

Carlops Parish Church Eco Service, 2019

CLIMATE EMERGENCY

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

Welcome

We'd like to welcome you all to church today for this Eco service, as we reflect on the world around us and how best we can live in it. Today we are looking at Climate Emergency, which has engaged the UN and several action groups this year, and which has been covered extensively by the media.

First hymn – No 141; Oh, the life of the world is a joy and a treasure ...

Prayer

Living God,
From ice melting to polar bears dying,
We are damaging your creation.
Forgive us and free us from fear and denial.
May your Spirit so envision us,
That governments gladly choose
Policies for healing and gentle change.
Bless us, so that our lives honour your gift of life.

And now, the Lord's Prayer

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

Amen

Introductory talk

Climate change as a threat to the world

Climate change is one of the principal threats facing the world today. And it is largely driven by humankind's activities.

Science demonstrates that we need to keep global warming below 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels to avoid planet-changing consequences. Already, we are at 1.1°C and rising. We have an urgent need to reduce carbon emissions and greenhouse gases, the prime drivers of unwanted and dangerous change.

Carbon emissions are still rising, and that target of 1.5°C of warming looks like being missed. The target is not just a number plucked from the air. Scientific forecasts show that, more than this, and the planet will go into feedback loops that lock us into a further 8°C of warming. That will melt all the ice caps and glaciers completely. Sea levels will rise by several metres. Temperatures will rise at all latitudes; this will change the pattern of what can grow where. It's easy to work out the consequences. The United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warns that we have just eleven years from 2019 to limit this ecological collapse. We need to act now.

Climate change has provoked a global movement by young people, inspired by Greta Thunberg, the 16-year-old from Sweden. They demand that governments listen to the climate scientists, who have been warning of ecological breakdown for over forty years.

Greta says: "I want you to panic ... I want you to act as if the house was on fire. I have said those words before and a lot of people have explained that that is a bad idea. A great number of politicians have told me that panic never leads to anything good. And I agree; to panic, unless you have to, is a terrible idea. But when your house is on fire and you want to keep it from burning to the ground, then that does require some level of panic."

So what is being done? How can we help? We will explore these questions later.

Second Hymn – No 143; Who put the colours in the rainbow?

Readings

We have three readings which together, reflect our journey from a beautiful planet, through pollution to climate change, and hopefully, out of it.

Genesis 1: 24, 26-28, 31

*God creates life and the Garden of Eden
Humankind inherits a beautiful planet*

And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind." And it was so.

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.

Genesis 6: 5 & 12; Genesis 7: 4; Genesis 7: 19-22

*Adam and his descendants sin, and God is angry and sends the flood
Humankind pollutes the environment and climate change results*

The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually.

And God saw that the earth was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted its ways upon the earth.

[The Lord said] “... I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights; and every living thing that I have made I will blot out from the face of the ground.”

The waters swelled so mightily on the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered;

The waters swelled above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep.

And all flesh died that moved on the earth, birds, domestic animals, wild animals, all swarming creatures that swarm on the earth, and all human beings;

Everything on dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died.

Exodus 3: 7-8

*The Israelites suffer in Egypt and repent; God forgives and promises them a better future
If humankind mends its ways, environmental damage will be reduced*

Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry ... Indeed, I know their sufferings,

“and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey ... “

Third Hymn – No 245; It’s a world of sunshine, a world of rain ...

Talk

1. The need for action

Quote from the Bible – Jeremiah 2: 7

“And I brought you into a plentiful country, to eat the fruit thereof and the goodness thereof, but when ye entered, ye defiled my land, and made mine heritage an abomination.”

Quote from 2019 – one of our young people at an after-school demonstrations held at the Scottish Parliament at Holyrood

“This is an emergency and we are scared. So we strike.”

Two quotations, but just one stark message. Climate change is one of the principal threats facing the world today.

We need to act at all levels of society and throughout the world. It will require difficult choices which will change the way we live. But doing nothing will also change the way we live, because if climate change goes too far, Earth may be damaged beyond recognition.

Tackling climate change effectively will cost large sums of money over a long period of time. But we already find large sums of money for other projects. For example ...

The Scottish share of the cost of updating the UK’s nuclear missile programme will exceed £5 billion over the next decade. This, coincidentally, is exactly the time frame in which we need to take action over the climate crisis.

A recent estimate of the cost of HS2 is £88 billion; and that’s up from £62 billion!

It is legitimate to ask what impact such sums could have on reducing climate change. Indeed, it’s irresponsible *not* to calculate the impact these sums could have.

2. Who’s doing what: individuals

It’s not just money; it’s our personal behaviour too. At individual level, habits and opinions are changing for the better.

Here in Carlops, we support Traidcraft, as individuals and with our monthly produce stall. Traidcraft is thinking through what it takes to be a 1.5°C organisation – one that can prove it’s contributing to meeting that 1.5°C target. Traidcraft’s answers are small ones, but together they make big differences. And they are answers that anyone can work on, any time: supporting local producers; eating less meat and more vegetables; using cars and planes less. Not huge sacrifices, but all conscious decisions.

Traidcraft is just one Carlops activity that is environmentally friendly. Nearly all of us compost. Nearly all of us recycle. Nearly all of us support green charities.

Most of us here are old enough to remember what it was like when flying was still an exciting adventure, and exotic fruits and vegetables were becoming available.

Today, flying accounts for 15% of all Scottish transport emissions and is the fastest growing source. A return flight to the US generates emissions similar to the average annual domestic heating bill.

So remember the question: “Is your journey really necessary?” We all need to ask that, and we need to be less self-indulgent about our answer.

Growing awareness is already causing people to rethink travel habits. In Sweden, inspired by Greta Thunberg, who prefers to travel by rail, air travel fell in 2019 despite a growing economy.

The same goes for diet. Going veggie reduces emissions. Humankind will not stop eating meat entirely, but if you suggest that we have one meat-free day a week, say, many people will find that achievable.

You can take the same approach to using your car.

These are not huge sacrifices, though they may shake the comfort zone. But they won't shake it as much as temperatures that harm crops; or a flooded house every other year because rainfall has tipped out of control.

We need to change our personal behaviour and we know how to do it. Small changes mean big improvements. Do what you can do; but do it all the time.

2019 has been a year of activism that has put climate change centre stage.

Xtinction Rebellion has succeeded in making everyone talk about plastic, pollution, climate crisis, ocean degradation and fossil fuel dependency.

You may think that these are nameless activists, disrupting our day-to-day lives with their protests. Reading a report in the paper, I spotted a reference to Gary Jack taking part in the recent Glasgow demonstration, and I contacted him to check. Yes, he, Elaine and Vincent are all involved in Xtinction Rebellion, trying to force our governments to take more urgent action on the climate issues affecting us. Gary and Vincent camped at the London protest in April which led to the UK government declaring a climate emergency a week or so after the protest. Then all three of them camped at the Scottish Parliament for 5 days which was an uplifting and an inspiring experience.

Children have become involved with passion and energy. The school strike on 20th September 2019 was one of the biggest climate protests ever. Millions of people across 185 countries rejected “business as usual” and stood together, calling for change.

So, there's a lot of drive coming from the broad-based bottom of the social pyramid – individuals, small organisations and charities.

3. Who's doing what: international organisations and cross-national work

Drive and leadership are also coming from the top of the pyramid.

The United Nations (as an organisation, though not yet its individual members) with its climate summits: remember Paris; look forward to Glasgow 2020.

The World Bank is helping, by shaping its aid policies and producing accurate ecological and economic forecasts. It predicts that 128 million climate refugees will be created by 2050 if we do not act now. Some refugees crossing the Mediterranean may be political escapees, but most are fleeing areas devastated by drought, flooding or crop failure, and the civil strife that they create.

The scientific community, by undertaking and publishing research, is clarifying the questions, finding the evidence, setting the targets, making them known.

So the top of the pyramid is also doing its bit.

4. Who's doing what: national governments and larger businesses

The gap seems to be in the middle; national governments and larger companies.

It is the inadequate action of our governments who prioritise “business as usual” which has led to today’s need for drastic action. “Business as usual” is killing life on this planet. Governments are reluctant to act lest it cost votes.

And the continuing insistence of business on importing asparagus from Peru in winter is helping to keep up the air miles and the emissions. Eat local – choose brussels sprouts instead of asparagus.

But remember two things. First, this is also the segment of the pyramid that delivers the infrastructure we depend upon for daily living; it creates and maintains our comfort zone. Second, we are quick to blame if we are inconvenienced or uncomfortable. They should have foreseen this. There should be a law against it. Why is there no asparagus this Christmas?

Let us not downplay the need for this section to act and drive change; but let us not pretend we have no part to play either.

Fourth Hymn – No 238; Lord bring the day to pass ...

Talk finale

What we need to do. What we need to communicate

The children are right: we need to change behaviour in government and in business.

It's our government; what are we *really* telling the politicians? And who buys that asparagus? It won't be flown from Peru if they stop.

Governments need our votes. We need to make it clear that we want climate action and will put up with the consequences. We won't sack them if taxes rise and green measures make

life a bit uncomfortable. But we will vote them out if they let things drift. Contact our prospective candidates now, as we approach this election.

And business needs our custom. Send a similar message by economic action. Buy from companies that try green initiatives; but also, promise we won't take our custom away if there's no Peruvian asparagus at Christmas!

Things are improving, even if too slowly. Personal opinion is miles away from where it stood ten, five, even one year ago. And governments are feeling the pressure; that's the prelude to action

Nelson Mandela, the Suffragettes and the Civil Rights movement achieved justice by sticking to their principles, and by speaking and acting consistently over the longer term.

We need to do the same. Raise our voices – Yes. Demonstrate – Yes. Strike for our grandchildren, so they have a world to grow up in – Yes. But also – change our own habits and accept the consequences of what we need governments and businesses to do.

As Christians, we know that our responsibility is to care for the poor, disadvantaged and marginalised. But it is just they who are most severely affected by climate change and its consequences. They cannot move away from a rising ocean level. They cannot pay someone to plant trees to “offset” the carbon released by burning wood, because it's the only fuel they have.

And as an Eco-congregation, we treasure the planet. We believe we should help the needy. We believe we should speak out for what we know is right. So let's talk, and act, and behave consistently about it.

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.

Now let us pray for others and especially today, for those affected by a damaged environment, and for the Earth itself.

Lord, we cherish and respect the planet you gave us and the marvel of creation that made it.

We are realising at long last that actions of ours that we thought were achievements, are damaging this good Earth. We have taken too long to learn this lesson; we are sorry for that and for our lack of care. We want to do better. We want to preserve all that we still can of our world – of *your* world.

Help us Lord, as we try to improve our ways; help us touch the earth lightly; help us as individuals and as a society bound together on this one planet. And help us as we try to persuade those who govern us and provide for us to do so in ways that treat your Earth better.

Help us fulfil your message of love for all as we try to put the needs of those who suffer from a damaged environment before our own comforts and convenience. And help us put the lives of our children and grandchildren before our own selfishness. They have a rightful expectation to have this good Earth to live on; help us work to ensure that that right is not taken away from them.

Amen

Fifth (closing) Hymn – No 243; Touch the earth lightly ...

Blessing

Hear us, Creator of all, convert the hearts of those who ravage the earth and strengthen the resolve of those who respect it. And since the earth is your gift to us, prevent us from destroying by thoughtlessness that which is not ours to own.

Sung triple amen

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