

Notes on Genesis 2 verses 4 – 15
'We enrich our community by our care for creation'

In the song 'English Country Garden' we are given lots of names of the fauna and flora we might like to see in our gardens. It is a song rich in both power and suggestion of what a garden, dare I say, should look like. It is a space which is richly cared for, for us to enjoy as well as welcome all visitors human and not. Genesis 2 is equally rich in imagery as it describes how creation came to be, as in Genesis 1, but even more so of our vocation to be its gardeners made in the image of God.

I asked my resident experts to speak about how to care for our gardens and Norman first spoke about feeding the birds who visit us in winter. He reminded us that we are to feed birds in winter because they often cannot get enough natural food, it gives an opportunity to see birds at close quarters and it helps to keep bird numbers good. He asked when we should feed the birds and he said every day, all year round and not to give up as they will be waiting for you to feed them. Then how are we to feed them and he recommended a bird table and to use a bird feeder but if you do feed them on the ground, then to use a tray. Finally, what type of food should we give them? You can give them peanuts, either whole or broken up; Sunflower seed with or without shells; Wild bird food which is a special mixture of seeds; Fat balls, which is fat with seeds mixed in; Fruit, such as apples pears etc; Baked potatoes cut in two and household scraps which are best put on a bird table.

Genesis 2 is both delightful and delightfully odd. It reflects the use of sacred gardens in the Ancient Near East which were used to grow food to be offered to the gods. However, in Genesis 2 it has a very different use as it provides food not for the gods but for humanity. It is also a good and sacred place which God can dwell in and also enjoy the companionship of those who are made in his image. Genesis 3 describes this beautifully in verse 8 where God has an evening stroll in the garden with Adam and Eve. Genesis 2 describes our vocation as those who are called to work in and take care of this Garden, this sacred space. However, the words used to describe this work are neither agricultural nor horticultural but instead are words used describe the human service offered to God by priests in a Temple. As God's 'Gardener-Priests' serving in the Temple of creation, we are to work and guard this sacred space from all that threatens to bring disorder and chaos. This disorder and chaos if let loose in this sacred space would turn it from being a place of fruitfulness and abundance into a place of hunger, sickness and death.

Our second resident expert was Margaret who spoke about the plants in our gardens. She said that one of the easiest ways we can encourage wildlife into our gardens is by our choice of plants and how we use our gardens. Choosing the right flowers provides pollen and nectar for bees, butterflies and other insects that perform the vital task of fertilisation - seed and fruit production would drop dramatically without them. We were encouraged to avoid too many highly-bred cultivars with big and blowsy or double flowers, as most of them contain little or no pollen or nectar. Instead, we were encouraged to choose plants that provide pollen and nectar for a long a season as possible from spring, Crocus and Mahonia for example, through to autumn and Michaelmas daisy, Sedum and Ivy which is particularly late to bloom and may provide food into early winter. For more information she encouraged us go to www.rhs.org.uk for a list of suitable plants for wildlife gardens.

We were also encouraged to grow a mix of trees and shrubs as they are good for blossom and berries and good examples are rowan crab apple, elder, blackthorn and hawthorn. If possible, we were encouraged to add water, a pond but a container of water will suffice. Also please leave a pile of dead wood in a shady spot and gather up the fallen leaves and put those in a shady spot they all provide an ideal habitat for insects and small animals. Or if you have room a small pile of rocks or stones also work well too as a ideal habitat

This idea of being God's gardeners is how we are to understand Genesis 1 verse 28 and its use of the language of rule and subdue. As Norman and Margaret have said this is how we can bring life to the birds and animals in our gardens as well as how they prepare for new growth in the spring. This is what it means for us to be good gardeners of God's Garden of creation where God walks alongside us in contented companionship to 'smell the roses'. But it also means that we are to roll up our sleeves, as in verse 5, and do the hard work of environmental and ecological care and to push back against all disorder and chaos which threatens starvation, environmental degradation and pollution. This means that when we think of us being the 'Priesthood of all believers' we need to include this very different feel and interpretation to what we usually think but it is essential we do so if we are to fulfil our vocation which God, our Master Gardener, has given us to be his under gardeners in this his most beautiful of gardens.