

The third of our occasional eco-sermon series, drawn from three elements –water, earth and, today, air.

We have previously thought about the issue of pollution, focusing in particular on plastics pollution in our oceans and the use of water in the clothing industry;

we have thought about our use of the earth's resources, the impact of production methods on biodiversity and what it means to seek a fairer and more responsible economic approach to our consumer habits;

In reflecting on these issues, we have recognised that we should care because God cares;

- that we are an integral part of his creation and called to stewardship of the earth;
- that we are called to love neighbour and to actively seek God's justice in the world.

Today we will add to those reflections another key aspect of the Christian gospel

- hope - as we consider the issue of Climate Change

I know you don't need me to tell you that Climate Change is a hot topic.

It featured strongly in the recent elections here in the UK.

We hear a lot about it in the news.

Today also marks the first Sunday of Epiphany.

We recall the wonder and realisation of ancient scholars, the Magi, people of wisdom, drawn through a combination of scientific knowledge, theological learning and a yearning of hope for the future, to actively seek, find, witness and worship the Christ-child,

God incarnate, God revealed in human form, God in the world.

Theirs was an Epiphany, a sudden and profound understanding of something; a moment of great intuitive revelation.

Definitions which sit in our modern dictionaries

Sometimes it is the most unlikely people who enable an epiphany for the many.

For me, this is what the Magi represent in the history of God and humankind – strangers from afar, seeing and acknowledging what those who should have seen and known were not able to see.

I see resonance in that with a young sixteen year old who has taken remarkable action during 2019 and been recognised internationally for her impact on the world's awareness, seeking a global epiphany.

“We children are doing this to wake the adults up. We children are doing this for you to put your differences aside and start acting as you would in a crisis. We children are doing this because we want our hopes and dreams back”

Those are the closing words in this little book – No-one is Too Small to Make a Difference” by Greta Thunberg, with the chapter heading-“Can you hear me?”

Many in the world did hear her, whether they agreed with, or accepted her stance.

There is no doubt that Climate Change is a big concern, and no doubt that it is a complex, challenging, issue, which can seem out of our reach, overwhelming.

*I am going to stop at this point and hand over to someone from our own congregation who knows far more about this than I do, ( and has way more interesting slides) to tell you about her work and her perspective in this issue.*

*Let me introduce Fiona Jones to you, from Oxford University’s Penguin Watch*

The Antarctic Peninsula (AP) is one of the most rapidly warming places on the planet.

As such, the species that live there - particularly penguins - are often thought of as a 'bellwether' of climate change.

In addition to rising temperatures, an increasing frequency of storms and changing sea ice dynamics are projected under climate change scenarios.

We are already seeing an earlier break-up of the sea ice (and less extensive ice) in the AP region, which is of particular concern for Adélie and Emperor penguins which are heavily dependent on it during their breeding season.

At *Penguin Watch*, we are monitoring penguins species across the AP and surrounding Southern Ocean region, to examine the effects of climate change and other threats such as the krill fishery.

We monitor the penguins via a network of remote time-lapse cameras. The images from these cameras are uploaded to our online citizen science project, also called *Penguin Watch*, which asks members of the public to help us count the penguins within images.

Please get involved at [penguinwatch.org](http://penguinwatch.org) (we will be loading in more images very soon, when our team returns from Antarctica in a couple of weeks)!

You can also find out more about the project on this website.

We are already seeing changes occurring in the Southern Ocean ecosystem as a result of climate change. For example, Gentoo penguins (which are more tolerant of warm conditions than their sister species) are beginning to move southwards, displacing Adélies and Chinstraps.

Emperor penguin colonies have had failed breeding seasons when sea ice has broken up too early, and my own research has shown that Gentoo eggs/chicks have been badly effected by severe snowstorms (which are projected to increase in frequency in future, as mentioned above).

We can also see changes when we are conducting our fieldwork - for example, the Cook Glacier on South Georgia has receded markedly over recent years.

As a Christian, I care about the world and what is happening due to Climate Change.

We could look back at the last decade and see what the head of the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) has seen – that the last decade has almost certainly been the hottest on record.

Or we can look forwards, like those Magi and like Greta Thunberg, seeking a better future for the world of which we are an integral part.

Of all people we, as Christians, are well placed to do so.

For ours is a faith with a gospel message of transformation and hope at its very heart.

The beautiful description we listened to from Revelation, is not just a fanciful picture.

It was, and it remains, a moment of profound revelation, an Epiphany in its own right, a symbolic vision of a future world, with its renewed Holy City and its tree mirroring the tree from the garden of Eden.

Notice that city and nature sit in perfect harmony in this picture.

The healing of the Nations emerges in this vision from creation itself, humanity blessed and at one with God.

The world may feel in chaos and crisis right now, but, just as we can read in the opening chapter of Genesis, when God's Holy Spirit brought order, hope and life across the waters to form the world in which we live, so our hope today lies in our call upon God's Holy Spirit.

The difference between then and now is, that we, as an integral part of the order of creation, are also called to respond.

We learn from that same chapter in Genesis that we are placed within God's creation to have dominion over and to subdue the earth.

The fact is that mankind (we) have a choice, to work in partnership with God or to decide for ourselves what it means to "have dominion" and "to subdue."

Sam Dawson, from A Rocha UK writes:

"We are on the verge of a climate catastrophe-therefore it is clear what our decision has been and still is."

He reminds us that hope without action is useless, but also that life-changing, problem saving, redeeming action requires at first a firm hope that our efforts are not in vain.

Sam also cites Charles Wesley's words, as a demonstration of how Christian discipleship (in other words, Christian doing) can manifest and offer that hope to others –

"Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the places you can, at all times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can."

Sam continues: “The resolution to the climate crisis lies in our attitudes and how that manifests itself in our day to day lives. We need to do all the good we can in all the ways we can, but also recognise our limitations and abound in hope from above.”

Here’s further reason for us to take this issue into our active discipleship

Christian Aid’s Global Climate Lead, Dr Kathleen Kramer, issued a public comment at the end of the recent Madrid climate summit, with a view ahead to the summit due to take place in Glasgow in December 2020.

She spoke of the “gargantuan task” that the UK faces in putting its house in order in creating and implementing policies to reduce its own emissions, and the need to deploy diplomatic skills that respond to the demands of both science and people,. She recognised a “disconnect” between people and politicians and a need for leaders to wake up to the climate crisis they are fuelling with their appalling inaction.”

She did so because she knows through Christian Aid’s work that those most affected right now by the life changing impact of climate change are some of the poorest and most vulnerable of people.

The NGO Action Aid offer similar findings, stating many of the world’s richest and highest polluting countries are feeling the impact of climate change the least and that even when they do, they have resources and more resilient infrastructures.

Action Aid point out that in many poorer areas, where they are already struggling with the degradation caused by unsustainable and poorly managed land, the negative impact of Climate Change is speeded up.

It is estimated that up to 600 million people in Africa could face malnutrition as agricultural systems break down due to climate change impact if we don’t stop it escalating.

Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, calls upon the Anglican Church to recognise and respond to this:

“The moral crisis of climate change is an opportunity to find purpose and joy, and to respond to our creator’s charge. Reducing the causes of climate change is essential to the life of faith. It is a way to love our neighbour and to steward the gift of creation.”

He reminds us that, as Christian’s, we’re called to follow the five marks of mission set out by the Anglican church and says that all are deeply relevant to environmental action – as you can see for yourselves on the screen:

- Proclaiming the good news of the Gospel
- Teaching
- Responding to human need
- Transforming unjust structures of society & pursuing peace
- Safeguarding creation & renewing life on earth

It is well known that we British are very good about talking about the weather. As Christians we need to start talking about the weather in a different way, to share ideas about what we can do individually and together to reduce our carbon footprint, to actively engage with climate crisis and to hold our political leaders to account on this issue.

The Archbishop's recommended Lent book for this year is designed to help individuals, groups and churches to do just that.

It's by Ruth Valerio and is called "Say Yes to Life"

Perhaps that is a book for you, or maybe you would be interested in joining with others to explore how your discipleship can respond to the Archbishop's call?

The Mothers Union focus for 2020 is "Building Hope and Confidence" - a theme very relevant to this issue.

Their accompanying prayer guide focuses on an active response to gifts, being used eagerly, used well, used together, used faithfully and used for the Glory of God.

I think these prayer headings give a good foundation for our attitude towards the great gift that we all share, as integral beings - the world which God created

Bishop Stephen Croft, who heads up a small Christian lobbying group called Hope for the Future, has highlighted amongst reasons why he feels Christians are well placed to take a lead and to lobby on environmental issues such as climate change:

- As disciples we are open to and always learning.
- We understand the world is imperfect.
- We are committed to making a difference.
- We know or we can learn how to mobilise others to achieve common goals.

We do not need to see ourselves as ineffectual individuals who can do nothing, we have the means to strengthen our response and our resolve through the Christian fellowships we belong to, local, national and global.

No-one is too small to make a difference.

Let me leave you with another thought from young Greta Thunberg:

"Avoiding climate breakdown will require Cathedral thinking. We must lay the foundations while we may not know exactly how to build the ceiling."

If one so young can find such confidence in her convictions, surely so can you and I.

References and background reading:

Greta Thunberg, "No-one is Too Small to Make a Difference" *Penguin 2018*

Dave Bookless, "Planetwise-Dare to Care for God's World" *IVP 2008*

Nick Spencer and Robert White, "Christianity, Climate Change and Sustainable Living"  
*SPCK 2007*

A reflection written by A Rocha UK's Community and Conservation Intern, Sam Dawson,  
for the Wild Christian December 2019 email, "Nature and Climate Change"

CofE Creationtide Discussion Material, 2019, "week 5: Renewal of Creation"