

A woman with short dark hair, wearing a white church robe with a ruffled collar, is looking down at a black smartphone she is holding in her right hand. She is standing in a field with green plants, possibly corn, in the background. The lighting is bright, suggesting it's daytime.

christian
aid

Prophetic Voices
Discussion starters for
church groups

**Calling for
Climate Justice**

What is climate change?

Climate change is a life or death issue. Not a niche concern, but an issue of justice. People's lives are at stake.

Climate change is the term used to describe changes in global weather patterns. These changes are happening because our consumer-driven lifestyles and activities mean more gases (such as carbon dioxide) insulate our planet and heat it up.

Carbon dioxide is emitted when we burn fossil fuels, which we do a lot – to drive our cars, to generate energy, to warm our homes and much more. Our addiction to this dirty energy has resulted in an unprecedented rise in carbon dioxide emissions.

Already, the world is feeling the consequences. We're seeing more extreme climate events: more floods in some places and droughts in others, rising sea levels, and some diseases becoming more widespread.

Those who are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change are also the least responsible for it. Climate change is destroying the homes and livelihoods of some of the poorest people in our world.

But there is an alternative.

We have a vision of a world that doesn't rely on carbon-emitting fossil fuels. It is unjust that the world's poorest are suffering as a result of the choices and actions of people in industrialised countries. We have only a short time, but we can do something about this. We need to keep global temperatures from rising further.

The most developed and industrialised countries, such as our own, need to take responsibility for curbing carbon emissions, while enabling low-carbon and sustainable development to happen in the least industrialised countries.

Prophetic voices

Prophets in the biblical tradition are people of hope. The truths they declare are often difficult to hear, but they also bring good news and hope for the future. They confront us with a need to change, warning us what will happen if nothing is done and showing us what the world could look like if we would only change our ways. They know how often we run away from unpleasant realities, but they always help us to imagine a new future.

Putting new things before our eyes, they absolutely refuse to let go of hope.

Here are some of today's prophetic voices on climate change:

'Forget about making poverty history. Climate change will make poverty permanent.'

Nazmal Chowdry¹

'People living on the front line of climate change are the canaries in the climate coalmine. But their plight is more than just a warning of what many other parts of the world can expect.'

These are individuals paying the price for the actions of wealthy nations and people grown rich through continued dependence on polluting fossil fuels.'

It is vital that politicians hear their voices and make tackling climate change a priority if we are to pass on a safe planet fit for future generations.'

Alison Doig³

'It is hard to see how anyone could justify the assertion that the need to drive a car which can accelerate from 0 to 60 miles an hour in 4-5 seconds... overrides the Ethiopians' need to avoid recurrent famines.'

George Monbiot²



For discussion

- Are you challenged by what these voices are saying? What more do you want to ask or know?
- Think about the church communities you know or have links with in different parts of the world, with whom you share fellowship and faith. Do you know how they are experiencing climate change? Does their situation have anything to say to you?
- How do these prophetic voices make you feel? What action might you want to take? Does your faith have an impact on your response?
- What do you want to say to God? What is your prayer?



Prayer

Share a time of prayer together, however is most comfortable for your group. If a form of words is helpful, there is a prayer on page 11 that you may like to use.



Husband and wife team Truphena and Justin Ileri are Kenyan farmers who receive important weather reports by SMS message. Because of that project, they say they understand better how climate change is affecting their farming, and how best to cope.

Going back to the beginning: our relationship with creation



Read: Genesis 1:26-28; Genesis 2:7-8, 15; Genesis 3:17-19

What do these passages say to you about the relationship between humankind and creation?

Richard Bauckham, a Christian theologian, suggests that we have, for too long, imagined a *vertical* structure to describe the relationship between God, humankind and the rest of creation, with God at the top, us in the middle, and the rest of creation under our dominion. He suggests that we need a change of imagination, so that we can understand ourselves as part of a *horizontal* set of relationships, and have a renewed appreciation of ourselves as *creatures*.

Spend some time exploring that thought. Do you think he could be right or do you want to argue? What difference might it make to think 'horizontally'?

In the Bible's stories of creation, we are described as being among all the living creatures. In the original Hebrew language of Genesis, 'Adam' is not so much a name as a description of what it is to be a human being. It means 'earth creature', made from the earth. Human beings are given the important work of 'tilling and keeping the earth' and when we die we return to the earth from which we came.

What could it mean to be an 'earth creature'?

Some of the prophets of climate change in recent times have alerted us to the hubris of much of our past and present

theology of creation.⁴ Some think it laughable that we have considered ourselves stewards of creation when we have made such a mess of it. We have deceived ourselves if we think that the earth is simply something 'for us'. As Rowan Williams puts it, we need to regain a sense that our relationship to the earth is about 'communion not consumption'.⁵

What do you associate with the word 'steward'? Can it still help us understand our role in creation?



Imagine

You have a stained glass window in your church that celebrates the vocation of humankind to be 'stewards of creation'. It is a very beautiful window. You have received a letter from some local ecology campaigners. They urge you to take the window out because the idea of stewardship has led us not to care for or keep creation, but rather to exploit it so much that it is now in danger. They say that we ought to be ashamed of what we are doing to the planet, especially because of the effects on the poor. They argue that we need a new word and a new attitude to the planet. How do you respond?



Action

Plan to do something in your church to show the local community what you really believe about humankind's place in creation.



Theresa Mwakasungula is a small-scale farmer in Malawi. Thanks to our partner's economic empowerment project, she's diversified her crops and improved her farming methods, and now has enough food to eat and sell.

Looking to Jesus: wisdom for creation



Read: Matthew 6:25-34

What do these verses say to us about Jesus' understanding of creation?

It is easy for us to see how the birds of the air and the lilies of the field are entirely dependent on God's gifts, but perhaps we do not see so easily how we are dependent too. Despite our ability to toil and spin (or whatever it is we do), there is, after all, a fundamental dependence and interdependence that we share with all living things.

Reflect together on how human beings are like, and not like, the 'birds of the air' and the 'lilies of the field'.

Does Jesus' own life offer us a model for our living in creation? You might say that Jesus lived a simple life himself. He did not accumulate possessions, and the movement he founded was one in which lives were shaped by fellowship and sharing rather than by accumulation and consumption.

He taught that 'the meek will inherit the earth' (Matthew 5:5), a saying that challenges and re-imagines the world in which we live now where it is the powerful who seem to be inheriting the earth, while the poor reap the whirlwind. But Jesus also enjoyed creation, eating and drinking with friends, and blessing children.

How does Jesus' own life show us a good way to live in creation?

The Christian understanding of Jesus as God incarnate declares that creation is holy and God is redeeming it. Sometimes Jesus is referred to in the New Testament as 'the second Adam' (1 Corinthians 15:45-47), the new 'earth creature'. He is buried in earth, descends into hell, is raised to life and ascends to heaven.

Such a salvation story reveals a God who is, out of love, recreating humanity. Not destroying us, not lifting us into a spiritual realm in which we escape the earthiness of creation, but remaking us for a renewed (not abandoned) earth.

Jesus offers us the clearest vision we have of a new humanity with a new relationship with the earth. The Gospels reveal one who is at peace with the animals in the wilderness, before whom the storms are stilled. Justice comes as the poor inherit the earth. This is what it could be like to live a human life in all its fullness.

Here is a vision.

The New Testament writers witness to their belief that Jesus rose from death, that he was the first fruits of a new humanity, and that God is bringing a 'new Heaven and a new Earth' (Revelation 21:1). In what ways can this faith bring real hope to a world subject to climate change?

St Francis: prophet of creation

The Christian tradition has continued to produce and listen to prophetic voices who have been able to offer us a new way of envisioning human life. One much loved example is St Francis of Assisi. The liberation theologian Leonardo Boff describes Francis as having had 'a distinct way of being in the world, not over things, but together with them, like brothers and sisters of the same family'.⁶



St Francis of Assisi

St Francis of Assisi was himself living at a time when storms, droughts, crop failures, famines and hard winters had led to despair. But he was part of a change in imagination, a moral revolution in thinking about justice and poverty, as well as about the created world.

Francis was not a dreamy romantic. He knew about suffering and self-denial. He knew about a world frightened for its future. But he saw the world as one in which the deepest joy and hope could be found in living as a brother or sister of creation, rather than its master.

His imagination and hope continue to inspire the world today. His voice is being heard again in times in which we need a vision as clear and simple as his, as beautiful and as filled with hope. The present Pope's adoption of the name Francis signals his own will to shape a church that is of the poor, but also of creation, rather than somehow over it.

St Francis also embraced the strong biblical tradition in which all creation is understood to be praising God.

 Share in singing: 'All creatures of our God and King' or read together Francis' poem, the 'Canticle of the Sun'.

Listening to the prophetic voices

Those who tell us about the realities of climate change bring a challenging message. They urgently call us to change our lives for the sake of climate justice. We do not have long.

They find echoes in prophetic voices from the traditions of our faith who cheerfully, gladly and sacrificially embrace the challenge of living in new ways, because they see a vision of a new creation.

How can we hold together all of these prophetic voices?

The stories of creation show us that we are part of the community of creation. Jesus calls us not be anxious. Francis calls us to live as brothers and sisters of creation. And the whole tradition celebrates the God who will always bring life, even out of death.

We are promised 'a new heaven and a new earth' (Revelation 21:1), because what we have now is not to be discarded but renewed. The prophetic voices of our tradition give us the courage to work for climate justice, not with despair, but with hope.

This prophetic, imaginative and hopeful faith, rooted in the God of life, is what will help us to embrace even painful truth. We will fear nothing, but rather be inspired to become part of God's good future. In the face of the challenge of climate change, we need a new imagination. So let's listen to today's prophets, and listen in hope.



The edge of the Rio Lempa river in El Salvador, which endangers local communities when it floods.

From here on: how you can get involved



Give

Climate change, and its implications for all of us on Earth, is the biggest challenge we face in this generation. Our partners are supporting people on the front line as they adapt to climate change. Our staff and supporters are working hard to shape policy, to advocate and to press towards climate justice at a global level. All this work requires funding! This is something worth a lifetime commitment.

Please commit to climate justice by beginning or increasing your regular giving to Christian Aid. Visit christianaid.org.uk/give

Or could you organise a fundraising event that will also inspire hope for the future of creation?



Act

Join the movement that is fighting climate change in a million different ways.

Visit christianaid.org.uk/actnow to take the latest action.

At home

- Join the monthly fast for the climate, a global movement of people choosing to go without food on the first day of every month. Fast in solidarity with those hungry because of a changed climate and take time to reflect on your own consumption patterns.

In church

- Walk to worship – dedicate a Sunday as a carbon-free travel day by encouraging all those who can to walk or cycle to church. Make it a regular occurrence if you can.
- Plan a service that celebrates a renewed relationship with creation.
- Get together with people in your congregation and write to your MP. Explain that you are concerned about climate change and climate justice and ask what they are doing to respond to the problem.





Pray

God of all creation,
as the seas rise and the air changes,
when the storms rage and the crops die,
do you still call it good?

Jesus our Saviour,
as the birds of air change their flight,
and the lilies of the field are coated with dust,
do you still tell us not to be anxious?

Holy Spirit, source of life,
as we see what we have done,
and hear the cries of the hungry,
give us a vision of a hopeful future,
for an earth renewed and restored,
good for everyone.

Amen

Endnotes

1. Nazmal Chowdry, *The Climate of Poverty*, Christian Aid, 2006
2. George Monbiot, *Heat: how we can stop the planet burning*, Penguin, 2006, p154
3. Alison Doig, Christian Aid press release, to mark the publication of *Taken By Storm: responding to the impacts of climate change*, March 2014
4. For example, James Lovelock
5. Rowan Williams, 'Changing the myths we live by' in *Faith in the Public Square*, Bloomsbury, 2012
6. Leonardo Boff, *St Francis. A Model for Human Liberation*, SCM Press, 1982, p35

Cover photo: Drought and erratic rainfall have made farming on Truphena's land a struggle. Now, our partner sends weather forecasts by text message to farmers like Truphena, to help them adapt to changing weather patterns. As a result, Truphena can plan better, increasing her chances of a successful crop.



In the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan, our partner CODE distributes essential items including clean drinking water, rice, tinned corned beef and sardines, cooking oil, soap and detergent.

Poverty is an outrage against humanity.
It robs people of dignity, freedom and hope,
of power over their own lives.

Christian Aid has a vision – an end to
poverty – and we believe that vision can
become a reality. We urge you to join us.

For more of our worship resources for use
in churches, schools, small groups or by yourself,
go to christianaid.org.uk/worship



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