

CARLOPS PARISH CHURCH ECO SERVICE, 2007

THE POWER OF SMALL CHOICES

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

Welcome

We'd like to extend a very warm welcome to everyone worshipping with us this morning. And we would like to thank you, the congregation, for giving us the opportunity to present this eco-service.

Our theme is the power of small choices. Why have we chosen that? It is to remind us that each and every one of us really can make a difference, if only we believe and keep trying.

A quote from the statesman Edmund Burke provides a good starting point. He said "Nobody makes a greater mistake than he who does nothing because he can only do a little. The only necessary thing for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."

So, we want to think about some small choices that have had powerful results and also, to consider the small choices which each of us might make.

First hymn – No 522: The church is wherever God's people are praising ...

Prayer

Our first prayer is by Peter Millar and is taken from a United Nations environmental programme.

Great spirit, give us hearts to understand never to take from creation's beauty more than we can give; never to destroy wantonly for the furtherance of greed; never to deny to give our hands for the building of earth's beauty; never to take from her what we cannot use.

Give us hearts to understand that to destroy earth's music is to create confusion; that to wreck her appearance is to blind us to beauty; and that as we care for her – so she will care for us.

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

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: Saving used postage stamps

Every country has its own postage stamps and some have very beautiful pictures on them. Stamps from our own country have had pictures of flowers, birds, animals, ships, bridges, and even the Harry Potter books! People from all over the world are interested in collecting stamps. But do you know that, even if you're not a stamp-collector – a philatelist to give them the technical name – you can still help people by just keeping the used stamps you receive?

When the postman brings you a letter, or maybe a birthday card, it will always have a stamp on the envelope because that's how we pay to have the letter delivered from one part of the country to another.

After you've enjoyed reading your letter or looking at your card, you have a small choice to make. You can throw the envelope into the waste paper basket just as it is – or you can cut or tear the stamp off and save it!

That's a very easy thing to do, but let's think about what happens if lots of people decide to save their used stamps like that. Before long, your family will have collected a small bundle of used stamps – maybe about this size (*show a small bag full of used stamps to illustrate*). Then bring that bundle of stamps to church and put them with used stamps that other people have collected too. Now there's a much bigger bundle. This is how many stamps our church collected together in the last six months (*show a much larger bag full of used stamps to illustrate*).

Now think about how many stamps there would be if lots of other churches collected their used stamps in the same way! Just think how many stamps there would be if everyone in every church in Scotland made the same small choice, to save used stamps!

Well, a great many people do make that same small choice and because of that, the church's headquarters in Edinburgh can collect together all these stamps and sell them and make quite a lot of money by doing so. When the stamps were sold last year, they raised a total of over £2,000, and this money was used to help elderly people in Bangladesh. This year, the money will help to buy wheelchairs and crutches for disabled children in remote parts of China, so that they will be able to go outdoors and move about again. (*Sentence can be updated for each calendar year, or one can simply add "In recent years, the money from stamps has ..."*)

So – do you think you might make a small choice yourself now – and start saving your used stamps?

Prayer

Please God, take care of little things,
The fledglings with their feeble wings
Till they are big enough to fly
And stretch their wings across the sky.

And please take care of little seeds,
So small amongst the forest weeds,
Till they can grow as tall as trees
With leafy boughs – take care of these.

And please take care of children who
Kneel down at night to pray to you.
Please teach them how to love and share,
And come to you with praise and prayer.

Please help them see the world around
Where all your lovely gifts abound.
And make each one of them aware
That all the world needs love and care.

Amen

The Offering

We will continue worshipping God with our offering

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we bring our offerings to be used in your service and ask that the money is spent wisely, according to your will.

Amen

Second Hymn – No 523: Hands to work and feet to run ...

Children may go out at this point if desired

A small choice in Africa

There is a story from Africa about a small choice made by a man called Trevor Huddleston. Archbishop Desmond Tutu recounts this telling incident from his childhood in South Africa in 1940. As a barefoot, ten year old black boy, growing up in a slum area with dusty lanes and no sanitation, he was out one day with his mother when they passed a tall, gaunt white man, wearing a flapping cassock and a big black hat. As he passed, the man raised his hat to Mrs Tutu in a well-mannered greeting. The young Desmond was amazed – he had never seen a white man greet his mother so courteously.

The white man who chose to greet the black woman in this way was Trevor Huddleston, then

parish priest of a black township near Johannesburg. It was a small action, but one that Desmond Tutu never forgot. The young Tutu went on to become the first black archbishop of Cape Town and a key player in the struggle against apartheid. But perhaps it all began with one small boy noting one tiny gesture and beginning to believe that things could be different.

Prayer

This prayer is adapted from a prayer by Stephen Gellet.

Dear Lord, we expect to pass through this world but once. Any good thing, therefore, that we can do, or any kindness that we can show to any fellow creature, let us do it now. Let us not defer or neglect it, for we shall not pass this way again.

Amen

Third hymn – No 193: God is love ...

A small choice in America

This story comes from America and is one that many people may have heard.

It is the story of Rosa Parkes, who travelled to work each day on the bus, where, by law, she had to sit near the back in the “blacks only” section. But on 1st December 1955, the bus was full and when the driver noticed a white man standing, he ordered four black people to move out of their row of seats. Three of them did move, but Rosa Parkes refused and eventually, she was arrested.

It wasn't the first time that she had acted to be true to her beliefs. She had been thrown off a bus twelve years previously and forced to walk five miles home in the rain. She regularly chose to walk upstairs in multi-storey buildings rather than take the lift marked “blacks only”. And she and her husband had worked quietly in the background doing what they could to secure equal rights for all people.

But this time things changed. After her arrest she was tried and convicted, and fined. But she refused to pay the fine. Several thousand protesters supported her and staged a boycott of the buses which eventually extended to 382 days, with about 42,000 people participating. What began as a small split-second choice swelled ultimately into a huge movement across the United States that inspired by the speeches of Martin Luther-King, eventually wiped out the segregation laws forever.

Prayer

Give to your church, O God, a bold vision and a daring charity, a refreshed wisdom and a courteous understanding that the eternal message of “love your neighbour as yourself” may be spread around the world.

Bless the community in which we live; our neighbours, friends and all visitors.

Thank you for the services and facilities we enjoy and for the people who provide them; help them to find fulfilment in doing their job well.

Thank you for all those who work for the common good, attempting to find solutions to problems in our own country and abroad.

Encourage, inspire and energise us all in the choices we make so that together, we can make a difference in your world.

Amen

Fourth hymn – No 530: One more step along the world we go ...

We can make choices!

We talk, in our western European culture, about land ownership, and controlling the environment. But throughout history, many peoples, the Native Americans are a good example, have believed that they did not own the land, but instead, had a responsibility to nurture it in return for the bounty it gave them, and to preserve it for future generations.

It is suggested that the climate change we are seeing now is a consequence of a long on-going failure to follow this philosophy and live a sustainable lifestyle – a failure to nurture the environment. Whether or not we believe that climate change is a real issue, we have nothing to lose, and possibly a very great deal to gain, by committing to the nurturing of our environment.

Here is one idea for individual action. One year recently, James Jones, the then Bishop of Liverpool, invited people to observe a carbon fast for Lent. He offered the idea as a reminder of what needs to be done urgently to help the world's poor, already suffering as a result of climate change, and as a practical step towards reducing our own carbon footprint.

Inviting people to carbon fast, one day at a time through Lent, he suggested a list of possible actions, eg, lowering the heating thermostat by one degree; switching off electrical appliances rather than leaving them on standby; avoiding food waste by careful menu planning and shopping; saying “No” to unwanted plastic bags; checking chemicals and cleaning materials and gradually replacing them with eco-friendly products.

None of this is very new, or exciting, or even difficult. They are small actions that we can take privately and individually but which, when added together can lead to significant change. But is there also some action that we can take collectively? How do we rate the need for sustainable living? How mindful are we of a responsibility to nurture the earth – for its sake, for future generation, and even for ourselves?

Every day, we have choices. Right now, given our present habits and culture as a society, doing nothing is doing harm. So how and what will we choose? And how and what will we

tell our national decision-makers?

Prayer

We pray for those dealing with climate change and for the scientists and political leaders addressing these issues. We pray for our community and its environment and we ask that the church be prominent in helping to make it a better place.

Amen

Fifth hymn – No 243: Touch the earth lightly ...

Reading: Romans 12: 6-8

A small choice in the UK

Our last “small choice” is located in our own country and the moral might be “anything is possible”!

Modbury is a small town in Devon. In that town lives a young woman named Rebecca Hoskins, a camera woman with the BBC Natural History Unit, who was involved in the making of a documentary about the environmental changes facing the people and wildlife in Hawaii.

At home, she was well aware of the numbers of plastic bags littering the road sides and washed up on the beach, but what she saw when making the film shocked her and she resolved to do something about it. Marine animals and birds – whales, seals, dolphins, albatrosses – are attracted to floating plastic as a possible food and many ingest it, then die of starvation because their stomachs are filled with indigestible plastic garbage.

In mid-Pacific is an area known as the Horse Latitudes, where floating rubbish collects as a function of winds and tides. Apparently, 80% of marine trash comes from the land, and 90% of that is plastic. On Hawaii, some beaches are piled two to three metres high with every kind of plastic waste and some of the so-called “sand” is actually plastic granules – plastic ground down by water just as pebbles are ground to real; sand by the action of wind and wave.

Let's consider the plastic bag. In the whole world, 1.2 trillion bags are used every year; most of them only once and for an average time of 12 minutes. But each of these bags, if discarded, takes 500 to 1,000 years to break down.

Seeking a starting point, Rebecca Hoskins decided to find a way to discourage people from using plastic bags. So, she showed her film to local shopkeepers in Modbury and asked if they would choose to use alternatives to plastic bags. Action was initiated. From that small beginning in 2001, Modbury became the first plastic-bag-free town in Europe by 2005.

Today, this is no longer a startling or even very newsworthy story. Supermarkets urge us to re-use bags, or use eco-friendly ones. Governments in Ireland and more recently, Wales have taken steps to make the free throwaway plastic bag less attractive to consumers. And it is working.

But the point is this – one person had an idea, raised awareness, investigated, took action, encourage and influenced others. *And started things happening as a result!* Rebecca Hoskins made a small choice and then, persuaded others to make small choices until the aims was realised. Rebecca freely admits that at the outset she had no idea what she as taking on, nor how her dedication, know-how and people skills would persuade others to take up the challenge – and to enjoy doing so!

I wonder – can we identify some environmental challenge which might gain general community support and lead on to better things?

Final hymn – No 711: Loving God in heaven above ...

Benediction

God our father, who made us all,
Rich and poor and great and small
And every race beneath the sun,
Please care for us – everyone.

Sung triple Amen