

## Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> October – Harvest Festival – What can we do about Climate Change?

A couple of months ago we were at an event where the focus was the effects of climate change. We sang a version of **All things bright and beautiful** where the words had been changed in a way that shocked and surprised us but also reflected some truths about climate change.

*All things bright and beautiful,  
All creatures great and small,  
All things wise and wonderful,  
We humans trashed them all.*

Each little flower that opens,  
Each little bird that sings,  
Is tainted with the plastic,  
We've thrown into our bins.

*All things bright and beautiful,  
All creatures great and small,  
God who made the universe,  
Looks out on us appalled.*

And it was hard to sing those words.

The temptation was to sing the familiar ones – the ones we have always sung. In effect the temptation was to carry on as we always have.

And maybe that's the problem as we think about the world around us, the planet and the issues facing us to do with the effects of climate change

We want to carry on as we always have ; we would rather not change the way we live as we are very comfortable thank you very much. – but the sad truth is that that is not an option for some people

I suspect that many of you saw the foreign minister of the South Pacific nation of Tuvalu – Simon Kofe - address last years COP 26 climate conference while standing in the sea. He was making the point that his country – made up of nine small islands – was at serious risk of being covered by the sea with rising sea levels caused by global warming. The Polar ice caps are melting and as they do so they cause sea levels across the world to rise. He was urging the larger industrial nations – nations like ourselves – to take the issue seriously and to do something. To change the way we live.

And I am sure we have all noticed extreme weather events here as well as elsewhere across the world. The floods in Pakistan recently have been devastating; and here in the UK we have had unprecedented temperatures , extremely dry

summers and rain -when it comes – being torrential. Our climate is changing – and it is beginning to affect the way we live. For some nations – like Tuvalu – it presents a threat to their very survival. Simon Kofe said that the current generation of schoolchildren could be the last generation to grow up in his country – so many were emigrating to New Zealand.

The usual and familiar words for All things Bright and Beautiful present a picture that all is well with the world. That the birds are still singing, the rivers are flowing fresh and clear, the seasons are as they always have been and that the trees are continuing to grow and thrive.

And the temptation is for us is to think its all true. Either to disbelieve the evidence all around us of a troubled and sick world, or to believe it's a problem out there in the Pacific or the far East and one that needn't concern us.

But rising sea levels, deforestation, change in weather patterns, decimation of wildlife and pollution is all around us and cannot be so easily ignored. Such issues affect us all – to one degree or another. Like it or not, we are part of a world that is interdependent.

But, you might say, why are we thinking about this at harvest time when we should be rejoicing and thanking God for his provision? Harvest festival is usually a time for having Bible readings and a sermon that urge us to thank God for all the good gifts he has given us; to bring offerings as a token of that thanksgiving. Not an occasion to think of painful and hard things.

And yes of course it is right to thank God for the beautiful world, but also right to accept that the human race – perhaps largely unintentionally – has caused immense damage to ecosystems and the environment. So it is also a time to ask ourselves the question – What have we done?

In that short reading from Luke that we just had, Jesus talks about how we instinctively look at the signs around us and draw conclusions. Perhaps it is a time to do just that. To draw conclusions from what we see about the nature of the problem and the possible ways forward.

The salutary words from Isaiah that we heard gave a picture of what life when we turn away from God might look like. And it's a shocking and sobering vision – one that is not so far removed from what we see around us.

So as we think about the effects of human action on the planet, let us join together in a prayer of confession. For the things we ourselves have done and for our part in the things the human race has done.

I will read some words and then in the silence you make your own confession.

## PART 2

But does it have to be like that vision from Isaiah 24?

Scientists tell us that it isn't too late ; that things could still be different.

Governments have made many commitments to reach net zero carbon by certain dates – 2030, 2040 or 2050. Talk is easy – it's the actions to back up the talk that seem to be so elusive.

We have just made a confession of things we have got wrong; of things the human race has done that have abused and misused the planet. But confession too requires action. Its not simply a matter of saying sorry and carrying on; if we think of it as repentance, then it involves turning around and changing the way we behave. To do all we can to ensure we don't do the same thing again.

Perhaps you were at the Green Fair yesterday where we saw some ways that ordinary people like you and me can make a difference, can change the way we do things. In a moment Kate, Chris and Chris will share some more ideas.

But almost without saying the things we can do ourselves can only make tiny differences. Yes, the cumulative effect will mount up but will still be fairly small.

To make a significant difference there must be changes at a larger level. National and international.

Just think for a moment about our finite planet with its finite resources. We simply cannot carry on and on using its resources and expecting them to last forever. There has to be a limit on what we use. Which is why basing economic policy on growth, growth, growth – judging the health of a nation by its GDP – Gross Domestic Product - is not the way to address these global issues. Nor is an ongoing and continuing investment in fossil fuels especially when alternative technologies are so readily available. How much better to assess countries by a well being measure that takes into account health, education, employment, equality and climate rather than just total wealth.

We have to think and act differently. Change our mindset. Move from more and more to enough is enough. In the words of the song Beauty for Brokenness that we will sing in moment

*Lord, end our madness*

*Carelessness, greed*

*Make us content with*

*The things that we need*

Our sympathies might not lie with the methods of the Extinction Rebellion protestors, but I for one can understand their frustrations. Governments and businesses don't seem to be taking these issues seriously. They are not being courageous enough to take these huge decisions to change direction. They are so wrapped up in the way we have always done things that they are blind to possibilities.

If we don't feel direct action is for us, the least we can do is lobby businesses, MPs, Councils and Governments. Make our voice heard.

In situations like this it is easy to get depressed, but there are other words in the book of the prophet Isaiah that offer us some hope:

Isaiah 11:6-9

*The wolf shall live with the lamb,  
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,  
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,  
and a little child shall lead them.  
The cow and the bear shall graze,  
their young shall lie down together;  
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.  
The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,  
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.  
They will not hurt or destroy  
on all my holy mountain;  
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord  
as the waters cover the sea.*

*This is the word of the Lord*

### **Thank God for that**

Now those words present a very different picture of how the future might be if we lived as God wanted us to live. A vision that's worth working towards. Something for which its worth changing the way we live. And towards the end of the service there will be an opportunity to commit ourselves to this. To making those changes. To being that change

In a moment we will sing that song Beauty for Brokenness, then we will hear about some easy things we can do to make a difference. Because every positive thing we do makes a difference.