

Care of God's Creation ...

... as a Way of Life

The sermon given at the Parish Communion Service, on 27th October 2019 by the Associate Vicar, the Revd. Wendy Wale, in Beverley Minster.

1 Chronicles 29:10-18; Luke 18:18-30

"I don't go to church to hear about the environment."

This hasn't got anything to do with me. Worse has happened before- we don't need to worry.

Climate change is just made up to scare us. It's God's world, he'll look after it.

It's all just too much- I can't cope.

If we're honest- we've probably thought all of those thoughts at some point in our lives- perhaps you're thinking them now....I get it. It's much easier to write this sermon than to live it out....

The rich young ruler would agree....

"Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."

It was all going so well - Jesus was about to confirm his spiritual credentials...he knew he could tick the boxes, If you heard Tim's sermon last week...this man 'did the right thing'....he'd kept all the commandments since he was a boy- I imagine we could tick most of them too....no murder (tick) no theft (yup) no adultery (nope) never born false witness (ummm, not entirely sure what that could mean- but probably not), honour your father and mother.....hmmmmm, getting harder- but the young man was confident his life was good, his heart was clear, he was a regular worshipper, he no doubt gave money to the temple, wore the correct clothing, ate the right food.....then the bomb shell, the casual suggestion that cut to the heart of this young man's complacency.

“Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.”

Jesus didn't ask everyone to sell their possessions- but the point here is clear....following Jesus isn't just about a moral and religious personal purity- but about an active engagement with the world which includes those in poverty- a leaving behind of personal comfort zones . A willingness to see beyond one's own family, friends and groupings to the needs of others and the impact our carefully constructed comfort has on the systemic whole.

We heard last week that creation care is a justice issue and that the choices we make in the industrialized west have direct impact on the global community- from plastic washed up across oceans to global warming causing environmental disasters in the poorest and vulnerable regions of the world. Christian Aid produced a report (Hunger Strike) which demonstrated how the 10 most food- insecure nations in the world generate just 0.08% of global carbon emissions. As the planet warms, agriculture and food supplies are being disrupted, which is disproportionately impacting underdeveloped countries. Bangladesh is ranked top, #1 for food insecurity and bottom (113th out of 113) for carbon emissions.

God may not be calling us to sell all our possessions and give them to the poor- but ignoring the interconnectedness of our planet, it's resources and the impact of global greed is not an option. I wonder if we might be helped by the story of the building of the temple in 1 Chronicles. The plans that are set out before the people of God are mind-blowingly ambitious with unimaginable amounts of resources required. Just before the passage we heard read this morning, it says:

Who then will offer willingly, consecrating themselves today to the LORD?”

⁶ Then the leaders of ancestral houses made their freewill offerings, as did also the leaders of the tribes, the commanders of the thousands and of the hundreds, and the officers over the king's work. ⁷ They gave for the service of the house of God five thousand talents and ten thousand darics of gold, ten thousand talents of silver, eighteen thousand talents of bronze, and one hundred thousand talents of iron. ⁸

Whoever had precious stones gave them to the treasury of the house of the LORD, into the care of Jehiel the Gershonite. ⁹ Then the people rejoiced because these had given willingly, for with single mind they had offered freely to the LORD; King David also rejoiced greatly.

The people of God take great delight in giving freely to the project- the temple that will last beyond their lifetime, something permanent when so much else is fleeting. They also cling lightly to their wealth, recognizing that without God, they would have nothing and so they are simply giving back to God what God has given to them....

For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you. ¹⁵ For we are aliens and transients before you, as were all our ancestors; our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope. ¹⁶ O LORD our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building you a house for your holy name comes from your hand and is all your own.

This passage is often used to encourage people to give money to the church or to a good cause- and rightly so....but it is also a vivid picture of the call to ALL people to take active care of creation so that it remains a flourishing glorious permanence for our children and their children's children.

So, what could it look like for God's people to take a lead in joyfully, freely, demonstrating that we are seeking to give back to our planet, to take seriously the call to look after God's creation?

We are, of course, hugely aware of the economic complexities and implications of all of our choices- from the simple fact that buying organic food costs more, through to the competitive financing of international corporations which can shout louder than any other voice, cause or concern. This is an important area explore, but not within our time frame this morning - instead,

I'm going to end this talk with 2 suggestions of things we can do together and 2 things we can do individually to make a practical difference. This is not about the few, young or the powerful, it's not about making people feel guilty or overwhelmed....this is about many playing their part joyfully and determinedly- recognizing that all we have comes

from God and wanting to share the resources of our world more fairly, loving our neighbours in Bangladesh and Chad, as ourselves.

As a church we've conducted the Eco Church Survey and have appointed champions to help take us forward in reducing our carbon footprint.

Worship and Teaching	Vicar, with the Associate Vicar
Buildings	Peter Mounstephen, with John Bull and Simon Delaney
Land	Clive Waddington is considering whether to take this on
Community and Global Engagement	Meg Choules will take this on, but cannot begin yet
Lifestyle	Bridget Bawn

It's early days....but exciting times as we continue to learn and work together. On a more national and global level, I invite those of you who use the internet to log on to the Christian Aid website (as a starting point) and begin signing petitions- adding your voice to thousands, calling upon government and industry to take their responsibilities seriously in relation to the environment. I've signed 2 whilst researching for this sermon, it took 5 minutes- adding my voice to the many asking the government and a major bank to invest in renewable energy considering the impact of carbon emissions on the poorest countries. There are many others and you will find yourself on a steep learning curve- and an interactive one.

Which leads me nicely to my 2 individual suggestions- firstly, whatever your starting point on this journey - and I'm aware many are much more engaged and informed than I am....read and learn some more. Whether it's about climate change, soil usage and animal care, environmental theology or practical suggestions- there are books and websites galore- I'll post a list on line as well as leaving you a printed version for those who don't use a computer.

Finally, for those who would like to know more and just aren't sure where to start....WWF (World Wildlife Fund) has a simple online tool to help you calculate your carbon footprint....and I have a Personal Lifestyle Audit which I can email to anyone who asks- and will leave some hard copies in the office for those without email access.

It asks simple questions about our energy use, transport, waste, money, possessions, garden and food- and invites us to make small, simple changes that will benefit God's creation. Tom and I have looked at it and now need to prioritise some actions...

God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.....let's help keep it that way!

Link for Small Group Bible Study with Environmental Audit at the end....

<https://www.stpaulsdorking.org.uk/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=236621>

Reading Texts

1 Chronicles 29:10-18

¹⁰ Then David blessed the LORD in the presence of all the assembly; David said: “Blessed are you, O LORD, the God of our ancestor Israel, forever and ever. ¹¹ Yours, O LORD, are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and on the earth is yours; yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all. ¹² Riches and honour come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might; and it is in your hand to make great and to give strength to all. ¹³ And now, our God, we give thanks to you and praise your glorious name. ¹⁴ “But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to make this freewill offering? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you. ¹⁵ For we are aliens and transients before you, as were all our ancestors; our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope. ¹⁶ O LORD our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building you a house for your holy name comes from your hand and is all your own. ¹⁷ I know, my God, that you search the heart, and take pleasure in uprightness; in the uprightness of my heart I have freely offered all these things, and now I have seen your people, who are present here, offering freely and joyously to you. ¹⁸ O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our ancestors, keep forever such purposes and thoughts in the hearts of your people, and direct their hearts toward you.

Luke 18:18-30

¹⁸ A certain ruler asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ¹⁹ Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. ²⁰ You know the commandments: ‘You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honour your father and mother.’” ²¹ He replied, “I have kept all these since my youth.” ²² When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money[a] to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” ²³ But when he heard this, he became sad; for he was very rich. ²⁴ Jesus looked at him and said, “How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” ²⁶ Those who heard it said, “Then who can be saved?” ²⁷ He replied, “What is impossible for mortals is possible for God.” ²⁸ Then Peter said, “Look, we have left our homes and followed you.” ²⁹ And he said to them, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, ³⁰ who will not get back very much more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life.”