

**Call to Worship Psalm 121:5-8**

- <sup>5</sup>The LORD watches over you—  
the LORD is your shade at your right hand;  
<sup>6</sup>the sun will not harm you by day,  
nor the moon by night.  
<sup>7</sup>The LORD will keep you from all harm—  
he will watch over your life;  
<sup>8</sup>the LORD will watch over your coming and going  
both now and forevermore.

**HYMN StF 82 How Great Thou Art**

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| <p>1 O Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder<br/>consider all the works thy hand hath made,<br/>I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,<br/>thy power throughout the universe displayed :<br/><i>Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee :<br/>how great thou art, how great thou art !<br/>Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee :<br/>how great thou art, how great thou art !</i></p> <p>2 When through the woods and forest glades I wander<br/>and hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees ;<br/>when I look down from lofty mountain grandeur,<br/>and hear the brook, and feel the gentle breeze :</p> | <p>3 And when I think that God, his Son not sparing,<br/>sent him to die, I scarce can take it in<br/>that on the cross, my burden gladly bearing,<br/>he bled and died to take away my sin :</p> <p>4 When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation<br/>and take me home — what joy shall fill my heart ;<br/>then shall I bow in humble adoration,<br/>and there proclaim : my God, how great thou art :</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Stuart K. Hine (1899–1989)<br/>vv. 1, 2, 4 based on <i>O store Gud</i> 1885by<br/>Carl Gustaf Boberg (1859–1940)</p> |
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**Prayers of approach and confession****Approach:**

Almighty God, who lives in unsearchable light, we thank you for Jesus who has shone in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of your glory. We thank you that he is your very image, God of God, light of light and we have beheld his glory and have laid our lives before him. So fill us with the light of your love and of the knowledge of your greatness that we may bow the knee and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

**Confession:**

Father, your light exposes many kinds of darkness in our world and within our own hearts. We are laid bare before you as you look beyond the thin veneer of respectability we build and the mask we present to the world. You have searched us and know us and yet you love us and hold out your hands to forgive and to restore. So take us as we are and work in us what is good and pleasing to you.

**Collect:**

Almighty God you have delivered us from the death of sin and raised us to new life in your love, through our saviour Jesus Christ; and in baptism you have made us one with him so that now we are the children of light. Grant that we may walk in his light and show forth your glory in the world; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.

And now, we say the prayer Jesus himself taught us.

<p>Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins,</p>	<p>as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.</p>
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**Junior Church: Mothering Sunday - Showing What We Really Mean**

**CHORUS: Spread the Love of Jesus** (The minister will play the guitar)

Clap your hands, stamp your feet. Spread the love of Jesus to everyone you meet  
Clap your hands, stamp your feet. Spread a little love around. (*repeat*)

The love of Jesus is a sweet, sweet song  
that you can give to others as you walk along  
with a smile on your face and his love in your heart  
spread the love of Jesus; now everybody start to...

Clap your hands, stamp your feet *etc*

**Reading Isaiah 40:25-31**

“To whom will you compare me?  
Or who is my equal?” says the Holy One.  
<sup>26</sup> Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens:  
Who created all these?  
He who brings out the starry host one by one  
and calls forth each of them by name.  
Because of his great power and mighty strength,  
not one of them is missing.  
<sup>27</sup> Why do you complain, Jacob?  
Why do you say, Israel,  
“My way is hidden from the LORD;  
my cause is disregarded by my God”?  
<sup>28</sup> Do you not know?  
Have you not heard?  
The LORD is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.  
He will not grow tired or weary,  
and his understanding no one can fathom.  
<sup>29</sup> He gives strength to the weary  
and increases the power of the weak.  
<sup>30</sup> Even youths grow tired and weary,  
and young men stumble and fall;  
<sup>31</sup> but those who hope in the LORD  
will renew their strength.  
They will soar on wings like eagles;  
they will run and not grow weary,  
they will walk and not be faint.

**Reading: Revelation 21:1-8 and 22-27**

<sup>1</sup> Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth”, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. <sup>2</sup> I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. <sup>4</sup> ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

<sup>5</sup> He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

<sup>6</sup> He said to me: “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. <sup>7</sup> Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children. <sup>8</sup> But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”

<sup>22</sup> I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. <sup>23</sup> The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. <sup>24</sup> The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. <sup>25</sup> On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. <sup>26</sup> The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. <sup>27</sup> Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.

### **HYMN StF 328 Jesus Shall Reign**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tcxdvJy\\_t\\_8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tcxdvJy_t_8)

1 Jesus shall reign where'er the sun  
does his successive journeys run ;  
his kingdom stretch from shore to shore,  
till moons shall wax and wane no more.

2 For him shall endless prayer be made,  
and praises throng to crown his head ;  
his name like sweet perfume shall rise  
with every morning sacrifice.

3 People and realms of every tongue  
dwell on his love with sweetest song ;  
and infant voices shall proclaim  
their early blessings on his name.

4 Blessings abound where'er he reigns ;  
the prisoner leaps to lose his chains ;  
the weary find eternal rest,  
and all who are in want are blest.

5 Let every creature rise and bring  
its grateful honours to our King ;  
angels descend with songs again,  
and earth repeat the loud amen.

Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

### **Sermon: The Sun, Moon and Stars**

During Lent it is my understanding that you have been following the order of creation set out in the first chapter of Genesis while using Ruth Valerio’s book, ‘Saying Yes to Life’, as an aid. This Sunday we reach the fourth day of creation when God said, “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons and for days and years.” So God created the sun, the moon and the stars.

Apart from the very beginning of creation when God said, “Let there be light”, this is the only reference to anything beyond planet Earth. And although these objects are only mentioned in as far as they influence the times and seasons on Earth, never-the-less here we have, in the middle of this very geocentric creation story, a reference to the creation of the rest of the Universe.

Indeed, it is very often the case that when we look up at the night sky we are forced to search for meaning as we are overcome by a sense of wonder and awe. As the Psalmist wrote, “When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?” (Psalm 8:3f)

When you look up at a clear night sky you might see around 3,000 stars. Galileo, with his homemade telescope, managed to see 10 times that but we now know that there are around 200,000 million stars in the Milky Way alone, which is but a minute fraction of the total Universe. The numbers and the distances are simply staggering - yet here we stand trying to comprehend the mystery of it all.

Stephen Hawking in his book, *A Brief History of Time*, wrote these words, "Ever since the dawn of civilization, people have not been content to see events as unconnected and inexplicable. They have craved an understanding of the underlying order in the world. Today we still yearn to know why we are here and where we came from."

Valerio describes the Babylonian creation myth, and how the god of all gods, Marduk, created the heavens and the earth from the body of the slain goddess. And there are examples everywhere throughout the ancient world of gods being associated with natural bodies, like the sun and moon, the mountains and the sea and so on. I can visualise my Old Testament Professor, John Gray, standing with his elbow on the mantelpiece telling us all about the Ba'al Myth of Rashamra and how God had established his reign in opposition to the forces of chaos represented by the raging sea and the sea monsters that inhabited it.

Ba'al was the Canaanite fertility god that features prominently in the days of the Judges, the god whose coming was heralded by the thunder and lightning which accompanied the life giving rains. He was the Rider on the Storm.

Interesting is the contrast with the God of Israel. After his victory over the prophets of Ba'al on Mount Carmel, when Elijah is allowed to see the glory of God pass by, God is neither to be found in the thunder, nor in the lightning, nor even in the earthquake, nor the fire. He is to be found in the still small voice.

Another such difference is found in the creation stories themselves. In the Babylonian myth and others the gods themselves become the creation, turning into suns and moons, mountains and rivers and so on. The Genesis account however, is nothing like that. Rather it closely mirrors a modern scientific understanding of the creation of our world and of life itself. Not that it claims to be science. It is very definitely theology. But they complement one another.

The scientific approach, however, is very much behind the 'Wonders of the Universe' series championed by Professor Brian Cox. And at first glance the astrophysics that he revels in seems to be so complicated and detailed and yet he talks of two mysteries at the heart of his science for which, he states, we have no answer.

The first is that the Universe is so simple. He states, "Underlying all of the astonishing complexity appears to be a magnificent simplicity." He's talking about the basic building blocks of matter and how everything consists of the same stuff, ordered in a very particular way. He says, "This (ordering) cannot be a coincidence, and it is one of the great challenges of twenty-first-century physics to explain it."

The second is that the Universe was created in a highly ordered state. In the context of a discussion about entropy he suggests that chaos is far more likely than order. His example is to suggest that if you threw a bucket of sand into the air it is infinitely more likely that the result will be a pile of sand than a sandcastle.

So he asks, "How did I get here? I'm very ordered. How did Earth get here? It's very ordered too. And how did the Milky Way appear if it is composed of billions of ordered worlds orbiting around billions of ordered stars? There must have been some reason why the Universe began in such a highly ordered state."

The writer of our creation story knows the answer and so do we, even if science doesn't. "In the beginning, God..." Brian Cox is an agnostic and so would reserve judgement but isn't it amazing how our scientific understanding of creation has space for God!

But as the days and years tick by and time moves inextricably towards the last days we turn our attention to the new heaven and the new earth described by John in his Apocalypse. And, amid all the references to the last days, Ruth Valerio focuses on, and seeks to demonstrate that, the culmination of all things doesn't mean the destruction of the created order nor even the creation of something entirely new. Rather she speaks of 'radical renewal', like making something new out the old. Indeed, if you consider the words of Paul to the church in Corinth, "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" (2 Corinthians 5:17). John describes this process as being 'born again' and Peter as 'born anew'. We're still the same person of flesh and blood that we were before, but something fundamental has changed. In another place (Romans 6:11) Paul describes it as 'dead to sin and alive to God'.

You have already seen that there is a close connection between creation and redemption and I suspect you will hear more of it when you have a look at the creation of humankind. The two are inextricably linked like this: God created us in his own image, that image was defaced at the Fall, and in redemption that image is recreated or restored. And the same process is also true regarding the wider creation.

At the beginning of this sermon I drew your attention to the words of Stephen Hawking, "Today we still yearn to know why we are here and where we came from". Another book I recently read claimed to have the answer. Not a science book this time but one about counselling and psychotherapy. And I quote, "It is a truism that we come, as all matter must, from the stars."

Interestingly the same claim was expressed just over 50 years ago at Woodstock where Hendrix, Santana, Joe Cocker and a constellation of other stars (excuse the pun) took the world by storm. And later the song 'Woodstock', as performed by Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young, contained these words:

"We are stardust, We are golden  
We are billion year old carbon  
And we've got to get ourselves back to the garden."

These lyrics, written by Joni Mitchell, don't just tell us where we've come from, they also suggest where we should be going. We are stardust and we've got to get ourselves back to where it all started, back to the garden.

The Garden of Eden, that earthy paradise in which Adam and Eve walked with God, was equally affected by the Fall. The whole of creation, not just humanity, is now subject to death and decay. There's a verse in Romans (8:19) that gave rise to a wonderful children's hymn. It was taken from the J B Phillips translation and runs thus, "And all creation's straining, on tiptoe, just to see, the sons of God come into their own." - A beautiful picture of eager anticipation of a final salvation. But it hardly tells the whole story,

for although Paul writes that creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay, he also tells us that it groans in pain, like the pains of childbirth, as it awaits the time when it too will be born anew, recreated, made new.

Creation groans in pain. We're beginning to become alive to that fact but our response is painfully slow. Thankfully America has rejoined the Paris Climate Accord amid pleas for the G20 nations to do more. But we all have a part to play. We are all stewards of God's creation. We're not expected to just sit around and wait for God to make all things new. We have to take responsibility for the salvation of our world just as we are fellow workers with God in the redemption of humanity.

The choice is pretty stark. Either we do our bit to save the planet or we try to live with consequences. Raised sea levels, the extinction of many species, weather extremes, the exhaustion of resources and so on. Neil Young, a contemporary of Joni Mitchell, also wrote a song which asks a very important question, "What will you do when the garden is gone?"

Creation and redemption: The latter is but an extension of the former, a new creation springing from the old. As we live in anticipation of a new heaven and a new earth let's remember that the creation itself awaits the time when it too will be set free from its bondage to death and decay.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth ...and then he gave it to us to look after: to be stewards of his creation. My own church, the Church of Scotland, has introduced a whole life approach to stewardship which they call, 'the Narrative of Generosity'. It consists of 12 threads which include such things as time, money, relationships, the youth, the mind, our bodies and, of course, the Earth.

On this 4th Sunday in Lent, we affirm that God is the creator of the Universe and that he has called us to work with him in the redemption of humanity and in the salvation of a creation that longs to be free.

### **HYMN SoF 1187 Before the Throne of God Above**

1. Before the throne of God above,  
I have a strong, a perfect plea,  
A great High Priest whose name is Love,  
Who ever lives and pleads for me.  
My name is graven on His hands,  
My name is written on His heart;  
I know that while in heaven He stands  
No tongue can bid me thence depart,  
No tongue can bid me thence depart.
2. When Satan tempts me to despair,  
And tells me of the guilt within,  
Upward I look and see Him there  
Who made an end to all my sin.  
Because the sinless Saviour died,  
My sinful soul is counted free;  
For God the Just is satisfied  
To look on Him and pardon me,  
To look on Him and pardon me.
3. Behold Him there! The risen Lamb,  
My perfect, spotless righteousness;  
The great unchangeable I AM,  
The King of glory and of grace!  
One with Himself I cannot die,  
y soul is purchased with His blood;  
My life is hid with Christ on high,  
With Christ, my Saviour and my God,  
With Christ my Saviour and my God.

Charitie L. Bancroft (1841-92)

## Prayers for Others

### Thanksgiving:

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the world which you made to be good, for the life you have given us and for the light you shed upon our way. Help us always to walk in the light that we may be your faithful witnesses to the ends of the earth. That all men and women may bow down in adoration and give the thanks of their hearts.

### Intercession:

We pray for those who walk in darkness, especially for those whose lives are shrouded by a darkness not of their own making. Be near to those who are exploited and used, those whose freedom has been taken away, those for whom there is no justice and for those whose lives know violence. We pray for your light and for your saving grace. Bless those who walk as children of the light and who strive to expel the darkness.

We pray for those whose decisions affect others, those in government and industry, in public service or in commerce. Give them wisdom and understanding that enlightened by the truth they may serve and not seek to be served.

On this Mothering Sunday, we pray for mothers everywhere. For the love they give, the sheer exhaustion they experience and the angst they bear. We pray for those who would love to be mothers but cannot be, for those whose mothers have not been the loving influence they needed, and for those whose mother is no longer with them. Help all mothers and their children to find joy in their relationship.

We pray for families that your blessing may be upon them. But especially we pray for families on the verge of breakdown, stressed to breaking point by debt or homelessness or overshadowed by addiction or violence. We pray for children caught up in such families where they are frightened or insecure, neglected or abused, often by those they trust and rely on. May they come to know your cleansing light and find in you a friend who is always faithful.

We pray for our own family of faith here. May we be united in our faith and witness, bearing one another's burdens, sharing one another's joys and working together for Christ's kingdom in this place, that together we may walk as children of light.

*Amen*

## HYMN StF 167 Colours of Day

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rwxAi12UiJ0>

1

Colours of day dawn into the mind,  
the sun has come up, the night is behind.  
Go down in the city, into the street,  
and let's give the message to the people we meet.

*So light up the fire and let the flame burn,  
open the door, let Jesus return.  
Take seeds of his Spirit, let the fruit grow,  
tell the people of Jesus, let his love show.*

2

Go through the park, on into the town;  
the sun still shines on; it never goes down.  
The light of the world is risen again;  
the people of darkness are needing a friend.

3

Open your eyes, look into the sky,  
the darkness has come, the sun came to die.  
The evening draws on, the sun disappears,  
but Jesus is living, his Spirit is near.

Sue McClellan, John Paculabo, Keith Rycroft

**Blessing**

Walk as children of the light, and the blessing of Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you now and always.

*Amen*

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