

NAURC Worship at Ipswich Rd
Sunday 27th September 2020
Climate change and us as Christians
Led by Audrey Elliott

Introduction

Why are we looking at climate change in worship?

Over 20 years ago, Churches Together in England produced a document: “5 Marks of Mission”-some of you may have heard of it. The document is based on the belief that mission is the purpose of every place where the body of Christ meets in fellowship and the marks of mission show what should be included. The 5th of these marks is : *to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of earth*

But as Ecochurch Scotland says: Climate change is not an ‘issue’ or ‘outreach opportunity’. It is the biggest spiritual and moral challenge that society has ever faced and asks questions which go to the heart of our worship.

The URC Environmental Policy (Did you know there was one?) puts into words what we may know in our hearts, but can’t explain and to be honest, I could just read the policy instead of saying anything else! I will put a link to it on the website with the other paper information relating to this service.

Here are a couple of excerpts from it:

....We believe that God entrusts creation to our care, calling us to be stewards of it; calls us to be partners in God’s ongoing creative, renewing and redeeming activity; commands us to act justly and in righteousness not only towards our fellow human beings but to all creation; and requires us to care for creation so that future generations, whom God also loves, can enjoy it and benefit from it.

....We affirm that Christian mission includes caring for God’s earth and all creation. It includes acknowledging humankind’s responsibility, sharing in putting right the relationships within God’s creation that have gone wrong, and working within the church and with partners outside the church to grow towards justice and good stewardship as envisaged in the biblical vision of the world as it is meant to be.. When you look at the problem of climate change in this context, we as Christians **MUST** do our part

Reading :Philippians 2 1-13 NIV and is read by Jim Elliott

2 Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain

conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

⁶ Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

⁷ rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,

¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

¹² Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

Reflection

The reading we have just heard emphasises how we should always be aiming to have the same mindset as Christ who is in the very nature of God.

There are many references to God the author of creation throughout the Bible and I found a really interesting quote on the Eco-congregation Scotland website which helped me get to grips with the links between Christianity and our need to be more responsible for our world: *“Both the Bible and Christian tradition have some vital and profound insights into care of what the world terms the ‘environment’ but which the Church understands as God’s creation. Approaching environmental issues through Christian ‘lenses’ offers valuable ethical and spiritual dimensions that may contribute to environmental work both within and outside the church. It is also an approach filled with hope. So often, environmental issues are dealt with against a background of fear and threat....”*

So-substitute the word “environment” for “creation” in many Bible readings and things become clearer.

But what is the problem?

National Geographic puts it quite succinctly: *Climate change is the long-term alteration of temperature and typical weather patterns in a place. ... Climate change*

may cause weather patterns to be less predictable. These unexpected weather patterns can make it difficult to maintain and grow crops in regions that rely on farming because expected temperature and rainfall levels can no longer be relied on. Climate change has also been connected with other damaging weather events such as more frequent and more intense hurricanes, floods, downpours, and winter storms.....The cause of current climate change is largely human activity, like burning fossil fuels, like natural gas, oil, and coal.

Last week, John spoke about how we, as God's people, are connected within God's wider creation-whether we are connected across the world or across time.

Material produced for services in this season of creation, includes the statement: "Climate change is a result of the intersection of greed, inequality and destruction of God's Earth."

Put those 2 sentences together and you can see why we should be thinking about climate change in this time of worship. We are part of God's creation, we are connected through space and time, but as part of God's creation, we have a responsibility to praise it and to look after it. Look around you at God's creation-what isn't to be praised?

Whether it be the wonder of harvest crops the beauty of our countryside, the sound of the birds, the wonder of a new born baby or animal, the ingenuity of man in creating the most amazing structures or machines, the ability God gives to inventors, scientists, engineers, artists-the list goes on. Sadly sometimes we don't just accept God's creation and wonder at it, we want more-we want cheaper food, we want cheaper and more energy, we want more money, we want more consumable goods, we want to get to places quicker so we want more aeroplanes, faster roads, faster cars, faster trains etc. This leads to wider roads, larger airports, wider railway lines, more powerful cars and trains -but at what cost?

But our greed doesn't just mean bigger buildings, more goods in the shops or online in this country-it has far wider implications--as many of you know, I visit my daughter in Bangalore when I can. I first went there in 2006-it was known then as the Garden City, Streets were lined with the most beautiful trees, there was lots of open space and it was safe to walk across MG Road which was in 2006 the main road around central Bangalore.

I last went there in 2018. In the intervening years, Bangalore has changed rapidly-it is now more often known as Silicon City-IT firms from all over the world are based there-this has meant that there has been an incredible number of new buildings on the outskirts-but to get to them, roads had to be widened which meant houses with big gardens were knocked down, trees pulled up and even small hills levelled for building materials. High rise buildings took their place, which meant that builders and other craftsmen came in from outlying villages, which meant that they needed somewhere to live (usually under tarpaulins on the building site), their children needed schools, more hospitals were needed, the water supply is not sufficient, the

electricity cuts out or its use is rationed throughout the day. You can smell the pollution in the air from the traffic. It is no longer safe to walk across MG Road.

This is the reality of our greed. This situation is no doubt copied in many of what were known as third world countries as we demand more goods. Silicon City was to some extent a blessing. Because of its geographical situation and better climate than many Indian cities, Bangalore was always likely to expand as time went on. Many cities like it would have expanded industrially to produce goods for us to buy and added the noise and fumes from those units to the problems of roads and housing. What right have we to destroy the lives of those people who live in these countries? Why should those with money, trample over the lifestyle of those without?

And all of this extra pollution, demand for cheap food, fast travel, excess use of heat and water cause our climate to change at an alarming rate. As the Season of creation material says: *"We are in the midst of a climate emergency this is a time to acknowledge that tipping points are being reached, threatening the lives of the most vulnerable and putting the lives of future generations in jeopardy. As Christians, we cannot be in the image of God, try to follow what Jesus would have done and ignore what is happening."*

As Christians we are called to avoid and, where possible, to repair the damage humanity inflicts on the created order.

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What can we do to live fully as a Christian in this difficult time? :

What are some practical things we can do to change our behaviour and our attitudes?

It's not actually rocket science!

In July, Mission Council passed a resolution from The National URC Youth Assembly that the Council, on behalf of the whole URC officially recognise the climate emergency, It also asked that local churches across the denomination be challenged to "make conscious changes to their practices in order to reflect this."

At Ipswich Road URC for a number of years, we have been trying to become more environmentally friendly-building wise we have installed solar panels, double glazed windows, cavity insulation, air conditioning units, water butts etc. I had heard about the Eco church awards run by A Rocha-Bungay URC is a gold star Eco church, so last November with Elders' approval, I registered Ipswich Road URC as an Eco Church. To be honest, before registering I thought we were well on our way to achieving at least the bronze level, but that's because I thought it was mainly about buildings. Other Elders were equally surprised at the breadth of the questions we have to answer to work towards each award. They are split into 5 sections: Worship and teaching, Buildings, land, Community and global engagement and lifestyle. I answered the questions as best I could and Peter has amended some from his knowledge of the buildings .As you can see from the slide-in some areas we

are scoring higher than others-although for the scores to be a bit more accurate, we need the survey to be completed through discussion with a small group of people. If you attend Ipswich Road URC and would like to be involved-please let me know-it's something which can be done via Zoom!!

The questions asked, provide the steps which we as a church need to achieve and which we also need to encourage you all to take, in order to help slow down climate change and to look after our environment in the way that Jesus would have done. We can't all be Greta Thunberg or David Attenborough, but we can take play our part.

So what can we do? From the 101 points in the survey , I have chosen just a few to start us off:

- limit our/your waste by adhering to the principles of reduce, re-use, recycle:
- use food at home that is LOAF (Locally grown, Organic, Animal-friendly, Fairtrade)
- Invest any savings ethically
- Use energy efficient lightbulbs
- Use a water meter
- Use recycled paper products where possible
- Grow plants that benefit bees and butterflies
- Provide bird boxes, bug boxes etc in our gardens
- Share amongst us including in our church newsletters/on our church website practical lifestyle tips and advice on caring for God's earth

These are just a fraction of the actions Eco Church recommends, they are small steps, but they add up. If we want to do our part in slowing down climate change, these are really good places to start. As I said, they are not rocket science-but they are helping us live as God wants us to. Maybe we think we can't change-but with God's help, we can.