

Carlops Parish Church Eco-service, 2020

PROTECTING THE EARTH WITH ETHICAL ACTION

WELCOME

Welcome to the 2020 Carlops eco-service, the fifteenth in the series and the first to be delivered over the internet via *Zoom*. The theme of the service is how we can protect the Earth by our personal, positive and ethical actions.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader We gather to thank God for our community of people and love
Response *Thank you, Lord; we rejoice in it*

Leader We gather to thank God for our capacity to choose the right way
Response *Thank you, Lord; we rejoice in it*

Leader We gather to thank God for our planet
Response *Thank you, Lord; we rejoice in it*
Help us tend this good Earth as we know we should

HYMN 240 (CH4) God in such love for us lent us this planet

God in such love for us lent us this planet,
Gave it a purpose in time and in space;
Small as a spark from the fire of creation,
Cradle of life and the home of our race.

Thanks be to God for its bounty and beauty;
Life that sustains us in body and mind;
Plenty for all, if we learn how to share it;
Riches undreamed-of to fathom and find.

Long have our human wars ruined its harvest;
Long has earth bowed to the terror of force;
Long have we wasted what others have need of;
Poisoned the fountain of life at its source.

Earth is the Lord's; it is ours to enjoy it;
Ours, as God's stewards, to farm and defend.
From its pollution, misuse, and destruction,
good Lord, deliver us, world without end!

READINGS

Genesis 1: 26-29, 31

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 said: “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food.”

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

Galatians 6: 4-10

All must test their own work; then that work, rather than their neighbour’s work, will become a cause for pride. For all must carry their own loads. Those who are taught the word must share in all good things with their teacher.

Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all.

REFLECTION: PROTECTING THE EARTH WITH ETHICAL ACTION

Three schools

It is widely acknowledged that we need to change human behaviour to protect the Earth and its environment, but we still lack a secure consensus about what changes would be most effective and how they might be implemented.

We may discern three broad schools: *Don’t*, *Somehow someday* and *We can do this*. The first two get most publicity, but the third may achieve more in our life-times.

A lot of campaigning goes into *Don’t*: don’t fly, don’t drive, don’t fertilise, don’t wrap, don’t discard. *Don’t* can help the environment; during lockdown, many fewer car miles and flights showed up quickly in air quality measures. But should we choose between the environment,

the economy and freedom of action in ways that effectively write one or another element out of the equation? What about doing as well as *Don'ting*?

Somehow someday looks to new solutions: nuclear fusion, hydrogen-powered aeroplanes, carbon capture, electric cars. The last of these is growing in present-day markets, but the others remain big-budget development projects; could happen, might not. What about now?

We can do this gets less air-time; fewer protest marches. Yet this school simply asks all of us to apply our natural human gifts and do something positive, right now.

All three approaches raise questions about the purpose and nature of human existence.

- For the *Don't* school: Are we on this Earth to *not* do things?
- For *Somehow someday*: Are we on this Earth to *wait*?
- And for *We can do this*: Can we rely on our own judgment and actions?

What do our readings suggest?

The dominion given to humankind in *Genesis* is founded on our capacity to think, make moral judgments, and effect change. Exercising dominion is not throwing one's weight around; it is leading and nurturing, as well as ruling. Good leadership is more *Let's try this together* than *Charge! Follow me*. Nurturing is ethical care for others: animal, human, plant, land; and it means acting in ways that protect their future, as well as looking after them in the present.

In *Galatians*, Paul tells us to act for the good of all and according to what we know is right. He also tells us to keep trying, even when the going gets tough.

These readings tell us to act. There are no *Don'ts* there. And we are not to sit and wait for something better because what we did in the past hasn't worked.

In addition to these readings, think about the parable of the talents, in *Matthew 25: 14-30*. Those servants who took action and increased their portion were praised; the servant who did nothing was criticised. Jesus taught action, not *Don't* or *Somehow someday*.

We can do this

This is where *We can do this* comes in.

Few things are more hurtful than a gift disregarded. If we are to honour God, we must use his gifts of curiosity, ingenuity and the capacity for moral judgment. We need to do, and do ethically. It's not enough just to *Don't*. And as the environment is being damaged now, we need to do now, rather than wait and hope for a *Somehow someday* solution.

Acting positively and ethically honours God and creation and has material advantages too. Managing your garden, farm, vast estate, or window-box positively and ethically helps the environment, and increases output too. There's a virtuous cycle in working with nature and the environment, rather than trying to overpower them; nurturing animals, not just exploiting them; exercising dominion ethically, with integrity and restraint. Doing good, returns good.

Participants in the TV series, *This farming life*, explain that managing land and stock ethically is not only a moral imperative; it improves performance too. Tending land sympathetically, making room for insects, birds and wild plants, produces larger harvests of higher quality; and better returns. Caring for animals' well-being; providing healthcare, good living conditions and diet, deliver enhanced birth and survival rates, improved growth; and better returns.

Invariably, successful people have chosen breeds well attuned to terrain and climate. Rough, inaccessible land and Scottish climate: stock that can thrive outdoors in poor weather and can calve or lamb without constant intervention. One farmer, who had to keep cattle indoors for nine months over a prolonged winter, didn't blame climate change, but re-examined what he had chosen to farm. Should he change to a breed better attuned to conditions? That is, should he improve the balance between creation, the environment and his ambition? Lower sale price per beast; but improved herd-wide welfare and condition, so better performance overall.

At sea, research shows that re-constituting wild fish stocks by hatch-and-release schemes generates more stock than captive fish farming, and largely eliminates the pest infestations than can affect intensive fish farms. It takes longer, but produces more and healthier fish, and thus, more successful fishermen.

Shift to another sector: chefs confirm that caringly-nurtured animals are better on the plate; their meat lacks the toxins found in animals that have led more stressful lives. Dearer beef and lamb carcasses, but better texture and taste, so more diners, higher income. And at the beginning of that chain, a better-nurtured creature.

This evidence persists at individual and home level, the garden and the pet, rather than the farm and the herd. Vegetables grown in carefully and naturally tended gardens taste better at your dining-table. And a cared-for pet rewards its owner with loyalty and affection.

There is a common thread on the farm, at sea, in restaurants and at home: doing good, returns good. Exercising dominion in a positive, ethical way delivers healthier creatures and plants, more productive land, a better environment, and a richer, more secure life for humankind. And God and creation are honoured.

We can do this with our existing experience and resources, if we let our uniquely human moral compass guide us. Thought, determination and restraint are needed, but little more.

Balance

Of course, none of the three schools is the answer on its own. We need balance.

By all means, let us invest in fusion, hydrogen engines and the rest: *Somehow someday*, there will be benefits. And let us use resources, but not squander them; *Don't* fly, or drive, or wrap, or discard, unthinkingly.

But let us also act positively, and ethically, and now. Each individual's impact may be slight, but if we do what we can do, and do it consistently, the aggregate will be significant and will help this good Earth that has been entrusted to us. *We can do this*.

PRAYER

Lord, we thank you for this good Earth you have given us to live on. Thank you for its life-giving qualities. Thank you for its bounty. Thank you for its beauty. We hold the Earth in trust for you, so help us look after it as we know we should. Help us repair the damage we have done to it. Help us secure it for future generations of your people.

Lord, we thank you for the animals and the plants; the fields, forests and mountains; the lakes, rivers and seas; the fertile places and wildernesses; the villages, towns and cities. Help us to enjoy all of these. But help us to nurture them, not exploit them heedlessly.

Lord, we thank you for the people you have given us to live with. Thank you for our family, friends, colleagues, neighbours, community, church. Thank you for those who lead and guide us. Thank you for those through whom we conduct our daily lives. Thank you for those who need our help. Help us to care for all these people as we know we should.

In silence, we cherish our dearest and all our fellows. We pray that they flourish in your love.

15 second silence

Lord, thank you for this good Earth and for your love that gives it to us.

Amen

BENEDICTION

This benediction was often used by the late Ian Alison, a founder member of Carlops Church's Eco Group.

May the road rise to meet you
May the wind be always at your back
May the sun shine warmly upon your face
May the rain fall softly upon your fields until we meet again
May God bless us and hold us in the hollow of his hand

SUNG BLESSING

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.

CLOSE

Rennie McElroy, with Laura Armstrong, Nan Buchan and Mary McElroy
18 October 2020