

**W2: The Worship of all Creation** (Relationship between created and maker)

Day a: *Dream of the Rood*, in translation from the Anglo Saxon

Day b: Psalm 19

Day c: *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis

Day d: Psalm 148

Day e: Barkskins

Day f: Mark 4

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**Dream of the Rood**

**Introduction**

*Dream of the Rood* is considered a masterful expression of the theme of the crucifixion. It is one of the oldest Christian poems known to have been written in Britain, and was originally written in Anglo Saxon. Although no one knows for sure who wrote it, it was probably written around the 8<sup>th</sup> century.

The poem has three parts: the Dreamer's account of his vision of the Cross, the Cross's monologue describing the Crucifixion, and the Dreamer's resolution to seek the salvation of the Cross. In this section from the start of the poem, the cross tells the story of how it used to be a tree and was cut down to be the cross on which Jesus died. The fact that the rood tells the story is significant, implying nature has the capacity to teach man how to praise God.

**Dream of the Rood**

Hear while I tell about the best of dreams  
Which came to me the middle of one night  
While humankind were sleeping in their beds.  
It was as though I saw a wondrous tree  
Towering in the sky suffused with light,  
Brightest of beams; and all that beacon was  
Covered with gold. The corners of the earth  
Gleamed with fair jewels, just as there were five  
Upon the cross-beam. Many bands of angels,  
Fair throughout all eternity, looked on.  
No felon's gallows that, but holy spirits,  
Mankind, and all this marvellous creation,  
Gazed on the glorious tree of victory.  
And I with sins was stained, wounded with guilt.  
I saw the tree of glory brightly shine  
In gorgeous clothing, all bedecked with gold.  
The Ruler's tree was worthily adorned  
With gems; yet I could see beyond that gold  
The ancient strife of wretched men, when first  
Upon its right side it began to bleed.  
I was all moved with sorrows, and afraid  
At the fair sight. I saw that lively beacon  
Changing its clothes and hues; sometimes it was  
Bedewed with blood and drenched with flowing gore,  
At other times it was bedecked with treasure.

So I lay watching there the Saviour's tree,  
Grieving in spirit for a long, long while,  
Until I heard it utter sounds, the best  
Of woods began to speak these words to me:  
"It was long past - I still remember it -  
That I was cut down at the copse's end,  
Moved from my root. Strong enemies there took me,  
Told me to hold aloft their criminals,  
Made me a spectacle. Men carried me  
Upon their shoulders, set me on a hill,  
A host of enemies there fastened me.  
And then I saw the Lord of all mankind  
Hasten with eager zeal that He might mount  
Upon me. I durst not against God's word  
Bend down or break, when I saw tremble all  
The surface of the earth. Although I might  
Have struck down all the foes, yet stood I fast.  
Then the young hero (who was God almighty)  
Got ready, resolute and strong in heart.  
He climbed onto the lofty gallows-tree,  
Bold in the sight of many watching men,  
When He intended to redeem mankind.  
I trembled as the warrior embraced me.  
But still I dared not bend down to the earth,  
Fall to the ground. Upright I had to stand.  
A rood I was raised up; and I held high  
The noble King, the Lord of heaven above."

### **Questions for reflection**

- *In this poem, the tree which became the cross is sentient. How does this offer a different perspective on the crucifixion?*
- *The tree has a place in God's plan, just like Jesus – how do you think nature fits into God's plan for the world?*
- *In the poem there is much symbolism around the tree, described as 'wondrous' and 'glorious' and it has been richly decorated by people. How does this align with other biblical depictions of trees that you know?*
- *Later in the poem, the cross says that "all creation wept" when Jesus died. Matthew 27 says that at the moment of Jesus's death "the earth shook, the rocks split and the tombs broke open". If the natural world can react to Jesus's death, how might that change our view of it?*

### **Further reading**

Ed. SAJ Bradley, *Anglo Saxon Poetry*

Jurgen Moltman (1972), *The Crucified God*

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## **Psalm 19**

### **Introduction**

*The Psalms are a rich source of imagery taken from nature. They are also a common source of inspiration for Christian worship. The musical and poetic value of the Psalms may sometimes lead us to miss their theological richness. In Psalm 19 the Psalmist explores how God's glory is revealed through both Creation and the gift of The Law to Israel.*

### **God's Glory in Creation and the Law**

<sup>1</sup> The heavens are telling the glory of God;  
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

<sup>2</sup> Day to day pours forth speech,  
and night to night declares knowledge.

<sup>3</sup> There is no speech, nor are there words;  
their voice is not heard;

<sup>4</sup> yet their voice goes out through all the earth,  
and their words to the end of the world.

In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun,

<sup>5</sup> which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy,  
and like a strong man runs its course with joy.

<sup>6</sup> Its rising is from the end of the heavens,  
and its circuit to the end of them;  
and nothing is hid from its heat.

<sup>7</sup> The law of the LORD is perfect,  
reviving the soul;

the decrees of the LORD are sure,  
making wise the simple;

<sup>8</sup> the precepts of the LORD are right,  
rejoicing the heart;

the commandment of the LORD is clear,  
enlightening the eyes;

<sup>9</sup> the fear of the LORD is pure,  
enduring forever;

the ordinances of the LORD are true  
and righteous altogether.

<sup>10</sup> More to be desired are they than gold,  
even much fine gold;

sweeter also than honey,  
and drippings of the honeycomb.

<sup>11</sup> Moreover by them is your servant warned;  
in keeping them there is great reward.

<sup>12</sup> But who can detect their errors?  
Clear me from hidden faults.

<sup>13</sup> Keep back your servant also from the insolent;  
do not let them have dominion over me.

Then I shall be blameless,  
and innocent of great transgression.

<sup>14</sup> Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart  
be acceptable to you,  
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer

### **Prayer**

Eternal God,  
We thank you for the glory of your creation – a mystery that surpasses our knowledge.  
Eternal God,  
We thank you for the earth and water, sun and wind, creatures and peoples – cultures – nations:  
Guide us as we gather to confess that we have violated the gift of life given to us.  
Strengthen us as we seek to affirm that the earth and all therein is yours.  
Enable us as we seek to recall your covenant and make it our own.  
(Source: World Council of Churches. Reproduced by ECEN for Creation Time 2003)

### **Questions for Reflection**

- *How do you think the heavens tell the glory of God if they cannot use words?*
- *What in your life is telling of the glory of God?*
- *The Psalmist says God's law and ordinances are perfect – how do you think humanity's law could be closer to God's, particularly to protect the environment?*
- *Are there any images in Psalm 19 which capture your imagination?*

### **Some further reading**

Hans-Joachim Kraus (1992) *Theology of the Psalms*

Waltke, Houston and Moore (2014), *The Psalms as Christian Lament*

Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme (1992) *The Universe Story*

Haydn, *The Heavens are telling the Glory of God* – a musical setting of this Psalm

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### **Laudato Si', Pope Francis I**

#### **Introduction**

*In his Papal Encyclical, 'Laudato Si', Pope Francis addresses all people about their 'Common Home'. The phrase 'Laudato Si' is taken from a poem by Saint Francis Assisi and literally means 'praise be to you'. Whilst the Pope is concerned with the state of the natural world, he sees this as intimately linked with the flourishing of humanity and issues around social justice. Environmental destruction is positioned as symptomatic of a larger issue: disregard for nature and human beings in pursuit of economic gain. A central theme of Laudato Si' is the relationship between God, mankind and nature. The Pope takes issue with a biblical interpretation in which mankind is seen as having dominion. Instead, he argues that mankind has a responsibility to protect nature and care for all that exists, understanding that other living beings have a value of their own in the eyes of God.*

#### **The Wisdom Of The Biblical Accounts**

65. Without repeating the entire theology of creation, we can ask what the great biblical narratives say about the relationship of human beings with the world. In the first creation account in the Book

of Genesis, God's plan includes creating humanity. After the creation of man and woman, "God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good" (Gen 1:31). The Bible teaches that every man and woman is created out of love and made in God's image and likeness (cf. Gen 1:26). This shows us the immense dignity of each person, "who is not just something, but someone. He is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving himself and entering into communion with other persons". Saint John Paul II stated that the special love of the Creator for each human being "confers upon him or her an infinite dignity". Those who are committed to defending human dignity can find in the Christian faith the deepest reasons for this commitment. How wonderful is the certainty that each human life is not adrift in the midst of hopeless chaos, in a world ruled by pure chance or endlessly recurring cycles! The Creator can say to each one of us: "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you" (Jer 1:5). We were conceived in the heart of God, and for this reason "each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary".

66. The creation accounts in the book of Genesis contain, in their own symbolic and narrative language, profound teachings about human existence and its historical reality. They suggest that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself. According to the Bible, these three vital relationships have been broken, both outwardly and within us. This rupture is sin. The harmony between the Creator, humanity and creation as a whole was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations. This in turn distorted our mandate to "have dominion" over the earth (cf. Gen 1:28), to "till it and keep it" (Gen 2:15). As a result, the originally harmonious relationship between human beings and nature became conflictual (cf. Gen 3:17-19). It is significant that the harmony which Saint Francis of Assisi experienced with all creatures was seen as a healing of that rupture. Saint Bonaventure held that, through universal reconciliation with every creature, Saint Francis in some way returned to the state of original innocence. This is a far cry from our situation today, where sin is manifest in all its destructive power in wars, the various forms of violence and abuse, the abandonment of the most vulnerable, and attacks on nature.

67. We are not God. The earth was here before us and it has been given to us. This allows us to respond to the charge that Judaeo-Christian thinking, on the basis of the Genesis account which grants man "dominion" over the earth (cf. Gen 1:28), has encouraged the unbridled exploitation of nature by painting him as domineering and destructive by nature. This is not a correct interpretation of the Bible as understood by the Church. Although it is true that we Christians have at times incorrectly interpreted the Scriptures, nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God's image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures. The biblical texts are to be read in their context, with an appropriate hermeneutic, recognizing that they tell us to "till and keep" the garden of the world (cf. Gen 2:15). "Tilling" refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while "keeping" means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature. Each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations. "The earth is the Lord's" (Ps 24:1); to him belongs "the earth with all that is within it" (Dt 10:14). Thus God rejects every claim to absolute ownership: "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with me" (Lev 25:23).

68. This responsibility for God's earth means that human beings, endowed with intelligence, must respect the laws of nature and the delicate equilibria existing between the creatures of this world, for "he commanded and they were created; and he established them for ever and ever; he fixed

their bounds and he set a law which cannot pass away” (Ps 148:5b-6). The laws found in the Bible dwell on relationships, not only among individuals but also with other living beings. “You shall not see your brother’s donkey or his ox fallen down by the way and withhold your help... If you chance to come upon a bird’s nest in any tree or on the ground, with young ones or eggs and the mother sitting upon the young or upon the eggs; you shall not take the mother with the young” (Dt 22:4, 6). Along these same lines, rest on the seventh day is meant not only for human beings, but also so “that your ox and your donkey may have rest” (Ex 23:12). Clearly, the Bible has no place for a tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures.

69. Together with our obligation to use the earth’s goods responsibly, we are called to recognize that other living beings have a value of their own in God’s eyes: “by their mere existence they bless him and give him glory”, and indeed, “the Lord rejoices in all his works” (Ps 104:31). By virtue of our unique dignity and our gift of intelligence, we are called to respect creation and its inherent laws, for “the Lord by wisdom founded the earth” (Prov 3:19). In our time, the Church does not simply state that other creatures are completely subordinated to the good of human beings, as if they have no worth in themselves and can be treated as we wish. The German bishops have taught that, where other creatures are concerned, “we can speak of the priority of being over that of being useful”. The Catechism clearly and forcefully criticizes a distorted anthropocentrism: “Each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection... Each of the various creatures, willed in its own being, reflects in its own way a ray of God’s infinite wisdom and goodness. Man must therefore respect the particular goodness of every creature, to avoid any disordered use of things”.

### **Questions for Reflection**

- *What biblical quotations used by Pope Francis strike you as you read the extract above?*
- *Pope Francis says that the relationship between humanity and nature is broken; how far do you agree?*
- *In what ways might a better relationship with nature help us rediscover a sense of “original innocence”?*
- *Think back to your own reflections on the opening of Genesis last week. How much did your reflection agree with Pope Francis?*
- *How might the idea of Sabbath rest be applied simultaneously to our own lives and the natural world?*

### **Some further reading**

St Bonaventure (13<sup>th</sup> Century) *The Life of St Francis*

John Haught (2004) *The Promise of Nature*

Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Bartholomew I (2002), *Venice Declaration*

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## **Psalm 148**

### **Introduction**

*The psalms contain almost every human emotion be it joy, sorrow, anger or despair. Psalm 148 starts and finishes with the line "Praise the Lord!" and it is a common refrain throughout the psalm. This is clearly a psalm of thanksgiving.*

*Psalm 148 has inspired several well known hymns/songs including All Creatures of Our God and King written by Saint Francis of Assisi. It may help in reading this Psalm to think of it as a song with the rhythms and energy that accompany collective singing.*

### **Psalm 148**

Praise for God's Universal Glory

1 Praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord from the heavens;  
praise him in the heights!

2 Praise him, all his angels;  
praise him, all his host!

3 Praise him, sun and moon;  
praise him, all you shining stars!

4 Praise him, you highest heavens,  
and you waters above the heavens!

5 Let them praise the name of the Lord,  
for he commanded and they were created.

6 He established them forever and ever;  
he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.

7 Praise the Lord from the earth,  
you sea monsters and all deeps,

8 fire and hail, snow and frost,  
stormy wind fulfilling his command!

9 Mountains and all hills,  
fruit trees and all cedars!

10 Wild animals and all cattle,  
creeping things and flying birds!

11 Kings of the earth and all peoples,  
princes and all rulers of the earth!

12 Young men and women alike,  
old and young together!

13 Let them praise the name of the Lord,  
for his name alone is exalted;  
his glory is above earth and heaven.

14 He has raised up a horn for his people,  
praise for all his faithful,  
for the people of Israel who are close to him.

Praise the Lord!

### **Questions for Reflection**

- Why do you think the Psalmist lists so many different beings praising God?
- Humanity comes last in the beings praising God – why do you think this might be?

- How do you praise God and give thanks for creation?

### **Some further reading**

Robert Alter (2011) *The Art of Biblical Poetry*

Hymn: *All Creatures of Our God and King*, by Saint Francis of Assisi

## **Barkskins**

### **Introduction**

*Annie Proulx (b. 1935) is a contemporary American writer. Her epic novel 'Barkskins' traces two wood-cutting families across eight generations, beginning in what is now modern Canada at the start of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. The book's ecological message concerning this violent and rapid destruction of the world's forests is unavoidable. However, numerous descriptions of forests where characters see them only in terms of their economic value contrast with other passages where ancient woodlands are given a majestic and almost sacred quality. This is seen especially in the case of Charley, one of the book's later characters, who is appalled by his ancestors' rapacious and cavalier treatment of the earth and those most closely attuned to it. Charley views forests as something of wonder and of intrinsic worth. His almost visceral reaction to nature's destruction and passion for conservation gives the sense that nature in its entirety must be preserved and even revered.*

### **Extract**

"Tell me what you thought of the forests."

"I saw many, many plantations of pine in orderly rows. But I did not consider them to be forests."

"Indeed. Then what in your consideration is a forest?"

Charley said slowly "I am sure that wild natural woodlands are the only true forests. The entire atmosphere – the surrounding air, the intertwined roots, the humble ferns and lichens, insects and diseases, the soil and water, weather. All these parts seem to play together in a kind of grand wild orchestra. A forest living for itself rather than for the benefit of humankind". He stopped.

"I see, 'living for itself'. Yes of course, but that is not managed land, where we plant and watch over trees to provide revenue to the owners, lifetime jobs to workers, shade and pleasure to nature lovers. Wild forests cannot be managed. This is why we cut them and benefit from their wood, then replace them with trees. Your idea of a forest living for itself is not part of modern life. This is what Austin Cary is trying to teach – that timber can be grown as a good crop that makes good profit and can be renewed endlessly. On one side he has to persuade the men who want to cut as they always have and who see his talks as attacks to ruin their business. On the other side are people not unlike you who see the end of the forests, disaster for the rivers. Even changes in the weather. He has to convince them that forest crops are the way to keep a steady supply and control erosion."

They heard the light ticks of sleet on the window glass. Dieter narrowed his eyes. Chicago had long hard winters, and was it possible this one was persisting so deeply into spring? It was possible.

Charley seemed not to notice the sleet but talked on in his low voice.

"I see little merit in rows of pine trees. There is no diversity and the vaunted utility is an illusion.

What of the rural people who once went into the wild forest for a hundred reasons? Why do we assume they have no rights to continue their traditional woodland familiarities?" He noticed the fine layer of dust on everything in Dieter's office – globe, bookshelves, chair rungs, windowledges. There was dust on Dieter's ideas.

“Charley, you are missing my point. Here in America the cast of mind is fixed on taking all. My plea for replanting is still a peculiar idea to them. You may be right to say the old forests are imperilled, but this is, unfortunately, a matter of politics. You are wrong, too, when you say German forests are only managed plantations – there are no people in Europe as passionate for wild forests as the Germans. In you I see the German streak, partly romantic, partly rebellious. And I wish you could understand that there are hidden complexities in the *managed* forests of which you know nothing”. “A pity you cannot grow barkless planks. It is no use, Father – I have seen what I have seen and cannot accept tree plantations as a greater good.” He could see Dieter was working himself up, his bald pate shone red and he pinched his lips in and out.

“Then you had better become a *botanist*” – Dieter spat out the word – “and continue your adventuring”. He got up and left the office.

Charley waited. Dieter’s anger was rare but he was angry now. His temper would not last, never did last. He would come back. And in a while Charley heard the outer door open, heard Dieter say something to Miss Heinrich, heard her answer. He came in, spicules of melting ice on his shoulders. He nodded at Charley, drew out a bottle, went to the cupboard and took out two glasses, poured for himself and Charley.

“Forgive me, Charley”. He swallowed some whiskey. Sighed. “I had ideas and feelings similar to yours when I was young but over the years I learned that the entrepreneurial spirit of this country could not be dampened. We can’t be wild animals. We are humans. We live in a world that is a certain way and forests must adopt to the overwhelming tide of men with axes, not the reverse. I came to believe that planting trees was a kind of forest continuation, not perfect but better than stumpland. We call such plots ‘forest’ and we believe that is what they are. Also I have never thought that the German management could be less than superior.”

“Father, it reeks of the eighteenth century. It no longer fits. It is also true that there is too much cutting. The old forests are going and once they are gone we will have to wait a thousand years or more to see their like. Though nothing will be allowed such a generous measure of time to grow. Most wild American woodlands have already been savaged.”

“I need a real cause, Father, if I am to work at anything. I am no businessman. And I may indeed write a book. Although I know pitifully little and one lifetime is not enough to study even a single tropical forest tree. I want – how can I describe it. I want to discover the dynamo, the central force of the wild forest – all my interest lies in searching out that vital force”.

### **Questions for Reflection**

- *Charley thinks forests should be left to be as wild as possible, whereas his father Dieter believes they need to be managed in order to be protected. Who do you agree with?*
- *What do we lose when we fail to preserve Nature?*
- *How can humanity best strike a balance between stewarding nature (like using the wood from forests in order to build houses) and protecting it?*
- *What is special about forests which might enable them to be seen as particularly good examples of God’s creation?*

### **Further reading**

Wendell Berry (2015), *Our Only World*

Thomas Berry (1988), *The Dream of the Earth*

Janine Benyus (2002), *Biomimicry*

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## **Mark 4**

### **Introduction**

*Mark's Gospel is widely regarded as the first Gospel to have been written and significantly shaped the way subsequent writers wrote about the life and times of Jesus of Nazareth. It is also the shortest Gospel meaning that the details of each part of the narrative tend to be concise and in the original Greek scholars note the Greek is not well written.*

*In terms of content the book is dominated by the death and resurrection of Christ which forms nearly half the total book. John the Baptist is also more prominent in Mark than the other three Gospels. A further feature of Mark, though by no means unique to Mark, are parables set in nature. Mark 4 contains a number of such parables which culminates in not a parable but a story from the life of Jesus with him calming the waves. The earlier nature parables draw on our common understandings about nature whilst the last section on Mark 4 urges us to see Christ not as a part of creation but as one with the Creator God.*

### **Mark 4: The Parable of the Sower**

#### The Parable of the Growing Seed

26 He also said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, 27 and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. 28 The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. 29 But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come."

#### The Parable of the Mustard Seed

30 He also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? 31 It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; 32 yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

#### The Use of Parables

33 With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; 34 he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

35 On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." 36 And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. 37 A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. 38 But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" 39 He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. 40 He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" 41 And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

### **Questions for reflection**

- *Jesus often tells parables about the natural world and we see two of them here. His audience at the time would have understood his messages about sowing seeds and shepherds; how do we understand them differently now?*
- *Jesus demonstrates God's power over nature by calming a storm. What does this tell us about Him?*
- *Jesus is also able to sleep through the storm when the disciples can't. Does this tell us something further about Him?*
- *At harvest time we often sing the hymn, which includes the lines "the winds and waves obey him". What might be other opportunities during the church year for reflecting on God's power over nature?*

**Further reading**

Rowan Williams (2014) *Meeting God in Mark*

Jeffrey John (2001), *The Meaning in the Miracles*

D.E. Nineham (1969), *Saint Mark*

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