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Let the land produce living creatures and let us make humankind in our image

(Genesis 1.24–31)

²⁴And God said, 'Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind.' And it was so. ²⁵God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.'

²⁷So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

²⁸God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'

²⁹Then God said, 'I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. ³⁰And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along

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the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.' And it was so.

³¹God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

While writing this book, we have been sharing our garden with a family of hedgehogs. We have had hedgehogs off and on over the years, but these last few months have given us our closest encounters yet. A mother had three babies in a nest she built under a piece of garden furniture, and we started to see her snuffling around in the garden in broad daylight. Then at dusk one evening, much to our delight, the babies came out too. They didn't see us as we stood stock still, and they trotted around our feet, foraging in the vegetation.

We put water and hedgehog food out every day and soon a pattern emerged: the mum would come out early evening while it was still light (an early breakfast in peace and quiet without the kids), then she would come back at dusk with the babies for them to feed as well. It became part of our regular routine too, each evening, to go out and watch them pottering about the garden.

The babies grew and, just recently, they went on their way to find their own territories. But it has felt a special privilege to be part of their lives and, hopefully, we have done something to help hedgehogs in general because whilst stable on a global level, in the UK they have suffered a massive decline. It is thought that around 30 million hedgehogs populated Britain in the 1950s, but now there are possibly only around a million left, meaning nationally they are at risk of extinction.¹

Encounters like these are precious as they underline the connection between us humans and the wider animal world. In her 2016 Archbishop of Canterbury's Lent Book, *I Am With You*, Episcopal priest Kathryn Greene-McCreight says, 'There is no true humanity without other creatures of God.'² As we will also see in this chapter, there is no true humanity without other humans: a human on their own is not fully who they are meant to be. But humanity does not only exist within the human community: without the wider community of creatures that God has created we cannot be what we have been created to be and we are the poorer for it.

In this final chapter our focus turns to land creatures, both human and other-than-human. First we will consider land animals in general and then we will look at human beings; at what it means to be made 'in the image of God', and what that tells us about our relationship with one another and the wider creation. As part of this we will turn our attention to a topic we have touched on in almost every chapter – food. We will give further thought to what and how we should eat: a topic that seems very fitting for Lent, focused as it is on fasting!

Creatures of the land

So now the final created space gets filled – the land. In similar fashion to verse 11 where the land is told to bring forth/produce vegetation, now it is to bring forth living creatures. As we saw in the previous chapter, the literal translation is the same as that for the sea creatures: 'living beings'. So the land is to produce 'living *nepes*'. This is demonstrated towards the end of the chapter where green plants are given to 'everything that has the breath of life in it' (v. 30). Literally this could also be translated as everything that has the 'soul of life' in it, and it is a beautiful reminder that the soul is not some distinct spiritual entity that only human beings have, trapped inside our physical bodies, waiting to be freed. It is a description of who we are as created beings, both human and non-human. All of us have God's breath in us.

In the categories of living creatures given in verse 24 we see the basic division into domestic animals, land-based 'crawling things' and wild animals. As with the creation of vegetation, sea creatures and birds, the land creatures are made 'according to their kinds'. This is an important phrase to the author, who uses it five times in just the two verses 24 and 25. It reflects the overall stress in the Hebrew Bible on appreciating and respecting the distinct nature of different kinds. The word is used again when Noah, in Genesis 6.20, is commanded to take two of every kind of animal into the ark. Rabbi Norman Solomon argues that God and the text are concerned with biodiversity and the preservation of each separate and distinct species.³ In Chapter Three

we looked at the fertility of the land and in Chapter Five at the many kinds of birds and sea creatures. Here too, this phrase calls attention to the number and variety of different species that are envisaged.

In other words, we share this world with the most incredible and wonderful mix of strange, colourful, funny, scary, cuddly, scaly, odd, tiny, huge creatures that we could ever possibly imagine! Who could have thought up the star-shaped mole of North America with its 22 little tentacles on the end of its nose that it uses to find food, or the tiny elusive primate called the tarsia of southeast Asia, with its huge eyes, ability to turn its head 180 degrees and super-long back legs which enable it to leap up to five meters from branch to branch? Who would make up the saiga antelope of Eurasia with its strange nose that comes down over its mouth, or the aardvark of sub-Saharan Africa with its long tongue and kangaroo-like ears, or the lion-tailed macaque of India, with its stunning silver-white mane and tail that ends in a tuft like a lion's? Who would think to put such tufty ears on the European lynx and who ever could have imagined the duck-billed platypus with its duck-like bill and beaver-like tail?! Wherever in the world we live, in the city or in the countryside, we have amazing creatures around us – even if they are not all as fancy as those just mentioned. Why not pause for a moment to think about the animals that live around you and give thanks to God for such an abundance of life?

Having created the land animals, God pauses to look once more at what he has made, and he declares it 'good'. This deepens the affirmation we have seen throughout Genesis 1 of the inherent value and worth of God's creation. And it is worth stating again: God loves each aspect of the created world for its own sake – each thing has goodness in and of itself in the eyes of God. I was once privileged enough to stay in a lodge in the Serengeti in Tanzania. The view from my balcony stretched for miles and, as the sun set, I stood out and watched a troupe of about 50 elephants wandering across the savannah. I was struck by my irrelevance to them: they had no idea I was there and their lives would continue without me. Of course, I am aware of the painful politics around safari parks and the deep interrelation between people and the non-human animals that live there. The reality is my life probably *did* have relevance to them in a variety of ways (not least through my

park fees). Nonetheless, it was a humbling experience watching these majestic creatures with the breath of God in them, knowing that God saw them too and declared them to be good.

A giant fish and a talking donkey

As we have worked our way through Genesis 1 during the course of this book, we have seen how the Bible is not only a story about human beings but a story about the whole world – indeed the whole universe! To be sure, the story centres around people and God's unfolding relationship with them, but the wider natural world is never far away, and the biblical text is full of trees, birds, fish, fields, gardens, stars, insects, the sun and moon, flowers, seas, rivers, rain, clouds, wind . . . and the animals created on Day Six. In fact, animals in general are pictured alongside people right the way through the Bible.

Noah's Ark is an obvious favourite in this regard, and we touched on it earlier, but it is important to notice that God's covenant with Noah is actually also with 'every living creature that was with you' (Gen. 9.10). It is emphasized seven times that God's covenant is with 'all living creatures' or 'all life on the earth' (9.10, 12, 13, 15–17). Really, this ought to be called the Earth Covenant.

As David Clough points out, 'The people of Israel are always to be found in the company of . . . animals', particularly domestic animals but sometimes wild ones too.⁴ The Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) and their families always have animals with them, and it is interesting to note that on the night of the Passover, when the Egyptians are wailing at the death of their first born sons, even the Israelites' dogs keep quiet and do not bark (Ex. 11.7). As we mentioned in Chapter Three with reference to the land, animals are also included in the laws of the Sabbath, including the wild animals that may eat off the land in the Sabbath years (Lev. 2.6–7).

When we looked at Jonah in the last chapter, we saw that God spared the repentant Nineveh with its 120,000 people – 'and also many animals', and the story tells us that the animals as well as the people fasted and were covered with sackcloth (3.7–8). Animals are therefore seen as having their own capacity to act and respond to God.

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In the Bible we see God speaking to creatures: the snake in Genesis 3; the raven who fed Elijah; the wild animals he told not to be afraid (Joel 2.22), and the fish that vomited Jonah out. In the amusing story of Balaam's donkey we find a creature far more aware of God than his master (Num. 22.21–35)!

Alongside the land, the animal kingdom will suffer the effects of judgment for people's sins (eg. Ez. 14.21; Zeph. 1.2–3; Joel 1.18–20). But, more positively, taking their place with all the other aspects of the natural world that we have looked at in *Saying Yes to Life*, land animals are called to join creation's choir in praising God. It is interesting to note that Psalm 65.2 in the NIV says 'all people will come' to praise God, but the literal translation is 'all flesh', in other words, all living things. The beautiful image of the whole creation praising God, that we have seen so many times already, finds its fulfillment in Revelation 4 and 5 with the four living creatures – one with a face like an ox and another like a lion, representing the domestic and wild animals respectively, alongside one with a face like an eagle and one with a face like a person – as the central worshippers, subsequently joined by 'every creature' in creation (5.13).⁵ When we praise God, we do so in good and full company.

Like the Patriarchs, Jesus too lived his life in the company of animals. Although the gospel stories don't specify this, the fact that Jesus was laid in an animal feeding trough when he was born and that shepherds came to worship him, suggests there may well have been sheep and goats, cows and donkeys around the place where he lay.

There is an important little verse just before the start of Jesus' ministry when he is being tempted in the wilderness. Mark tells us that 'he was with the wild animals' (1.13). Following a long tradition of scholarship, which sees this passage as portraying Jesus as the second Adam who is tempted but this time does not succumb, Richard Bauckham picks up on the eschatological hopes of Isaiah 11.6–9, with its beautiful picture of concord within the animal kingdom (what scholars call 'the peaceable kingdom').⁶ In this Isaiah passage, as Bauckham highlights, there is peace between wild and domestic animals, and between wild animals and people, made the more poignant by highlighting peace with the most vulnerable of animals: those that are young (yearlings

and infants). In the wilderness, Jesus encounters three kinds of non-human beings: Satan, the wild animals, and the angels. Satan is only to be resisted. The angels are there to minister to him. In between are the wild animals: 'They are enemies of whom Jesus makes friends.'⁷ Jesus being with the wild animals in this peaceable way not only confirms their independent value (he does not try to control or dominate them) but affirms that 'the kingdom of God inaugurated by Jesus includes the wider animal kingdom.'⁸

This is a very important point for us to grasp and resonates with our discussions around eschatology in Chapter Four where we saw that the whole created order (rather than humans alone) is caught up in God's plans for redemption. As Indian theologian, Ken Gnanakan says, 'The promise of God cannot be restricted to people.'⁹ We may therefore look forward to the transformed heaven and earth including other creatures and, yes, maybe even particular creatures we have known and loved in our lives, as well as the many we have not.¹⁰

Animals were naturally part of Jesus' world. He talks about sheep and wolves, snakes, dogs and oxen, and it is an animal – a donkey – that brings Jesus into Jerusalem towards his death. This is not to say that Jesus saw no differentiation between people and other animals: his saying about sparrows and his teaching on the Sabbath (see below) argues from the lesser to the greater, and assumes that sparrows, sheep and oxen are not as valuable as people, though, of course, that does not mean they have no value at all. We see this too in his allowing the demons to take possession of the pigs when teaching in the region of the Gerasenes (Matt. 8.28–32; Mark 5.1–13; Luke 8.26–33). In the understanding of the day, the demons had to go somewhere otherwise they would have returned to the man. So casting them into the pigs is a lesser of two evils in the time before Jesus had won his full victory on the cross, and a recognition that the pigs were of less value than the man. But, in the light of the broader biblical picture, we cannot say from this story that Jesus had no concern for animals at all.¹¹

The Bible shows us a God who is deeply concerned for his creation, and not least for his animal creation. It is God who provides water for the beasts of the field and grass for the cattle; God who provides

all creatures with their food so that they look to him and are satisfied (Ps. 104.11, 14, 27–28). It is God, in Jesus, who says that the Sabbath laws are there to serve his creation, not the other way round: if an ox has fallen into a pit or a well on the Sabbath day, of course the owner would pull it out and not leave it there till the Sabbath is over – that is part of what it means to 'do good' (Matt. 12.11; Luke 14.5). Therefore, as we will explore further below, it is expected that we too follow God in doing good towards what he has made and looking after the other creatures of this world.

The place of animals in the Bible shows us they are an integral part of the story of redemption; therefore we should remember their place in our lives as well. We see something of this happening in the *Thanksgiving Address* from the Native American Haudenosaunee nation, which goes through and addresses each part of creation – the animals:

We gather our minds together to send greetings and thanks to all the Animal life in the world. They have many things to teach us as people. We see them near our homes and in the deep forests. We are glad they are still here and we hope that it will always be so.¹²

How might our church services – or our individual prayers – be changed if we paused and took time to remember the animals in our world; recognized their presence and were thankful for it; acknowledged humbly that we can learn from them, and expressed our desire that they will always be with us? And how might it change our lives to have this rooted deeply within us?

Doing a die-in

Remembering God's love for his animal creation and their place in his plans for redemption strengthens our motivation to be living and acting in ways that do not harm them, but instead enable them to flourish. This is desperately needed today because we are facing unprecedented extinction rates.

April 2019 saw the emergence of Extinction Rebellion (XR), a new climate movement with national groups in 16 countries (at the time of writing). The origins of the group relate to the recognition that we are facing a climate and ecological emergency, as we have discussed at so many points in this book. XR believes that the political and corporate world is not taking the action it should and feels frustrated by the slow rate of change and the lack of urgency in response to this crisis. XR is therefore building a movement that increases pressure on those who could make a difference by means of civil disobedience: it is undertaking acts of peaceful resistance to attract the media's attention and get these issues on the public agenda. Its call is, 'for governments to tell the truth about our emergency; to commit to becoming net zero by 2025, and to create a more participatory democracy in the form of citizen assemblies which will lead on climate and ecological decisions.'¹³

For ten days in April 2019, protesters (called Rebels) gathered in different countries. In London, thousands of people took over five sites: Waterloo Bridge, Piccadilly Circus, Marble Arch, Oxford Circus and Parliament Square. They blockaded the roads with some chaining and gluing themselves to one another and the ground; they held rallies and parties and picnics; they talked to the media and government. Over one thousand people were arrested though the whole demonstration was conducted peaceably (which was not the case in France where the police were more brutal and used tear gas despite the protestors' lack of aggression). There have been more mass actions since those days in April and churches, Christians and Christian agencies were and are involved.

I joined in over the mid-point weekend, and my elder daughter Mali stayed up and participated for longer. She took part in a 'die-in' at the Natural History Museum. About a hundred activists – many of them young families with pushchairs – gathered in the iconic main hall and, when a whistle was blown, fell to the floor and lay for 25 minutes in silence, pretending to be dead, until the whistle was blown again and they got up and continued on their way. Performed under the massive skeleton of the blue whale – itself an endangered species – the act was done to symbolize the mass extinction of animals we are currently experiencing, which climate change is making worse.

It is one of five key drivers that are altering nature, the other ones being changes in land and sea use (as we saw in regard to birds and sea creatures); direct exploitation of organisms;¹⁴ pollution, and invasive species. Although currently it is land and sea use (intensive agriculture, urbanization and overfishing) that cause the greatest species decline, it is expected that climate change may become the key driver in some cases.¹⁵ And, of course, they are all interlinked.

Currently, around one in four mammals is at risk of extinction – a terrible statistic.¹⁶ In 2019, the IPBES released its Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (we saw it briefly in the last chapter in relation to marine fish stocks).¹⁷ The then-IPBES Chair, Sir Robert Watson, said at its launch, 'Ecosystems, species, wild populations, local varieties and breeds of domesticated plants and animals are shrinking, deteriorating or vanishing. The essential, interconnected web of life on Earth is getting smaller and increasingly frayed.' It is also becoming increasingly upside down in that, as we saw with birds in the previous chapter, the vast majority of mammals are livestock.

What was clear from the report is that it is people who are both causing the problems and suffering the consequences, along with other species. From a human perspective, the failure to conserve and use the wider world sustainably is affecting our ability to meet 80 per cent of the Sustainable Development Goals: those related to poverty, hunger, health, water, cities, climate, oceans and land. As the IPBES report says, 'Loss of biodiversity is therefore shown to be not only an environmental issue, but also a developmental, economic, security, social and moral issue as well.'¹⁸ As we have seen throughout *Saying Yes to Life*, people and planet have to be held together.

Underlying the five key drivers of our current levels of extinction and loss of biodiversity is consumerism. Brazilian anthropologist, Professor Eduardo Brondizio, who co-chaired the report, highlights a pattern that emerges: 'one of global interconnectivity . . . with resource extraction and production often occurring in one part of the world to satisfy the needs of distant consumers in other regions.'¹⁹ Our globalized, consumer-focused society has brought us many good things and I am not against consumerism *per se*. The fact that

I can sit and write this book on a laptop, with a cup of tea and some chocolate next to me, comfortably clothed; the fact that I can relax with a variety of different books or television programmes; the fact that I am not spending my days working in the fields to grow food for my family or taking hours to wash our clothes by hand – all these indicate that I am living in and enjoying the benefits of a consumer culture.

And yet we know this culture is causing immense damage and our demands are more than the earth's resources can carry. Paulos Mar Gregorios, Metropolitan of Delhi of the Indian Orthodox Church says, 'In taking what is given by nature, we should be careful to give back to nature what it needs to maintain its own integrity and to supply the needs of the future.'²⁰ We know we are not doing that.

It sounds obvious to say, but nothing comes from nowhere: everything we buy and use comes from somewhere and uses resources from the land or seas. Put simply, we need to buy and use less in order to take better care of the natural world for its own and for God's sake, and to free up resources for those who truly need them. Ask yourself all the time: Do I need this? Can I do without it? And, if you think you really do need it, is there is a way of buying or using it that uses no resources (e.g. second hand or sharing with someone else) or that uses new resources sustainably? Wherever you live in the world, my guess is that if you are reading this book, you are in a position to take on this challenge, and what better time to do that than now during Lent?²¹

North American poet, Luci Shaw, calls God, 'the original artist of the universe', saying, 'Just as each human thumbprint is unique, its pattern inscribed on the work of our hands and minds, the Creator's is even more so – the original thumbprint on the universe.'²² From a theological perspective, therefore, the loss of biodiversity is a desecration of God's artistry, worse than any terrorist demolition of a precious world heritage site. A world that God has created to be teeming with life is instead losing its life at an unparalleled rate. Thoughtlessness and selfishness make us all complicit. But – as we shall consider soon – alongside our sinfulness, we also bear the imprint of God in our own lives and that means we can act and bring about hope.

Yasha the pangolin

One animal that has found a special place in our lives as a family is the pangolin. The world's only scaly mammal, it is an incredible creature with eight species across Africa and Asia, some living on the ground and some in trees. The pangolin is covered from head to foot in scales, has an amazingly long tongue for reaching termites, and rolls into a ball to protect itself when threatened. Ground-dwelling pangolins walk on their hind legs in a very endearing manner.

The pangolin is totally harmless but is also the world's most illegally trafficked animal. It is hunted for its meat – both for local bushmeat and for sale around Asia where it is considered a delicacy – and its scales, which are thought to have medicinal properties and are used in traditional medicine, particularly in China (though the scales are made of nothing more than keratin like our nails). All eight species are at risk of extinction and, though globally illegal, over a million pangolins have been trafficked in the last decade alone. Hauls of pangolin scales are regularly found by customs officials. While I was writing this, news came in of Turkish officials finding 1.2 tonnes of scales at Istanbul airport, and the biggest haul ever came in April 2019 when nearly 13 tonnes from Nigeria were seized by customs officials in Singapore, en route to Vietnam. The scales were likely to come from some 17,000 pangolins.²³

Mali participated in the die-in at the Natural History Museum because she has developed a love of pangolins and wanted to play her part in something to raise awareness around species extinction. She took time out between school and university to volunteer with A Rocha Ghana and be involved in the work they are doing to protect the Atewa Forest. The Atewa Forest, in the south east of Ghana, is 250 square kilometres and the source of three major rivers which together provide water to five million people, as well as supporting livelihoods and agriculture. It is home to over 100 species of mammals, birds, amphibians and plants that are globally threatened or near-threatened with extinction, some of which are found nowhere else in the world. And it is home to pangolins.

The pangolins in the Atewa Forest are hunted for local bushmeat and for the wider international trade. The forest itself is under

pressure because large amounts of bauxite – used to make aluminium – are in the ground and the Ghanaian government is working with the Chinese government to open up the forest to extraction. There is also illegal logging and gold mining and land clearance for farming.

Mali's work was focused on going into schools and forest communities to help the local people understand why they should not take pangolins from the forest, and to look at alternative employment so they would not need to sell them as a means of income. Unexpectedly, she rescued a female juvenile pangolin, whom she named Yasha (which means 'saved' in Hebrew), whose tail had been cut off by a chainsaw when an illegal logger was felling a tree. She took the little creature back to her lodgings and – with the advice of a pangolin expert in Zimbabwe – looked after her, nursing her back to health, taking her into the forest twice a day to feed on termites, and teaching her to gain confidence climbing trees, since she did not have her tail to help her balance. Eventually, Mali released the pangolin back into the forest and we pray that Yasha is still an appropriate name for her.

The plight of the pangolin highlights so many issues: poverty, greed, ignorance, deforestation, consumerism, poaching, land use, biodiversity loss, etc. Yet, it also highlights the amazing love and dedication of those working to safeguard them in Africa and Asia, and of those involved in protecting the Atewa Forest. A Rocha Ghana is one of the key organizations engaged in a lengthy battle with the Ghanaian government to keep bauxite mining out of Atewa and protect the area. At the time of writing the Government of Ghana is preparing to offer sections of the forest to mining companies to start extracting bauxite, but local campaigners have not given up hope that these plans can still be averted.

Some of us reading this will be living in countries that have or use pangolins. If that is the case for you, you can help by calling on the government to put more resources into policing and penalizing poaching and by doing what you can to change the culture so it becomes unacceptable to eat or use pangolins. And of course you can make sure you never do so yourself. Others of us can play our part by supporting organizations working for their protection, and for the protection of other endangered animals.

Whoever would have thought that a prehistoric creature called a pangolin would find its way into a Lent book? But it is completely appropriate. For those of us reading *Saying Yes to Life* a chapter a week through Lent, you will be heading towards or maybe even in Holy Week, focusing your thoughts on the events leading up to Jesus' death and resurrection. When all the creatures in heaven and earth in Revelation 5 come together with the elders to worship at the throne of God, they see at the centre the Lion of Judah who has become a slain lamb. Animal imagery is everywhere and animals themselves feature right the way through the biblical story of salvation. With them we worship the one who died so that all creation might be reconciled to God through his blood.

Made in the image of God

Let us return to the text of Genesis 1 that we are looking at in this chapter and consider the last thing God creates: human beings. Immediately we see there is something different here that sets this final species apart from all else that has been created. In verses 11, 20 and 24, the land and seas are told to produce the creatures that will inhabit those spaces. Here though in verse 26, we see 'a special deliberation on the part of God'.²⁴ The plural that is used ('let us make') may refer to the concept of the celestial court that we see elsewhere in the Old Testament (eg. 1 Kings 22.19–22), and could be God discussing his decision with the other heavenly beings there. Or it may be what French theologian Paul Beauchamp describes as 'the distant dawn of a trinitarian revelation'.²⁵ Or it may be the 'royal we', an expression of the grandeur and momentousness of the act being undertaken (the Hebrew 'ēlōhīm, 'God', is often in the plural, e.g. Isa. 19.4). Whichever of these understandings is correct, the author wants us to understand that the creation of humankind carries particular significance.

We must, however, be careful not to make too much of a distinction. Humans are, after all, created on the same day as the other land creatures. We may have preferred the sea, sky and land animals all to have been made on Day Five with Day Six as our very

own special day! But no, we are land creatures along with all the rest of Day Six. Like them, we have the breath of God in us as we have seen already. And we remember what we saw in Chapter Five on the fish and birds, that the blessing given to us to be fruitful and increase and fill the earth (our space) is also given to the sea and sky creatures to fill their spaces (Gen. 1.22). We shall consider further on in this chapter how we should see ourselves in relation to the wider world, but for now it is worth noting the things that make us the same as the other animals created by God, and to allow that to engender humility within us.

Nonetheless, there is one key difference: whereas all the other sea, sky and land animals are made 'according to their kinds', humankind is made instead 'in the image of God', and it is in this description that we learn what makes us uniquely human. There has been much ink spilt over what this phrase means and scholars have tried to locate it in what particular aspect of humankind's being the image of God can be found. S. R. Driver, for example, in his 1904 commentary on Genesis says that 'it can be nothing but the gift of *self-conscious reason*, which is possessed by man, but by no other animal', while Karl Barth believed as God made them male and female, that the image of God referred to human sexuality.²⁶

The Hebrew for image, *selem*, is used elsewhere of a physical image or statue of a god (eg. Num. 33.52) and it has its parallels with Israel's neighbours: a Mesopotamian text talks about the king being in 'the image (*šalam*) of Bel' and the name Tutankhamun in Egypt means 'the living image of Amon'.²⁷ The Israelites were therefore well familiar with the concept of a person or object imaging a god. They will also have been familiar with their neighbours putting such images in their temples to signify the presence of their god(s).

In a number of places in the Bible, the world is seen in temple imagery: the cosmos is depicted as a building created to provide a space in which God's creatures can reside (Job 38.4-7), and the building of the physical temple has resonances with the creation of the universe.²⁸ Canadian Bible scholar, Richard Middleton, thus describes the creation as the 'macrocosmos' and the tabernacle as the 'microcosmos'. Seen from this perspective, just as a temple would

be expected to contain statues representing the god/s (or goddess/es) to which it was dedicated, so as human beings we are the images – the representatives – of the one true God in his creation. It is because of this, of course, that the Israelites are commanded not to make any idols or set up any images of God (Lev. 26.1). They should have no need of such things because they themselves are the images of God. To make other images can only mean they have forgotten their calling.

Henri Blocher notices that the term suggests 'beholding'.²⁹ An image in a temple is something you look at in order to gain a better understanding of the divine. We are that image and other people and indeed the whole creation should be able to look at us, individually and as a species, and see God reflected in us.

Being made as the image of God puts humankind in a particular relationship before God. It cannot be a coincidence that, in Genesis 5, after a summary statement which says, 'when God created mankind, he made them in the likeness of God', the author goes straight on to tell us that Adam then had a son 'in his own likeness, in his own image' (Gen. 5.1-2). As Blocher says, 'God creates man as a sort of earthly son, who represents him and responds to him'³⁰ and of course 'child of God' language is used throughout the Scriptures (e.g. Hos. 11.1; Lk. 11.11-13; Gal. 3.26; Rom. 8.19).

We cannot jump from this to say that other creatures therefore have no relationship with God: we have seen time and time again that the wider creation in its diversity, fullness and individuality responds to God and God responds to and communicates with it in various ways. And we have also observed repeatedly that the natural world reflects God and carries his imprint, so we must be careful in our understanding of people being made to image God – it does not mean that God cannot be seen in any creature other than humans.

Yet, the human being is the species chosen by God to bear his image and be his representative. Being made as God's image-bearers gives us a job to do with which no other part of the created order is tasked. This carries significance in two particular areas: it impacts how we view our relationships with one another, human to human; and it impacts how we view our relationships with the wider creation, and

other creatures in particular. Let us look first at what being created as the image of God tells us about human relationships, and then we shall turn to consider our relationship with the rest of creation.

All people made in the image of God

One of the strands running through *Saying Yes to Life* has been an exploration of how seeing the creation story of Genesis 1 in its wider historical context, particularly alongside the dominant narrative of *Enuma Elish*, can help us understand it more and appreciate what it is telling us. This is no less the case when it comes to the creation of humanity.

Right back in Chapter One, when we heard the story of *Enuma Elish*, we saw that humans were created from the blood of the defeated and slain enemy Kingu (Tiamat's consort) to serve the gods and set them free from doing the work that Marduk at first assigned to them (cleaning the temples and arduous jobs like that). Effectively, people were created to be the slaves of the gods – and created out of the blood of an inferior deity. That is hardly a flattering way to see yourself! And then we discovered in the culture of Israel's neighbours that it was the king who was seen as being God's image-bearer: him and no-one else. The rest of the population were, again, slaves. As slaves they had no value and could be used and abused without justification.

It will be immediately obvious how different that is to the creation of humankind in Genesis 1. Created in the image of the supreme creator God, Yahweh, people are endowed with dignity and worth. And not only the king: *all* people. Yes we have been tasked with a job to do, but it is one that gives us responsibility and respect. There is an astounding, radical equality here, and we see the implications of this reverberating through the pages of the Bible, as inequality and oppression are denounced and the people of God are called to live lives that demonstrate justice, mercy and humility (e.g. Ex. 15.1–18; Amos 8.4–7; Micah 6.8; Acts 4.32–37; 1 Cor. 11.17–22; James 2.1–4; 5.1–6).

People are, as the Psalmist puts it, 'fearfully and wonderfully made' (Ps. 139.14). Each one of us has been knit together in our mother's

womb, with our innermost being created by God (v. 13). Rowan Williams writes beautifully of how we are each of value before God:

This means that whenever I face another human being, I face a mystery. There is a level of their life, their existence, where I cannot go and which I cannot control, because it exists in relation to God alone . . . The reverence I owe to every human person is connected with the reverence I owe to God, who brings them into being and keeps them in being. I stand before holy ground when I encounter another person.³¹

Equality does not mean being identical: different skills and different choices will lead to different lives. But, it is this belief in the equality of all people before God that leads Christians to fight so adamantly against poverty, injustice, discrimination and oppression. As we have seen in every chapter, we live in a fallen world – a world where things are not as they should be because of the consequences of sin. When we do not follow the God, whom Jesus reveals, and his ways of love, compassion and faithful service, the results are devastating. They lead to a caste system of deep inequality; to people working in horrendous conditions to provide the goods we want; to children being trafficked for the sex industry or domestic slavery; to colonialism that destroys whole peoples and ways of life; to war and ethnic conflict that wreck many innocent lives, and much more besides. Every time something happens to a person that goes against the value and worth God places on them, 'some unique and unrepeatable aspect of God's purposes has been allowed to vanish.'³²

This is what drives Tearfund and all our amazing partners and supporters around the world to work to see people freed from poverty and living transformed lives, helped to reach their God-given potential. Christian Aid similarly is committed to working 'for dignity, equality and justice' and CAFOD reaches out to help people living in poverty and campaigns for global justice. We are just a tiny part of a huge global Church with churches, individual Christians and organizations responding practically to people's needs, standing up against oppression and discrimination, and very often putting their own lives on the line as they do so.

The other fifty percent

When thinking about issues of inequality and injustice, one key area is gender. Though Barth may have been wrong in seeing the image of God as located in human sexuality *per se*, he highlighted something that is important: the image of God is found in human beings as male and female together, in equality. For true human flourishing to occur, both women and men need to be able to live their lives to the full. Gender equality is needed because limited education means lower skill levels, leading to fewer opportunities for work and therefore less income. However, increased rates of female education lead to greater social development and enhanced communities. Gender equality is also the best way to tackle overpopulation because, by educating young women, families are started later and the length of time between each child increases. Though there has been good progress, we still face a situation where only 52 per cent of women in marriage or partnership make their own free decisions about sex, contraception and health care; globally, national parliaments are only 37 per cent women; at least 200 million women and girls in 30 countries have undergone Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), and women in northern Africa hold fewer than one in five paid jobs in the non-agricultural sector. Thinking back to Chapter Three on the importance of land rights, globally women own just 13 per cent of agricultural land though they are the majority farmers.³³

There is a lot of focus on empowering women, in line with this being one of the Sustainable Development Goals (no. 5: Gender equality). Tearfund has seen how cultural and religious norms that justify male dominance and violent behaviour are a significant contributor to lack of female empowerment and so, if we want to see gender equality, we need to tackle those norms.

Mary from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) suffered in an abusive and controlling marriage for more than six years. 'He would come back home drunk at around 10pm, and would immediately attack and insult me in front of the children,' she remembers. Mary is one of a staggering number of women affected by sexual and gender-based violence in the DRC.

Recognizing that faith leaders are in a unique position to speak

Let the land produce living creatures

out against such harmful social norms, Tearfund has pioneered an approach to tackling violence against women that is called 'Transforming Masculinities.' This uses scriptural reflections to change thinking and promote respectful relationships between men and women, and religious leaders of various faiths are being equipped and mobilized to tackle violence against women in their communities.

When Mary's husband started attending the Bible-based Transforming Masculinities sessions at his church, his whole mindset started to alter, and his behaviour followed suit. 'I was so amazed by the way my husband started changing little by little, and acting differently,' says Mary. 'Now, my husband speaks to me in a soft voice, we even get to discuss questions in our home. He comes back at 7pm at the latest, and he is now concerned with the education of the children and, most importantly, not being drunk. I do not know how to thank you enough.'

So far nearly 800 faith leaders have been trained through the workshops and 6,000 men and women have completed the six-week process. The programme is now being run in Liberia, Nigeria, Brazil, Myanmar, DRC, Central African Republic, Iraq and Burundi, with adapted programmes in Chad, Mali and Sierra Leone which focus on FGM and preventing child marriage. As with Mary's husband, this is resulting in amazing changes in behaviour, including decreased violence. It has also led to increased confidence for many more women like Mary, and safer and more positive home lives for children, all of which will lead to greater empowerment for women.³⁴

Sharing our common home

So the image of God in which we are made places us in a particular relationship with God and it affirms the equality of all people, women and men together (and of course the wider biblical witness, particularly in the New Testament, would affirm equality across ethnicity too, though that is not the focus of the Genesis text itself, eg. Eph. 2.11-22; Gal. 3.28). Yet it also has something to say about our relationship with the wider natural world and other creatures.

In his encyclical letter, *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis coined a new term, referring to this world as 'our common home' and calling on

every person living on this planet to care for it. He described this common home as being 'like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us', and goes on to say, 'everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth.'³⁵ In referring to aspects of the natural world in this way, he is drawing on St Francis and his 'Canticle of the Creatures' in which he gives praise to God for brother sun and sister moon, brothers wind and air, sister water and brother fire, mother earth and even sister death.

This way of seeing our relationship with the wider natural world also has resonances with indigenous spirituality. Stan McKay explains,

Indigenous spirituality around the world is centred on the notion of relationship to the whole creation. We call the earth our mother and the animals are our brothers and sisters. Those parts of creation which biologists describe as inanimate we call our relatives. This naming of creation into our family is an imagery of substance, but it is more than that, because it describes a relationship of love and faithfulness between human persons and the creation.³⁶

Contemporary society has moved so far from that understanding: we tend to regard the rest of the created order as 'the environment', something separate to us, which is there to be used as we want.

In Genesis 1.26–28 we have seen that God made humankind in his image to be his representative in the wider world, in the same way that a physical image of a god or goddess would be put in the temple, or images of a king would be set up throughout his territory to signal his lordship. By making people in his image, God has given us delegated authority over his creation (*The Message* talks about us being 'responsible for . . .'). British Old Testament scholar, Chris Wright, makes the point that the grammar used in these verses indicates the role that humans have: 'Because God intended this last-created

species, the human species, to exercise dominion over the rest of his creatures, for that reason God expressly and purposefully creates this species alone in his own image.' The sense of the verses could then be read, 'Let us make human beings in our own image and likeness, so that they may look after the rest of creation.'³⁷

The image of God, therefore, is not so much any innate quality within us but more like a job title. All those qualities that people have tried to single out as being what constitutes the image of God in us – our ability to reason, to love and form relationships, our creativity and so forth – have been given to us by God, not because we are special but because we need those abilities if we are to carry out well the role that God has assigned to us. We recognize, humbly, that other creatures have those qualities too, but we have been blessed to have been given them in special measure.

The idea of 'having dominion/ruling over' and 'subduing' has of course been used to legitimize all sorts of abusive behaviour towards the land, seas and skies and their inhabitants. In each chapter so far we have sadly had to acknowledge examples of such behaviour. But the text itself does not allow such interpretation. 'Subdue' can imply force but, when used of the land (eg. Num. 32.22) is more akin to 'occupy' and is tied to the idea of filling the earth rather than to a sense of brute force. It finds further meaning in Genesis 2.15 where the human is put in the Garden of Eden 'to work it and take care of it'. Subdue in this wider context would then be associated with agriculture. 'Dominion' or 'rule' is itself a neutral word though it often has negative associations because, regrettably, most rulers carried out their role with violence (e.g. Ez. 34.4).³⁸ But, God expects his rulers to be different, to be servant rulers who exercise their dominion with love and compassion, working for justice and against oppression (eg. Prov. 31.4–9). American Rabbi, David Sears, concludes therefore that 'the divine mandate for man to dominate the natural world is a sacred trust, not a carte blanche for destructiveness.'³⁹

So we occupy this special role as caretakers or gardeners of this world. And, against the Babylonian narrative which fashioned human beings out of defeated divine blood, the Genesis 2 creation story says we are formed out of the dust of the ground (v. 7). There

is a play on words throughout these opening chapters: the Hebrew word for earth or ground is *ʾādāmā* and the name for our species is 'the *ʾādām* (until Eve is created Adam is not a proper name, it is always 'the adam', more like a description). We are literally made from the earth – humans from the humus. We are earth creatures, 'earthy ones', and this signals the integral relationship we have with the world around us.

Genesis 1.26–28 is only one expression of our relationship with the wider world, though it has tended to be the most dominant one, and it is reflected in Psalm 8 (which is picked up by the author of Hebrews in 2.5–8). Yet we have seen clearly throughout *Saying Yes to Life* that other passages, particularly in the Psalms and the Prophets, do not separate us out in the same way but rather place us on an equal footing with the wider world. Richard Bauckham has captured this in his simple phrase, 'the community of creation', and, as we take on the job of looking after what God has made, we do so remembering that we are indeed part of this wider community.⁴⁰

One part of being in this community of creation is that we are not immune to creation's sufferings. Climate change, species loss, plastic pollution, war and poverty all impact people, other creatures, and ecosystems together. It is a tragic reality too that environmental problems impact the poorest the most and, in countries of mixed colour (such as the US), environmental hazards follow race lines.⁴¹

We cannot tackle poverty without thinking about the air people breathe, the land they live on and the waters they fish in; and we cannot tackle environmental breakdown without thinking about the people living in specific places who contribute to localized problems through their poverty, and wealthy people like ourselves who are causing global problems through our consumerism. That is why Tearfund, and many other organizations, have made it their priority to help people lift themselves out of poverty in a way that enables the natural world to flourish at the same time. In this area, our work focuses on waste management, renewable energy and climate-smart agriculture, all of which are designed to create green jobs and livelihoods, restore the environment and reduce local inequality. We do this alongside advocacy work that calls on

governments and businesses to put into place policies and practices that function in favour of those in poverty and the environment, and help wealthier consumers take action to reduce their levels of consumption. You can see more on this from various organizations at <www.spckpublishing.co.uk/saying-yes-resources>.

We are part of a vibrant, wonderful community of creation and there is much to celebrate in it. But perhaps it would be appropriate to finish this section with an awareness that there is also a place for lament. Patriarch Bartholomew says, 'To commit a crime against the natural world is a sin against ourselves and a sin against God'.⁴² Lent is a season when we reflect on suffering; sharing in the suffering of Christ; and acknowledging where our sin has resulted in suffering for others and ourselves. As we reach Holy Week, let us pause to repent of the sins we have committed against God's world and his creatures, whether through negligence, weakness or our own deliberate fault.

Holy eating

As part of the community of creation, we also share common food, and green plants are given for food to all the creatures (Gen. 1.29–30). Food is a really important part of our humanity. We use it not only to give us the energy we need but also to build community and personal relationships. For many of us, food is a way by which we express love and nurture. As Canadian theologian, Norman Wirzba, puts it, 'Food is a gift to be gratefully received and generously shared'.⁴³ Not having enough food to eat or give to our loved ones is a disaster physically and it robs us of much of what it means to be human. The central act of the Christian faith is the commemoration of a meal. Every time we take communion we remember the Last Supper that Jesus shared with his disciples, with its symbols of his broken body and shed blood, and you may well be about to commemorate that meal yourself with your church on Maundy Thursday.

Yet it has become blatantly clear in *Saying Yes to Life* that food today is one of the key drivers behind many of the problems we are facing, through its rearing, growing, transportation, packaging and

disposal. With regards to climate change, agriculture is a significant contributor through greenhouse gas emissions from livestock; the cutting down and burning of forests for land; emissions from the production of the chemical inputs used to grow crops (much of which then goes to feed livestock), and emissions from transportation and the production and disposal of packaging. Land use is hugely important for tackling climate change, through soil and trees absorbing carbon (which reduces when land is degraded or, of course, when trees are cut down).

We certainly cannot put the blame wholly on farmers: the vast majority care deeply about the land under their care and we owe them immense gratitude for the work they do. We must remember too that globally 70 per cent of food is produced by smallholder farmers, the majority of whom are women. Behind them, though, is a system regulated by a few huge multinationals (the ABCD group – ADM, Bunge, Cargill and Louis Dreyfus – control 75–90 per cent of the global grain trade)⁴⁴, and the overriding aim is to provide us with food that we can buy as cheaply as possible while making the greatest potential profit.

Rabbis Yonatan Neril and Yedidya Sinclair say there are four questions we should ask ourselves in order to eat in holiness. First, *Why am I eating?* Let us ensure we are eating out of healthy desire rather than negative emotional cravings. Second, *How fast do I eat my food?* This urges us to eat our food slowly and consciously, leading to gratitude for what we have. Third, *Where do I eat?* This is an encouragement to eat at a table rather than at our desk or in front of the television. And then fourth, *With whom do I eat?* Let us share our food with others, speaking words of blessing to one another as we do so.⁴⁵

A fifth question we should add is, *Where has my food come from?* We need to increase our understanding of the food we eat: where it has been grown or reared; whether land and trees have needed to be cleared to provide it; whether harmful chemicals have been used; how far it has travelled; whether it is wrapped in plastic, and so on. I have written in more detail on these issues and what we can do practically in both *Just Living* and *L is for Lifestyle*, and there are more resources on the online resources page.

Genesis 1.29–30 makes clear that the original vision for creation was a vegetarian one, for all creatures. Does that mean we should be vegetarian now? To answer that fully needs more space than we have here and I recommend you look at the online resources for helpful links to explore this further.⁴⁶ The way I have come to see it is that the ‘book ends’ of the Bible do not envisage meat-eating (i.e. at the beginning in Genesis 1 and then the vision of the future ‘peaceable kingdom’ we discussed in Chapter Four, reflecting Isaiah 11.6–9). In between, meat eating is allowed, though it would appear to be as a concession to humanity’s sin rather than a positive thing (Gen. 9.1–3); it seems clear that Jesus ate fish and lamb, and no mention of not eating meat is made in the New Testament (other than in relation to meat offered sacrificially), although of course none of this meat was mass-produced in cages or filled with antibiotics.

So it would seem that meat eating is allowed in this current time. However, as Christians we look back to the harmonious relationship between people and other creatures that was envisaged in Genesis 1, and forward to the transformed peaceful creation. When we remember how much God loves all he has made and that animals are and will be part of God’s kingdom, it becomes hard to understand why we would want to kill another creature, however ingrained that might be in our culture. I think it can be argued that there are situations where meat eating is permissible, such as where people depend on hunting for their food (not for pleasure) or in situations of real need and hunger, and we may want to argue that mixed farming systems where animals are reared very well, are beneficial to the health of the wider environment. But as Christians we need to challenge ourselves on the extent of our meat eating much more than we currently do. And, if we do choose to eat meat, we must ensure we only do so from animals we know have lived and died well. Personally, I now eat almost no meat (a far cry from the days when I was part of a pig cooperative!) I have stayed flexible for unexpected situations I might find myself in, but don’t cook meat at home and am enjoying discovering how delicious vegan food is too. We all need to move towards a more plant-based diet for the sake of the planet.

And it was very good

We have covered big topics in this chapter! As we draw it and Day Six to a close, we see that the divine declaration of goodness changes. Whereas each day finishes with God looking at what he has made and seeing that it is good (except for Day Two), now God looks at *all* he has made and sees that it is very good (Gen. 1.31). I like to think this is an understatement and God surveys all he has made and says, 'Wow, that's fantastic . . . look at this . . . it's amazing!' In fact, we get some glimpse of that in Psalm 104 where the Psalmist says, 'May the Lord rejoice in his works' (v. 31).

I was speaking at a conference recently on the themes of this book, and the day after, a young woman who had gone home overnight came to see me. She had been playing Lego with her young son that morning and had built a house which, she said, she put a lot of time into and was pretty impressive! Her son came over and – wham – knocked the whole thing down and destroyed it. She felt her emotions rising and then, she told me, she sensed God say to her, 'And how do you think I feel about how you treat my home?' It was the first time she had glimpsed God's love for his whole creation and it changed her.

To end this chapter, pray the prayer below and ask God, similarly, to give you a new understanding of how he sees this world and of how you can be his image within it.

For discussion

- 1 Pope Francis calls this world 'our common home' and Richard Bauckham talks of 'the community of creation.' Reflect on those two terms. What do they say to you?
- 2 Philip Newell writes, 'The extent to which we fail to reflect the image of God in our lives is the extent to which we have become less than truly human.'⁴⁷ What does it mean to you that all people have been made in God's image? Are there people in your circles or society you need to remind yourself have been made in God's image? In what ways do/can you reflect God's image in your own life in relation to other people and the wider world?
- 3 We have talked a lot in this book about food and the role it plays in many of the issues we have considered. We have looked at

Let the land produce living creatures

eating fish sustainably; using less plastic in our food; cutting out or reducing our consumption of meat; growing our own food, and supporting farmers who look after their land and don't use lots of chemical inputs. How willing are you to change the way you eat? What will you commit to doing?

- 4 The final interview features Archbishop Justin. As *Saying Yes to Life* draws to a close and we head into the Conclusion, watch it here (<www.spckpublishing.co.uk/saying-yes-resources>) and consider: what have you learnt through the book? What has been most memorable? Are there things for which you need to repent? What changes are you making as a result?

A prayer from France

Lord be praised for the immensity and the beauty of your creation.
I pray with humility to be every single day more aware of the variety of species on earth and to seek for their protection.

I thank you for this calling to take care of our planet that you put in many hearts, and I pray many others will follow.

I ask you the grace of being able to see the world with your eyes and to always be amazed by the places I'm blessed to go.

In this time of Lent, Lord help me to discern what specific choice I can make to reduce my ecological imprint on the earth and how I can be an encouragement to people around me to think and act about it.

At times when I can be discouraged by the amount of ecological issues, help me to remember I stand before holy ground when

I encounter another person and to believe that you can make everything possible.

Prisca Liotard is a French Catholic with a heart for the unity of Christians. She was part of the Community of St Anselm in 2017–2018 where her sisters and brothers gave her the 'Environment' award, a cause that truly matters to her!

Conclusion

The seventh day (Genesis 2.1–3)

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in their vast array. ²By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. ³Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating he had done.

As we come to the end of the first story of creation, so too we approach the end of our Lenten travels, turning our eyes now to the empty tomb and the resurrection of Jesus.

We have witnessed a beautiful symmetry in the narrative we have been reading, with its creation of spaces first and then the creatures to inhabit them, and this verse rounds off that narrative, bringing creation to its completion. God now stops and rests. In Exodus 31.17 we are given a different version: 'he rested and was refreshed'; literally, 'he rested and took breath'. There is a sense of enormous fulfilment, of having completed something wonderfully good and breathing a sigh of satisfaction.

We are reminded of the rhythm of day and night and sacred times that we saw on Day Four, as the seventh day is made holy and the Sabbath is confirmed. Seven-day patterns were not unique to the Israelites and appear also in Assyrian and Babylonian writings, but in the Genesis text, that pattern is rooted firmly in the God who has created the heavens and the earth as his temple, and now takes up residence through his people.¹

On Day Seven, there is no longer the formula that has accompanied each day – 'and there was evening, and there was morning . . .' – and there is the implication that Day Seven does not finish but continues on. And yet we know we do not live fully in Sabbath rest. Tragically,

in the very next chapter of Genesis, we see humanity fall from our intended state of *shalom* to a place of discord and enmity on all levels: with God, with one another, and with the wider created order. Remembering the word play around *ādām* that we saw in Chapter Six, in Genesis 3.17 we read that the *ādāmā* ('the ground') is cursed because of the *ādām*. The rest of the Bible is the story of how God works to bring restoration: to put back to rights what has gone wrong and bring about the Sabbath rest that has been promised.

As we come out of Lent and into Easter Sunday, we proclaim again our belief that Christ has died and Christ has risen – and that he *will* come again. As Amy Plantinga Pauw says, 'Easter is God's seal that the last word on creaturely life will be peace and praise, and the joy of that hope is already seeping into the present.'²

As followers of the risen Messiah, we live in the 'overlapping of the ages'. We have the first fruits of the Spirit, like a seal or deposit that guarantees our future inheritance (Rom. 8.23; Eph. 1.13–14), but we are still awaiting that final time. For all its beauty and wonder, we know we inhabit a world of terrible sadness and suffering and we will not escape that while we live in what Ecuadorian theologian, René Padilla, has called 'between the times.'³ This is a world of wounds and it can be all too easy to bury our heads in the sand, focus on our own lives and refuse to engage in the issues we have touched on in this book, particularly where they require us to make changes, personally and in our churches and broader society.

There is a tension between where we are now and where we look forward to being, described beautifully by British Catholic theologian, Peter Hocken: 'The Spirit has been given both as the first fruits and the hope of full liberation, and we are stretched between the two.' I feel that stretch and it can be painful and difficult. But we know that, as followers of the risen Jesus, we are called to navigate that tension and live lives that speak of his hope for creation. We do that symbolically as we meet each week to pray, worship and break bread together – the Sabbath now not held on the last day of the week, but on the first day of the new week, the resurrection day. And we do that by refusing to give up, remembering that no act of ours is in vain even if we can feel overwhelmed by the tragedies around us.

Resurrection churches

In Tchirozérine in the Republic of the Niger, Pastor Koupra has been helping his church, *Coopération Évangélique du Niger* (CEN), to consider through a series of Bible studies what it means to care for creation in their local area, and how they can take action as a community. Situated in a desert with little vegetation, the congregation decided that planting trees was a priority and set about digging in hundreds of Neem trees around the community's schools, homes and the church. At the same time, the political crisis was unfolding in neighbouring Libya, resulting in an influx of predominantly Muslim Libyan migrants to the community, who had fled with nothing and had no means of supporting themselves in a new country. CEN made a plan to combine helping the migrants with the work they had been doing to look after the natural world around them. In exchange for food supplies, the migrants supported the tree-planting initiative, as well as helping clear the plastic rubbish in the area, which they used to turn into bricks for building projects. The scheme now supports 650 families in Tchirozérine and nearby Agadez, and has made a visible difference to the natural environment of both cities.

For many years I have carried in my mind an image of the Church as being like a sleeping giant with regards to caring for the whole community of creation. That is not to disregard those who *have* understood the creation-wide implications of the gospel (we could cite, for example, Clement of Rome, Basil the Great, Hildegard of Bingen and Martin Luther, plus others). But on the whole, and particularly in later centuries, the Church has been guilty of moving away from a sacramental and connected relationship with nature to one where nature is simply seen as a resource to be exploited.

We are the largest group of people on the planet – around a third of the global population adheres to the Christian faith.⁴ Think what a difference we would make if the sleeping giant awoke and became active!

The good news is that I notice that starting to happen. I see the giant beginning to wake and get out of bed, as all around the

world churches are responding to the call to look after the planet entrusted to us. In Thailand, Huay Mai Duei Church is now involved in garbage collection because waste had become a huge problem in the area, and Kha Mu Church has planted a vegetable garden for the local community. In Australia, Tuggeranong Uniting runs a charity shop (known as an 'op shop') to encourage reusing and recycling and they have activists who belong to climate change groups. In the US, Trinity Christian Reformed Church in Michigan promotes caring for the whole creation as an integral part of its preaching and has adopted a stretch of creek that runs near the church to look after. In Argentina, the Church of God in Mendoza has won an award for its litter-picking scheme in the central park, and the Anglican Diocese of Northern Argentina has been monitoring deforestation for the last decade, providing information to the provincial government. In the UK, Portsmouth Cathedral has become the first cathedral to publish its carbon footprint and is actively reducing its emissions, and the Gate Church in Dundee has a whole project dedicated to carbon saving, aiming to become the 'greenest church in Scotland'.

For many churches, prayers and sermons on caring for creation have become a natural part of their church action. Churches have become places where food waste is collected and toddler groups use recycled material that would otherwise have been binned. There are churches going on climate strikes and holding an event with their MP, doing community lunches with plant-based food, and organizing litter picks. There are churches involved in sustainable building projects, zero waste cafés, environmental teaching series, tree planting alongside church planting, toilet twinning, switching to renewable energy and eco-friendly cleaning products, forest schools, using Fairtrade refreshments, installing beehives, moving away from disposable crockery, installing solar panels, holding eco fairs and putting eco-tips in church magazines . . .

This list could go on, though we still have a long way to go and many of us will be in churches that have not yet begun embracing these things and feel discouraged and overwhelmed. Yet, whatever context you are in, I hope these examples will inspire you in your church – whether big or small, urban or rural, of whatever denomination or

network – that there are things you can do. How will your church take action to wake the giant?

Resurrection lives

As we wake the sleeping giant of the Church, so we must wake the sleeper inside ourselves too. We now know, biblically, that we are called to look after our common home. And yet, somehow we fail to take serious action in our own lives. When we know the terrible conditions in which the majority of farmed animals are kept, why do we keep buying meat that supports those systems? When we know the immense destruction being done by climate breakdown, why do we refuse to change our flying and travel habits or make a simple decision to eat less meat and dairy? When we know that plastic is causing so much damage to both people and the wider environment, why do we not take easy and obvious steps to use less? When we know our governments and businesses need us to push them to make large-scale changes, why do we stay silent rather than joining our voices with others?

At Tearfund we talk about Pray, Act, Give.

Pray is where we start and what undergirds everything we do. We pray because we believe prayer works and because it changes things – ourselves included. As I write in *L is for Lifestyle*, prayer connects us with the people and situations around the world for whom and for which we are praying. It reminds us of our motivation, which is to see the kingdom of God manifest in our world. It reminds us that there is a strong spiritual dimension to all we do. Above all, prayer reminds us that we cannot do everything by ourselves or in our own strength. Ultimately, we depend on God to bring his redeeming power to bear in the situations we pray for.⁵

As part of our prayer, we must then Act. We have considered in the course of this book many difficult, heartbreaking and challenging topics, as well as glimpsing the wonder and diversity of God's creation. If what you have read has made for interesting Lent discussions and nothing else, then it has failed. We are facing a climate crisis, species loss and plastic pollution, and they interweave with a host of other

issues, causing conflict, poverty and suffering. We *must* act. We must make bold changes in the way we live – consuming less and consuming better – and take action by pushing our governments and businesses to make bold changes too, including moving to an economic model that enables all people to have what they need, within a flourishing natural environment.⁶ As you finish this book and move out of Lent into Easter, go to <www.spckpublishing.co.uk/saying-yes-resources> and look again at the wealth of information that is there. We cannot do everything. But God will break your heart over particular issues, and that is where he is calling you to get involved. What resurrection practices will you take on in your life?

Finally, one very tangible resurrection practice is to Give. Giving connects us with people and places around the world as we use our money to bring relief and help change situations. It challenges our own attitude to money and material goods, and causes us to delight in being generous to others rather than focusing on buying more things for ourselves. Of course, we cannot support each and every issue. But, ask yourself today, am I being as generous as I could be? Has God stirred my heart about particular issues in *Saying Yes to Life* that I could start supporting financially?

As we pray, act and give, Day Seven reminds us that we do so as part of a Sabbath rhythm. Yes, the problems are immense and there is much to be done, but our actions must be held within patterns of rest, stillness amid activity.

Writing for the *New York Times* on the moral crisis of climate breakdown and the charge to the Church to respond, Archbishop Justin said, 'As people of faith, we don't just state our beliefs — we live them out. One belief is that we find purpose and joy in loving our neighbors. Another is that we are charged by our creator with taking good care of his creation.'⁷

Resurrection churches, resurrection lives. This is the calling that is on us as we look at all that God has made and say yes to life.