

I don't know if you've all noticed, but there's a new word on our pew sheet this week...

### **Creationtide!**

Now, when I say it's a new word, I mean it's new in the sense that we didn't have it on our pew sheet last week. Creationtide runs from the 1st September to the 4th October, so the season has only just begun.

But I also say it's a new word, because would anyone like to guess how old Creationtide is as a season? It's a baby!

**It all started in 1989**, when the Eastern Orthodox Church declared the 1st September as a day of prayer for creation. Different churches very quickly picked up on this idea, especially as our knowledge and understanding of climate change grew. In the '90s and naughties this idea became a season in itself, which we now call Creationtide, and it finishes on the feast day of Saint Francis of Assisi, who is widely seen as the patron saint of animals and ecology. ***It's such a new season that the Church of England only published official resources on it in August 2016.***

And while growing awareness of global warming and climate change are an important part of the season, and why it came into being, that's only half of it. The other half of Creationtide is to celebrate God's creation - to admire it, to be in awe of it, to be aware that god and God's creation have their own relationship, that, frankly, not everything is about us humans.

This really occurred to me when I was reading the Isaiah passage for tonight, **particularly verses 19 and 20...**

Throughout the Bible we have this message that creation and God have their own relationship. We know that if humans don't recognise God, the very stones would cry out. The natural world lives in such harmony, when us humans don't get in the way. We hear tonight, that the wild animals will honour God.

I thought it was a very nice touch, then, that our anthem tonight is Jesus Christ the Apple Tree.

Because have you noticed that apple trees, or plum trees, or tomato plants, or any kind of food-giving plant, is all about 'abundance'. From one plant, year after year, as long as nothing goes wrong, it brings forth the most amazing abundance.

I remember from my childhood, that just from plum trees, from just one year, we would have enough plums that a family of six could have a snack whenever they wanted, that we could have plum crumble for pudding, that we could freeze the plums for later in the year, you'd be sent to neighbours to drop off boxes of plums... nature, when it is thriving, is so incredibly abundant.

And not just in terms of harvest or food for us humans to eat.

Think about Fred (*Pippa's dog*) - if there's one thing he has, it's love in abundance.

**PTO**

There's a trend on social media at the moment, which is horse riders sharing videos of when something goes wrong in their riding lessons - all very light-hearted, and it's often videos of horses trying to jump a fence but something funny happens. But all those horses have energy and determination, in abundance.

I could go on, about how all you need to grow a plant is to take a tiny cutting, because nature will keep growing until it's stopped, but you get the idea. Nature, flora and fauna, is so good at being abundant. It just comes naturally to it all. And it doesn't ask for anything back in return. Nature just gives, Fred just gives, because it doesn't occur to it to take away, to hold back.

And that is something to be so thankful for, in this season of Creationtide.

And I wonder if our Gospel reading tonight, is a reminder, or perhaps a warning, if we don't follow nature's example.

Because in our Gospel reading, Jesus is railing against skepticism. Against cynicism. Against meanheartedness. Against an attitude of 'Well, we'll consider what this John the Baptist has to say, but anyone or anything bigger than that is too much'. Jesus sees people limiting themselves, limiting their own salvation, and is trying to get them to break out of this mind sight. He sees them shutting themselves off, closing themselves down, refusing grace. People are standing there, with clenched fists, and he's trying to get them to open their hands.

We see this in our OT lesson too - God's forgiveness is abundant, but the people of Jacob and Israel refuse to learn.

**Nature, and Creationtide, teaches us selfless abundance.** Jesus came, to give us selfless grace. So that we could receive it, and so that we could give it out in return.

Sometimes, for our relationship with God, one of the best things we can do isn't to look to other humans for examples, but to look to creation. Look to nature. Look to how it effortlessly overflows. And simply ask for the grace to do the same.

Amen.