

# Walking and working

The following text is Jonathan Green and Benedicta Norman's speaking notes from the gathering held at The Sanctuary Westminster on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2006.

## Jonathan's Introduction

Well today we are going to think about a couple of themes found in Genesis 1, 2 and 3... themes of walking with God and the work given by God, to humankind to do.

You know, work is not the result of what Christians throughout the generations have called 'the fall'. The narrative of creation tells us that it is all part of the very good creation that God made. When humankind disobeyed God's instruction, work became toil... a struggle... but work it seems was always part of the plan... which is why I believe that we will have roles in the greater story of eternity!

And what kind of work was given to us in the beginning? Well we are told that God placed man in a garden to work it and take care of it. He then makes woman to help the man in his work. Not to work for the man! But *with* the man in their God ordained work.

You know, it is so exciting for me to watch more and more people getting involved here. I love seeing people have opportunities to explore their gifting and to have a go at a variety of things. To grow... so it gives me great pleasure to invite Benedicta to the microphone to talk about creation. Something I know, as you will certainly see, that she is passionate about.

Then I will briefly wrap up with some thoughts about journeying with God.

## Talk by Benedicta

So God created the Earth – and he filled it with good things and he saved the best creation till last – human beings. We are the icing on the cake / the cream of the crop – he gave us all the good things within the earth to sustain us and so that we may live and enjoy good food. Genesis says He placed man in the garden to cultivate the land and guard it.

We are the stewards of Gods kingdom but what does this stewardship entail?

Well the biblical world was good – before pesticides and pollutants.

As a steward we are to keep the air clean, keep the water pure, save the topsoil and replenish the forests and protect the animals.

We have been trusted to maintain the balance of nature.

But are we maintaining the balance? How do we maintain the balance?

### How can we show in the way we live that we belong to God?

Through our actions! The earth is facing an environmental crisis. In order to successfully address the emerging environmental issues, humans must first examine and critique their attitudes towards nature.

You hear it over and over again – climate change, global warming, rising sea levels, extinction, deforestation...and the rest. Let me break it down for you:

Lets look at **Building and Energy** and the real cost of living for example how much carbon dioxide are you producing in your homes?

A 3-bed home produces 5.6tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> every year from heating, lighting, running of kitchen appliances, etc.

- Did you know every 2 mins the sun gives the earth enough energy to use worldwide in a whole year? That is just amazing!!

So we should be out there supporting renewable alternatives! We young adults joining the property ladder should be implementing the likes of solar panels or green roofs on our roof tops. And in the case where we can't we should be supporting carbon neutral organisations and low carbon building

programmes that do this on our behalf. Our homes should be furnished with energy saving fridge/freezers, kettles, washing machines and other appliances.

Here's another question - How many of you overfill your kettle when making a cup of tea for example? This grossly contributes to Co2 emissions because of the amount of energy being used!

How many of you have a dripping tap at home? One wasted drip of water per second adds up to around 1,200 litres in a year. If we can't be bothered to fix a dripping tap right under our nose – how will we ever be bothered to contribute to sustainable living!?

Did you know single washing machine cycle uses up to 100 litres of water, totalling 26,000 litres a year. And what of the ariel/ persil and other household bleach products we use? They all go down the drain and eventually end up in our rivers! How many of these products for e.g. are contributing to the mutation of the beautiful living creatures that God filled the oceans and seas with?

So what alternatives are there? They are more natural alternatives to conventional washing powders - they save energy in machine washes....as well as keeping the water pure!

Find out more at the back table!

**I sometimes sit and think: And God looked down and God was not pleased with what he saw.**

Lets look at **Food** – it is said you are what you eat! For example flying 1kg of strawberries from California to the UK uses 900 times more energy than the home-grown equivalent. This summer I ate must admit I ate strawberries like they were going out of fashion – and they probably will one day. I must also admit that every pack I bought was home grown. I deliberately avoided the USA produce and instead went for the Kent produce. Now how many of you know where your food comes from? How far it has travelled? Under what conditions it has arrived on your plate? Most of us don't even think twice about these sorts of things BUT we should. Here we are living on Earth as stewards of the air, land and sea – yet do we take responsibility for facts like Cox apples being potentially sprayed up to 16 times with 36 different pesticides? Do we take responsibility for the fact that dairy cows produce more milk by being inseminated with hormones, which often causes udder infections? Is this how we steward to Gods creation....Gods gift to us? By turning a blind eye on these matters and hoping someone else will deal with them?

Well, here's one way to eat what you like and stay in Gods' good books:

Organic crops contain significantly higher levels of nutrients compared with conventional produce, including vitamin C, magnesium, iron and phosphorous.

Organic farms contain 85% more plant species, 33% more bats, 17% more spiders and 5% more birds. Scary to think if these organic farms were not in place – where would that 85% of plant species, 33% bats and 17% spiders dwell?

Genesis 1 vs 11 says 'then he commanded, 'let the earth produce all kinds of plants, those that bear grain and those that bear fruit'' – and it was done.' Verse 14 continues to say: 'let them serve as signs to mark the season''. It struck me that these days the seasons can be overlooked!

They pass us by – merging like the day and night of winter – our eyes are not delighted by the sight of new fruit and vegetable on the supermarket shelves because we see the same fruit & veg all year round. We no longer plough the fields and scatter – we just plough, plough and plough some more.

Here's something not even I thought about but when I read it I suddenly thought – oh yeah: Take a pint of beer. Land is required not only to grow the hops and barley, but also for processing and distributing operations, for housing the brewery's management and administration, and for the pub or restaurant which sells the end product. Additional forest land is needed to absorb the waste CO2 released from all the energy used during harvesting, processing and shipping the beer!

It also prompted me to think where does the cotton to produce cloth come from? Who loves 100% cotton materials – I sure do! But as from now I when I shop at Zara or wherever I will ask – where does your cotton come from? Is it sustainably sourced? I don't want my cotton top to add to those poor cotton fields that utilise so much water. In Uzbekistan the Aral Sea is drying up – literally a desert now because the water has been irrigated for cotton fields. Is that the sort of conditions you want your desire for nice clothes to come from?

I sometimes sit and think: And God looked down and God was not pleased with what he saw.

Lets look at **Transport** – first the stench of death...

It is estimated that 1,600 people die prematurely in London as a result of air pollution. How many of you drive? Here's a fact: In heavy traffic jams, the air quality can be poorer inside the car than out! So why don't we start using Biofuel cars? They produce 65% less harmful emissions than petrol fuelled cars. Hydrogen powered vehicles produce only oxygen and water vapour from their exhaust pipes. How cool is that?! I can't drive yet but when I do I'm so getting a green car!

I'm going home to Gambia on Tuesday for a week – I feel bad about flying but as I have to fly because my annual leave will not permit me to take a weekly boat ride. Yes I feel terrible about contributing to the 300kg of carbon dioxide added to the earth's atmosphere each time a plane takes off. But I have off set my carbon by donating money to carbon neutral projects - so I feel a bit better!

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Finally lets look at **Nature** - ravaged places versus beautiful spaces!

Since 1945, 50% of ancient woodland, 95% of flower-rich meadows, 70% of lowland heath, 50% of coastal marshes and 94% of peat bogs have been destroyed.

Two studies I read about yesterday on the friends of the earth web site:

Indonesian rainforests are being destroyed for paper – these forests are home to species such as: Orangutan and, Sumatran tiger as well as millions of people from indigenous communities.

Do you know where your paper comes from?

**Palm oil** is a vegetable oil present in 1 in 10 supermarket products including chocolate, bread, crisps, detergents and lipsticks. Demand for palm oil is the major cause of habitat loss in Malaysian and Indonesian rainforests. You know, it's sad to think one day these animals will all be extinct. Our children's children will probably ever know of these animals as extinct. The sumatran tiger is an endangered animal and will probably be extinct in the next 10 years for these reasons.

Go home and have a look in your kitchen cupboards – see if you can spot any palm oil products.

A new report released yesterday by WWF finds a clear and escalating pattern of climate change impacts on bird species around the world, suggesting a trend towards a major bird extinction from global warming.

So the beautiful earth created on the 5<sup>th</sup> day of creation is being destroyed right before our very eyes. In Genesis 1 vs. 22 when God told the birds to increase in number...the plan was that we would look after those birds. Now it seems this grand design we call earth is in need of a makeover of a massive scale.

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To end I want to draw your attention to WWF's one planet living: Its looking at our ecological footprint and the impact it is having. Ecological footprint is a way of measuring how our lifestyles impact not only the planet, but also other people. It calculates how much productive land and sea is needed to feed us and provide all the energy, water and materials we use in our everyday lives. It also calculates the emissions generated from the oil, coal and gas we burn at ever-increasing rates, and it determines how much land is required to absorb our waste.

One planet living is centred around 10 guiding principles which can be found on your seats. Take them home – reflect on them – pray about them and then implement them!

We don't have the three planets required to sustain – we have only ONE.

One planet that God created for our benefit and one planet that we need to look after – and it is you and I who is responsible to look after this planet.

It's not like we are not equipped to do it – we can all make a difference in the home or the workplace...be it through hanging our shopping habits, reducing our co2 emissions or saving energy by using efficient light bulbs, not leaving things on stand-by and fixing dripping taps. We are the people set apart so we must set the precedent - we are the generation that can make the difference – that can educate friends and family, if we don't do it how will the younger ones learn?

Clearly, the creation story gives us responsibility for caring for the earth.

We must think – what big or what small thing are we doing right now to exercise this stewardship of all creation?

**Take the World Environment Day pledge and then do what you said you would do.** Walk more, car less. Don't buy over-packaged goods. Sort your rubbish. Composting is good for you, if you can. Cold? Wear a woolly and turn down the heating. Offset the carbon of your flights. Save water, shower with a friend!

**Become an Eco-bore like me and nag all you friends and family!!!**

Tell your MP you won't vote for him unless he supports the environment in demonstrable ways in Parliament, which should get their attention!

Next time you take a walk out doors – be it on your way home, through a park on a sunny day or any other time – be aware of the sky, the trees or the water... try to see something you have never seen before in creation...and from time to time – say ‘Thank you God’.

Wouldn't it be great if God looked down and God was pleased with what he saw.

## Jonathan wrapping up

Well, you know what they say, ‘Red sky at night, shepherd's delight. Drowned sheep in morning, global warming’

The whole idea of spending time looking at the story of our origins is that it gives us an identity and a place in a larger story. And as Benedicta said, the highpoint of the Genesis story of creation is the making of humankind... God places within humankind such incredible potential. Potential to create things that have not been before. Potential to make cultures. Culture that is for the good of the world. A world in harmony not dissonance.

We are part of God's created world. The earth is our habitat that supports our life. And our primary work is to work and care for creation. But it is dangerous for us to try and do this work without reference to another who puts all of our activities in perspective. In many ways, the title of this talk is in the right order. You see, walking with God comes before working with God. For it is only as we know our creator that we can go about our days in the right way.

Notice in the story that God only personally addresses male and female – they enjoy a uniquely personal relationship with him. We see in Genesis 3:8 that God is in the habit of ‘walking in the garden in the cool of the day’ and meeting with the man and woman he has put there. Men and women are made for intimate relationship with God, and our earthiness is no obstacle to that relationship... God meets us in the midst of the sweat and dirt. God walks regularly with Adam and Eve in the huge garden set aside for them. He discusses with them how this great park is developing, how its plants are growing under their care, and how the animals are getting along.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Drama, 14

You know, it's not like – have you been praying for 8 hours a day? No, Adam and Eve's discipleship is worked out in the wholeness of their existence. Their conversation is practical and natural - they talk with God as they walk and God talks back. There is something substantial going on here.

I think we see a few defining characteristics in the nature of the man and woman. I think that we see a purity and innocence to their lives. For example they were naked and felt no shame. Jesus often says that to enter God's kingdom you need to become like a child. Well children are often described as innocent and pure. As a child I used to run around the garden naked... I didn't feel shame! God can help to bring those qualities again into our lives – now I am not suggesting that you run around naked in St James' park! That's not what I was trying to say! And you know, innocence doesn't mean naïve!

Also, children have an implicit trust. Again we see this in the story and I believe that it is another essential quality of Christian growth. Trusting our creator.

So intimate knowledge of God is how it was in the beginning. We do not walk with God, physically in the cool of the day in a physical way, that kind of interaction ceased for the most part when Adam and Eve disobeyed God. However, the wonderful news today is that, because of Jesus, we can know an intimacy with God as we journey through life. And out of that relationship comes a call to steward creation, to work to create culture.

To be human means to have huge freedom and responsibility, to respond to God and to be held accountable for that response. Thus a better way of expressing the concept of humankind's 'dominion' over creation may be to say that we are God's royal stewards, put here to develop its hidden potentials in God's creation so that the whole of it may celebrate his glory.

That is an incredible mandate. It defines our work – whatever shape it takes in our daily lives. It also gives us purpose.

Life without purpose is not much of a life... the creation story helps us to grasp our purpose and that is cause for hope! So let us be hopeful and journey with God and take our place as God's royal stewards so that all of creation may thrive and experience life in its fullest.