

Readings: Job: 38:1-3; 39:1-12. Psalm 148:7-14. Mark: 4:26-29.

Four years ago we went with friends on my birthday to Trentham Gardens for the day and we saw a lovely meadow of beautiful wild flowers which I took photos of, and which I am showing you on the screen today. So please enjoy looking at them.

On my way to and from Tettenhall Wood I have also noticed a garden where the owner has purposely planted wild flower seeds in the borders, and they look really attractive and colourful. In High Meadows, where I live, there is also literally a high meadow in someone's front garden, but I really think that has more to do with the lack of a lawn mower than any attempt to help biodiversity!

By the way if any of you do plant wild flowers I read that the key is to ensure that you plant native UK species rather than any invasive plants that could do damage to local flora and fauna – no immigration in this case please!

I still marvel at how incredible this earth is, as part of God's creation – a circular blob suspended in space, and teeming with life, from the tiniest creature to the largest whale, and including us human beings – capable of communication and the capacity to reflect on the world around us. It is really quite remarkable. The world is so finely tuned in its balance – with mutual dependency – each species of plant and animal relying on, and adapting to, each other.

As stewards of God's creation we have a huge responsibility to maintain that ecological balance, and of course it isn't just Christians who have wised up to that responsibility. It is the talk of the moment, apart from Brexit! I don't think there is a week that goes by without a new insight into what has gone wrong with our environment, but also tips on how we can help to sustain it.

I'm sure all of you know far more than I do on what we can do for our world, and it would be an idea to collect everyone's suggestions together, so they can be shared out. There may be things we don't think about as individuals, until someone else shares a helpful idea with us. And of course we have copies of the leaflet Phil has mentioned which is a good starting point.

Let's now look at the bible passages with regard to this week's topic of biodiversity.

As God questions Job we can get the wrong impression that Job is being told off – that he ought to maintain ignorance and just let God get on with the business of running everything, but that isn't how we should see this passage.

Human beings have been given the role of caring for our planet. It is actually helpful to learn all we can – to have a real desire to explore God's world. In fact in doing so we are more likely to end up in awe and wonder at the magnificent symmetry of the universe, and praise God even more.

God is inspiring Job into praise and increased faith as He points out to Job the way creation operates. Any complaints Job has are unjustified as he is forced to reflect on God's care and goodness for His world. Job may be able to control domestic animals and work them, but he can't do the same for the wild animals. They are free to roam and forage for food as God intended.

Then as we look at Psalm 148 there is a call for all creation to praise its creator – from the earth, the sea, the rains and the winds, the hills, plant life, animals, birds, all living beings including kings and rulers, and all generations of humanity – all are called to praise our creator. Notice the call for kings to give praise, instead of being praised, and also the fact that we aren't separate from the rest of creation but are part of it.

Finally, the Gospel shows how seeds grow till they can be harvested for food. It happens just through the elements of nature – the soil and the rains. We don't make the seeds grow. They just need the right natural conditions.

Our job as stewards of the earth is to enable nature to work in the way intended – with the right balance of biodiversity. The trouble is that we have been too good at destroying our world instead of caring for it. But the call is to reverse the trend away from the greed of some to the care of most. The problems can feel too big for us but little changes by many people can have a huge effect.

I have mentioned the leaflets that were given out, but we can also support groups like the World Wildlife Fund in their endeavours to halt the extinction of animals. We can research the practices that have a negative effect on global environments, and reduce our demand for the produce of

those practices. There is the mantra: reduce, reuse and recycle, which we need to remember – reduce our demand for things and our use of energy, reuse what we have, and recycle what we don't need. I'm sure we are all very aware of the need to consider the results of our actions.

We can support groups that try to expand the natural habitats necessary for species to survive, because the loss of those habitats has a knock on effect for other species and upsets the balance of our world. The need to keep planting more trees is an obvious practice that needs to be supported. We know all this stuff so well, but nevertheless there are still things that we learn all the time.

There are a few things I want to mention that I have recently learned. We know that what we take for fuel from the ground cannot easily be replaced. It was recently highlighted that when we buy bags of compost we should only buy those with a reduced peat content, to stop the carbon being taken out of the ground that has built up over thousands of years.

I am now also wary of buying fruit from Spain because of Simon Reeve's programme on the Mediterranean. It was shown that there was over 100 square miles of land round Almeria that was covered by plastic polytunnels where produce was grown for export. That in itself wasn't bad, but the wealthy owners just left the old disused plastic sheets to disintegrate, filling the soil with layers and layers of the stuff. The African immigrants who worked on these farms were also exploited dreadfully, used like machines to harvest the produce, earning a pittance and living in appalling overcrowded shacks for which they paid huge rents. It was horrific.

Finally, although we all know about the problems of deforestation, I only found out this week about the connection with the production of cannabis. It was reported in my daily paper that the cannabis farmers cut down the rainforests so they can plant coca plants which they convert into cocaine by marinating them in paraffin and caustic lime. Organised crime gangs then turn it into a powder using a cocktail of chemicals such as sulphuric acid and ammonia. Gangs will resort to violence to protect their labs from rivals or the police, and innocent villagers or farmers are caught up in the bloodshed. All the waste product is then just dumped in the rainforest. To make a kilo takes a huge amount of coca leaves and different acids. It is the disposal of those which cause the most damage.

Well I'm sure none of us are cannabis users, but we need to tell our children and grandchildren about the damage it can do, not only to our brains, but also through the horrific way in which it is produced. As a neighbourhood watch co-ordinator I pass on to the police the registration numbers of vehicles that I strongly suspect are being used by dealers, and I have been assured that those cars are listed on their database and the meeting areas put under surveillance. I had just never before connected the problem with deforestation.

We aren't helpless. We can do things. We can keep ourselves informed about practices that harm our world. We can check whether our food is produced in sustainable ways. We can sign petitions and do our bit, and, unlike a lot of Christian concerns, when it comes to the stewardship of our planet we generally have society on our side in the pursuit of making the world a better and more beautiful place, like the wild flowers.