

# The Environment ...

## *... News from Northern Argentina*

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*Greetings from the Rt Revd Bishop Nick Drayson, Bishop of Northern Argentina and Primate of the Anglican Church of South America, given by video link on 9th October 2022 in Beverley Minster*

*Romans 8:18-22; John 6:1-13*

Hi. This is Nick Grayson greeting you from Northern Argentina. It's actually winter here, but it's quite warm. And as you can see, we're in a forested region. Most of the area around here is scrub forest, one sort or another and it's the largest area of forests after the Amazon in South America. So that's where I'm speaking to you from and joining you at this time of the season of creation, when churches around the world are thinking and acting together on the whole question of loss of biodiversity, climate change and the problems of how to care for creation. Latin America is a beautiful continent with stunning variety of habitats, from mountains and plains to forests and jungles and the sea, of course, the coast. And where we are in the north, as I say, it's mainly forested and the people we work with are the indigenous people who are hunter gatherers, so the forest is their home. And in recent years, we have seen a huge growth in what we call the extractive industry, mining and logging: particularly logging is the one that affects the people here most and if you want to draw on the famous line, 'Don't cry for me, Argentina' the weeping is for those who are losing their forest home. Where the forest once seemed so huge it would never disappear, now huge swathes of forests are being cut down, not just in the chacra where we are, but in the Amazon. There are fires and there's deliberate clearing of forests for sowing soya and for developing cattle ranching. And that affects not only the environment, but also the people who live here, who are indeed weeping for the loss of their home.

Pope Francis has reminded us that we have a common home, that this planet we share is our home. And where one part of it is being destroyed, it affects those in another part. So we have a local expression of that, where people lived from forest fruits, from animals, from fishing, they are now facing a barren landscape. But also, of course, what happens to the forest where we are, affects climate change in other parts of the world. And that is the situation we have here, as we care not only for the people and try to help those who are fighting to protect the land (and this is something our diocese is very heavily involved in, helping with land rights, helping prevent logging; it's a legal and political battle very often), but also caring for creation, the 'fifth mark of mission' to safeguard and help creation to flourish on the basis that what God loves, what God made, what God created is our

responsibility also to love and care for and help to flourish. And so, in different ways, we seek to create, to protect and bless the creation around us, which, as I say, is stunning - but is being depleted and is being degraded. Mining, of course, is another major issue in parts of our area in the Andes particularly: mining which is illegal and mining which is legal, both degrade and affect the environment and ultimately affect the planet in terms of climate change. So this is our situation here in Latin America.

The good news is that throughout the world, God's people are waking up to our responsibility to care for creation. Whether this is done locally through greater care of what we do with plastic, what we do with recycling, how we use energy in our churches, in our homes and so on, or whether increasingly this can be done at a political level, putting pressure, particularly in democracies, putting pressure on governments to produce green and environment-friendly policies. This is something that we can do in Argentina and you can do in Britain. It's something that the Anglican Communion has been doing increasingly. And I would draw your attention to some of the literature that is available on websites to do with the 'Communion Forest', to do with the Anglican Communion environmental network, organisations like A Rocha. There's an immense amount that can be done locally, both where you are and where we are, and globally through policymaking and influencing those in power.

So we have a wonderful creation to protect. It is in danger through extractive industries and we are called to care for our neighbours and also to care for what God loves and what God has made. So as I send this greeting, I would encourage you as you look at Eco Church, as you look at the season of creation as a congregation, don't feel there's nothing you can do. There's a huge amount you can do. But we are already feeling the effects of climate change. We, perhaps in our area because of deforestation, are contributing sadly to climate change, but we're also experiencing unusual weather: floods; snow; whirlwinds; heatwaves; fires - just like in other parts of Europe. This is surely because of the heating up of the planet and protecting the forest and the mountains and our environment is a huge step that we need to take as part of our Christian discipleship.

So please join us as we protect the forest and as we join you in protecting the planet against unnecessary climate change, which becomes climate injustice and climate emergency. So it's a serious business, but we have a wonderful world to live in and to protect. So may we take this seriously, recognise the danger we're in and turn to the Lord in prayer, but also with action. Don't cry for me, Argentina, but speak out for me, Argentina. God bless you.

*Revd Canon Jonathan Baker, vicar, adds...*

And just to connect what Bishop Nick was saying with our first reading this morning, that passage from Romans 8 is a great vision of all of creation, healed and renewed. But what is rather wonderful about it is that it draws a connection between the salvation of human beings and the renewal of the planet. We tend to focus on human salvation and Jesus's death on the cross, making our forgiveness and new life possible, but in some mysterious way that is connected with the future of planet Earth or with the whole created order. So just as we don't save ourselves, but we receive it by grace, also, ultimately, the future of the planet is in God's hands and he can be trusted with it and he's not about to walk away from the universe he has made. So in that sense, there is a deep and profound hope, despite all the gloom that can emerge in this situation. But just as our salvation is incomplete until we receive it and say 'yes' and respond in faith and obedience, so the future of the planet is where we're invited to be co-creators with God, just like Adam. And we're invited to respond to God with faith and obedience, in caring not just for each other, but for the environment around us.

So I believe there is good news there, there is something hopeful because the future is in God's hands. But there is also a responsibility that we're invited to shoulder and to reflect in our daily lives.

# Reading Texts

## Romans 8:18-23

<sup>18</sup> I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. <sup>19</sup> For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; <sup>20</sup> for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup> We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; <sup>23</sup> and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

## John 6:1-13

<sup>1</sup> After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. <sup>2</sup> A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. <sup>3</sup> Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. <sup>4</sup> Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. <sup>5</sup> When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" <sup>6</sup> He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. <sup>7</sup> Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." <sup>8</sup> One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, <sup>9</sup> "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?" <sup>10</sup> Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. <sup>11</sup> Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. <sup>12</sup> When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost." <sup>13</sup> So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets.