

Lent2021



**A gentle Lenten journey from
the Diocese of Chester**

Week 6

24 March: David King

25 March: Revd Mike Loach

26 March: Christine Wetherell

27 March: Revd Peter Hart

29 March: Revd Matt Graham

30 March: Revd Richard Pennystan

Mini challenge  Introduce meat-free days

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 March
David King

Lent2021

This seems to be an instruction not to take everything now and leave nothing for the future. It is an instruction we have difficulty in following in our management of the planet, but does it have more to say to us?

We all love to attract birds whether it's with children at a pond or by setting up feeding stations in our gardens and we delight to see a new variety especially if it's colourful. I like to use up scraps of wood to build bird boxes for smaller birds and by changing the design, attract different ones. Finding ways to help the natural world thrive is really important. We now have some nesting boxes in our church tower to attract swifts and other boxes in our churchyard. Sadly, occasionally, they can be attacked by cats, squirrels and larger birds and it is upsetting when they don't survive to leave the nest. The dedication of the parent birds is very impressive and even if disturbed or only one parent survives, they will still go about feeding their young.

The psalmist talks of God having us under His protective wing; Jesus, as he laments over Jerusalem, likens himself to a mother hen wanting to gather her chicks, in order to protect them. Birds in general and sparrows, in particular, are used to illustrate God's ongoing care. We too are called to protect that which is vulnerable especially if it reflects God's love and care for us.

David King, St John the Baptist, Hartford

"If you come across a bird's nest in any tree or on the ground, with young ones or eggs and the mother sitting on the young or on the eggs, you shall not take the mother with the young."

Deuteronomy 22:6

Information Point

The John Ray Initiative is an educational charity formed to respond to the global environmental crisis and the challenges of sustainable development and environmental stewardship. Their work aims to bring together scientific, technological and Christian understanding of the environment in a way to lead to effective action. Click on the link to learn more.

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

A prayer

Heavenly Father,

We thank you for the wide-ranging wonder of creation. Help us celebrate Your wonderful generosity and artistry in all that surrounds us each day. As we enjoy Your care and protection, may we also be caring and protective of all Your gifts to us.

Amen



25 March Revd Mike Loach

Lent2021

Right from the very beginning, our relationship with trees has been a deep and existential one. From Eden to Amazonian rainforests, our wellbeing, indeed our very survival seems to rely upon our being willing to uphold the integrity of our woods and forests. On the eve of inheriting God's promised land, the Israelites are reminded of the need to act sustainably, recognising their duty to honour God's gifts and to resist short-term planning that focuses only on immediate wants.

Tragically, our world has been blighted by such short-termism, with eco-systems being destroyed in the interest of profits that will benefit only a few. Every four days it is estimated that an area of forest roughly the size of our Diocese is cleared, often to be replaced with crops planted to satisfy the demands of Western consumers.

In the face of such vast losses, it may seem that our efforts are futile. Yet, reforestation schemes are now springing up all over the place. And while protecting our ancient woodland remains vital, in time, our own small contributions will hopefully combine to help slow the rate of global warming. At Christ Church, we have recently planted an orchard of two dozen native fruit trees and in their first blossom, we read a sign that God was with us!

Revd Mike Loach, Christ Church, Higher Bebington

"When you lay siege to a city for a long time, fighting against it to capture it, do not destroy its trees by putting an axe to them, because you can eat their fruit. Do not cut them down. Are the trees people, that you should besiege them?"

Deuteronomy 20:19

Information Point

Considering further study then you might be interested in the CRES course. This is a two-year certificate in Christian and Rural Environmental studies.

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

A prayer

Lord,

Help me to examine the everyday choices I make, to consider their impact on your creation and to do all that I can to honour what you have entrusted to my care.

Amen



26 March Christine Wetherell

Lent2021

Pharaoh wouldn't listen to God, so through Moses, the sheer power of nature was unleashed in a series of devastating plagues. The power of nature is a gift we are only now beginning to understand how to use well.

I recently discovered a letter in a family prayer book from Joyce Grenfell to her 'unofficial' God-child. She wished that he would have a "Discovery of nature; of flowers, of birds and beasts. (just think of the design of a fern, a shell, a petal a feather; of moss and frost patterns!). These are our joy, our heritage, our responsibility to ourselves and to God. I love that thought.

Several years ago, as we approached retirement, David (my husband) and I decided we would try and fulfill a long-held dream – to build our own house. There was one firm condition in our minds – it had to be as energy-efficient as possible, a new discovery of nature. We had no idea where to start, except to take the proverbial plunge and see.

Our research made us realise we were on the back of a new wave of energy-efficient technology. But we had no plans, no plot on which to build. We knew where ideally, near a town, easy access to our friends and family, church and walks and found the ideal plot, with an old bungalow ready to go, and a beautiful but neglected garden. We just felt blessed and bought it the next working day. We planned the design, futureproofed and found a builder who knew more than both of us. It was hard work, most days on-site, endless decisions, the odd major hiccup, but 15 months after the build started, we were exhausted, but in our new home.

So, how energy-efficient are we? To the highest 'Passivhaus' standard. We have no central heating, no gas, generate the majority of our electricity; we have rainwater harvesting, are rewilding parts of the garden, and recycled as many of the original garden features as possible. Badgers, foxes, hedgehogs, toads and newts are regulars, so are increasing numbers of insects, spiders, and birds.

We have shared our experiences with architects, universities, self-builders, friends and family. Our home is more of a gift to us than we ever expected. For that, we are truly grateful and ever thankful for the opportunity we had to fulfil our trust in God and his creation. The power of creation is there not to be defied but to be harnessed as a gift. We know that houses like ours will be followed by many others to come as we learn to steward the earth properly.

Christine Wetherell, member of the Environment Forum

"God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'"

Genesis 1:28

Information Point

Friends of the Earth is one of the biggest campaigning groups seeking to raise awareness of 'Green' issues in politics and society. Could you add your voice?

<https://friendsoftheearth.uk/>



27 March Revd Peter Hart

Lent2021

In this time of pandemic, with changes in the law and new rules emerging regularly, we can become confused and frightened. Yet the Spirit of God is not bound with law, and in the midst of turmoil, we can see His Spirit in many acts of kindness, love, and endless patience as countless people selflessly care for those in need. The Church continues to offer spiritual sustenance through the sacraments, assuring us of His love and that all the fruits of the Spirit remain as gifts to enjoy and work towards in our daily lives.

In St Barnabas Crewe, thanks to a partnership with 'Enterprise Education Alliance' we have established a Community Garden and Social Hub. Here the fruits of the earth can be grown, nurtured, and harvested. Help can be offered to those in the community with particular needs or maybe provide a simple meal at a low cost. In so doing we aim to celebrate God in His Creation and hopefully demonstrate the Fruit of the Spirit in our contacts.

Revd Peter Hart, St Barnabas Crewe

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."

Galatians 5 22,23

Information Point

RECORD is the Local Biological recording centre for Cheshire. Their website is a wonderful one-stop-shop of information on all things about biodiversity in Cheshire.

<https://record-lrc.co.uk/>

A prayer

Almighty God,

In these days of Lent, help us to be guided by Your Holy Spirit and prepare for the great promise of Easter. In these seemingly dark days help us to see Your Light.

Amen



29 March Revd Matt Graham

Lent2021

I'm more the mower than the gardener in our family. Even so, Jesus' garden picture is clear, the branches depend on the vine, not the other way around.

The vine metaphor is humbling. We love to stand on our own two feet and be reliant on no one. Jesus says for our spiritual life and sustenance, growth, and vibrancy, we cannot do it alone. The branches depend utterly on the life-giving and sustaining nourishment of the vine. This may be stretching the metaphor too far but imagine a branch that greedily devours and strips the vine of all its resources. To sap all the life from the vine, in the end would lead to certain death for the branch (and more fuel for the bonfire v.6).

As I said, I'm not a gardener, I suspect a branch can't do that to a vine. But isn't it a fair picture of our exploitation of the world's resources? Selfishly consuming what we rely on. Greedily gorging on what we should receive with humble gratitude and expecting it to keep giving, despite our ravaging and neglect is clearly wrong.

But perhaps our dawning regret at how we have mistreated God's world can help us grasp something about our reliance on Jesus the vine. Do we take, and presume and ignore? Or humbly, gratefully depend, day after day?

Probably the greatest success in our garden is an apple tree (that I have never touched!). The fruit comes year after year. Unlike my relationship with Jesus, the branches don't wander off for a bit, or ignore the trunk when things get busy. This lent, tell Jesus how much you need him and remain in him.

Revd Matt Graham, St Stephen, Prenton

"I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing."

John 15:5

Information Point

Despite the unwelcome recent cuts in the overseas aid budget the UK Government is still providing significant support to poorer nations.

<https://www.ukaiddirect.org/>

A prayer

Dear Lord

I love you. I need you. I rely on you. Apart from you, I can do nothing. Help me stick close and bear much fruit for you.

Amen



30 March Revd Richard Pennystan

Lent2021

Sukkot, the festival of booths is a major Jewish festival in which Jewish people leave their homes for 7 days and camp in booths, with leaves for roofs (Lev 23 & Deut 16). It is a festival saturated in symbolism: harvest, trusting, wilderness, living temporarily, and open heaven. The Rabbis link each of the four types of leaves used in the booths to gratitude for rain, and on the final day, Ezekiel 47 is read and the people ask God for rain.

It is a festival of justice and joy, everyone is included, and crowds camping creates connections. Jesus travels to Jerusalem incognito during the festival, but the crowd's buzz is around his identity and the religious leaders' desire to silence him. He breaks his cover and on the final day makes this bold public declaration, pointing to himself as the source of living water, on the very day they are asking God for rain.

Through John's gospel, Jesus uses day-to-day images to describe himself: bread, gate, light and here he chooses water. Water is essential to life, civilisations are built around it, wars have been fought over it, harvests depend on it. I visited Israel in 1998, my primary memory was how irrigation shaped the landscape and sociology of Israel. The absence of rain leads to poverty and displacement. Water is a gift of God we are to treasure, the prophets call us to look to him gratefully as the source of life for his provision. We don't feel the need to ask God for rain in the North West of England, but in Israel, they were dependent upon him for it.

Ezekiel's vision is water flowing from the temple, bringing life, restoration, and healing everywhere it goes.

Jesus' vision is a people, who are both refreshed through a relationship with him and bringing life and restoration wherever we go. This past year we have had to find new ways to both remain rooted in Jesus and to take his water of life to those around us. What we have seen this past year in Romiley is that the small amount of living water we share with others goes a long way in such thirsty ground.

What thirsts do you have right now, which only Jesus can refresh. And what ways can living water flow from your heart to those who are thirsty around you?

Revd Richard Pennystan, St Chad Romiley

"On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'"

John 7:37-38

Information Point

Please bookmark the Diocese of Chester Environment web page. Here you will find new information as it becomes available.

<https://www.chester.anglican.org/social-responsibility/environment/>

A prayer

Lord Jesus,

Source of life, I come to you thirsty and trusting today. Renew and refresh me, so that I may share your living water with those around me who need you so greatly.

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.

Reduce energy consumption

Try to turn the thermostat down a couple of degrees and reduce car journeys.