

CARLOPS PARISH CHURCH ECO SERVICE, 2006

STARTING OUT AS AN ECO-CONGREGATION

Hymns are Church Hymnary, Fourth edition (CH4) unless indicated otherwise

Welcome

First of all, I want to extend a very warm welcome to everyone worshipping with us this morning. I'm going to talk about the environment, which is God's creation, remember, and about some simple things we could do to afford it some protection.

Many people would like to do something for the environment but don't know where to start, so I would like to give a brief introduction to the Eco-congregation movement. It is an ecumenical movement supported by several churches, to help those of us who are interested in environmental issues to make a practical response.

Some people fear that the problems facing the environment are too big for us to make any difference. Eco-congregation disagrees and sets out to show that we can all do things, however small, that really will help. And if many people each do a little, collectively, that means a lot gets done. Small actions add up to big results.

Eco-congregation was launched at a dedication service in Dunblane in 2001 which was attended by senior representatives of all denominations. It aims to encourage local churches to consider environmental issues and, as part of a community, to make positive contributions to the local area and environment.

Suggested additional paragraph, updating the text from its origins in 2006, to 2012

Eco-congregation Scotland is set within the movement as a whole. It is an ecumenical movement and a registered charity. There are currently 270 eco-congregations in Scotland; 93 of these hold an eco-congregation award for their work. These numbers are growing week by week. Learn more at www.ecocongregationscotland.org

Establishing an eco group in any church is a straightforward matter and requires only a simple approach to the eco-congregation website.

Prayer

The first prayer in this morning's service comes from the Christian Ecology Prayer Diary.

Lord of Creation, the life we possess is your gift. Teach us to value it and use it wisely and responsibly, for we have but one life to live, one life with which to serve your church, to advance your kingdom, and to be of help to others. Show us your purpose in our lives and inspire us to act.

Amen

First hymn – No 147: All creatures of our God and king ...

Prayer

Almighty God, our creator and redeemer, we praise you for all your wonderful works, for the beauty and bounty of the world around us, for everything you have given us to enjoy.

We bless you for your own creation – men and women made in your image, with minds to know you, hearts to love you and wills to obey you.

Accept O God, this our praise and thanksgiving, and to your name be honour and glory evermore.

We thank you, O father, for all the good gifts around us which add so much joy to our daily lives:

for the sun that warms us;
for the air that gives us life;
for the loveliness of the natural world;
for the changing seasons – each in its order, beautiful;
for our homes and families and friends;
for health of body and soundness of mind;
for music and books and works of art;
for the land of our birth – the land we love;
for our gardens and flowers and trees;
for the bees and birds and butterflies that entrance us with their beauty.

Father, for these manifold blessings and for all your love, we give you heartfelt thanks.

And now, let us say together the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples to say.

Our father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done – in earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever.

Amen

Children's address

Has anyone made or been given something which, although it has no monetary value, means a great deal to them?

What would you feel if you lent it to someone who either lost it or was careless with it and damaged it?

The actual text was not written down; it was delivered extempore. It can be regenerated easily enough, however. It told how God entrusted his cherished creation to humankind, our subsequent failure to nurture it, and the damage our activities are doing to it. And it ended by asking how we think God must feel about that?

The Offering

We will continue worshipping God with our offering.

Prayer

Gracious and loving God, accept the offerings we make, and grant that gifts that can never be worthy may yet be hallowed by your blessing and used in your service, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Second Hymn – No 137: All things bright and beautiful ...

Children may go out at this point if desired

Reading: Psalm 104, v1-24 and 35

Third Hymn – No 706: For the healing of the nations ...

Reading: Matthew 6: 24-34

Prayer

Almighty Father, as we pray for the impoverished people of the earth, help us to remember that we ourselves are poor in spirit when, in our plenty, we leave them in misery and want. Remind us that there can be no peace in the world without justice, and no justice unless we share what we have with those who are dying of hunger. Open our hearts to give as well as to pray, and to give generously, as we remember of example of him who gave all for us, Jesus Christ our Lord.

O God our heavenly father, you have blessed us and given us dominion over all the earth; give us reverence for the mystery of life; and give us new insights into your purposes for the

human race, and new wisdom and determination for us to make provision for its future in accordance with your will.

Teach us to conserve and not to squander that riches of nature, to use aright the heritage of former generations and to plan for the welfare of children and future generations. Refresh our wonder, awaken our concern, and make us better stewards and more careful tenants of the world that you lend us as our home, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Most merciful father, we remember before you those whom it would be easy for us to forget; the poor and homeless; the old and friendless; and all who care for them. Bless those whop minister to their needs, that they may bring them comfort and hope; and show us what we can do as servants of your son, who for our sake became poor, Jesus Christ our Lord.

O God of love, whose compassion does not fail, we bring to you the sufferings of all humankind; the despair of the homeless; the depression of prisoners, especially those held unjustly; the sorrows of the bereaved; the helplessness of the aged and the frail. In your great mercy comfort and relieve them Father, according to their various needs and for the sake of your son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Fourth Hymn – No 181: For the beauty of the earth ...

Sermon

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in yiour sight, O Lord our strength and redeemer.

Amen

Perhaps I might start this morning with a definition:

“Spring is God thinking in gold, laughing in blue and speaking in green.”

As we all know only too well, the long awaited signs of spring do arrive eventually. The white of the snowdrop give way to the yellow, purple and white of the crocus which, in turn, are superseded by the nodding multi-yellow heads of the daffodils, both large and small. Spring, however late sometimes, does arrive and the appearance of blossom on the trees and fresh green leaves on their branches prepare us for summer.

I think that a service of thanks to God for all the beauties that surround us, might best remind us of our gratitude to our Maker and our responsibilities as keepers of his kingdom on earth.

Our first lesson, from Psalm 104, was David's song of praise to God the creator. It gives a quick picture of all that he has done and continues to do. It is a very colourful description of the world, its seasons and its weather. It was only after I had read it several times that I realised what a full picture it gives. If, like me, you have not read it recently, you may be surprised by the picture it paints.

The second lesson however, moves on from the beauty of the world and, as Psalm 24 reminds us “The world and all that is in it belong to the Lord, the earth and all who live on it are his.” Psalm 50 enlarges on this theme, “The almighty God, the Lord speaks, ‘All the animals in the forest are mine. All the wild birds are mine and all living things in the fields.’” God has lent the world to us and it is surely up to us to look after it. We can grow things from seed, from plant cuttings, and from breeding programmes – but we cannot create!

There is a story of a city child who was taken for a day in the country. For the first time in her life, she saw a drift of bluebells. She turned to her teacher and said, “Do you think God would mind if I picked one of his flowers?” That small girl said something which we often forget. There is nothing in this world about which one can say “This is mine and I can do what I like with it.” Of everything, we must say “This belongs to God and I must use it as he would use it.” This should be a basic principle of life.

A second basic principle is that people are always more important than things. If possessions have to be acquired, and if wealth has to be accumulated at the expense of treating people as things, then all such riches are wrong.

The third principle is stated in 1 Timothy 6: 10: “For the love of money is a source of all kinds of evil. Some have been so eager to have it that they have wandered away from the faith and have broken their hearts with many sorrows.” Note carefully, for that verse is often misquoted and so, misinterpreted. It does not state that *money* is the root of all evil, but that the *love of money* is the source of all kinds of evil.

There is one thing that emerges from all of this – the possession of wealth, money, material things, and one's own talent is not a sin, but it is a grave responsibility.

It may seem to you that I have drifted away from the theme of preserving God's world but I hope as we go on you will discover that this is not the case.

If we look back at our second lesson, from Matthew's Gospel, Jesus was concerned about the damage that can be caused by worry. Verse 25: “This is why I tell you” he said “not to be worried about the food and drink you need in order to stay alive. Look at the birds: they do not sow seeds, gather a harvest and put it in barns; yet your father in heaven takes care of them! Aren't you worth much more than the birds? Can any of you live a bit longer by worrying about it?” This last phrase is a modification of the Authorised Version which reads “Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit to his stature?” a cubit, by the way, was about 18 inches! Even in the revised text about living longer, worrying cannot add the shortest space to our lives. What Jesus is saying is that there is little point in worrying over things that we cannot control. Worry is pointless and can be destructive. There's plenty of other things for us to think about and give attention to.

You will recall that Jesus goes on to speak about the flower in the fields. The lilies of the field were probably the scarlet poppies and anemones which bloomed on the hillsides of Palestine. He said, in verse 28 “And why worry about clothes? Look at how the wild-flowers grow; they do not make clothes for themselves, but I tell you that even King Solomon, with all his wealth did not have clothes as beautiful as these flowers.”

Worry can be defeated when we acquire the art of living one day at a time. Or as verse 34

says “So do not worry about tomorrow ; it will have enough worries of its own.” There is no need to add to the troubles each day brings.

And of course, worrying about the past is completely pointless!

The following words from the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam are true

The moving finger writes, and having writ,
Moves on; nor all thy piety and wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,
Not all thy tears wash out a word of it.

The past, is past.

Here is a story that I once read. A London professor was the hero. He was paralysed and bedridden, but he was most outrageously cheerful and his smile was so brave and radiant that everyone forgot to feel sorry for him. His children adored him, and when one of the boys was preparing to leave home and start on life's adventures, the professor gave him good advice: “Johnny,” he said, “the thing to do, my lad, is to hold your own end up, and do it like a gentleman, and please remember that the biggest troubles we think we have to face, are those that never come!”

Worry about the future is wasted effort and the future of reality is rarely as bad as the future of our fears.

We are where we are, in the present. There is plenty to do in this present. Let us focus on what we can do – and let us do it!

If there is one point that we should take away this morning, it is this. We are tenants in God's world and as tenants, we are responsible for the upkeep and management of his property. If we fail to look after his world as tenants, then we may lose our deposit at the final judgement.

Or, as the Methodist John Wesley wrote: “When the creator and possessor of heaven and earth brought you into being and placed you in this world, he placed you here not as an owner but as a steward – as such, he entrusted you for a season with goods of various kinds – but the sole property of these still rests in him and can never be alienated from him.”

Prayer

May God who established the dance of creation, who marvelled at the lilies of the field, who transforms chaos to order, lead us to transform our lives and the church to reflect God's glory in creation.

Amen

Final hymn – No 153: Great is thy faithfulness ...

Benediction

In the dawn of the day lead us to the garden of life so that we might:

Prune the excess;
Root out injustice;
Water the wilting;
Nourish the withered;
Empty the potting shed of poison;
And, at the eve of the day, rest;
And wonder at God's garden.

As the air sings with songs of glory, as the water flashes with the silver of creation, as the forests bloom with leaves for the healing of the nations, so may God's light and love fill; our hearts and souls and minds. Now and forever.

Sung triple Amen