



Habitats of Hope

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Join us as this month as we look to cultivate hope!

A five week theme about nature, ecology and how we can enthuse and empower one another to tackle the myriad challenges we face as a planet.

We will be using nests, harvests, homes, ecosystems and habitats to reflect on nurturing an attitude of hope in our world as disciples of the hope bringer: Jesus Christ.

This August, as we look around about us we are taking hope! We're going to seek it, nurture it, carefully cultivate it, and celebrate its blossoming as we discover what the natural world can help us learn about our faith... and what our faith can teach us about the natural world.

As our Habitats of Hope theme begins we want to explore what we can learn from the metaphor of nest building. Nests are not fixed, birds often remake them season by season perhaps returning to the same location but rebuilding anew. A nest while offering a sense of security, is not so much a way for a bird to hide away from the world — but rather for

them to find a place in it. How could building a nest with God each year be helpful way of thinking about our relationship with God?

When we think about habitats we also think about harvests and how our harvests can harm them. When we work the land we can make choices that work with it or against it. In the last hundred years we have made phenomenal leaps in productivity, producing enormous amounts of food to feed millions of people. But sometimes this has been done at the cost of the land itself causing degradation, habitat loss and pollution.

How can we ensure homes for all of humanity and nature? The vision we are given in Psalm 85 of righteousness and peace kissing is a tender image of restoration and togetherness. When righteousness and peace are kept apart — conflict and inequality rise. Peace isn't simply the absence of war, it's the presence of something: a habitat where the qualities of peacefulness can blossom, where homes can be made.

As people who cherish and value the world we have been entrusted with for our flourishing — what on earth can we learn from the habitats we are in danger of erasing completely before it's too late? What do we learn from the desert, the fields, the forests, the ocean? How can we rediscover humility and awe, and in that space — hope also.

So, having sought hope as nest builders, tended to it as harvesters, lived it as dwellers, and cultivated ecosystems to nurture it... we will conclude our theme by asking how do we hold on to habitats of hope?

Over May to July our trio of themes **Rock, Paper, Scissors, Pegs; Who are we?**; and **A-Z** delved into some of the fundamentals of our faith. We looked at figures who shaped the early church, the key principles of the Gospel, and several of the everyday concepts that make up our day-to-day faith.

So as we begin a new sequence of themes running August - October we want to take what we have learned about the fundamentals and see how they relate to the world around about us. Nothing exists in a vacuum, our faith is not something that takes place *in* the natural world — it is *part* of the natural world.

We begin by *looking around* with this first month's theme focusing on nature and ecology, then with our second theme we will *look back* over the **80 Generations** between us and the time of Christ's earthly ministry. And then in October, as skies begin to darken and temperatures cool, we will *look up* as we consider **Stormy Weather, Peaceful Shore** — exploring poetry, language weather and metaphor as we express our response to the love that sustains us through all.

So you could say this new trilogy is one of Hope, Faith and Love as we consider: what happens when our belief takes root in a rich and vibrant world, finds itself tossed to and fro on the waves of history trying to stay true to the faith, and then the love that sustains us amid the storms and to the peaceful shores.

In the meantime, harvests, homes, eco-systems and habitats await us.

Look around — it's time to take hope!

SETTING THE SCENE: A visual motif for each week. An optional additional focus point for preparing worship services or multimedia inspired by the material.

SEEDS TO SOW: Open-ended prompts to inspire creative responses to the themes. Perhaps a song, some drawing, or creative writing! They are short and sweet, simply a starting off place for you and your imagination. Expand, tailor and develop as suits you. Often they take the form of a question, to encourage reflection.

Each week of the 5 week theme runs Sunday-Saturday and has its own subtheme, which contains daily Bible readings and prompts for thought.

Nests of Hope (30 July)

When a bird starts gathering twigs and moss they are acting in hope, working towards an uncertain but willed for future. Similarly, when the summer holidays begin to draw to a close and a new season approaches we start putting together what we need for the months ahead. A new bundle of ideas, plans: names we'll be remembering, gifts we'll be nurturing, cares we'll be carrying. Perhaps there will be particular song lyrics, Bible verses, quotes from books, and conversation with friends we'll be weaving into this year's nest. In Psalm 84 we read that the sparrow and swallow can make a home in God's dwelling place. Nests are not fixed, birds often remake them season by season perhaps returning to the same location but rebuilding anew. A nest while offering a sense of security, is not so much a way for a bird to hide away from the world — but rather for them to find a place *in it*. As our Habitats of Hope theme begins we want to explore what we can learn from this metaphor of nest building. How could building a nest with God each year be helpful way of thinking about our relationship with God?

SETTING THE SCENE: **A SMALL NEST PERCHED IN A TREE**

SEEDS TO SOW: **ARE WE MAKING IT EASY FOR WILDLIFE TO FIND A HOME IN OUR LOCAL NEIGHBOURHOODS?**

1. Psalm 84: 3
 2. Psalm 16
 3. Genesis 29: 15-28
 4. 1 Kings 3: 5-12
 5. Romans 8: 26-27
 6. Luke 9: 57-62
 7. Matthew 13: 31-32
1. **Nest making anew.** What would it mean to consciously 'nest' each year with God? Intentionally working on a place to shelter with God.
 2. **Nesting with God.** Making a nest is as an act of hope. Our faith, like a bird nest, is made up of all sorts of different things: Bible verses, hymns, the community we live in, history, art, life experience — but at its core is our relationship with God.
 3. **It's complicated...** Many birds when competing for mates go to elaborate lengths, like Jacob labouring here to 'earn' his two wives — although here it's the patriarch Laban he's trying to impress not Leah and Rachel (who are treated abysmally). What can we learn from this interpersonal car crash where the trickster Jacob finds himself being tricked in return?
 4. **Triangulating.** Reflecting on the keen-eyed owl perception of Solomon who wisely asked for wisdom. Some species of owls have ears at two different heights on their heads. The asymmetry helps them discern where sound comes from. Wisdom is often the study of how things relate to each other.
 5. **Nesting with the Spirit.** The albatross wings of the Spirit can enfold our hearts when we find ourselves wordless in the storm.
 6. **Jesus knows what it is to have no nest...**
 7. **A vast nest network!** We may have different ways of nesting but our nests can nestle together on the broad branches of Jesus.

Harvests of Hope (6 August)

When we work the land we can make choices that work *with* it or *against* it. In the last hundred years we have made phenomenal leaps in productivity, producing enormous amounts of food to feed millions of people. But sometimes this has been done at the cost of the land itself causing degradation, habitat loss and pollution. Our response to issues of sustainability is not a lifestyle choice that's tacked on to the end of our faith, like choosing a nice hessian tote instead of a plastic bag, but a beating question at the heart of it. If we believe we have been entrusted with a beautiful world and that we owe it to others to feed and care for them, that we have a responsibility for one another beyond borders and continents, then sustainability is crucial.

As grim as the ecological picture can look sometimes we want to sow in hope as a people of hope who wish to reap not in bitterness, but in joy.

SETTING THE SCENE: A PLOUGH IN A FIELD

SEEDS TO SOW: WHERE CAN WE DIRECTLY MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN CARING FOR OUR PLANET THIS WEEK?

1. **Genesis 32: 22-31**
 1. **Wrestling for answers.** When we face the mounting challenges of war, extreme weather, and growing inequality it can be an instinctive action to turn away — from the news, from the problem, from God. But like Jacob, we may learn more by coming to God face to face and refusing to let go...
2. **Isaiah 55: 1-5**
 2. **Everyone who thirsts.** At the core of our story is *abundance*, an invitation to all. How can we harvest with this openhearted generosity in mind?
3. **Micah 6: 9-16**
 3. **Considering the consequences of an uncaring, and acquisitive culture.** Injustice and dishonesty and a sowing without reaping echo uncomfortably today.
4. **Hosea 10: 12-13**
 4. **Breaking the cycle of injustice.** Reflect on the fruit of lies and the role of truth in our harvesting.
5. **Psalm 126: 4-6**
 5. **The role of lament in our food production.** How do we process and then address the uncertainty and vulnerability of our food chains?
6. **Galatians 6: 7-10**
 6. **Not growing weary.** Sustaining one another as we sow to the Spirit.
7. **Matthew 14: 13-21**
 7. **Two solutions.** The disciples suggest that the crowd disperse, spread out, forage. Jesus instead invites them to stay, to get closer together, to share. What can we learn from this contrast and then apply to how we produce enough food for our world?

Homes of Hope (13 August)

The vision we are given in Psalm 85 of righteousness and peace kissing is a tender image of restoration and togetherness. When righteousness and peace are kept apart — conflict and inequality rise. Peace isn't simply the absence of war, it's the *presence* of something: a habitat where the qualities of peacefulness can blossom. Peace requires righteousness — people acting with goodness, virtue and integrity. The unrighteousness of millions of people displaced from their homes through war, catastrophe and crop failure; of homelessness and inadequate housing; of unfair systems that punish the poor for being poor; make it incredibly hard to foster peace. Rather than just wallowing in the doom and gloom, how can we recognise the pain of our world but also do something positive about it? How can we make a world with homes of hope for all?

SETTING THE SCENE: **A ROOF**

SEEDS TO SOW: **WHEN DID YOU LAST FEEL 'UPROOTED'? WHEN DID YOU LAST GO THROUGH AN 'UPHEAVAL'? AND WHEN DID YOU LAST FEEL 'UPLIFTED'?**

1. Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28
 2. Psalm 105: 1-6, 16-22, 45b
 3. 1 Kings 19: 9-15
 4. Jeremiah 29: 7
 5. Ruth 1
 6. Jeremiah 12: 1-4
 7. Psalm 85: 8-13
1. **'Here comes this dreamer'**. Jealousy, violence, economic pressure and the discontent that unsettles...
 2. **Uprooting, upheaval, uplifting**. What does 'home' mean over the course of Joseph's story?
 3. **On the run, in the quiet**. Who today is on the move and needs to hear God in the stillness?
 4. **Urban liturgy**. Most of humanity now lives lives — either directly or indirectly — shaped by large urban centres. What can we do today to seek the welfare of the city?
 5. **A contemporary story**. The story of Ruth and Naomi we read about in this chapter is one sadly lived out countless times today as families are stretched and broken across borders, in want of home and peace and safety.
 6. **The land mourns**. Railing against injustice.
 7. **Righteousness and Peace kiss, a vision of security and justice and mercy for all**. Peace without righteousness isn't really peace and righteousness without peace isn't really righteousness.

Ecosystems of hope (20 August)

Habitats are complex interrelated systems. Flick one lever, change one part, and you'll influence the rest. Scientists sometimes talk about the 'Anthropocene', the idea that we humans have made such an impact on the world around us that we are entering a new epoch where human action on the planet is defining this current age, whether it be in wildlife, meteorologically, geologically. Animal, vegetable or mineral — we humans have bulldozed through with our building, farming and processing. As people who cherish and value the world we have been entrusted with for our flourishing — what on earth can we learn from the habitats we are in danger of erasing completely before it's too late? What do we learn from the desert, the fields, the forests, the ocean? How can we rediscover humility and awe, and in that space — hope also.

SETTING THE SCENE: **OIL IN AARON'S BEARD**

SEEDS TO SOW: **WHAT IS THE CONNECTION BETWEEN HOW WE TREAT THE LAND AND HOW WE TREAT OTHER PEOPLE?**

1. Genesis 45: 1-15
 2. Psalm 133
 3. Isaiah 56: 1, 6-8
 4. Exodus 23: 9-13
 5. Nehemiah 9: 6
 6. Colossians 1: 15-17
 7. Psalm 67
1. **Restoring broken relationships, in families and in ecosystems.** This family is hardly a paragon of virtue... and yet they play a crucial role in maintaining food through a famine for a great many people.
 2. **The pleasantness of unity.** Drawing a parallel between the pleasantness of unity amongst people and within an ecosystem.
 3. **Drawn into an ecosystem of grace.** The story of our God is not of conquest but of gathering. A vision where people will be congregated not trampled.
 4. **Do not oppress others, do not oppress the land, do not oppress yourself.** All three are linked.
 5. **God as creator and sustainer.** It all starts, and continues, with God.
 6. **Christ himself as an ecosystem.** Imagine Jesus himself as an ecosystem we all thrive in...
 7. **What do we revere?** Considering what the Earth yields, what the Earth reveres, and the connection between the two.

Holding on to Habitats of Hope (27 August)

So, having sought hope as nest builders, tended to it as harvesters, lived it as dwellers, and cultivated ecosystems to nurture it... how do we hold on to habitats of hope? As this theme draws to a close we take inspiration from different habitats to think about the breadth and depth of the hope that God calls us to.

SETTING THE SCENE: **THE HABITATS IN THE LIST BELOW**

SEEDS TO SOW: **WHAT HABITATS CAN WE BE PART OF RESTORING THIS YEAR?**

1. Exodus 1: 8-22
 2. Exodus 2: 1-10
 3. Psalm 124
 4. Isaiah 51: 1-6
 5. Isaiah 55: 10-13
 6. Romans 12: 1-8
 7. 1 Timothy 4: 10
1. **The hope of women, labouring in the desert.** Shiphrah and Puah, given an impossibly cruel task in an impossibly cruel time — somehow foster a habitat of hope through their ingenuity. Habitats of hope can and do sometimes blossom in the midst of dire circumstances.
 2. **Rivers and survival.** Rivers have always been crucial to human survival — offering a means of sustenance, travel and information. What did the river represent to Moses's mother? To his sister? To the Pharaoh's daughter? (Both before and after the incident in this reading.)
 3. **Through badlands and wild places.** The Lord is by our side.
 4. **Bedrock.** Looking to the rock from which we were hewn and where theology meets geology more widely.
 5. **What makes a tree clap and cheer?** Well, what do you reckon?
 6. **Our bodies — our biomes — a living sacrifice.** Thinking outside the box here, the human body is a habitat both literally and metaphorically for the microbes and thoughts, hopes and dreams that inhabit us. How can we ourselves be habitats of grace?
 7. **God's habitat.** We are nourished by God's habitat of grace, where there is always a home for us.