

THE OCEANS

Carlops Parish Church Eco Service, 2015

Hymns are Church Hymnary, Fourth edition (CH4) unless indicated otherwise

Welcome

A warm welcome to everyone to church this morning. The theme of our Eco Service this year is “The Oceans of the Earth”.

Call to worship

O come, let us sing to the Lord
For the good gifts of the land and the seas,
For the fruits of the Earth and its countless provisions.

For the cycle of life with its tissues and cells, molecules and atoms;
Swarms of living creatures and birds of the air,
Sheep and cattle and creeping things
And fish that swim in the seas.

For the food we eat
And for those whose skill brings your gift to us.

For the life we have been given
And the communities in which we live and share.
Blessed be our Creator God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit
Blessed be God for ever.

First hymn – No 235: God is working his purposes out ...

Prayer

Eternal God - we open our hearts to you;
Breathe on what is hardened, that we may love again.

Incarnate God, we open our minds to you;
Touch what is blinded, that we may see life anew.

Transforming Spirit, we open our wills to you;
Free what is bound, that we may move upwards and outwards.

Living Trinity, We open ourselves to you;
Come in, we pray, that we may live.

We will now join together to say The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come – thy will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive
our debtors.
Lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever.

Amen

Children's address

It is always exciting to hear about treasure! There are many stories about divers finding treasure in sunken ships, but this morning I'm going to talk about a different kind of treasure that comes from the ocean.

I was once lucky enough to go for a long holiday to the northern half of Alaska. It was in July so there was no snow on the roads and it was easy to travel around the country by coach and rail. In winter it is a different story altogether and travel is difficult because of the very deep snow. And winter lasts for a long time! We were told by our guide to think of the month of June as Spring – the month of July as Summer – the month of August as Autumn – and all the other nine months as Winter. How would you like to live in a country with that climate? You would need clothes that would keep out very severe cold and sometimes blizzard conditions.

The Inuit people live in that part of Alaska and long ago learned how to make their clothes from the skins of the animals that live there, like the reindeer, the caribou, the beaver and the moose, because these animals have coats of hair or fur designed to keep out the cold. But one of the fur coats that is most highly valued comes from an animal that lives in the

beds of sea weed at the edge of the Pacific Ocean – it is the coat of the sea otter.

Sea otters live in family groups. There is a name for a group of sea otters; just as a group of sheep is called a flock and a group of cows is called a herd, a group of sea otters is called a “raft” – probably because they often float on their backs close together and look as if they were lying on a raft.

When I was out on a boat I saw a raft of sea otters and actually saw some of them feeding. They pick up a shellfish from the sea bed and also a stone. They swim on their backs and with their front paws they bang the shell of the shellfish with the stone until it breaks open and they can eat the soft centre. Mother otters also swim on their backs, carrying their young on their fronts. In order to stop themselves from drifting away with the tide, they wrap lengths of sea weed round their bodies to act as an anchor. Because the water is so very cold – and they hardly ever go on land – the sea otters need to have very thick fur coats to keep their bodies warm. Their fur is one of the warmest coverings in the world. It’s hard to believe – but they have 100,000 hairs to each square centimetre of skin – that’s about the size of a finger nail. Human beings have about 20,000 hairs growing on their whole head!

Years ago, sea otters were killed in great numbers so that their skins could be used for clothing for people. The number of sea otters became seriously low and at one time it was thought that there were none left alive. However a small raft was found and protected and now their numbers have recovered. They can no longer be hunted for their skins and are covered by a law – the Endangered Species Act. They are, however, still in danger from the threat of oil spills, pollution and being drowned if trapped in fishing nets all of which are the fault of human beings. People today – and especially young people – must be prepared to act and to tackle problems such as these.

A garment made from the fur of a sea otter used to be a very valuable possession and was considered by the Inuit people to be a great treasure. Now, it is good news that the sea otters themselves – alive and healthy – are what we think of as treasures and people today and, we hope, in the future, can enjoy watching rafts of sea otters in the ocean along the coast of Alaska.

That really is – Treasure in the ocean!

Second hymn – No 232: Pears and apples ...

Offering

Prayer

Heavenly Father we ask that you bless our offering. May it be used wisely in your service.

Amen

Readings

We now have three readings – a poem, a piece of prose and a short drama. The poem is anonymous, the reading is an adaptation from Job, written by Julia Morris and the drama is entitled “A Creation Drama” and was written by John Polhill. The prose and the drama will be read by two voices.

The poem is entitled *The Sea Shell*

There is found a tiny sea shell
Half embedded in the sand,
Sometimes flashing in the moonlight
Like a diamond on the strand.

And from out the winding chambers
That are hid within the shell,
Ever steals a curious music
That doth never sink nor swell.

But like the far-off voice of ocean
Murmurs forth its monotone,
Holding thus within its bosom
E'en an ocean of its own.

Thus the sea shells ever gather
Little oceans in their breasts,
Which do echo there for ever
Oceans' hymn which never rests.

Thus our soul will echo music

Born in heaven, and not on earth;
And give praises all, for ever,
To the One that gave it birth.

The prose reading, adapted from Job

Both voices

All praise to God, who colours the rainbow's ribbons.

Voice A

The lord laid the earth's foundations; He measured it and shaped it.

Voice B

As he set the cornerstone in place, the morning stars sang for joy

Voice A

He gave birth to the sea, and set its limits for ebb and flow.

Voice B

He shook down the snow, and poured out the rain.

Voice A

He let loose the lightning, and thundered abroad the storm.

Voice B

He gave the earth its seasons, its growing time and harvests.

Voice A

He made all that runs and crawls; all that swims and flies he shaped.

Voice B

With love he made the light; with laughter he burnished the sun.

Both voices

All praise to God, who colours the rainbow's ribbons

The drama

Voice A

A Creation Drama

In the beginning before God created the heavens and the earth, there was nothing. And God said ...

Voice B

Let there be light

Voice A

Through the Word all things came into being and the Spirit of God swept over the void. In the first minute of time, the universe stretched one million billion kilometres across. Two minutes more and God made 98 percent of all the matter there is, or ever will be.

Perhaps about nine billion years passed ... And God caught up a swirl of gas and dust 24 billion kilometres wide, and from almost all that gas and dust, God made our sun. But around it still spun the dust grains that became its planets. God spent two million years fashioning planet Earth.

Voice B

And God saw that it was good. There was evening and there was morning. The first day...

Voice A

About five hundred million years later. God said ...

Voice B

Let there be life.

Voice A

And beneath sulphurous vapours in boiling seas, bacteria swarmed. And some became blue/greens which could photosynthesise. The blue/greens sent up bubbles of oxygen – like beads of silver on the surface of the deep – and over millennia these transformed the atmosphere and built the ozone layer.

Voice B

And God saw that it was good. There was evening and there was morning. The second day...

Voice A

And God said ... Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures.

Voice B

Plants grew in the seas. Corals and sponges formed.

Voice A

Worms and jellyfish swam, then trilobites and ammonites. Fish evolved about 160 million years after the ammonites.

Both voices

And there was evening and there was morning, the third day...

Third hymn – No 149: Let all creation dance ...

Address

The oceans are a wonderful part of creation – awe-inspiring, bountiful and sometimes terrifying. In the days before cheap flights, I crossed the Atlantic four times by ship and remember vividly the sight of the sun setting in a golden pathway over the vastness of the ocean.

I once visited the Great Barrier Reef in Australia, and was amazed by the myriads of exotic fish and corals to be found there. My son, Steven, when a teenager, sailed adventurously from Grand Canary to St Lucia in the West Indies, and saw flying fish and porpoises and wonderful stars at night.

Most of us love to watch the sea in all its moods and to swim and sail and fish and watch whales and dolphins and seals and sea birds.

But the oceans, upon which we depend for so much – food, transport, leisure, CO2 absorption – are in trouble.

A recent report commissioned by the World Wildlife Fund puts the asset value of the oceans at about 24 trillion US dollars, but warns that over-fishing, pollution and climate change are putting an unprecedented strain on marine eco-systems.

That calculation of 24 trillion dollars is based upon all of: fisheries, shipping, tourism, and the protection to coastlines provided by mangroves, coral reefs and beaches

Nearly two-thirds of the world's fisheries are already classes as "fully exploited" and a majority of the rest are "over exploited". The biological diversity of the oceans slumped by 39% between 1970 and 2010.

Phytoplankton in the oceans produce about 50% of the oxygen we breathe. The oceans also soak up about 30% of the CO₂ pumped into the atmosphere by human activity, a process which is raising the temperature and increasing the acidity of the oceans.

Warming ocean temperatures can make life challenging for some marine species, and acidification of the oceans affects the ability of creatures such as corals and molluscs to form their skeletons and shells. Half of the world's corals and one third of its sea grasses have disappeared in the last forty years.

The latest UN climate science panel report states that changes in the chemistry of the oceans due to increased CO₂ emissions are occurring faster than at any time in the past 65 million years.

Professor Ove Hoegh-Guldberg, the lead author of the World Wildlife Fund report, said that it was important that the communities of the world understand the value of the oceans and that a strategy to reverse their decline was devised.

I quote ...

“ If you do not look after an asset like the ocean, it starts to degrade, so it is important that we start to solve these problems NOW on an international basis. The oceans are in a bad state and getting worse. Fisheries are starting to collapse, there are record levels of pollution, for instance plastic pollution, and there is climate change. Nations should do more to manage local issues of over-fishing and pollution.

“If you protect marine areas and regulate fishing you can help corals survive the impact of climate change. If we solve these local problems, we can buy some time whilst we deal with the global climate issue. But it is vital that we get off the current CO₂ pathway.”

Four key steps are called for

1. Stronger UN agreements on oceans
2. Deep cuts in CO₂ emissions
3. 30% of marine areas to be protected
4. Greater action against illegal fishing

So what can WE DO to help to protect the oceans, part of God's creation?

- We can try to make sure that we only eat fish from sustainable sources.

- We can do all we can to reduce our personal carbon footprint.
- We can lobby politicians to support the creation of marine reserves in which species can safely breed.

The first Marine Reserve in the world was created around an island off New Zealand, largely through the sustained determination and efforts of one man. The effect was almost immediate: species which had been almost wiped out began to colonise the area again and to breed, and the area regained its original diversity of marine life.

In Scotland, there are currently thirty designated Marine Protected Areas. In the UK as a whole, about one-quarter of inshore waters are now fully protected within a network of Marine Protected Areas. Globally however, only about 3% is so protected. In March 2015, the British government committed itself to creating the world's largest Marine Reserve around the Pitcairn Islands, and the US has created a network of reserves around the Pacific Remote islands.

So, with God's help, we can do it – if the will is there.

Fourth hymn – No 240: God in such love for us lent us this planet ...

Prayer

Our prayer of intercession was written by John Polhill and is entitled
That all may act

Loving God, we pray for the churches.
Grant them insight to perceive that the Earth is at risk.
Grant them a prophetic voice to clarify the actions needed.
Empower your churches to be a model for others.

Living God, we pray for the leaders of the nations.
Grant them thee vision to see the implications of climate change.
Grant them the wisdom to determine appropriate action
And the conviction to persuade others.

Caring God, we pray for the leaders of our local community.
Grant them time to inform themselves about local environmental issues.

Grant them courage to speak out
And the commitment to see plans through to realisation.

Saviour God, we pray for ourselves.
Grant us hearts that love your creation in all its aspects.
Grant us grace to acknowledge our failure to care.
Grant us compassion for those who will suffer,
And the will to bring about a better and fairer world.

Amen

Closing hymn – No 173: Sing to God new songs of worship...

Blessing

Our blessing is entitled *Sustaining blessing* and is taken from *A heart for creation* by Eleanor Harris, p 154

May the earth sustain your strength.
May Christ sustain your love.
May you sustain one another's joy:
And may you live as a blessing
To God, to the earth and to humanity.

Triple Amen