

Rogation Sunday: Worship Resources

An introduction to the fifth Sunday after Easter

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Introduction

ROGATION SUNDAY

This Sunday was originally so called because of the words in the Prayer Book gospel for the day: "Whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give to you". (The Latin is 'Rogare' - to ask.) In the strictly biblical context, the chief thing to ask for is the spirit of God to enable us to be true children of God.

By the 17th century, the old Roman festival of 'Terminalia', or "boundaries", had been adapted by the church and served a practical purpose. In days before Ordnance Survey maps, there were not always clear lines of demarcation between the parishes, especially where there were open field systems. During the procession, boys were bumped on prominent marks and boundary stones, or rolled in briars and ditches, or thrown in the pond to ensure they never forgot the boundaries. The Victorians made it more civilised by beating objects rather than people, in the context of a service and procession.

In the Western Church, processions to bless the crops and to include "beating the bounds", developed from the old Roman rites of "Robigalia" ("robigo": Latin for "rust" or "mould"), when prayers would be offered to the deity for crops to be spared from mildew.

These rogation themes of blessing the fields and beating the bounds were commended in the 1630s by the poet George Herbert, that epitome of English country parsons. He said that processions should be encouraged for four reasons:

- 1 A Blessing of God for the fruits of the field.
- 2 Justice in the preservation of bounds.
- 3 Charity in loving, walking and neighbourly accompanying one another with reconciling of differences at the time if there be any.
- 4 Mercie, in relieving the poor by a liberal distribution of largesse, which at the time is or ought to be used.

Today the emphasis has shifted. A blessing on growing crops in fields and gardens, and on young lambs and calves remain. In the agricultural cycle, the main themes are seed sowing and the tending of the young plants and animals. This does not pre-suppose that all sowing takes place around Rogation. Sowing is done all the year round, as is the birth and rearing of the young, but it is convenient to fix on one particular festival as the time to remember these before God in a public way.

Rogation takes place in the springtime, when there is a renewing of the earth. In this country, it follows Easter, the season of resurrection. Renewal and resurrection therefore are also underlying themes of this occasion.

Contemporary concerns will include:-

- 1 The enjoyment by all of, and access to, the countryside.onservation of species not directly offering economic profit to the owner or occupier of the land where they flourish.
- 2 The ecological insight of the inter-relatedness of the created order.
- 3 Reflection upon human-kind's relationship to the natural order. What does it mean to "have dominion" under God over the fish in the sea, the birds of the air, the cattle, the wild animals, and the reptiles, the plants bearing seed, the trees bearing fruit, the green plants? Are the words 'stewards' or 'managers' appropriate to describe this role?
- 4 The relief of the poor. Rogation Sunday often precedes Christian Aid week.

The Christian 'virtues associated with Rogation are hope and justice - and as George Herbert reminds us - there is always room for charity.

Readings, Prayers and Responses for a Processional Service

Hymn

IN A POSITION FACING FIELDS AND GARDENS

Prayer: Creator Spirit, who broods everlastingly over the lands and the waters, who endows them with forms and colours which no human skill can copy: give us today, we ask you, the mind and heart to rejoice in your creation. AMEN

Reading: Deuteronomy 8 : 7 - 11; 17 - 18

Blessing:

Almighty God, whose will it is that the earth should bear its fruits in their seasons: bless the labours of those who work in the field, bless the increase of crops and grain and fruit-bearing trees, that bread and wine and wholesome food may be shared and enjoyed by all your people. AMEN

Benedicite, Omnia Opera (verses 1 - 21)

- a) O all ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord:
- b) O ye angels of the Lord, bless ye the Lord:
- a) O ye heavens, bless ye the Lord:
- All) Praise him and magnify him for ever.
- b) O ye waters that be above the firmament, bless ye the Lord:
- a) O all ye powers of the Lord, bless ye the Lord:
- b) O ye sun and moon, bless ye the Lord:
- All) Praise him and magnify him for ever.
- a) O ye stars of heaven, bless ye the Lord:
- b) O ye showers and dew, bless ye the Lord:
- a) O ye winds of God, bless ye the Lord:
- All) Praise him and magnify him for ever.
- b) O ye frosts and cold, bless ye the Lord:
- a) O ye ice and snow, bless ye the Lord:
- b) O ye nights and days, bless ye the Lord:
- All) Praise him and magnify him for ever.
- a) O ye light and darkness, bless ye the Lord:

- b) O ye lightnings and clouds, bless ye the Lord:
- a) O let the earth bless the Lord:
- All) Yea, let it praise him and magnify him for ever.
- b) O ye mountains and hills, bless ye the Lord:
- a) O all ye green things upon the earth, bless ye the Lord:
- b) O ye wells, bless the Lord:
- All) Praise him and magnify him for ever.

IN A POSITION FACING ANIMALS, BIRDS AND OTHER CREATURES

Reading: Isaiah 11 : 6 - 9

Prayer and Blessing:

O Lord, who surrounds with your love all things living and promises to save both man and beast: we thank you for the companionship of animals and birds, without which there would be for human kind a great loneliness of spirit on the earth. When we are careless of the beasts and forget that they are your creatures, forgive us. AMEN

May God's blessing shower upon all his creatures may peace pervade the whole creation; may there be an abundance of plants we use; may humankind prosper and animals flourish. Bless all living things, O Lord.

Benedicite, Omnia Opera verses 22 - 25

- a) O ye seas and floods, bless ye the Lord:
- b) O ye whales and all that move in the waters, bless ye the Lord:
- All) Praise him and magnify him for ever.
- a) O all ye fowls of the air, bless ye the Lord:
- b) O all ye beasts and cattle, bless ye the Lord:
- All) Praise him and magnify him for ever.

IN A POSITION FACING THE HOUSES OF THE VILLAGE (OR TOWN)

Reading: Luke 19 : 41 - 42

A Litany for the Parish:

Help us with your grace, good Lord, to live as true followers of your Son, Jesus Christ:

All) Grant this, O Lord.

That in all things we may hold to your will and purpose:

All) Grant this, O Lord.

That our hearts and minds may be open to your holiness and truth:

All) Grant this, O Lord.

That we may rightly value the whole of your creation:

All) Grant this, O Lord.

That we may seek your righteousness in all our dealings with one another:

All) Grant this, O Lord.

That we may bear each other's burdens and so obey your law:

All) Grant this, O Lord.

That in all our time on earth we may work and live as citizens of your heavenly kingdom:

All) Grant this, O Lord.

Benedicite, Omnia Opera (verses 26 - 32)

a) O ye children of men, bless ye the Lord:

b) O let Israel bless the Lord:

All) Praise him and magnify him forever.

a) O ye priests of the Lord, bless ye the Lord:

b) O ye servants of the Lord, bless ye the Lord:

All) Praise him and magnify him for ever.

a) O ye spirits and souls of the righteous, bless ye the Lord:

b) O ye holy and humble men of heart, bless ye the Lord:

All) Praise him and magnify him for ever.

Blessing:

God bless this village (town, area), its farmers its homes and its people. May he visit you with his mercy, surround you with his love and make you perfect to do his will. AMEN

Hymn : (To be sung while the Minister and people return to church)

READINGS, PRAYERS & RESPONSES FOR A SERVICE INSIDE A CHURCH BUILDING

Sentences:

The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to his kind. And God saw that it was good.

While the earth endures, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.

And other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty fold and sixty fold and a hundred-fold.

There is a time for working and a time for resting, a time for ploughing and a time for sowing, a time for spraying and a time for harvesting; there is a time for lambing and a time for culling; there is a time for the byre, a time for the field and a time for the market, and a time for God. Indeed, all times are his.

A hymn may be sung.

V: The heavens are yours and the earth is also yours.

R: You have laid the foundations of the round world and all that is in it.

V: Blessed are the people that can rejoice in You.

R: They shall walk in the light of your countenance.

V: Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

R: As it was in the beginning, is now and shall be, forever. AMEN

Benedicite (or a hymn)

Old Testament Lesson: Genesis 9 : 26 - end

Psalm 126 or 145 or 8

Suggested New Testament Lessons:

Mark 4 : 1 - 8; 13 - 20

John 11 : 5 - 15

2 Corinthians 9 : 6 - 15

Phil 4: 4-7

Matt 6 : 7 - 15; or 24 - end; or Matt 7 : 7 - 12

Sermon

Meditation:

Long before the time of man in this world, there was a seeding and fruiting. In an infinite variety each species produced its own seed particular to itself.

V: My song shall be always of the loving kindness of the Lord.

R With my mouth will I ever be sharing your truth from generation to generation. In an indescribable complexity of temperature and humidity, of shelter and exposure, plant and soil, plant and plant, plant and animal - inter-reaction grew and bred.

V: My song shall be always of the loving kindness of the Lord.

R: With my mouth will I ever be sharing your truth from generation to generation.

Human beings began to exercise their long stewardship. They gathered seed and sowed it for food. They diverted streams. They cleared trees. They dug wells. They made their own selection of plants to grow and animals to rear.

V: My song shall be always of the loving kindness of the Lord.

R: With my mouth will I ever be sharing your truth from generation to generation.

The human race, at times, has thought only of its own needs and has forgotten the particular good that is in each created living thing.

V: Have mercy upon me, O God, after Your great goodness.

R: According to the multitude of your mercies, do away with my offence.

But still the seed is good; some sow it and tend it. Others gather it, package and distribute it.

And there are improved seeds: seed that sown bears heavier heads of corn, seed that ground makes better bread; and this is the work of human skill.

V: So teach us to number our days.

R: That we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

Farmers tend their flocks of sheep and with close attention breed a better lamb; they tend their cattle and improve their herds, delighting in the promise of each calf.

V: So teach us to number our days.

R: That we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

There are improved strains, improved cultivations, but all the time that marvellous inter-reactive system of the created order is altering and shifting and adjusting.

V: So teach us to number our days.

R: That we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

(There should follow, or be inserted here, an offering of seeds, etc. The following simple form is proposed, spoken by different people.)

Seeds we bring: *we ask you to bless them, Lord.*

Fields we bring: *we ask you to bless them, Lord.*

Gardens we bring: *we ask you to bless them, Lord.*

Lambs we bring: *we ask you to bless them, Lord.*

Calves we bring: *we ask you to bless them, Lord.*

Minister: In the name of the Lord I bless them for human use and in their own goodness. May they be a blessing to us, material and spiritual; may we who care for them and enjoy them reap material and spiritual fruit.

Hymn

The service may suitably end with a form of reconciling covenant said together:

Brothers and sisters, we covenant today with one another: With every living creature and all on which we depend With all that is on earth and with earth itself. With all that lives in the waters and with the waters themselves. With all creatures of the air and with the air itself. With all that is warm with life and with the living fire. We commit ourselves today to put away all selfishness and greed and embrace one another in love and joy and peace.

This may be sealed in some symbolic act, such as the passing of the Peace.

Thus reconciled, prayers of intercession for the whole creation may appropriately be offered here, perhaps preceding the collection.

A hymn may be sung.

Final Blessing:

May He that provided the seed for sowing, the hand for doing, the mind for thinking, and the heart for loving, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, bless you and preserve you all the days of your life.

Footnote: Processions or walks of a less formal character are traditional at Rogationtide. Parts of this service might be used in conjunction with such a walk On the walk detailed attention might be given to the world around, with observations of causes and effects and inter reactions. It should be a "living walking" as George Herbert puts it.