

LIVING AS CHRISTIANS IN A COMPLEX WORLD: A HOMEGROUP DISCUSSION SERIES ON SOME TOPICAL ISSUES

CLIMATE CHANGE: AN EXISTENTIAL ISSUE

To begin this session, I have recorded a short introductory video which you can access on You Tube [link]

This session is about Climate Change. This is an important subject, because one of the five Marks of Mission of the Church of England commits us: *To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth*

Unusually, perhaps, we are not going to begin with a video showing the dramatic effects of atmospheric disturbances and increasingly turbulent weather patterns. You only have to switch on your TV news to see that, or take a look at a selection of YouTube videos. Sir David Attenborough has, for many years, been sharing graphic evidence of the effects of climate change on the natural world and has done probably more than anyone to raise awareness of the issues and consequences arising from our relentless use of fossil fuels.

We know only too well what is happening to our world. We know that for too long, because of our reliance on fossil fuels, we have been pumping greenhouse gasses into the earth's atmosphere and that, as a result, warming is happening at an almost inexorable rate which the earth cannot absorb or adapt to. And scientists keep giving us apocalyptic warnings of the catastrophic effects of that - ecologically, economically and socially. That has driven many to ask what kind of a world future generations - our grandchildren - will inherit.

Climate change is undoubtedly the biggest threat to humanity and a growing threat to nature. Efforts have been made in the past - I'm sure you'll be aware of the Paris Accord in 2015 where 194 countries got together and agreed to attempt to limit global earth temperatures to 2 degrees by reducing carbon emissions. But as you'll also know, none of the commitments entered into at Paris carried mandatory enforcement, so it was left to individual governments to act or not as they chose.

So this session asks: what can Christians and churches do to make a difference?

In November the UK government will host the critical international climate negotiations known as 'COP26' – the 26th Conference of Parties (signatory countries) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Much is at stake at this conference, and it has been described as the last best chance to avoid global climate catastrophe. Hosting and chairing it is a unique responsibility for the British government. It also presents a unique opportunity for British Christians and churches to

understand the key issues better and *act* on them, in service of our creator God, nature and all people.

To learn more about COP26, here is a briefing video from A Rocha UK:

https://m.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=152&v=J5khQBsDpOQ&feature=emb_logo

Here is a reflection by Margot Hodson, a Vicar in Oxfordshire and a member of the A Rocha board:

“Many years ago, I was given a beautiful, dark blue skirt from northern India. It was a mirror skirt, with silver thread woven through it – and I loved it and wore it almost all the time! Over the years it became a mottled mauve skirt, and began to look worn and faded. I wished I had fixed the colour when I first had it. I have since discovered that colour fixing is so easy – providing you have salt.

Salt is amazing, and dye-fixing is just one of its qualities: it is good for preserving and for improving flavour. With bread, it strengthens a loaf’s texture as it rises; it helps to bind food together and makes colour more vivid. Traditionally it was used for healing, and it’s still good for treating wounds. We can eat too much of course, but it is also vital for our health.

As we ask what Christians can do in the run-up to the COP26 climate summit, we should remember that Jesus calls us to be salt (Matthew 5:13-16). This means that all those qualities of preserving, flavouring, holding things together, making communities brighter and more enduring, and especially bringing healing, all make up our calling as we approach this.

Jesus also calls us to be light. There is tremendous anxiety among those concerned for the environment, and the term ‘climate grief’ is being used to describe the feelings of many who mourn the damage that humans have already done to the natural world and fear that the very worst will happen with runaway climate change.

As Christians, we have hope that one day creation will be renewed and restored. Being light means that something of that future hope can be made visible in the present – not in a way that denies the challenges of the present, where hope may be fading, nor ‘other-worldly’, simply looking to the future, and not engaging with the present. Being light means that our future hope gives us resilience to live *now* – whatever happens and however tough it gets. As things get darker, so even the smallest light becomes more visible and can bring hope.

So, in our local and online communities, work environments, networks and organisations, let us be salt and light to an increasingly hurting world. “

A Rocha have called us to pray along these lines:

- Churches in the UK to be awakened to the climate emergency: for many who have not yet acted on climate to get involved for the first time, and for those who have, to go deeper.
- Wisdom for politicians and the UN to know how to keep momentum going for action in this long-term crisis.
- Boris Johnson and COP President Alok Sharma in their key roles as hosts to be unwavering and courageous in leading countries towards committing to Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) that hold global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.
- Wisdom and compassion for agencies leading campaigns during the Covid-19 pandemic to be able to draw attention to the climate emergency, and to find appropriate and creative ways to engage people when planned events are cancelled.
- People in poverty who live with the reality of climate change impacts every day.

Also linked via this page is another Reflection, this time from our friend, Bishop David Atkinson, published on the Green Christian website. [Link]

So what *can* Christians and churches do to make a difference? This is for you to discuss now. Here are a few questions that might help guide your discussion:

Given that this entire series is about how we live as disciples of Jesus in a complex world, what principles ought we to bear in mind as we seek to live differently and faithfully before God?

Are we prepared to exemplify a different way of living, even if it means rethinking our desires and exercising costly restraint?

Do you agree that the warnings about climate change are a wake-up call? Or do you think the scientists have been “crying wolf”, with the result that nothing much will happen after the forthcoming COP26 Conference? Why do you think this?

What might all this mean in practice? At a personal level, as a church community, and as a nation?

The All Saints’ “Green Group” worked hard to acquire our Bronze and Silver Eco-Church award. But what more do you think we could do to make our parish more eco-aware and eco-friendly? Would you be willing to participate - and even lead - the Green Group in the future, to help identify new environmental measures we could take and make changes happen? [If so, please let Revd Jeremy know!]

And finally....

Bishop David was on the Board of “Operation Noah” who, in 2012, published a call to the Church supported by a number of eminent leaders including Rowan Williams (then Archbishop of Canterbury), Desmond Tutu (Archbishop of Cape Town, Richard Chartres (then Bishop of London), Barry Morgan (then Archbishop of Wales) and others. To aid your reflections on this important subject, here is a summary of

FIND JOY IN CREATION!

According to the witness of our Scriptures, everything that we have, life and the means of life, comes to us as gift. This is the ground of our worship. The beauty and harmony of God's creation is for all cultures a source of human wellbeing, spiritual nourishment and joy. Christians understand God's relation to creation in three ways. All reality comes from God the Father; the flourishing of the

How many are your works, Lord!
In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures...
May the Lord rejoice in his works. PSALM 104:24, 31

earth and its future are foundational to the mission of God (and therefore to the Church's mission). God embraces material reality in Jesus in whom all things hold together (Colossians 1:17). God the Spirit gives life to all reality at all times and in all places. 'The love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit,' (Romans 5:5) overflows in our love and care for all God's creatures.

LISTEN!

In recent decades, and with increasing urgency, climate scientists have warned of the dangers of catastrophic climate change resulting from human activity. Instability in weather systems is already bringing destruction and suffering to millions of people. In the light of the best knowledge we have, climate change could result in the loss of livelihoods and sometimes of life for huge numbers of people and the extinction of countless species.

I appointed watchmen over you and said;
"Listen to the sound of the trumpet!" JEREMIAH 6:17

This matters because the wellbeing of all creation matters to God (Psalm 145:9). Prophets are those who speak truth, usually uncomfortable truth, to their generation. In ancient Israel, prophets were always shadowed by false prophets, representing the ruling powers. We must listen to the scientists warning us of approaching dangers, exercise discernment, and be wary of 'false prophets' representing the vested interests of the powerful.

REPENT!

Continuing to pollute the atmosphere when we know the dangers, goes against what we know of God's ways and God's will. We are failing to love not only the earth, but our neighbours and ourselves, who are made in God's image. God grieves over the destruction of creation and so should we.

Jesus said; "The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near.
Repent and believe the good news!" MARK 1:14-15

Repentance means finding creative, constructive and immediate ways of addressing the danger. It happens when God's Spirit enables a change of mind and change of heart, prompting a turn from past wrong and a decision to change direction. For our generation, reducing our dependence on fossil fuels has become essential to Christian discipleship.

TAKE RESPONSIBILITY!

Humans, made in God's image, have unique responsibility for the wellbeing of creation (Genesis 1:26, 2:15). We are to care for the earth because it is gift, the product of God's love. No sparrow falls without God knowing. Humanity has always had the capacity to destroy our environment, but today

The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers, the heavens languish with the earth. The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant. ISAIAH 24:4-5

we have this to an unprecedented extent. Whereas previous generations did not know the damage they were causing, we do. We must use our power wisely to promote the flourishing of future generations and the diversity of life on earth. This is the responsibility of every Church and every believer.

SEEK JUSTICE!

God is just and requires justice in response from us. This justice applies to poor communities already suffering the devastating consequences of climate change, to future generations, and to all other creatures. The prophets put economic behaviour at the forefront of their call to justice. The primary driver of human induced climate change is the belief that prosperity depends on limitless consumption of the earth's resources. Today, the challenge is to seek a different, sustainable economy, based on

He will judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice. The mountains will bring prosperity to the people, the hills the fruit of righteousness. He will defend the afflicted among the people, and save the children of the needy; he will crush the oppressor. PSALM 72:2-4

the values of human flourishing and the wellbeing of all creation, not on the assumption of unlimited economic growth, on overconsumption, exploitative interest and debt.

To seek justice for all, for present and future generations, our authorities must encourage and enable all people to live fairly and sustainably. Acting justly requires us to hold our governments and corporations to account.

LOVE OUR NEIGHBOURS!

Christ teaches us to love all our neighbours, not just our own family and friends. This love extends to our grandchildren and future generations. People in poor communities are mostly innocent of any role in causing climate change, whilst the nations that pollute the most, refuse to accept their responsibilities. Loving our neighbour requires us to reduce our consumption of energy for the sake

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. MATTHEW 7:12

of Christ, who suffers with those who suffer. To live simply and sustainably contributes significantly to human flourishing. As the nations fight over dwindling energy resources, Christians need to bear witness that the way to life, and not death, is the way of non-retaliation. In the future, Christians may also be called to receive into their communities refugees forced to leave their lands through climate change.

ACT WITH HOPE!

Hope in God motivates us to take action that can lead to transformation, for by God's power at work within us, God is able to accomplish more than we can ask or imagine. Despite the strong probability of very serious effects from global warming, for Christians despair is not an option. It is when we follow Christ and the way of the Cross, in response to his grace, that we experience the God of hope who gives us joy and peace. We are called to faith and action in trusting response to the God made known by the Holy Spirit in the life, death

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. ROMANS 15:13

and resurrection of Jesus, the Lord of all life. As Christians we can live in hope, despite the dangers that threaten us.

Through God we hope for new life for all creation (Romans 8:19-25). Our planet, made new by the meeting of heaven and earth, will have an abiding value in the purpose of God (Revelation 21:1-5). We are called to live and work with hope in response to God's gift, and in the light of God's future: the promised coming of Christ's reign over all.

the theology that underpinned their call: