

Week 4: Let there be lights in the sky

Genesis 1:14-19

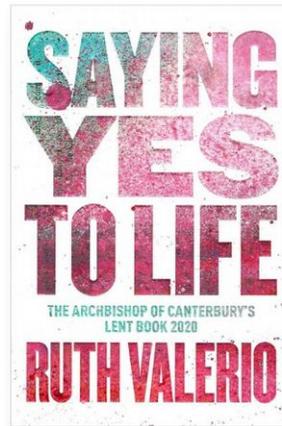
Introduction

The sun, moon and stars separate day and night and are 'for signs and for seasons and for days and years' (Genesis 1:14). A sense of rhythm is engrained into the patterns of the natural world and therefore into our patterns too. We live by a natural rhythm of day and night, and we know how it feels when that pattern is disrupted. (p 84)

In Matthew, Jesus' birth is announced by a star that alerts the magi and leads them to where Jesus lies. The birth of The Word who brings light into the world is accompanied by a night sky illuminated by the glory of the Lord and by a bright shining star. And then, his death – as he bears our sin in his earthly body - is accompanied by a dramatic response in the natural world, as the sun stops shining.

One main theme of this chapter is eschatology - 'study of the last things', because what we believe about God's plans for the future affect how we view creation. Many of us probably grew up with the view that 'heaven' is a place where those who believe in Christ will go when they die (or when Jesus returns if that comes first). As for this earth, we may have believed that this world would be completely destroyed when Jesus returned.

But in Genesis 1, God declares each part of creation is good, which presents a challenge to the view that creation is unavoidably divorced from redemption. Isaiah 65:17-25 is one of many passages stressing future hope. It is the passage that the prophet John quotes when he talks about seeing 'a new heaven and a new earth' (Revelation 21:1). The context for Isaiah's words is the time when the people had returned from exile and were looking forward to the rebuilding of their nation. The words are clearly spoken into that situation; but contained within them are the seeds of a wider hope in God's plans for the future.



We see here that the future hope that developed in the Old Testament had a very physical dimension and encompassed the wider natural world and human society, people and animals living together peaceably. This was the foundation for Christian thinking about God's plans for the future: Revelation 21-22 give a picture of a garden city with land, trees and water – the renewal of creation and not its destruction. As we care for God's creation we are living in anticipation of the day when it will be renewed.

Questions

- Q How much is the wider creation brought into your church worship gatherings? Is it incorporated into prayers, songs, liturgies and sermons? How could you help that happen more?
- Q Why are rhythms of day and night, times and seasons, important to us?
- Q This chapter has a strong focus on God's future plans. What stood out to you? Why does it matter what we believe about the future?
- Q Chris Wright is quoted on p 104: 'Christian ecological action points towards and anticipates the restoration of our proper status and function in creation. It is to behave as we were originally created to, and as one day we shall be fully redeemed for.' In what ways does this eschatological dimension motivate how you live now?

Interview: Professor Sir Martin Rees, Astronomer Royal

For Discussion and Action

- Q What most struck you about this week's interview?
- Q How can we reduce the amount of light we produce at night? (p 92)
- Q Look back over the last chapters and reflect on what things you have committed to do and whether or not you have done them.

Consider marking 'Earth Hour' on Saturday 28th March 8.30-9.30pm by turning off your lights. See www.earthhour.org. You could have a candle-lit dinner or go outside and look at the stars!

For further reading (on Eschatology)

Tom Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (SPCK)
Dave Bookless, *Planetwise* (IVP) ch 5