

ENVIRONMENT SUNDAY SERMON 16.05.21 (Psalm 146)

Is it a coincidence that the UN conference on climate change (COP26) is taking place this autumn; is it a coincidence that President Biden has brought the USA into re-joining the Paris climate pact and will take part in COP26; is it a coincidence that because the UK is heading up that conference we have made further commitments to reduce our carbon emissions more rapidly; and is it a coincidence that this conference follows a world pandemic which needed tackling on a combined international front? Bringing these world leaders together at this point in time and in these circumstances is I believe a key opportunity for mankind, given by God, to address the most significant challenge to us and the planet's future. As we saw so vividly displayed in the Mackay cartoon if we think Covid is bad then we better look out for the tsunami threat of climate change and mass extinction that is following on! It is deliberately shocking but thankfully it isn't, and I repeat, isn't, inevitable. Time is very short but if we work together, agree to wise COP26 resolutions, and implement them we can start to turn this around. But it will need all of us to change our mindsets and actions.

Earlier this week I sent emails out to a representative number in our congregation asking the question **"What are your thoughts/feelings as a Christian towards climate change and can you say why it is or is not important to you / your generation?"** I was so blessed by the response that I want to share some of them now. Words like guilt, greed, shame, unfairness, arrogance, and selfishness were prevalent particularly amongst the older members. Our obsession with oil and plastic, travelling, and our throw-away society also came to the fore. As was taking for granted God's gift of creation. Some felt that their actions would be insignificant in the scheme of things. One could not understand how we have been so blind. Another was challenged by the complexity of the issues and the apparent lack of easy answers. And for another it was the realization that it was now their generation that had the awesome responsibility of being policy makers / decision takers. The younger members are frustrated at the lack of action, a fear at how rapidly climate change is occurring, and how many species are nearing extinction. BUT, all of you are passionately concerned about this situation for yourselves as well as future generations. A Christian stewardship imperative, a love of God's creation, and social justice, particularly for the poor and vulnerable, were given as reasons to act, and many of you are already taking steps in the home and at work. Prayer and a sense that we have a loving God, who is full of grace and mercy, gave individuals a sense of optimism despite the enormity of the task ahead.

So, thank you to all of you who took courage to share your thoughts. I hope that these responses demonstrate that many desire to tackle climate change. So be encouraged.

In Psalm 146 we are reminded that God made this beautiful world – EVERYTHING in heaven, on earth, and in the sea. And He is forever faithful, in other words He is in control; He continues to sustain it until He decides, not us, when it should come to an end. In verses 7 to 9 The Lord's love and righteousness ensure that relief is given to the oppressed, hungry, prisoners, blind, burdened, foreigner, fatherless, and widow. It is not surprising that the

psalmist David wants to praise God all of his life, and encourages us to seek God's help in whatever challenges we face.

Oh boy what a challenge! We know that we cannot go on living as we have been. But are we ready to make those changes? It's so easy to talk the talk but are we going to walk the walk. But what are some of the key factors that actually galvanize us into action? At its most extreme sometimes it is foisted upon us as we flee from war, famine, flooding, and pandemics. At the other end of the scale love may be such an over-powering emotion that we would do anything for the one we adore regardless of the consequences! The majority however revolve around the 'sticks' of realizing our guilt, shame, greed, and selfishness working in conjunction with the 'carrots' of increased understanding, faith, technological advancement, wisdom, and hearing directly from God to move us to change. Are we still hesitant though? Often repeated phrases such as 'Build back better' or 'Grow back greener' are spoken to encourage us to take that final step. But I would like us to reflect on the following three phrases :-

'Win back wonder' – Over the last year we have realized afresh what an awesome, amazing world we are blessed to be living in. Our environment is precious but extremely vulnerable. As we come out of Covid we cannot go back to the way we lived before otherwise that will lead to disaster. We must continue to wonder and be inspired by God's earth, not turn our backs on it.

'Come back caring' – A love of God and the world he has given to us, in itself is not enough. As Christians, that seek to follow Jesus' example, we need to respect and care for it now and in the future. That may be sacrificially costly to us personally but if we don't act then we will all be critically endangered.

'Forge back fairer' – Our God can be trusted, He is fair, and he deals with us justly. But as we read in Psalm 146 He is also prepared to correct human-induced injustices. As followers of Jesus it is clear that climate change is an injustice, since the poor and vulnerable are most at risk, so we can no longer stand back and not respond.

When you take these three things together - 'Win back wonder', 'Come back caring', and 'forge back fairer' then I would hope that all of us will want to change and together encourage each other to change to bless God, our world neighbours, and this precious planet. So can we make the changes that matter? (*Show slide*).

Prayer : Lord God we are sorry for the mess we have made of your earth. We do not have the years that William Wilberforce and other enlightened Christians had to campaign against slavery. May the scales fall from our blind eyes with regards climate change. Please give us now love, courage and faith to take the necessary action to cut our carbon emissions dramatically; and pour your Holy Spirit into each one of us that we might be beacons of light and hope to those around us, and grow in our knowledge and understanding of you. Amen.

Douglas Allenby