

Bible Studies

Genesis 1:1–31; Genesis 2:4–24. Two accounts of creation and Psalm 8.

Introduction

In recent years, there has been much talk about climate change. Suriname, along with many other countries in the world, feels the effects of climate change due to global warming. Our main city, Paramaribo, is settled near the Atlantic Ocean and many places are now flooded in the rainy season. Many other countries are faced with drought, hurricanes and floods. Scientists believe that underlying changes to the environment can have serious consequences. We note the devastating effects of natural disasters on the environment or human disasters such as polluting the rivers with mercury when mining for gold. The harmonious life of humans, animals and nature is totally out of balance. Many agree that we, as human beings, are responsible for that. At the same time, we are the ones who can bring the solutions to restore the harmony between humankind and God's creation.

As women in Suriname, we believe that the Christian faith community can environment. Actually, the future of the earth and how we leave it as a legacy to next generations matters to us. We see this as one of the key elements of the Christian faith. We are reminded of the relationship between God and creation, God and humanity. It is about having respect for every living thing.

As a Christian community, it is very important to be aware that we live in the 21st century, a period that is characterised by a rapid advance in technology. Given that we now live in a 24-hour economy and people strive for excellence, we are all challenged to keep our moral and ethical principles high. We should ask ourselves how to reach the balance between keeping up with technology on one hand and minimising the negative side effects of technology on our environment on the other hand.

What does it mean to us when we affirm with the Apostle's Creed: "I believe in God the Father, Creator of heaven and earth; I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son; and I believe in the Holy Spirit?" How does this affirmation relate to our faith in God as creator? What is our role as Christians in the world of God? We are to be partners of God! How amazing is that? But how do we do that? How do we live responsibly as God's partners in the 21st century?

We are guided by our theme "All God's creation is very good!"

Background explanation

The word genesis means origin, beginning, or becoming. The book of Genesis opens the Bible for us in which the divine revelations of God are recorded by people of faith. Genesis testifies to the beginning of life on earth, the creation of humankind and their responsibility towards creation. In the creation stories, out of chaos God creates the heavens and the earth. God creates a cosmos, a living world. God finishes creation by creating humankind in God's image and likeness. They then receive God's commission to take care of God's creation, which in God's view was very good. All of this, God does by speaking, separating, differentiating and creating. In Genesis there are statements about the beauty of creation, and the place and function of every creature in the whole of creation. "And God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good."

In Psalm 8, the psalmist looks at the heavens, and asks God "what are human beings that you are mindful of them?" And goes on praising that "yet, you have crowned them with glory and honour and given them dominion over the works of your hands."

But, the Psalm does not imply that humankind has any right to make use of God's creation without taking care of it. Do not bring development to communities without considering sustainability. And certainly, do not consume what creation offers without preserving and renewing the natural resources. We, male and female, need to be aware that we are created in the image and likeness of God, and are called to live in peace and justice with creation, like the animals. Humanity also gets God's blessings, and a commission: be responsible, have good stewardship, protect and care for all God's creation.

Method: Group Bible Study

This Bible study method is known as contextual Bible reading and can be used for all three studies which each has its own slant.

We want to establish a dialogue between our present context and the Bible. We start reading the Bible aware of our situation, so that we can listen to the word of God from the past to today. This approach sheds new light on our questions and actions.

The method has four phases. Choose a facilitator who keeps a lively interaction with the participants.

1. Observation:

What does the text say? (Let the text be read many times or in several versions to initiate conversation) What words stand out to you? Are there repetitions, movements in the text? What is written about creation? What is written about humankind?

2. Interpretation:

- a. What images come to mind when you hear the words that stand out to you? (Participants should make associations between what is said and their own experience)
- b. In Genesis God blesses the animals and humankind. How do you hear the blessing of creation in the face of environmental pollution, natural disasters, advanced technology and abuse of human beings and nature?
- c. How do we, as human beings, use our gifts in caring for creation? What are our tasks to bring God's blessing to our context?
- d. How can we ensure the future of the earth for the following generations? Consider for example:
 - food growing (organic, chemical fertilizers, small scale farm, agro business)
 - extraction of minerals (gold, bauxite, etc), deforestation (clear cutting leads to less oxygen), harvesting, hunting and poaching of endangered species like turtle seas
 - waste management (landfill, recycle, re-use, composting)
 - all forms of violence against children, youth, men and women

3. Plenary:

Conclude the conversation summarising what the theme "All God's creation is very good!" means for you and for your communities as you receive the blessing as caretakers of God's creation.

4. Application:

- The participants may share the lessons learned from the Bible text and conversation in the groups
- The participants may work together on an environmental project
- The participants may write a poem or a prayer, or draw a picture based on the theme
- The participants may write down a personal commitment towards the care of God's creation

Continue to Pray for

- single women householders who have to provide for many children
- areas of concern: mercury poisoning, suicide rate, domestic violence, child sexual abuse
- adequate, appropriate support and provision for the disabled and those with mental health issues
- health issues caused by mosquitoes e.g. malaria, dengue, zika, chikungunya
- education which is available to all but not compulsory
- greater awareness of our collective responsibility to take better care of the environment



gold mining contaminates the rivers with poisonous mercury