

STUDY 1 FOR SUCH A TIME

GETTING STARTED

Before embarking on this six-week journey, let us spend some time contemplating the following questions:

- How do we value our common home, the Earth?
- In what ways do we value - or not value - all parts of Creation, including other human beings?

A VIEW FROM THE ASIAN THEOLOGICAL ACADEMY (ATA)

At the United Nations' (UN) summit on climate change in 2019, Greta Thunberg reprimanded the world saying, 'People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are in the beginning of a mass extinction, and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you?' She prophetically said,

'You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words. This is all wrong.'

Greta is not alone. Young activists around the world are enraged that their future has been 'sold' so that a small number of people may amass unimaginable fortunes. They are right to be furious.

Humanity is fast approaching a time for serious introspection; a planetary *kairos* where self-examination is warranted from leaders of religious, social, economic and political structures in order to identify their role in the ensuing ecological crisis. Recent history has deceived society into believing that economic growth and prosperity equal a good life.

Non-material human needs, such as love, faith and spiritual needs have no rational space in humanity's striving for this. *Growth* remains the single objective for economic organisation, whilst this logic proposes that economic systems will collapse without the expansion of production and consumption.

In this narrative, prosperity is built on the false belief that human beings are fundamentally selfish, seeking to advance personal pleasure, identity and power.

Our planet is the principal victim of this false narrative. The argument that continued economic growth is possible due to achievements in science and technology, and the efficient management in production is a partial story.

Production depends on natural resources. Growth currently depends on the unrestricted extraction of resources - which in turn, results in the destruction of life-giving qualities of nature.

The Earth is therefore objectified as the economy strengthens in financial value, Mother Earth bleeds. This phenomenon is often called 'cancerous capitalism'; the so-called advances are interlocked with destruction. Growth and death are therefore interrelated.

In the flood narrative described in Genesis, the destruction of the Earth was the result of human sin. The author of Genesis notes these sins as the injustice and wickedness that lead to a hedonistic life.

The anguish of God after the destruction of Creation was the catalyst for a new covenant of preservation. And as the mark of the covenant, God agreed to place the bow (symbol of ruling power and authority in ancient cultures) in front of Creation. And people were required to respect life ('Do not eat flesh with blood').



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It offered a radically new set of principles for governance based on ethically grounded relationships between people, nature and God. It rejected the hierarchical order that objectified 'the other' and specified that exploiting the Earth for consumption is a rebellion towards God.

Biblical covenants are a response to the self-giving and gratuitous love of God. The covenant of preservation after the flood is not with people and God, but 'with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that

is with you: the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the Earth'. The term 'covenant' reinforces the idea that God respects people and nature. The text further reminds us that people are not above nature, but an integral part of it. It reiterates the biblical theme that the restoration of the broken relationship between nature, people and God is the fundamental concern.

This extract is taken from a longer article which you will find at: www.uspg.org.uk/forsuchatime

QUESTIONS

- What is your response to the quote from Greta Thunberg?
- In what ways do we reinforce the idea that 'economic growth and prosperity equals a good life' in our personal and/or corporate lives?
- As the economy strengthens in financial value, Mother Earth bleeds.' What is your reaction to this statement?

GENESIS 9:8-13

- ⁸ Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him,
⁹ 'As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you,
¹⁰ and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the Earth with you, as many as came out of the Ark.
¹¹ I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the Earth.'
¹² God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations:
¹³ I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the Earth.'

QUESTIONS

- What does the idea of being invited into a covenant mean to you?
- In what ways do you feel 'a part of nature'?
- Describe ways in which you feel responsible for nature or give examples of practical action that you have taken to support it.
- How should this impact our thinking, as a church and as a global community?

CLOSING PRAYER

Creator God, breathing your own life into being, you gave us the gift of life: you placed us on this Earth with its minerals and waters, flowers and fruits, living creatures of grace and beauty. You gave us the care of the Earth. Teach us, Creator God of Love, that the Earth and all its fullness is yours, the world and all who dwell in it. Call us yet again to safeguard the gift of life.

Christian Conference of Asia

ACT

This week, look at how much energy you consume. Take steps to reduce the electricity, gas or oil you use in your home. Why not try using energy-efficient light bulbs? Turn your thermostat down by 2 degrees. Try using an airer instead of a tumble dryer. Consider having a (free) Smart Meter installed to help you understand where you use the most energy and perhaps reduce your usage.

For each action you take put £1 in your Lent box or jar. ■