

# Who we are and how we are called

Bishop Jane Alexander

*Second Week of Lent*

*Monday March 14*

## Scripture

### **Psalm 104: 1a, 24a, 33a**

Bless the Lord, O my soul...

How manifold are your works!

In wisdom you have made them all...

I will sing to the Lord as long as I live;

## Reflection

Psalm 104 has always filled me with delight especially the thought of the sea 'teeming with creatures,' the frolicking Leviathan, the mighty smoking mountains. Yes, humans are there in the ships on the sea, but there is an abundance of life below the surface. If you have ever gone fishing or snorkeling, you know that. The psalmist speaks about the importance of biodiversity, the abundance of living things on land and sea, great and small, 'creatures beyond number,' all looking to the creator. God rejoices in the work of creation, and the psalmist prays in an outpouring of joy, that the glory of the Lord will endure forever. God is seen every day, in every living thing.

In Psalm 104 God is the King, the Creator as well as the provider of life on earth. The psalm is entirely concerned with God's relationship with the world which means that the presence of God is experienced everywhere every day. The response to this beauty is joy and wonder and worship.

So, what do we do when we see a marring of beauty and the suffering of creation? In our family we have a couple of people with asthma as I am sure do many of you. These past couple of years have been increasingly difficult because the air is changing. We know that forest fires are increasing in frequency and severity because of climate change and they're harming the health of millions of people annually. - The World Health Organization has said that forms of air pollution, including those from factories and vehicles, lead to an estimated 8.79 million premature deaths each year. The forest fires in Australia that burned from 2019 into 2020 resulted in tens of thousands of people fleeing their homes. But escaping the flames didn't put people out of harm's way. Those who managed to flee are still being affected by the intense pollution being released into the air. The 2019 fires in the Amazon rainforest in Brazil made the air poisonous for children. Here in western Canada forest fires have raged in the past couple of years in Fort McMurray and in Saskatchewan. In 2019, 13,000 people, mostly Indigenous from Northern Saskatchewan, were displaced into makeshift shelters in Alberta. The Fort McMurray fires closed a whole city and sent the population on the road.

These kinds of situations are becoming more common and although wildfires have been a fact of life in this part of the world they are happening more often. PWRDF has been there to help, to heal and to restore. Their commitment to the third Mark of Mission is exemplary. What can each of us do to change

our ways, our habits, deny ourselves in order to lift up the fifth Mark of Mission “To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth?”

## Prayer

*Almighty God,*

*You created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them.*

*And you created humankind in your own image and it was very good;*

*Grant us the courage to recognize our failure to maintain your creation.*

*And by your grace help us to halt the degradation of our environment.*

*Through Jesus Christ our Lord,*

*Who came that we might have life in all its fullness. Amen.*

*From Season of Creation ONE, [www.greenanglicans.org/resources/liturgical/](http://www.greenanglicans.org/resources/liturgical/)*

## What can I do to help?

Editor’s note: McMurray wildfires written by the Rev. David Greenwood, a priest in the Diocese of Athabasca and brother of PWRDF Diocesan Representative, Dorothy Marshall (Diocese of Edmonton).

My name is David Greenwood, and I am an Anglican priest in the Diocese of Athabasca, where I serve as an honorary assistant to the parish of All Saints in Fort McMurray. I am also a Sr. Systems Advisor for the Human Resources department of Syncrude Canada Ltd. and I am a husband, father of four great kids (who each married, so I now have 8 great kids) and, at present, five grandchildren.

And over us all, of course, is God. In other words, I’m a person just like you, doing what I think God wants me to, as best as I can.

[As a result of the wildfire] I lost everything — which is true, and which is false. You see, I have found there are many degrees of ‘lost everything.’ The clothes I am wearing are all that I have had for the past week; all that I left the house with. So, emotionally and literally all I had WERE the clothes on my back. But literally as opposed to emotionally, I still have my house, with all my belongings in it — which I may not be able to get back into for about a year, and which is basically worthless financially now.

While all I had with me for the past week was this one set of clothes, I knew my wife was safe, for she was in Toronto on a field trip with students from her school. I knew my kids were all safe, for they had grown up and moved away. And I knew that I, indeed all of us, we’re with God. Others though, even though they had been able to pack a bunch of stuff, they totally lost their homes — and for many people, that is very hard to take.

We knew there were fires about — Monday night water bombers had been going over where I live because of a fire just in the north of the city which they successfully put out. I was told there was another fire four km to the south that they were also working on.

That night I was at Compline with a good friend. We prayed, and I felt led to say, “no one will be harmed because of these fires.” It was a statement for which I had no factual competence to say.

For me, the fire experience started shortly after noon on Tuesday [May 3, 2016]. I worked in downtown Fort McMurray, and a co-worker showed me a picture of a wall of smoke with an orange tinge to it from the flames, behind trees on a hill. I asked, “Where did you get that picture?” And she said, “I just took it right behind us.”

Running out, I saw for myself: looking up at the valley hilltop to an area known as Abasand you could see a ridge of trees, and behind them the sky was filled with billowing clouds of smoke, orange and yellow at the bottom and sooty grey at the top.

I burst out laughing. And I thought, “Well, this is exciting!”

We left work, with the idea that we could pack up and get ready to evacuate, just in case things got bad. I felt confident though that we’d be okay — the fire was on this side of the Athabasca River, my house on the other. The river valley was about a kilometre wide. I really expected we’d be fine.

Getting home around 3:00 p.m. I filled the bathtubs with water to drink from in case there were problems with the water supply. I took our will out of the freezer, grabbed our passports, and was starting to pile up what I thought would be useful on the kitchen counter. I received a note from my friend Fr. Christopher, who was uncertain what to do. I said I would be right over and that he and his family could stay at my house until this blew over. Leaving everything on the counter, I drove the 5 minutes to his place. Heading back to my house, we hit gridlock on the main road. The Mounties were directing traffic and made me turn right instead of left, saying I’d have to take the long way home.

I’m still taking it.

**Read the whole story on our website at**

<https://pwrdf.org/what-can-i-do-to-help-a-first-hand-account-from-fort-mcmurray/>