

Sermon: Getting the balance right

Readings: 1 Timothy 6:6-10
Matthew 6:25-33

Harvest is a season that can generate all sorts of reactions. We rightly want to respond to the harvest with thanks – recognising how fortunate we are, thanking God for what we have and committing to sharing it with others. But it can also be a time for lamenting our many failures to look after what God has entrusted to us – the damage we have brought to the land, to other species, and to future generations.

If we are to be good stewards of creation, then we all have to be aware of the many challenges we are facing and realise that responding isn't an option, it's a necessary part of Christian living.

Now it would be far too easy to just give you the facts and figures, so I thought we'd arrive at them through some puzzle solving! Can I please have a few volunteers?

Work out puzzles to provide a number.

Then match the number to an environmental fact, printed on cards...

3400 – average litres of water used by one person in the UK today

The number mentioned in Genesis 7:6

Multiplied by *Abide with me*

Plus *Hark! The sound of holy voices*

That seems like a huge amount, but it doesn't refer to the water that we personally drink or wash in each day, but rather the amount required to provide the many things we enjoy. Much of our food requires huge quantities of water and energy to get to our plates as do the many items that we own that are manufactured.

375 – square kilometres of forest that will be lost today

Hymn 3 plus hymn 4

Minus "Love is his word, love is his way"

Plus the verse number telling us to “look at the birds of the air” 26

375 square kilometres is more than 2 Wirrals and that amount of forest is, on average, being removed every single day. We need more trees, not fewer. If the Earth’s history was compared to a calendar year, then modern humans would have been around for only 23 minutes of that year and in the last 0.2 seconds, we have used a third of the earth’s natural resources.

01/08/2018 - Earth overshoot day

A brighter dawn is breaking

Ah, holy Jesu, how hast thou offended

The chapter and verse in John’s Gospel where, after the Resurrection, Mary tells the disciples she has seen the Lord.

20 years ago Earth Overshoot Day was today, 50 years ago it was 1st Jan. We’re now taking so much from the earth that we really need 1.7 earths – we’re 70% over what is sustainable. If we all lived as we in the West do, we’d need over 4 earths!

22/04/1970 - Earth Day

All ye who seek a comfort sure...

A new commandment I give unto you...

Age of Methuselah (Genesis 5) plus 1001

Earth Day started in 1970 in America as a response to the population and general lack of care for the environment. 20 million people protested against the actions of industrialists and governments and more events are being planned for 2020.

These figures can be very worrying and it would seem right that we do worry about the future of our planet, our future, our children’s future etc. There are plenty more that I could reel off, concerning the collapse of ecosystems, pollution of our oceans, rate of melting ice, extinction of species etc., and yet, in our Gospel reading, we’ve just been told that we ought not to worry!

Now these verses from the Sermon on the Mount have long been a favourite of mine and I have often read them if facing a particularly daunting challenge or if the troubles of the world are getting me down. It’s good to read that God has everything

under control, that we will be provided for, that there's no point in worrying, but, I certainly don't believe that God wants us to just shrug our shoulders and say "over to you Lord!"

In the reading from the first letter to Timothy, we hear how money and greed can corrupt and there is a call to live differently, to be concerned about the choices we make and to pursue particular Christian ways of living. Here, there are things we should worry about – the cost of materialism, the damage to our societies, the damage to our souls.

So how should we respond to the environment? Hand it over to God and put our trust in him? Or see clearly the things that are not of God in our world – the pursuit of profit over people, the lack of concern for non-human life, the lack of respect for God's creation – and do something about them!

To illustrate this, we need some more volunteers – anyone feeling strong today?!

Organise tug of war, with causes for worry represented on one side and reasons not to on the other...

Reasons to worry...
Called to be stewards
The earth is in danger
Called to love my neighbour
My neighbour is in danger!

Reasons not to worry...
Trust in God
God is all powerful & all loving
Good things happen when we trust in God
Worrying will not solve our problems

I think the reality is that God wants us to live in the tension between trusting in him and working with him to bring about a better world.

We're not to retreat away from the world, as some churches have done in the past, focusing purely on the objective of the Heavenly realm and ignoring the cries of the earthly one. Yet, neither are we to believe that we have the strength and the know-how to achieve the purposes of Heaven on earth without the help of Heaven.

God works through us when we trust in him, but that involves both faith and action, trust and response.

There's certainly a lot that we will have to do if we are to save the beauty and diversity of life on this planet for future generations, but I still believe that action grounded in prayerfulness can achieve this. I believe that God is calling those who recognise his handiwork in creation to honour it and show others the way to a more wholesome, a more holy way of living.

We all need to do more, both as individuals and within our communities. Here at Christ Church, we still need to formalise our Eco Church status and there's plenty that we can do to develop the land around church. In addition, we can perhaps also get a bit more involved in local issues, such as efforts to protect the green belt land and there's a petition online that is easy to find.

Faith in action – trusting in God, loving creation and making that love known. Let us pray...