

PROTECTING EARTH FROM CLIMATE CHANGE

Systems and influences; decisions and actions

CARLOPS PARISH CHURCH ECO-SERVICE, 2022

WELCOME and CALL TO WORSHIP

Welcome to the 2022 Carlops Eco-service, the 17th in a series that began in 2006. The service explores how Earth sits in the system that is the cosmos, the man-made environmental change that threatens Earth, and how we may approach our responsibility to protect it.

The service is presented in four chapters, each including one element of our eco-reflection, plus one or more of hymn, prayer and/or reading. A different voice presents each chapter.

Leader Let us worship God the creator
All Thank you, Lord, for the created Earth
Leader Let us give thanks for your Earth, which nurtures us
All Thank you, Lord, for the nurturing Earth
Leader Let us nurture the Earth in our turn
All Lord, help us to respect your Earth and ours

Lighting of candle

We begin by lighting a candle. As we do so, let us reflect upon the life-flame it represents, and our duty to the Earth's environment to keep its life-flame alive.

First Hymn CH4, 140; Lord, your hands have formed this world ...

Lord your hands have formed this world,
every part is shaped by you.
Water tumbling over rocks,
air and sunlight: each day's signs
that you make all things new.

Yours the soil that holds the seed,
you give warmth and moisture too.
Sprouting blossoms, crops and buds,
trees and plants: the season's signs
that you make all things new.

Like a mat you roll out land –
space to build for us and you –
earthly homes and, better still,
homes for Christ: the truest sign
that you make all things new.

VOICE 1 THE PALE BLUE DOT

Talk

The two spacecraft Voyager I and Voyager II were launched in 1977 to explore the outer planets – Jupiter, Saturn, Neptune and Uranus – and the farthest-distant regions of the solar system.

After it had completed its main mission, project scientist Carl Sagan proposed that, as Voyager I left the solar system, it be turned around to photograph Earth. This was a once-only opportunity to view Earth from the edge of our solar system. The pale blue dot, as it became known, was photographed and the images transmitted to Earth.

Here is a *Pale blue dot* video, showing Earth from space and Earth sitting in space, intercut with images of our species disrespecting it. It is both moving and disturbing – an environmental wake-up call to humanity. The commentary is by Carl Sagan himself.

Project *The pale blue dot* video

This is the link to the *You tube* video file

<https://youtu.be/vRF6EO0q6uQ>

The film shows how our Earth sits in the cosmos; part of the solar system and subject to its influences and laws, yet itself exercising an influence upon that system. The Earth is seeming insignificant, yet beautiful; one of many, yet distinct; alone in its capacity to nurture life as we understand it.

Reading Genesis 1: 1, 27, 28

We read from The Message translation, which makes it clear that being given dominion over something – being in put charge of it – makes one responsible also, for that thing's future well-being.

First this: God created the Heavens and Earth – all you see, all you don't see.

God created human beings; he created them godlike, reflecting God's nature. He created them male and female.

God blessed them: “Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Earth! Take charge! Be responsible for fish in the sea and birds in the air, for every living thing that moves on the face of Earth.”

Prayer

We give thanks for creation and its benefits; and seek help as we try to be worthy of it

Let us pray to God that he will bring to fruition all that he desires for his creation.
Father, Lord of creation, in your mercy, hear us.

You have created the universe by your eternal Word,
and have blessed humankind in making us stewards of the earth.
We pray for your world, that we may share and conserve its resources,
and live in reverence for the creation and in harmony with one another.
Father, Lord of creation, in your mercy, hear us.

You have given the human race a rich land,
a land of streams and springs, wheat and barley, vines and oil and honey.
We have made by sin a world of suffering and sorrow.
We pray for those who bear the weight of affliction
that they may come to share the life of wholeness and plenty.
Father, Lord of creation, in your mercy, hear us.

In Christ you call us to a new way of life, loving our neighbours as ourselves.
Help us to treat with care and respect the world as it is
as we live in hope and anticipation of the world as it will be
when your kingdom comes, and your will is done.
Father, Lord of creation, in your mercy, hear us.

We thank you for those, living and departed, who have shown true respect for your creation.
Help us to follow in their footsteps, until, with them, we see you face to face,
where all is made new in Christ our Lord.

Merciful Father, Accept these prayers
For the sake of your son, our saviour, Jesus Christ.

Amen

VOICE 2 ONLY ONE EARTH

Talk

Turning Voyager around to photograph Earth affected its mission and some data collection was interrupted. But people recognised that we could only photograph Earth this way at that one time; the loss of some data was a price worth paying.

This parallels the eco-issue. We have only one Earth. We can act to protect it, or risk losing it. And the one time we can act to protect it is now.

Science confirms that human activity is driving the changing conditions that threaten Earth; not by some one-time action, but by several influences sustained over time.

Now, if some human activities can affect Earth for the worse, others could affect it for the better – if these same humans wish it. We can protect Earth if we try – and keep trying.

Yes, protecting Earth will be costly and will interrupt other activities. But these other things can be done at any time and in many ways. We can make and sell products or develop new medicines at any time, but these are beneficial only if you preserve people to use them. That means – preserve Earth for those people to live on!

Reading *The Guardian; Earth under threat*

The climate crisis is undoubtedly the defining crisis of our era. [It is] the overwhelming long-term threat to our planet – and to the health and security of every living being on Earth.

We know now, more clearly than ever, that many of the most urgent global crises – food security, energy, land conflict, public health, migration, equality – all intersect with, and are made worse by, the climate emergency.

With the exception of all-out nuclear war, all the most important issues that confront us are environmental. None of our hopes, none of our dreams, none of our plans and expectations can survive the loss of a habitable planet. And there is barely an Earth system that is not now threatened with collapse.

Talk resumes

Science tells us that we have only a few years to start an environmental turnaround and preserve this Earth in something like the form we know – the form that nurtures us. Otherwise, Earth will deteriorate unpredictably, irrevocably, perhaps catastrophically.

But what if the science is mistaken? Or at least, overstating the case? The physically collected data upon which predictions are based date back a mere flicker in geological time; the rest is informed interpretation of sign, extrapolation, and forecasting.

Moreover, we may well accuse humans of being materially obsessed, but that obsession has brought benefits over many years. How can we be sure that it is worth declining real opportunities in the present to gain just the possibility of an ill-defined good in the future?

VOICE 3 HUMAN KIND'S DECISION: PROTECT EARTH or CARRY ON REGARDLESS

Talk

We have just heard that there may be valid, if rather self-serving, arguments for carrying on as we are. But the counter questions are: *What is our primary aim as a species?* and *Can we afford to risk not acting to protect Earth?* Some decision analysis theory may help us reach a conclusion, but first, a reading ...

Reading

Matthew 13:44-48

Here, Jesus alludes to the bounty of the Earth, and to humankind's instinct to improve its own condition. How much greater then, must be our instinct simply to survive?

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all he has and buys that field.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets, but threw out the bad.

Talk resumes

With these short parables in mind, let us try some decision modelling.

Blaise Pascal was a 17th century French mathematician and philosopher. He applied both disciplines to decision-making and analysed some pragmatic, self-orientated reasons why humans should believe in God. He took two starting points ...

1. Humans' natural urge is to improve their condition; to seek benefits and avoid pain
2. Jesus' promise of eternal life for believers

Focusing solely upon these two points and deliberately excluding moral, religious and theological concerns, Pascal analysed the decision ...

- If God does not exist, believing or not believing will have no effect on our condition.
- But if God exists, not believing may result in eternal damnation – a major negative. Believing may bring the reward of eternal life. As humankind's natural urge is to improve our condition, it would be irrational not to seek such a benefit.
- Therefore, as Pascal wrote, we should *wager for God*; if he exists, we gain; and if he does not, we lose nothing.

Transferring Pascal's approach to the environment ...

The starting assumptions become ...

1. Humans' natural urge is to survive, as a species and as individuals
2. Humans depend upon the Earth for their survival
3. Therefore, we should protect the Earth from deterioration

Focussing upon these issues, the Pascalian decision analysis becomes ...

- If the eco-science is wrong, then whether we act to protect the Earth or not, will have no impact.
- But if the eco-science is right, not acting will lead to the catastrophic deterioration of our planet. Acting to protect Earth may preserve it so that we and future generations may prosper. Given humankind's innate drive to survive, it is irrational not to pursue this.
- Therefore, adapting Pascal's terminology, we should wager *for the Earth* by acting to protect it.

VOICE 4 SYSTEMS, INFLUENCES AND ACTION

Talk

Almost everything anyone can imagine is a part of one or more systems. Systems influence their parts. In turn, the parts influence each other and the system itself.

We live on Earth; Earth is part of the solar system; the solar system is part of the Milky Way galaxy; the Milky Way is part of the universe. All of these are interdependent.

We are part of systems too: family, community, work group, this church. We influence them by acting to achieve some objective: doing selected things; proposing initiatives; giving orders. In turn, the systems influence us as we respond to requests, suggestions and instructions.

And *there* is the eco-issue. Earth and our actions are interdependent. Currently, we are influencing Earth to its detriment – and to our own, as we depend upon Earth for life. We *could* influence Earth to its benefit – if we choose to do so and are determined to prevail.

We can improve our personal environmental systems by adopting good habits. As an eco-congregation, Carlops Church people know about controlling consumption, reducing waste, recycling. These contributions may be small, but if many people make a small contribution, the aggregate impact is significant; if nearly everyone does so, it is planet-changing.

As well as improving personal lifestyles, we can influence big systems too, and help to improve national and international practices, by talking to our politicians, influencing them.

It's easy to say "I'm just one person; I can't change things at planet level." But that's not true. Parliament, Congress, European Union, United Nations may be big systems, but they are composed of individuals. And those individuals want to be where they are. All politicians act if they know their seat is at stake. Our duty is to explain what objectives and policies we want them to pursue for the good of the Earth.

A three-part message to your elected representatives ...

1. I want you to act to protect Earth – *now*

2. I will not vote against you for acting, even if it costs more and causes me inconvenience
3. I *will* vote against you if you fail to act

Christianity is ultimately about doing the right thing; improving lives; making the world a better place. But you can't make Earth a better place if you have damaged it so much that it can no longer support life. The right thing to do for the Earth is to start living in such a way that it can maintain the conditions that evolved over all time; the conditions which enable Earth to nurture us and future generations. Achieving this is up to *us*, not to some anonymous and convenient *them*.

It could be deceptively simple, as this well-known children's hymn tells ...

Second Hymn CH3, 488; Jesus bids us shine ...

Note that this hymn appears in the third edition of the Church hymnary

Jesus bids us shine with a pure, clear light,
Like a little candle burning in the night.
In this world is darkness, so let us shine,
You in your small corner, and I in mine.

Jesus bids us shine, first of all for him;
Well he sees and know it if our light grows dim
He looks down from heaven to see us shine,
You in your small corner, and I in mine.

Jesus bids us shine then for all around;
Many kinds of darkness in the world are found:
Sin and want and sorrow; so we must shine,
You in your small corner, and I in mine.

VOICE 1 RETURNS POSTSCRIPT and CLOSE

The two Voyagers passed beyond the most distant planets. They left the solar system and entered interstellar space. They are still travelling and still exploring, though no longer transmitting comprehensible data. They carry images and recordings describing Earth and our species. Someday, somewhere, someone may find, read and learn from these. We want Earth to be still flourishing when that happens.

God gave us this Earth to enjoy and to look after. Let's make sure our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren can do the same.

Third Hymn CH4, 149; Let all creation dance ...

Let all creation dance
in energies sublime,
as order turns with chance,

unfolding space and time;
for nature's art
in glory grows
and newly shows
God's mind and heart.

Our own amazing earth,
with sunlight, cloud, and storms,
and life's abundant growth
in lovely shapes and forms
is made for praise,
a fragile whole,
and from its soul
heaven's music plays.

Lift heart and soul and voice:
in Christ all praises meet,
and nature shall rejoice
as all is made complete.
In hope be strong,
all life befriend,
and kindly tend
creation's song.

Benediction

Let us go from here in peace,
Determined to tread lightly on the good Earth,
Committed to deal justly with our sisters and brothers everywhere,
Encouraged to care deeply for the world of nature,
Enlivened to treat our planet, the pale blue dot, and all it contains, as the object of God's love.

We go in that peace which challenges all our understanding,
And in the knowledge and love of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
To whom be all glory.

Sung blessing (CH4, 786)

May the God of peace go with us
As we travel from this place.
May the love of Jesus keep us
Firm in hope and full of grace.

END

