

“Let there be Lights in the Sky..” Readings for Week 4

Genesis 1:14-19

¹⁴ And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, ¹⁵ and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth.” And it was so. ¹⁶ God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. ¹⁷ God set them in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth, ¹⁸ to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day.

Psalms 19:1-6

¹ The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
² Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.
³ They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.
⁴ Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.
In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.
⁵ It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.
⁶ It rises at one end of the heavens
and makes its circuit to the other;
nothing is deprived of its warmth.

Revelation 21: 1-4; 22-27

Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. ²³ The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. ²⁴ The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendour into it. ²⁵ On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. ²⁶ The glory and honour of the nations will be brought into it. ²⁷ Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.

Let there be lights in the sky...Lent Reflection for Week 4

On the first day of creation, God separated light from darkness and declared the light to be “good”. In the Bible light is often a symbol of God’s presence; we speak of Jesus as the Light of the World who came to save us from the darkness of evil and sin and help us live as children of light.

Yet on the fourth day, we read of God creating... *“Lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night...God set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth, to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. **And God saw that it was good.** And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day.”*

Here darkness isn’t seen as something evil that we should fear, but as part of God’s creation; as such it is **good**. We actually need times of darkness to enable us to rest and sleep..

The passage from Genesis makes it clear that the sun, moon and stars were **created** by God and this was very important at a time when pagan people worshipped the sun and the moon. The sun and moon were never meant to be worshipped; they were created by God to serve his purposes. Our lives aren’t determined by the movement of the stars, as astrologers would have us believe. We know that the Magi were guided to the infant Jesus by a **star** – but God used what he had created for **his** purposes – to draw those men to the true light of his presence.

Psalms 19 paints a beautiful, poetic picture of the sun, moon and stars and, again, the message is that these things, beautiful as they are, are there to give glory to God, the creator of all things

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the skies proclaim the work of his hands.*

*² Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.”*

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*⁴ Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.” Ps19:1-4*

The main reason given for the creation of the sun, moon and stars was to separate day from night and to mark the seasons of the year. There is a clear rhythm to the pattern of the natural world – and we all know what it feels like when **our** natural rhythm of work and rest is interrupted by sleepless nights. The earth needs times of rest, as Becky reminded us in last week’s reflection. At one time, we would never have seen strawberries in our shops in December! In many ways we have lost the rhythm of the seasons, but perhaps now, amidst all the uncertainty around us, this is something we might begin to appreciate afresh.

I am certainly appreciating the beauty of spring. I am so fortunate in having a garden and green spaces where I can walk in comparative safety. Because I’ve had to stop rushing from place to place I now have time to notice my surroundings. Maybe you are also discovering a new sense of God’s presence in the beauties of nature.

We often associate the time of summer and winter solstice with pagan worship, but in her book “Saying yes to life,” Ruth Valerio writes, *“A renewed appreciation for God’s creation of the sun and moon can give those of us who live in seasonal parts of the world confidence that we can use these points that mark the turning of the earth towards and away from the sun. They can be times for us to reflect on the passing of time in our lives, and on themes of darkness and light and*

gratitude for God's continual involvement in our world- even in those places and situations that seem darkest."

For many people, the world now seems a dark and frightening place, but as Christians we hold on to the promise that Jesus will never leave or forsake us; that he is with us by his Spirit, that, as we read in Psalm 139, there is nowhere we can go from God's presence, that *"the darkness is as light to him"* v. 12

Another of the positive things to come out of this time when so many are unable to carry out their normal activities is the reduction in pollution. Light pollution means that more than a third of human beings are no longer able to see the Milky Way. In China, air quality has greatly improved in the past weeks and in New York there is a 50% reduction in carbon monoxide levels. When factories are no longer producing goods day and night, the levels of light pollution fall and, as well as giving us a clearer view of the stars, it allows creatures such as frogs, toads and migratory birds to flourish. Hopefully these are lessons we can take into the future.

The sun, moon and stars have always been significant in the lives of human beings; a star alerted the Magi to the birth of Jesus, the Word who was with God at the beginning, through whom all things were created. The sun was darkened as our Saviour died on the cross. The Bible also associates signs in the sun and moon with predictions of the "end times" On the day of Pentecost, Peter quoted from the prophet Joel, *"The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood"* Acts 2: 20

This may not be a particularly cheery thought, particularly at a time such as this! But these "word pictures" are not meant to be taken literally. If I told you that it was "raining cats and dogs" I'm sure you'd realise I just meant it was pouring down with rain! Instead of thinking in terms of the **destruction** of our world, perhaps we should think in terms of its **transformation**. In the book of Revelation we read of a New Heaven and a New Earth in which there is no more pain or death; a place in which all evil has been destroyed and in which all of God's creation are living and worshipping him together – just as God intended it to be. There is no need for a sun or moon, because light is provided by God's glory.

This beautiful picture should give us hope for the future- but looking forward to a new earth doesn't mean we can neglect the world we live in now. We still need to do everything we can to care for it. As the days grow warmer, we could cut turn down the thermostat on our heating and reduce the amount of time we use it. We could also use this time when we are forced to reduce our activity to reclaim a rhythm of prayer and rest that draws us nearer to God and helps to sustain us in these uncertain times and in the future. Maybe we could go outside, look up at the night sky and give thanks to God for the wonders of his creation.

A prayer from the Philippine s by Lei Lemuel Crizaldo

*Our heavenly Father, as we look up to you in the vastness of the skies,
The sun that you have made opens our eyes to a world lit in colour and clarity,
And the moon and the stars remind us of your faithfulness and steadfast presence
Amidst the seasons of darkness and our community's moments of uncertainty.
Lord Jesus, you have shown us how from beginning to end was the light of love.
That, as endless as the heavens above, so is the grace that sustains all things,
So with faith that the Spirit has wrought in us, we seek the care every creature is to have,
As we dream, hope, and labour for a future wrapped in the fullness of joy that your new creation brings. Amen.*