

Third Sunday in Lent – Pasture Lands (Psalm 95)

So far this series:

Lent week 1, 'The Solitary Places.' We received a call to remove distractions for a part of a day and to focus on Jesus: who he is, what he has said and done.

Lent week 2, 'I Am Your God.' Using Psalm 50 we heed God's summons to us to all the Earth, where he blesses us for gifts of sacrificial thanks and asked God to create in us a clean heart. (Ps.51:10-12)

This week's episode 3 is, 'Pasture Lands'. It is a response of action to take care of all the Earth, e.g., learning our part in looking after his pasture lands.

Focus scripture... our focus is **Psalm 95** and where it says, 'we are the people of his pasture', (Ps.95:7 NIV) within the context of the wider Psalm.

Introduction

There is a temptation for us to expect the world to yield its resources to us and nations have long fought after control of those resources – both through commercial endeavour and by using instruments of war.

Phil Jump, the author of the Lent Series we are using says,

"The popular perception of Lent is still one of a season in which we "give things up", and the Jesus we meet in the wilderness has fasted for 40 days. Today, we might not simply explore the spiritual virtues of doing without but recognise that our unhalted consumption is raising questions about the sustainability of our planet."ⁱ

Psalm 95...

The Psalm asks us to join in a celebration of joy for the LORD who is the great God and formed the depths of the earth, mountain peaks, the sea and dry land (see Ps.95:1-5).

Crafted by his hands and belonging to him we are not to worship those things he has created, but the creator himself. We are pictured as the 'people of his pasture, the flock under his care' (Ps.95:7 NIV).

Very often we focus on being the flock in his care, we are the sheep and he the shepherd (a picture Jesus used from scripture) but we tend to miss that the world is given to us as pasture. The world contains the resources we need (and more!) for our needs and pleasure (See Gen.1:28-30; 9:3-7 & Eccl.3:9-13)

Resources when in need...

For sure, when we are in need we want those resources, as exemplified by Israel's time of exodus and formation. Their base need is mentioned in our Psalm today. The people protested against Moses, demanding water; a fair request but it is their attitude of heart that was the problem; they doubted the Lord's provision for them as he led them into pastures that were not fertile for human needs, and they demanded it as a basic right. Nonetheless, the Lord gave them the water they needed. (Ps.95:8-9 / Ex.17:1-7)

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The attitude they displayed was not unique to them but is common among all nations; an expectation that we can plunder the resources of the pasture in which we live. However, the Lord's command for us to have dominion is not one where we pillage the earth but protect; one of animal and agricultural husbandry.

As I think on this I'm reminded of examples where farming and good environmental practice has led to changes in land management; of sheep and other animals being reintroduced to different types of land, of horses being used in some areas where the soil is particularly fragile, replacing mechanisation and restoring health to the land.

Phil Jump comments,

"The desert landscape is a stark reminder of what can happen, even to fertile places when they are exploited and over-consumed. The discipline of fasting and sacrifice invites us to consider what we might manage to curtail on a more permanent basis. It invites us to remember that this earth is not ours, and we have no more claim on its resources than any other generation - past or future."ⁱⁱ

Here are some verses from his poem:

Teach us to loosen our grasp
On what the habits of privilege have taught us to call essential
Set us free from the tyranny of consumption
That even in the wilderness, contentment might be found.

For at the dawn of time
You did not simply breathe out the life of your Spirit
But breathed it into the dust of the earth
We are yours; yet belong in and are sustained by your creation.

And so, we come to recognise
How easily we have forgotten the privilege of being its guardians.
The desert places become a stark foretaste
Of what can become, and is becoming, when we neglect this planet's care

You did not come to exploit and consume the resources of this world
But to redeem and reclaim – to reconcile all things
Pointing us to that full salvation, for which all creation groans
Help us walk in its direction, casting the light of hope across this ravaged earth.ⁱⁱⁱ

Phil asks and advises

What is Jesus calling us to do in repairing these relationships? [With God, the Earth and People] Paul affirms that creation 'groans' as it waits for us to get our relationship with God fixed - to behave in a Christ-like way towards God's world (Romans 8:18-23).

Revelation 16-18 reveals that following the alternative lordship of power and wealth leads to the destruction of the environment and ultimately of our own lives. Who are we following?^{iv} (The Lord as Shepherd or the world?)

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Expanding on Phil's suggested verse from Mark's gospel, where our need for his Lordship is our first basic need (8:34), the next rhetorical question of Jesus should be taken to heart,

'what good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?'

(Mark 8:36 NIV)

'Many of these themes and realities echo through this week's lent reflection';^v that everything we have is a gift of God. How might we be more thankful to God, both spiritually and practically?

Is it only an economic decision when you purchase food and goods; or might you be able to consider where it comes from and what it's made of?

When can you walk, share a car or use public transport, not simply as an environmentally friendly decision but as opportunity to use the walk, or time with a friend to praise and thank God?

We finish with Psalm 96,

Worship the Lord in the splendour of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth.

Say among the nations, 'The Lord reigns.'

The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity.

Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it.

Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them; let all the trees of the forest sing for joy.

Let all creation rejoice before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth.

He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness. (Psalm 96:9-13 NIV)

Amen

ⁱ Phil Jump, *Lent Sundays* (Didcot: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 2017), p4. <

https://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/509383/Lent_Sundays.aspx> [Accessed 20 March 2025].

ⁱⁱ Jump, p.4.

ⁱⁱⁱ Jump, p.4.

^{iv} Jump, p.5.

^v Jump, p.5.