

Moral themes, prayer and meditation: Christianity

Trees as features and metaphors in the Bible

After God and humans, trees are mentioned in the Bible more than any living thing. Every major character has a tree associated with them. For example:

- Noah received the olive branch (Genesis 8:11)
- Abraham sat under the oaks of Mamre (Genesis 18:1)
- Moses stood barefoot in front of the burning bush (Exodus 3:2-5)

Jesus died on a 'tree' (stripped of its branches and roots). Trees and plants are used symbolically. Trees, like Jesus, give rather than take and they keep giving.

Activity:

Discuss all the ways that trees support us: they give life and beauty, shade and rest; they clean the air and hold back erosion; they offer shelter, food, and protection.

Make a large cut-out silhouette of a tree, along with a pile of paper 'leaves'. Pupils should write their thoughts, wishes or prayers – linked to a theme if you're working through one (e.g. choices we make, sustainability, morality) – on to the leaves, and stick them all over the tree. They could add to these over the course of the topic, or over the course of a term.

'Physician, heal thyself'

Discuss how Christianity responds to global issues

Aim: Pupils consider the moral of Mathew 7 v4-5: "Physician, Heal Thyself".

Activity:

Facilitate a debate around the following issues:

- Humanity was once considered to be the centre of the world order, and early science supported this view.
- Copernicus, Darwin et al began to discover the co-dependent relationships between all living things and humanity is now beginning to separate ethics and morality.
- Control and technology rules to the detriment of the natural world.
- The old testament shows mankind as part of a created order, with the capacity to go astray.
- Have we gone too far astray now?

Christianity: stewardship

Garden of Eden

Aim: Pupils use the Garden of Eden story, and the quote from Genesis as a basis for discussion around the Christian principle of stewardship.

Activity:

Pupils read Genesis 1:29,

"Behold I have given to you every plant whose seed is sown, that is upon the face of all the earth, and every unfruitful tree for the requirements of building and for burning; and (every tree) on which there is fruit whose seed is sown shall be yours for food"

Christians were given responsibility by God to be stewards, to use The Earth wisely. God put Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden to look after it.

- Did they do so?
- What do the serpent and apple represent?

Compare faiths' attitudes to nature

Discuss how faiths respond to global issues

Aim: Pupils explore the similarities and differences between the faiths in their approach to the natural world.

Activity:

Facilitate a debate around the following issues:

- Every faith has much to offer the sustainability debate.
- Each enunciates principles still relevant to our present times of environmental crisis.
- Each teaches similar a message in different ways, such as concerns for humanity and the world it has responsibility for, and that we are inheritors from the past and trustees with responsibility for the future.
- Which faiths place greatest value on stewardship of the Earth?