

## A liturgy for a Natural Theology Sunday – 6 April 2014

- Opening Reading      The heavens declare the glory of God,  
the vault of heaven proclaims his handiwork,  
day discourses of it to day,  
night to night hands on the knowledge.  
  
No utterance at all, no speech,  
not a sound to be heard,  
but from the entire earth the design stands out,  
this message reaches the whole world.      1.
- Welcome and preamble      Good morning and welcome to Natural Theology Sunday.      2.  
  
What is ‘natural theology’? Well one definition is the recognition of our Creator in the observation of the creation from the perspective of faith, and also the recognition of the intended relationship between ourselves and our Creator.  
  
There are other ways to define natural theology but that is a topic for another time. Morning tea perhaps. This morning we are not here to analyse or debate, but simply to join in a long Christian tradition of celebrating God’s creation and appreciating what he can teach us through it.  
  
Along the way you will hear and see an ancient yet very familiar story from the book of Genesis, hear some thoughts of Christian teachers both ancient and not so ancient and hear another story from the Silk Road of a thousand years ago.  
  
You will be invited to respond in prayer and song and we will conclude with Communion.  
  
Now let us pray.
- Opening Prayer      How great you are, Lord, and how greatly to be praised!      3.  
  
How matchless is your power and how infinite your understanding.  
  
Humanity may be but a speck in your wide creation, but we want to praise you.  
  
We may carry around with us our mortality and our sin as a mute testimony to the truth that ‘God resists the proud’, but even so we want to praise you.  
  
You have thrilled us by causing us to delight in your praise.  
  
You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you.  
  
**Amen**

Song 1	<p>MHCC 137. Praise to the Lord the Almighty</p> <p>The collection will be taken up as we sing this song</p>	
Notices	<p>People with notices please form an orderly queue</p> <p>After the notices the Godly Play group will go out to their activities</p>	
Reading 1	<p>In the beginning God created heaven and earth. Now the earth was a formless void, there was darkness over the deep, with a divine wind sweeping over the waters.</p> <p>God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and God divided light from darkness. God called light ‘day’ and darkness he called ‘night’. Evening came and morning came: the first day.</p> <p>God said, ‘Let there be a vault through the middle of the waters to divide the waters in two.’ And so it was. God made the vault, and it divided the waters under the vault from the waters above the vault. God called the vault ‘heaven’. Evening came and morning came: the second day.</p> <p>God said, ‘Let the waters under heaven come together into a single mass, and let dry land appear.’ And so it was. God called the dry land ‘earth’ and the mass of waters ‘seas’, and God saw that it was good.</p> <p>God said, ‘Let the earth produce vegetation: seed-bearing fruit trees on earth, bearing fruit with their seed inside, each corresponding to its own species. God saw that it was good. Evening came and morning came: the third day.</p>	4.
Quote	<p>‘What is the source of this world?’ That is the question.</p> <p>‘In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth.’ That is the answer.</p> <p>This world did not create itself, as nothing in it has ever created itself. This world is not the work of an evil power, nor the work of many creators, good and evil, but is the work of one, gracious God. This answer evokes joy in our hearts and moves us towards good deeds. And we know that this is the one, true answer.</p> <p>The world comes from God, therefore rejoice and be glad! The world is divine in origin, and therefore its end shall also be in God. ... As in the beginning, so will be the end. The end will be found in Him who made the beginning. Let us cherish this</p>	5.

truth, the bearer of our salvation; let us have a luminous hope and let us grow strong in love of Him who for love created us.

O Lord God, the Creator and Sustainer of all things, our only God, our only Creator, the good Fount of all goodness, we worship You and entreat You: guide us by your Holy Spirit towards this good end, through the Lord Jesus Christ. To You be glory and praise forever. **Amen.**

Prayer 1 Grant us, Lord, to hope on your name, 6.  
**the primal source of all creation,**  
Open the eyes of our hearts that we may know You,  
who alone are highest among the high;  
**You are holy, abiding among the holy.**  
For You through your works have revealed the everlasting  
structure of the world.  
**You , Lord, created the earth.**

In wisdom, You laid the earth's foundations, 7.  
**in understanding You spread out the heavens.**  
Through Your knowledge the depths were cleft open,  
**And the clouds distil the dew.**  
**Amen**

Song 2 MHCC 8. First of the Newly Born

Reading 2 God said, 'Let there be lights in the vault of heaven to divide 8.  
day from night, and let them indicate festivals, days and years.  
Let them be lights in the vault of heaven to shine on the earth.'  
And so it was. God made the two great lights: the greater light  
to govern the day, the smaller light to govern the night, and the  
stars. God set them in the vault of heaven to shine on the earth,  
to govern the day and the night and to divide light from  
darkness. God saw that it was good. Evening came and  
morning came: the fourth day.

God said, 'Let the waters be alive with a swarm of living  
creatures, and let birds wing their way above the earth across  
the vault of heaven.' And so it was. God created great sea-  
monsters and all the creatures that glide and teem in the waters  
in their own species. God saw that it was good. God blessed  
them, saying, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters of the  
seas; and let the birds multiply on land.' Evening came and  
morning came: the fifth day.

Quote

Then for the first time is made a being with life and feeling. 9.  
Yet a wise and marvellous order reigns among these animals.  
How is it that each sort of fish, content with the regions that  
have been assigned to it, never travels over its own limits to  
pass into foreign seas? It is not so with us. Why? We  
incessantly move the ancient landmarks which our fathers have  
set. We encroach, we add house to house, field to field, to  
enrich ourselves at the expense of our neighbours.

Even migratory fish, when the time for breeding arrives, as if  
awakened by a common law of nature migrate from gulf to gulf.  
Who puts them in marching array? Who serves them as a  
guide? See how the divine order embraces all and extends to  
the smallest object.

A fish does not resist God's law, yet we humans cannot endure  
His precepts of salvation!

Prayer 2

Dear God, 10.

We rejoice and give thanks for earthworms,  
bees, ladybirds and broody hens;  
**for humans tending their gardens,  
talking to animals,  
cleaning their homes and singing to themselves;**  
for the rising of the sap,  
the fragrance of growth,  
**for the invention of the wheelbarrow  
and the existence of the teapot,  
we give thanks.**  
**We celebrate and give thanks.  
Amen**

Song 3

MHCC 31. I Was in His Mind

Reading 3

God said, 'Let the earth produce every kind of living creature in 11.  
its own species: cattle, creeping things and wild animals of all  
kinds.' And so it was. God made wild animals in their own  
species and cattle in theirs, and every creature that crawls along  
the earth in its own species. God saw that it was good.

God said, 'Let us make man in our own image, in the likeness  
of ourselves, and let them be masters of the fish of the sea, the  
birds of heaven, the cattle, the wild animals and all the creatures  
that creep along the ground.'

God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God  
he created him, male and female he created them.

God blessed them, saying to them, ‘Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. Be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven and all the living creatures that move on earth.’ God also said, ‘Look, to you I give all the seed-bearing plants everywhere on the surface of the earth, and all the trees with seed-bearing fruit; this will be your food. And to all the wild animals, all the birds of heaven and all the living creatures that creep along the ground, I give all the foliage of the plants as their food.’ And so it was. God saw all that he had made, and indeed it was very good. Evening came and morning came: the sixth day.

Thus heaven and earth were completed with all their array. On the seventh day God had completed the work he had been doing. He rested on the seventh day after all the work that he had been doing. God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on that day he rested after all his work of creating.

Such was the story of heaven and earth as they were created.

Quote

When we see the world as an end in itself, everything becomes itself a value and consequentially loses all value, because only in God is found the meaning (value) of everything, and the world is meaningful only when it is the “sacrament” of God’s presence. Things treated merely as things in themselves destroy themselves because only in God have they any life. The world of nature, cut off from the source of life, is a dying world.

12.

...The original sin is not that humanity has “disobeyed” God; the sin is that we ceased to be hungry for Him and for Him alone, ceased to see our whole life depending on the whole world as a sacrament of communion with God.

But it is the Christian gospel that God did not leave humans in our exile, in the predicament of confused longing... God acted decisively: into the darkness where humanity was groping towards Paradise, He sent light. He did so not as a rescue operation, to recover lost humanity: it was rather for the completing of what He had undertaken from the beginning. God acted so that humans might understand who He really was and where our hunger had been driving us.

The light God sent was his Son: the same light that had been shining unextinguished in the world’s darkness all along, seen now in full brightness.

Confessional Prayer	<p>Heavenly Father,</p> <p>We long to offer to You a living sacrifice of ourselves who You created in Your own image.</p> <p><b>But we have stained the garment of our flesh, and defiled that which was made in Your likeness.</b></p> <p>We have darkened the beauty of our souls, and turned our minds entirely to dust.</p> <p><b>We have torn the first garment that the Creator wove for us in the beginning, and now lie naked.</b></p> <p>You reared us and brought us up as Your children, but we have rebelled against You.</p> <p><b>Have mercy upon us.</b></p>	<p>13.</p> <p>14.</p> <p>15.</p>
Song 4	<p>MHCC 235. Comfort my Trembling Heart</p>	
Comment	<p>So now we have seen the world as it was created by God, and how He intended it to be, and how He intended us to be. But we look around at the world and see that all is not as it should be. We are not as we were intended to be. And this is our reality every day.</p> <p>But this is not the whole story. There is more. And there is Good News.</p> <p>About a thousand years ago, in the west of China, a community of followers of Jesus preserved their most sacred scriptures by carving them on stone pillars. The following reading is from one of these. Some turns of phrase may seem odd to our ears but the content of the story should be familiar.</p>	
Reading	<p>In the beginning was the natural constant, the true stillness of the Origin, and the primordial void of the Most High. Then, the spirit of the void emerged as the Most High Lord, moving in mysterious ways to enlighten the holy ones. He is Ye Su, my True Lord of the Void, who embodies the three subtle and wondrous bodies, and who was condemned to the cross so that the people of the four directions can be saved.</p> <p>He beat up the primordial winds and the two vapours were created. He differentiated the grey emptiness and opened up the sky and the earth. He set the sun and the moon on their course and day and night came into being. He crafted the myriad things and created the first people. He gave to them the original nature of goodness and appointed them as guardians of all</p>	<p>16.</p>

creation. Their minds were empty; they were content; and their hearts were simple and innocent.

Originally they had no desire, but under the influence of Satan, they abandoned their pure and simple goodness for the glitter and the gold. Falling into the trap of death and lies, they became embroiled in the three hundred and sixty five forms of sin. In doing so, they have woven the web of retribution and have bound themselves inside it. Some believe in the material origin of things; some have sunk into chaotic ways; some think they can receive blessings simply by reciting prayers; and some have abandoned kindness for treachery. Despite their intelligence and passionate pleas, they have got nowhere. Forced into the ever-turning wheel of fire, they are burned and obliterated. Having lost their way for eons, they can no longer return.

Therefore, my Lord Ye Su, the One emanating in three subtle bodies, hid his true power, became a human, and came on behalf of the Lord of Heaven, to preach the good teachings. A virgin gave birth to the sacred in a dwelling in the Da Qin Empire. The message was given to the Persians who saw and followed the bright light to offer him gifts.

He set afloat the raft of salvation and compassion so that we can use it to ascend to the palace of light and be united with the spirit. He carried out the work of deliverance, and when the task was completed, he ascended to immortality in broad daylight. He left twenty seven books of scripture to inspire our spirit; he revealed the workings of the Origin; and he gave to us the method of purification by water.

We purify our hearts and return to the simple and natural ways of the truth. This truth cannot be named but its function surpasses all expectations. When forced to give it a name, we call it the Religion of Light.

Thanksgiving  
Prayer

**Father of all,  
we give you thanks and praise  
that when we were still far off  
you met us in your Son and brought us home.  
Dying and living, he declared your love, gave us grace,  
and opened the gate of glory.  
May we who the spirit light give light to the world.  
Amen**

17.

Instructions for  
Communion

Let's now celebrate what Jesus has done for us by sharing together in Communion.  
Please gather in the circle in the usual way.

Prayer	<p>Hear us merciful Father,  and grant that we who receive these gifts of your creation,  this bread and this wine,  in obedience to our Saviour Christ,  may be partakers of his body and his blood,  and be made one with him and with each other  in peace and love.</p> <p><b>Amen</b></p> <p>On the night that he was betrayed the Lord Jesus took bread,  and after he had had given thanks,  he broke it, and he said,  ‘This is my body, which is for you;  do this in remembrance of me.’</p> <p>And in the same way, with the cup after supper, he said,  “‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood.  Whenever you drink it, do this in remembrance of me.’”</p>	18.
Communion	<p>When the bread is passed around:                    The body of Christ keep you in eternal life  The bread is eaten as each receives it.</p> <p>The cups are passed around and all drink together after:                    The blood of Christ keep you in eternal life.</p>	20.
Closing Prayer	<p>Father we thank you  that you feed us who have received these holy mysteries  with the spiritual food of the body and blood  of our saviour Jesus Christ.  Accept this our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving,  And help us to grow in love and obedience,  That with all your saints we may worship you forever.</p> <p><b>Amen</b></p>	21.
Song 5	<p>MHCC 77. Thank You for Every New Good Morning</p>	
Sending out	<p>May we who the spirit light give light to the world.  Let there be light.</p> <p>Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. And please join us for  morning tea in the kitchen.</p>	



## Bibliography

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