

St Peter's Ealing
Sunday 7th November 2021
Sermon

Creation Care and COP 26

If you have not noticed we are amid another climate change conference – the UN Climate Change Conference UK 2021 – COP (Conference of Parties) 26. It began last week with great fanfare. World leaders and royal personages held dinners, made speeches and declared their support. After two days they all left, leaving the lesser personages of politics and science to discuss and make declarations that should affect the future of our planet, our future, the future of our descendants and the descendants of everyone else on the planet.

Christians, with other faith groups, are attempting to make sense of what is a dramatic change in emphasis. For millennia it has been understood humanity stood atop creation. In the psalms we are told that we are only a little lower than the angels. In the writings of the early church it is suggested, as humanity is saved by an incarnate God then the human form God took has elevated the status of humanity even further.

In this view creation is a tool to serve humanity, to be used for its survival. The purpose of Nature is to provide food, clothing and shelter. Such views are rooted in creation stories, particularly of the Judeo-Christian heritage such as those of Genesis which suggest the place of nature (The Garden of Eden) has the soul purpose of providing sustenance for humanity (Adam & Eve) – or at least that has become an interpretation of that story as have such stories as Peter's vision at Joppa where a sheet full of all the creatures of the earth is lowered before him and he is instructed to kill and eat.

For centuries this has been a view that has driven our understanding of the planet upon which we live. Admittedly for much of human history this has been the case, one might even argue there has been a balance between humanity and nature. Until that is the emergence of first the agrarian and then the industrial revolutions. These major sociological events in history

accelerated and used this understanding of the place of nature in the history of humanity to better the lot of humanity.

The result of this view is the world we have today. In our time poverty is at an all time low; healthcare is better and more readily available than it ever has been; access to wealth, comfort, the increasing longevity of life, the place of travel and choice is as it has never been before. The life I can live now my grandmother could never have dreamed of.

Yet along side this we have a planet that is severely damaged, some would say on the brink of disaster. Damage caused because humanity believe it could, “fill the earth and subdue it” (Genesis 1.28). whilst we can still appreciate the beauty of the earth and marvel at its complexity, now humanity needs a new premise by which it can understand its relationship to planet earth.

In Christian thought theologians have returned to scripture for guidance and inspiration. As we look at our writings, we now see the balance maintained with nature between using creation and living as part of creation; as using nature as a source of food, energy and shelter whilst respecting it and nurturing it, recognising it as God’s creation, not ours; that we are not apart from creation but are part of God’s glory. We are encouraged to understand our place as carers, stewards for, rather than abusers of, nature.

What theologians also draw us to is an intimate, individual relationship with and responsibility for creation, as well as our corporate, connected relations; our fellowship with each other as well as our fellow members, seals, whales, birds and beast, our fellowship with all flora, fauna and terra firma. People of faith are encouraged to reinterpret God’s command to take dominion as meaning to be compassionate leaders and not abusers of nature.

These are still all grand words until we realise this is God’s call upon each of us. God’s word is not for someone else; someone else to worry about creation care; someone else to worry about birds and bees; someone else to worry about industrial farming practices and the use of plastic.

After mass we are showing a short film from Traidcraft. Our interest is in the stories of the people whose lives are affected by us, whether we support

Fairtrade wherever we can and whether we are going to play our small part in combating climate change. We will see people, many miles away, who are in fellowship with us because of our shared humanity and responsibility.

Throughout scripture we see God wanting God's people to see the wider picture of salvation. In this sphere to see the wider picture of our impact upon the world. In scripture we are challenged to look at the world with fresh eyes, with the eyes of God and not humanity. We are encouraged to live in the world as people who follow God, to be counter cultural when the world comes up against God and to respond to the world in ways that may not be expected.

Events like COP 26 challenge everyone to take a fresh look at how we live. Our faith, our listening to God will show us what is expected of us – to care for each other as well as the world we share. The question, as always is what will be do about it?