

Vicky MacArthur online sermon transcript 05/11/2021

You cannot have failed to notice that many of the world's leaders descended on Glasgow last weekend for the beginning of COP26.

COP stands for Conference of the Parties, a UN climate change conference where national leaders come together to discuss action on climate change. They occur annually and this will be the 26th meeting of the parties. Every year it is hosted by a different country to ensure all regions are represented. This year (after a year's delay due to the pandemic) the UK is co-hosting the 26th conference with Italy with the main conference taking place in Glasgow. The COP26 summit will bring parties together to accelerate action towards the goals of the Paris Agreement and the 1992 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change under which every country is bound by treaty to "avoid dangerous climate change". national leaders will discuss how to accelerate action towards achieving the goals of the Agreement and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

The services this week are taking the climate change emergency as their theme.

"Climate" refers to longer-term averages in weather (which may be regional or global) and can be thought of as the weather averaged over several decades. "Climate change" encompasses global warming, but refers to the broader range of changes that are happening to our planet, including rising sea levels; shrinking mountain glaciers; accelerating ice melt in Greenland, Antarctica and the Arctic; and shifts in flower/plant blooming times. There have been previous periods of climate change, but the current changes are more rapid than any known events in Earth's history. On land, temperatures have risen about twice as fast as the global average. Deserts are expanding, while heat waves and wildfires are becoming more common.[5] Increased warming in the Arctic has contributed to melting permafrost, glacial retreat and sea ice loss.[6] Higher temperatures are also causing more intense storms and other weather extremes.[7] In places such as coral reefs, mountains, and the Arctic, many species are forced to relocate or become extinct, as their environment changes.[8] Climate change threatens people with food and water scarcity, increased flooding, extreme heat, more disease, and economic loss. It can also drive human migration.[9] The World Health Organization calls climate change the greatest threat to global health in the 21st century.[10] Even if efforts to minimise future warming are successful, some effects will continue for centuries. These include sea level rise, and warmer, more acidic oceans. The vast majority of actively publishing climate scientists – 97 percent – agree that humans are causing global warming and climate change.

The five marks of mission have been developed by the Anglican Consultative Council since 1984. Since then, they have been widely adopted as an understanding of what contemporary mission is about. The marks were adopted by the General Synod of the Church of England in 1996 and many dioceses and other denominations used them as the basis of action plans and creative mission ideas.

Let me draw your attention to the fifth mark of mission, To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth. Some may wonder what this has to do with the good news of Jesus Christ. They might claim that this is a purely secular concern. But there are a number of arguments against this view.

The passage from Genesis read today makes clear the responsibility that God has given to human beings in relation to the rest of creation. It is often described in terms of humans having

stewardship over creation. In verses 26-28 God blesses humankind and gives the instruction to subdue and have dominion over other living creatures.

But we would be wrong to think that this was God allowing us to do whatever we liked with his creation. If we look at the next chapter of Genesis in verse 15 it says The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. In older translations of the Bible the words used are to tend and keep it. This is quite different from subduing it. In fact the words are significant. The word tend means to work or serve. And this relationship is emphasised by a word play where the Hebrew word for ground, Adamah, is very similar to the word for human being which is Adam, suggesting that the well-being of the earth and humanity are linked.

If we recognise that humankind has been placed in this world to nurture all that God has given us then we should feel duty bound to live in a right relationship with it. When we do this we are making God's love known. God's presence can be seen in the world around us and in caring for creation we are sharing in God's work.

There is also an element of justice in our relationship with God's world. The term 'Climate Justice' expresses how climate change is a social and political issue as much as a technical or environmental one. Climate change interacts with and exacerbates existing inequalities. Rising sea levels, deforestation, increasing pollution and decreasing flow in our rivers, dumping of our waste material, and so on, these are not just concerns of aesthetics or health or agriculture, but are fundamentally related to justice. Much pollution is caused by developed or developing nations. But the effects are often most directly felt by those who lack the resources to manage the damage to their fisheries or farms or forests. Pacific island nations have drawn attention to the fact that they are already suffering some of the worst impacts of sea level rise and acidification despite being among the nations that have contributed least to carbon emissions.

Throughout the Bible justice is an important concept. Justice is a central characteristic of the Kingdom of God. The people of God are called to seek justice (Micah 6:8)—not just for themselves but also for others. The Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby has written: "Climate Change is the greatest challenge that we and future generations face. When we look at Jesus, we see instinctively stood alongside the most vulnerable in society. It is absolutely clear that following Jesus must include standing alongside those that are on the frontline of this unfolding catastrophe".

So should we be campaigning? As Christians we have a double biblical mandate: we are called on to tend and care for God's creation and also to love our neighbour.

We can do things in our own lives to help make a difference, every little helps right? But the scale and nature of the problem at hand means that the hard fact is that only the government can obtain the actions needed at the scale and speed we need it now. We may not want to or be able to go to Glasgow or Westminster with a placard, but the church and Christians have enormous potential. The Anglican consultative council has recently gained accreditation as an observer NGO to the UNFCCC. This means that the Anglican communion can participate in this decision making space and provide opportunities including holding meetings with government delegations.

There are 50,000 churches in the UK with around 3 million regular church goers. Imagine if just a quarter of churches and Christians actually took action on this issue – stood up publicly and said "we need the Government to go further faster." It could have a huge impact on politicians locally and nationally, and encourage others to use their voice too.

Some people might say we have more pressing things to worry about right now than climate change. The pandemic is still very much with us and is an ever present cause of concern. There may never be a better window of opportunity to push for change in relation to climate change and climate justice than at the moment. Not just because COP26 is happening but because the Covid19 pandemic and our recovery from it gives us a unique opportunity to change the way we live.

Dutch research agency Glocalities told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "There's a lot of opportunity now for change because in times of crisis, things become more fluid, and changes can happen much faster." COVID-19 has created a climate for change and also proved that when we need to, we can act rapidly and restructure our lives.

These is the idea behind the Great RE:SET global initiative led by the World Economic Forum in partnership with the Prince of Wales sustainable markets initiative.

- Pray!
- Support organisations working with people disproportionately affected by climate change
- Make lifestyle changes
- Think of what our churches could be doing to help tackle climate change
- Sign a petition/write to your MP