **with the Earth** (Genesis 9:9-17) God restates that co-dependence of Earth, animals, humans. Humans have to live in harmony with nature, and preserve the balance, the peace and justice - the 'shalom' that God intended - that's the covenant. That's the deal, and as with all deals both sides have to do their part.

God gave us one planet Earth that can sustain and renew itself if we recognise the limits, but today we require the resources of three planets.³

God gave us the laws of nature but man substituted the laws of economics and the market.

God gave us the Sabbath as his gift of holy rest, but we ignore it.

God made a covenant with all of creation but we failed to recognise the deal.

³ New Economics Foundation Report "The world as a whole is living beyond its ecosystems' capacity to regenerate. If the whole world had wanted to share UK lifestyles in 1961, the Earth would just have managed with its available resources. Today we would need 3.1 planets to support them." 9th Oct 06





So God sent his beloved Son to show us His work in creation, and lead us back along the path to harmony, peace and justice that He originally intended.

Christ reclaimed the Earth as the Lord's

The God of Creation continued his work by sending His Son to restore and redeem His creation. "*The Word became flesh*" (John 1), the very stuff of creation. The Word of life becomes part of the living planet called Earth. "*God so loved the world that He sent his only Son . . .*" John 3:16. The "Earth" and "the world" are writ large in the mission of God. Jesus came to link heaven and Earth, and to **build the Kingdom of God on Earth.**⁴

Christ is "*the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation...by whom and through whom all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible . . . all things were created by him and for him . . . and in him all things hold together.*" Colossians 1:15-17. That last phrase defines God's vision of sustainability.

This is how He taught us to pray: "*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, **your will be done on earth** as it is in heaven.*" Matt 6:9.

The Earth has a central role in the mission of God. "And what is that mission? To do God's will on Earth as it is done in Heaven. His prayer and ours. His mission and ours. The "earthing" of Heaven. The Mission of God. No wonder the earth quakes as that mission unfolds through the unique ministry of the Son of Adam, the one hewn from the earth itself." says James Jones, Bishop of Liverpool.

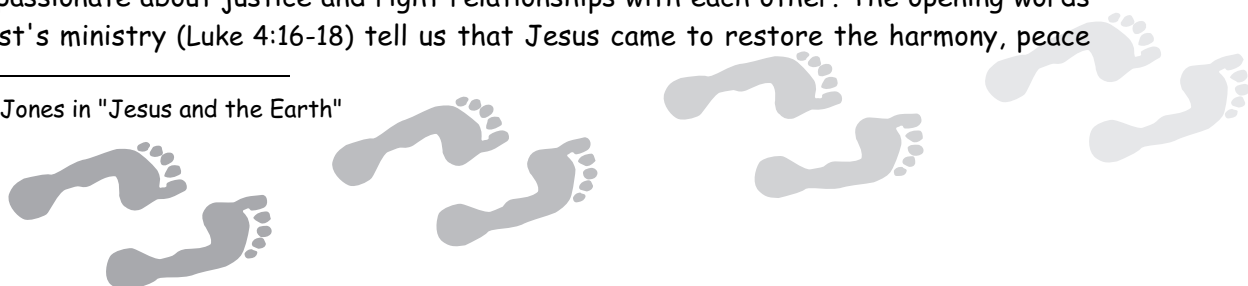
The power of the Almighty One was in Jesus. "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me . ." Matt 28:18. Jesus' power/authority over the natural order was revealed when He walked on water, He raised men from the dead, He restored sight to the blind. But one story in particular showed His power over nature. He calmed so fierce a storm that the fishermen feared for their lives. In that moment, the disciples recognised the authority of God in the man who had control over such wind (Matt 8:27).

There were two more earthquakes in the bible - one when Christ yielded up his spirit on the cross and the *curtain of the temple was torn in two, . And the earth shook*" (Matt 27:51) and on the day of the Resurrection (Matt 28:2) as the Earth responds to the immensity of God's action in overcoming sin and death for our sake. Today we are seeing God's power in nature revealed in alarming ways. What is the signal it sends us?

Jesus taught by stories and living example. **He lived lightly on the Earth**, from the moment of his birth in a manner untouched by materialism but surrounded by the stars, animals, and the poorest and simplest of earthly folk. Intimate with the world of nature, Jesus uses countless illustrations from his ecology: the sower and the seed (Matt 13:4-9, 18-23), the vine and the branches (John 15:1-17, Mark 12:1-12), the lilies of the field (Luke 12:27), the birds of the air (Matt 6:26) and foxes and their lairs (Luke 12:27). The created order shaped his thinking. Can it shape ours and help us recognise our co-dependence on the natural world?

God is passionate about justice and right relationships with each other. The opening words of Christ's ministry (Luke 4:16-18) tell us that Jesus came to restore the harmony, peace

⁴ James Jones in "Jesus and the Earth"





and justice in the world that the Father intended. Jesus' call for justice and wholeness for peoples everywhere and for the planet invites us to challenge all the entrenched powers that perpetuate injustice and harm life. We will be judged by how we look after the most vulnerable. (Matthew 25:40). This has brought millions out on the streets demanding the end to international debt for the poorest nations and to trade rules that trap people in poverty. So we are called to turn from our self-centredness and from all that is unjust, that impoverishes our fellow humans and harms the earth which feeds us. To this present age has come the realisation that we are killing the Earth for the poorest communities but also for our children and grandchildren. Action is urgently needed.

Jesus' mission is to bring people to the Father and to teach people to love their neighbours. *'There is no other commandment greater than these.'* Mark 12:30-31. *"Let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth."* I John 3:18. We see the poverty in the world and know that something is deeply wrong. Did we think we had the answer in promoting economic growth but somehow missed the values that are important to God? Has our moral compass got fixed to the wrong pole? Have we forgotten sharing, justice and righteousness? Have we forgotten the Earth which we all have to share?

Jesus, Son of God, came to renew the Covenant with all people and creation, a new inclusive covenant for all, promising redemption of the whole creation, forgiveness and a renewed relationship with God through the Holy Spirit. It is a covenant of grace mediated by Jesus Christ through his sacrifice on the cross.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. John 3:16-17"

Christ Jesus: Our hope

Amidst the encircling gloom of dangerous climate change, where do we find hope?

Jesus said: *"I am with you always, to the end of time."* Mat 28:19-20. Christ is our living hope (1 Peter 1:3). God is with those who keep his commandments.

"His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation". Luke 1:50.

"Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Hebrews 13:5

"Creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God." (Romans 8:19)

Creation is waiting for us to be true to the restored relationship with God, given to us by Christ's death on the cross and his promise of redemption. By God's grace and his continued presence with us on Earth, we can return to sustainable living and a new creation. *'For anyone united in Christ, there is a new creation: the old order has gone; a new order has already begun.'* 2 Corinthians 5:17.

We learn that we cannot solve the environmental problems on our own but in God's hands the worst we can do or experience can be reshaped and turned to good. With God "all things are possible". We start by trusting God to help us simplify and transform our lives.

