



Address given by Chris Wright on Sunday 31 January during our Sustainability-themed service

This is not a 'sermon' but rather a Reflection. First to reflect some aspects of the Climate Crisis back to you and then to reflect on the implications for our faith.

The paramount point is that the Climate Crisis is both a JUSTICE ISSUE and a SPIRITUAL ISSUE, and the two cannot be separated. In this short address I can give some pointers and it is for all of us to consider how we develop them.

In the autumn of 2019, which seems like an aeon ago, I attended a Climate Conference at St Paul's Church in Cambridge jointly organised by Amos Trust and A Rocha under the title Once in a Lifetime, with presentations from representatives of at least 24 organisations, some local, some global. It was an impressive achievement, and a model of what could be, just to bring such a richly diverse group together to work collaboratively.

I draw upon my notes and memory for some of what I want to say today. Also last July's Place Matters, which focussed on the Climate Crisis, is well worth re-visiting. Fundamental to all that was said at the Conference is the assertion that the Climate Crisis is a Justice Issue, encompassing so many other Justice Issues of our day: gender, race, poverty, education, health provision..... All of these are summed up in the Nazareth Manifesto which, St Luke tells us, launched Jesus's public ministry when he quoted words from Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me; he has sent me to announce good news to the poor, to proclaim release for prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind; to let the broken victims go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

The strap line for Once in a Lifetime conference might be seen as a version of that Manifesto for our time, "Climate change is a Justice Issue. Those who have the least political and economic power, and the least responsibility for the changing climate, are affected the most. We have a moral and ethical imperative to respond to their call for immediate action."

"Immediate action" can take many forms and each of us must choose where in the range our level of involvement might be, but I urge you not to set your level at Zero. Dave Bookless, in a book called Planet Wise, identifies 4 categories of response to the matter by Christians. I sincerely hope that none of us would see ourselves in his groups 1 and 2; the Insidious, who feel that 'ecology and environmental issues are a bit dodgy, and Christians should keep well clear,' or, 2, Irrelevant, 'Caring for the earth is not important for Christians. The gospel is about saving souls, not saving seals.' But Response 3, Incidental, might be closer to home; 'I'm glad somebody's caring for the planet, just as long it doesn't have to be me!' But God's creation isn't an optional extra for the enthusiasts, any more than prayer and worship are optional extras. Dave calls Response 4 Integral; 'Concern for the whole of God's creation is fundamental to the God of the Bible, and to God's purpose for human beings.'

So how do we show our concern? The reaction that we are tempted to make, and which places us firmly back in group 3, the Incidentals, is that the problems of Climate change are so vast that any small action I might take is pointless. The answer to that is summed up in the Swahili proverb that I learnt as a small boy in Dar es Salaam and have quoted before, 'Haba na haba

hujasa kibaba', which means, 'Grain and more grain fills up the measure.' Every grain counts, every drop of water in the ocean counts, every action that we can take counts. We cannot all do spectacular things. We aren't all able to install solar panels or ground source heat pumps, much as we might wish to. We cannot all abandon our cars, though it is something well worth consideration. But I hope that we are all doing more than changing the light bulbs and checking the loft insulation, important as those are.

The Covid lockdown prevents mass gatherings and protest marches but we can still raise our voices in protest by signing petitions to remind governments, local authorities and big business that they are being held accountable. Charlotte Thompson's petition to ban outdoor heaters which she writes about in the December/January Place Matters is an excellent example to us all. Thanks for this initiative, Charlotte. Have you signed it? If you question the effectiveness of such action, I remind you again of my Swahili proverb.

Our government pledges to reduce carbon emissions by 68% by 2030 and knows that it is in the Eco spotlight as it prepares to chair the Glasgow COPT 26 summit in November and to host the G7 conference in Cornwall to launch, it claims, a Green Recovery from Covid-19. Unbelievably this same government has given the go-ahead for the West Cumbria coal mine which will release 9 million tonnes of carbon emissions over the Lake District every year until 2050, as well as sending 3 million tonnes of coking coal to Germany each year to pollute their air. I know that the Bible tells us that the right hand shouldn't know what the left is doing, but I don't think Jesus had government departments in mind. As the COPT 26 date comes closer we need to be alert to the issues and be ready to use our single grains of influence as fully as we can. Where MP's are on side, encourage them. Where they are ambivalent, prod them.

Despite the non-travel of 2020 in response to the pandemic, the drop in fossil fuel burning was only 7% and heat-trapping carbon in the atmosphere continued to build to a new record, alongside the record number of wildfires in Australia and the record 29 tropical storms in the Atlantic, according to the EU's Copernicus Service. Alongside this in a recent Guardian Weekly, a report in Nature Climate Change claims that, if emissions are cut quickly, global temperature could stabilise within decades. The emphasis is on rapid, large scale cuts in emissions.

Achieving Climate Justice is not a straightforward matter. For instance, the government recently announced that all new vehicles must be electric by 2030 as a way of reducing fossil fuel dependency. It sounds great, but achieving this would require 12% of the entire world supply of copper. Most of the lithium and cobalt needed for lightweight batteries comes from DRC where many mines are reliant on child labour. So it is an ethical, moral and resources issue. The far better alternative is a drastic reduction of private vehicles combined with much improved public transport,- plus bicycles and feet of course.

Speaker after speaker at the Once in a Lifetime Conference placed emphasis on the need for a wider transformation, a restorative economy, for finding ways to take the whole community with us. The Churches have a role in helping to demonstrate and model what it is possible. St Andrew's Church in Rugby started its ecological journey, first, by making its buildings as sustainable and eco-friendly as possible. Margaret and Katie have reminded us that this is what we are doing here at DPURC. St Andrew's then moved on to encourage all members of the congregation to do the same in their homes. This led on to a raft of outreach activities appropriate to their location, embedded in the whole community and to achieving the Eco Gold Church Award. They didn't know where their journey would take them when they started. Is such a journey too scary for us? Phil Wood is investigating what some of the signposts might say regarding our outreach activity. Alongside those we need to develop a map of how we build upon the sustainability of our premises with a sustainable lifestyle for the Church and for each of us as individuals. This is ongoing work for us all.

Let us get back to that Strapline, the Manifesto for Climate Justice: “Climate change is a Justice Issue. Those who have the least political and economic power, and the least responsibility for the changing climate, are affected the most. We have a moral and ethical imperative to respond to their call for immediate action.”

To underline this, we will make a brief visit to Nicaragua through a video made by Amos Trust, which supports a local organisation called CEPAD, in the Teustepe region of Nicaragua, as it works with the community against the ravages of climate change. We will meet Damaris, Director of CEPAD, who was a speaker at the 2019 conference along with her husband, Gilberto. Very sadly he died from cancer during 2020. We are seeing this as one very positive example of effective external support:

Our journey could have taken us to many other corners of the world where we would hear similar stories of resilience, when the right kind of support is given to local communities. In the July issue of Place Matters, William McVey wrote about his visit to the Pacific Island of Tuvalu and Janet Bottoms, about Bangladesh, two other countries in the forefront of the Climate Crisis.

For external help to be effective and appropriate, it has to be based on more than a well-intentioned Westerner giving aid to needy communities. It must recognise both for ourselves and, particularly, for indigenous rural people, relationships with the land itself, with creation at a spiritual as well as a physical level. So many disastrous wounds continue to fester because of the ignorance and insensitivity of colonisers and settlers, be it in Australia, the Americas, much of Africa or the Holy Land itself. Much of the story that fills the Old Testament is of the triangular relationship between God, the People of Israel and the Promised Land. Take one leg away from that three-legged stool and it becomes precarious. If we understand ‘the land’ to encompass the whole of God’s creation, we see how this applies to our present situation. Both the ‘Insidious’ and the ‘irrelevant’ groups that I spoke of earlier ignore creation or see it purely as there to serve us, to be conquered.

Many of the Psalms, including the verses we heard from Ps.104, understand this relationship. The land is mentioned over 2000 times in the OT, emphasising its importance in the Israelites’ understanding of God and the importance of treating the land aright. For instance, Leviticus chapter 25 sets out the instructions about Sabbath and Jubilee years. The principle is one of justice and respect for the land and for the people of that land, and that remains the principle which should underlie all that we do to tackle the climate crisis. 60 years ago Martin Luther King stated, “How you feel about the Creator is how you treat nature, The Creation.” May we, the people of DPURC, sit fair and square on the three-legged stool, in balance with God and with God’s creation, faithfully playing our part towards ensuring Creation’s survival.

With these thoughts in mind, let us think carefully about the words as we sing ‘Am I my brother’s keeper.’