

The Nicaea & Creation Course

4. The Resurrection & Life

**We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

In the current discourse about the state of the planet, and particularly of this seventh great extinction event through which we are living, there is much to be explored about climate grief, despair, and anxiety. Eco-anxiety expresses global concern for the climate crisis and is often accompanied by a feeling of powerlessness to affect change. 'Solastalgia' is a term that was coined by Glenn Albrecht used to describe the distress caused by environmental change in one's home environment. Solastalgia is perhaps a more local form of grief related to the loss of 'home', of familiar landscapes, of the disruption of ecosystems caused by climate change, human activities, or natural disasters. It expresses longing.

Perhaps this concept of solastalgia resonates even more deeply with people who are quite literally displaced, as many people worshipping in the Diocese in Europe are. Some of us are living in our birthplaces and homes, but many of us are migrants or 'pilgrims' of one variety or another. Many of us know what it is to sojourn — to take our sense of 'home' and belonging and place with us as we set out like so many of our forebears in faith for a foreign land. Solastalgia may resonate with our experiences of homesickness, and solastalgia can emerge when we see local disasters, such as floods and drought, dramatically changing our new (or temporary) homelands.

"We are all strangers in a strange land, longing for home, but not quite knowing what or where home is. We glimpse it sometimes in our dreams, or as we turn a corner, and suddenly there is a strange, sweet familiarity that vanishes almost as soon as it comes."

Madeleine L'Engle, The Rock That Is Higher: Story as Truth

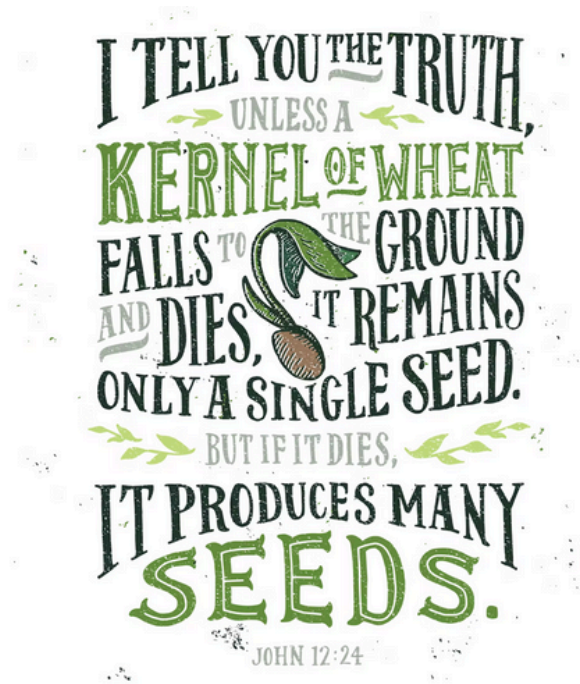
On this rapidly changing globe, which is increasingly unable to sustain plant, animal, and human life, our deeply-seated longing for 'home' may only increase. You may wish to pause to reflect individually or discuss as a group:

"Have you ever felt homesick or nostalgic?

Does this related concept of 'solastalgia' resonate with you?

Does the Christian faith have anything to say to this longing, anything comforting to speak into this sense of loss or void?"

Perhaps the most direct response to this longing offered by the Creed is found in the very final words: "We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come."



Of the Dead

The Nicene Creed of course does not mention death in the first instance, it mentions the resurrection, which is the fundamental reality that underpins our life in a world made and redeemed by a loving God. But in our experience, death appears nearer and more dreadful than does this reality of resurrection. We must pass through death in order to reach the final resurrection. For that reason, it seems best to first face the fact of death itself.

Death can be an unpopular topic even in communities of faith, and it can be counter-cultural (and a breath of fresh air!) to speak about the unspeakable. We spend a great deal of energy and time and money attempting to evade death.

Yet it is possible that the very “end” from which we are fleeing is our beginning. Christian faith does not begin with triumphalism, although resurrection is a victory which one day will be made absolute. Christian faith is cruciform, it has the capacity to engage seriously with creation’s suffering and with death rather than to deny either. The Christian rite of initiation of baptism is a burial: in baptism, we are buried with Christ in order to face the ugliness of death’s reality, within a liturgical act of rising again to new life. Poignantly, this foundational rite of Christian faith, the baptismal burial, is invoked in every subsequent rite of passage.

“What I have been surprised to discover... is that preparing to live and preparing to die are in the end the same thing.”

Denise Inge, Tour of Bones



In our worshipping year, on Ash Wednesday and on Good Friday in particular, we face death squarely, with sorrow and with courage. On Ash Wednesday, we mix oil with the ash of burned palm crosses and smear the dust on our foreheads. We hear the sobering words: “from dust you came and to dust you shall return”. We do this to remind ourselves of many things, not least our mortality. Our dusty crosses remind us of our connection to a suffering earth. We also remember what happened when God stepped in and chose to become like us, dust from dust. Rachel Held Evans writes in *Searching for Sunday*, “God in Christ came from the dust and showed us how to heal instead of kill, how to mend instead of destroy, how to love instead of hate, how to live instead of grasp for more.” The Christ of dust and ashes did all of this in the shape of a cross, in order to remind us that while we are dust, death is not our final destiny. As previously explored, we have received the divine breath of life that cannot be extinguished.

“To be aware that death is imminent is not to wallow in despair; it is precisely not that. To be aware is to acknowledge what is the case ... Pain must be used to turn the soul toward the real, to reform both action and attention: to love what, in this case, remains.”

Learning to Die: Wisdom in the age of climate crisis by Robert Bringham and Jan Zwicky

The Resurrection

There are plenty of Christians throughout the years and today for whom the doctrine of the resurrection is an embarrassment or a misunderstanding carried over from a pre-scientific age. There can be a tendency to imagine that the people who wrote the biblical witness to resurrection and those who formulated the Nicene Creed were simply ancients who didn’t understand reality. But this is an ungenerous view. The ancients understood that dead people remain dead. In addition to this, however, they believed that through Jesus Christ something had taken place which was unprecedented. They saw in Jesus a restoration of the intended order of creation, in which death is not absolute or final. They came to understand “the resurrection as the event and the truth that constitutes reality” (Erik Varden, ‘Healing Wounds: an invitation to Lenten contemplation - Feb 2025’, an interview between Paula Gooder and Erik Varden, hosted by [St Paul’s Cathedral, YouTube](#), 33:19). We reflect on their witness, especially in the season of Easter but at any time through the year, in the Easter Anthems:

Romans 6:9-11

Christ once raised from the dead dies no more:

death has no more dominion over him.

In dying he died to sin once for all:

in living he lives to God.

See yourselves therefore as dead to sin:

and alive to God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

1 Corinthians 15:20-22

Christ has been raised from the dead:

The first fruits of those who sleep.

For as by man came death:

by man has come also the resurrection of the dead;

for as in Adam all die:

even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

It did not take long for St Paul and others, following in a robust stream of Jewish theology, to connect the resurrection of Jesus with the Christian affirmation of a future of life for all who die. Accompanying this resurrection doctrine is, yet again, a hearty affirmation of the goodness of creation and the enduring nature of what God has made in love.

The Creed points us to faith in a God for whom nothing — ultimately — is impossible and whose life-giving will have the final word.

The precise details of the resurrection are not given in the Creed nor in Scripture, really. We have some lovely, if odd, descriptions of what the disciples' saw when they saw the resurrected Jesus. What they saw was evidently difficult to relate. There were experiences of unrecognition, there are accounts of a body that is quite different in appearance as well as capability to yours or mine. Clearly something entirely transformative had taken place, which was incredibly hard to express in words. So what we make of the details of these Gospel stories will vary, just as our expectations around the resurrection and the life of the world to come will vary. But belief in the resurrection, at minimum, is based on the conviction that our lives are set within a greater unfolding reality that holds us in love and in life. Expressed in the poetry of the Book of Job 19:26, "And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God..."

For those of us living in times of climate despair, faith in the resurrection of the dead may be worth re-discovering. This doctrine is not a desiccated relic of the past: it is rather one way of embracing a world shot through with the presence of God. The gift of this credal statement can be offered afresh for the good of our times of climate crisis and mass extinction, in our times of climate anxiety, pointing to the divine purposes to renew and heal creation. The resurrection of the dead casts a vision that out-imagines evil and suffering, inspiring us with an enduring hope for an enduring future. We call this "the life of the world to come."

The life of the world to come

Similarly to the reality of resurrection, there is a veil drawn over the details of the life in the world to come. The phrase "new heavens and new earth" is most famously found in Revelation 21:1, with the vision of a new creation after the old heaven and earth pass away. But the concept is much older, and we think of Isaiah 65:17 which also refers to God creating a new heavens and a new earth. "New creation" does not necessarily signify the discarding or destruction of this world. We can fruitfully think of "new creation" as re-creation, represents a complete renewal and restoration of creation. Each one of us is a "new creation" in Christ, for instance (cf 2 Corinthians 5:17). The rest of the cosmos will also experience being made new, the end of the old regime of death-dealing, and the total realisation of new life, in which sin and its effects, including death, sorrow, crying, and pain, will no longer dominate our experience.



The details of the “world to come” are not spelled out for us. From the book of Revelation we take several word-pictures and images that encourage us to look forward to the life that is to come on the other side of death. Revelation 22 depicts a return to a garden, an Eden in which stands a tree of life, “and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.” Christian hope is for a future in which all that God has been restoring over time will be fully restored. Meanwhile, we are commissioned to participate in the restoration project: to pray, to act, to reflect, to protest, to die in order to live, and to do all this in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection.

“In different ways each of us has a calling, is being summoned, to put our talents, passion, and insights into planetary well-being. Ecology is not an extracurricular activity; rather, it must be the focus of one's work, the central hours of one's day, however that is spent.”
Sallie McFague, The Body of God: An Ecological Theology

Later in Revelation 22:20 we read;

“The one who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.”
Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!”

God has always been the God who dwells with us and with our wounded world, and at last, we will dwell with God in unbroken communion. May it be so. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Questions

- If you are looking for practical ways to live out your worship of God, to express your worship by taking action on behalf of Creation, we warmly commend the resources developed by the Diocese in Europe's Caring 4 Creation group, [available here](#).
- You may enjoy discussing one of literature's truly celebrated endings, the closing lines of the novel *Middlemarch* by George Elliot: “The growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.”
- How are you (or your faith community more generally, if that is easier to discuss) preparing to die? And how does that preparation inspire you to live now? What is your hope for “the life of the world to come”?



Worship

The Resurrection and the Life

ACCLAMATION

Jesus Christ is Lord:
Lord, by your cross and resurrection you have set us free.
You are the Saviour of the world.

HYMN

Maker of mystery, dreamer of what will be

Words: © Marnie Barrell, 1996; Tune: Down Ampney; Meter: 66 11 D

Maker of mystery,
dreamer of what will be,
wellspring and fertile ground of all our growing:
tending the buried seed,
foreseeing every need,
you draw us into life beyond our knowing.

Christ, strong and living vine
spreading through space and time,
deep-rooted in the love of God our Mother:
dying, you live and share
your strength with us, to bear
ripe fruit in season for the life of others.

Wild Spirit, springing green,
coiled in the depths unseen,
promise of seed within the fruit maturing:
new life, you grow and swell,
burst from the outgrown shell,
hundredfold yield in every age ensuring.

Living and loving God,
sing in the pulse of our blood;
help us to know you in your own creation,
love you, the life of all,
serve you and hear your call
from our first forming to our full salvation.



ACT OF COMMITMENT

As the whole of creation looks with eager longing for the redemption of humankind, let us pledge ourselves anew to serve our Creator God, the Father who is the maker of all things, the Son through whom all things are made, and the Holy Spirit, the giver of life, who renews the face of the earth.

Let us affirm our commitment to care actively for God's creation:

Lord of life and giver of hope, we pledge ourselves to care for creation, to reduce our waste, to live sustainably, and to value the rich diversity of life. May your wisdom guide us, that life in all its forms may flourish, and may be faithful in voicing creation's praise. Amen.

SCRIPTURE READING

"Behold, I am making all things new."

Revelation 21:5

A silence is kept for reflection.

THE GRACE

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, evermore. Amen.

Some of the material in this book is extracted from Common Worship: Times and Seasons (2006), Common Worship: Daily Prayer (2005), Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England (2000) and New Patterns for Worship (2002). Copyright © The Archbishops' Council 2006, 2015, 2020