

TIME FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE

CLIMATE CHANGE IN CHURCH

Climate change is too important to be left to the environmentalists.¹ Back in 2007 a group of high-profile climate experts rated faith communities' involvement in tackling the issue second out of the 50 most powerful ways to make progress, after cutting carbon emissions.²

From tiny mustard seeds...

Do you feel like a lone voice in your church when it comes to climate change campaigning? Is your congregation passionate about ending poverty, but doesn't see climate change as part of the problem? Use these ideas to sow the seeds of climate justice in your church.

Educate

- Show the *Time for Climate Justice* DVD during a service or at a special event.
- Help Sunday school teachers and home-group leaders to gain access to climate change resources for use in their sessions.
- Meet your church leader or other relevant staff to share your enthusiasm for the campaign and persuade them to commit the church to taking part. You might find the resources here helpful when preparing for this meeting.
- If your church is keen, contact Christian Aid and arrange for a speaker to visit and share first-hand stories of how climate change is affecting the world's poorest communities.

Communicate

- Create a campaigns section on your church notice board, and use it to keep the congregation informed and to recruit people to campaign meetings and events. Pin up campaign materials, such as the *Time for Climate Justice* poster and the latest campaign postcard, remembering to keep these up to date. Does your church fundraise for a particular part of the world? Contact Christian Aid to find out more about how climate change is affecting the region and share this on the notice board.
- Negotiate a regular slot in the church magazine or on the website. Simply visit the Christian Aid website or contact the Campaigns team (campaigns@christian-aid.org or 020 7523 2264) to learn which postcard to promote and for the latest developments in the campaign. Link to the Christian Aid website from your church's website and include a specific link to the latest email action.

Integrate

- Encourage your church's prayer team to include communities affected by climate change in their intercessions – offer to research case studies for them or use the prayer and reflection material here.
- Suggest hymns and songs that speak of creation or justice issues.
- Work with the Parochial Church Council or your equivalent to lower the carbon footprint of your building and activities. Are people cycling to church? Is there a car-sharing scheme? Does everyone want a printed copy of the newsletter each time it comes out?

Christians and climate change

The main Christian denominations agree that a key aspect of Christian living has to do with how we safeguard the integrity of creation.³

Climate change sceptics

Most of us are not experts on the science of climate change and are reliant on the knowledge of others to form our opinions. As we listen to what others are saying, we are likely to come across climate change sceptics. Bishop James Jones, the Anglican Bishop of Liverpool, offers a way for non-scientists to address climate change sceptics, with four questions taken from George Monbiot (quoted in *Angels with Trumpets* by Paula Clifford, published by Christian Aid/DLT):⁴

'If you reject the [IPCC] explanation for planetary warming, you should ask yourself the following questions:

1. Does the atmosphere contain carbon dioxide?
2. Does atmospheric carbon dioxide raise the average global temperature?
3. Will this influence be enhanced by the addition of more carbon dioxide?
4. Have human activities led to a net increase of carbon dioxide?

If you are able to answer "no" to any one of them, you should put yourself forward for a prize. You will have turned science on its head.'

Made in the image of God

As Christians, we are responsible to God for the wellbeing of our planet and our fellow human beings. We are connected to one another and this brings responsibilities – to behave justly and to challenge injustice.

Genesis 1:27-28 tells us that we are made in God's image. This implies that we are drawn into a special relationship with other human beings who all reflect that image. Furthermore, God models relationship, being Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The good news of the Gospels is that we share in that relationship through Jesus Christ, a relationship that embraces not only human beings but all creation.

Theology of relationships

Christian Aid's theology explores the concept of being connected to each other, and its implications for our behaviour. Our theology paper *All Creation Groaning* takes its title from Paul, who, in Romans 8, writes of human suffering being echoed in all creation 'groaning in labour pains'. This is chillingly apposite today, where we see the unprecedented suffering among humanity, as lives and livelihoods are lost to increasingly erratic weather systems and disease, and areas of the earth rendered uninhabitable by flooding and extreme heat. If we believe that we are interconnected, with one another, with the earth and with God, then this implies a fracturing of right relationships.

Our response

As Christians, we believe that there is always hope, always the possibility for transformation. We have the opportunity to rebuild our relationships with the earth and with the millions of poor people for whom it is an increasingly fragile home.

Climate change is a moral and a theological issue. Christian Aid is committed to helping the church to be the church, to resource, inspire and empower people to put their faith into action. Go to christianaid.org.uk/churches for regularly updated prayer materials, Bible studies, reflections and theology papers.

Prayer of intercession

Transforming Spirit,
You hovered over the face of the waters
And breathed life into creation;
You continue to hover over the world,
Nourishing and brooding,
Bearing our pain,
Bringing life where there is brokenness and despair.
May we cherish all that brings life,
And enter into the dance of your creation,
So that the pastures of the wilderness will overflow,
the hills will gird themselves with joy,
and all your people can enjoy the fruits of the earth.

Prayer of praise

Creator God,
Who looked on the world and pronounced that it
was very good,
May we share this spirit of delight.
We rejoice in the sacred freshness of your creation;
In all that is rich and colourful,
Luscious and lovely,
Creative and fertile,
Juicy and delicious,
Bright and bursting and dazzling,
For all that gives life and love,
We praise you.

Prayer of confession

Holy God, Love Divine
Because you know what it is to be human,
To be tempted, to feel sorrow, to be afraid,
We entrust our lament to you.
And our lament is this:
For our part in an irreverent use of your creation;
For failing to see our connectedness;
For stockpiling the world's resources;
For worshipping gods of money;
For our sense of entitlement 'because we're
worth it';
For hammering nails into the cross of greed.
For all this we are truly sorry.
As we believe that you hear our lament and
transform it in your love,
Help us to be empowered people,
Knowing your blessing and having the courage to
turn around
And to live more gently on the earth.

Christians and climate change

This is a reflective piece on Mark 10:17-27. You could use it for individual reflection, or as part of a meditative service. If you do use it in a service, there is a suggestion at the end for a symbolic action on the part of the congregation.

Scientists are telling us that we are on the brink of a climate crisis, one that will only be averted if we ask the question that the young man asked Jesus: what must we do?

The encounter of the rich young man with Jesus was a pivotal moment, a time for him to be challenged to re-evaluate his priorities and his attitude to God and his fellow human beings. Jesus cut straight to the heart of the issue and straight to his heart – you have to give up that which keeps you from doing what you really need to do.

The young man was a respectable, law-abiding, devout Jew. He kept the commandments and did nothing to harm those around him. And he was wealthy – and at that time in Jewish culture, wealth was seen as evidence of God's blessing.

Spend a moment thinking about what society encourages us to take for granted as a blessing; perhaps our foreign holidays, or freedom of choice, or the exciting pace of our lives.

Jesus had compassion on the young man and desperately wanted to lead him on to the answer to his question. But the disciples were clearly as shocked as the young man by the interchange between him and Jesus. They too had bought into the idea that wealth was a sign of God's favour. So Jesus shocks them into a new understanding with a laughable statement: 'It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.'

Jesus is offering a gate, a way through from one life to another. He tells the young man, 'You lack one thing,

go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.'

What must we do? Not to inherit eternal life for ourselves, but to allow people a full and dignified life in the here and now, and to leave an inheritance of life for those who come after us. What does Jesus say to us in reply? Is there one thing we lack – the thing Jesus might ask us to get rid of or change? Are there things that get in the way of our relationship with God and God's creation – the so-called 'must-haves' of our lives? Our energy-thirsty appliances or lifestyles? Our investment in financial security? What must we shed? Let go of? Give away, in order that we might get a better glimpse of God's life for the world?

When Jesus says that it is very difficult for the rich to get into the kingdom of God, he is not talking about somewhere we go when we die, but somewhere that is open to us now. This is entirely counter-cultural. Jesus invites us into the fullness of life in a culture where the meek shall inherit the earth and the merciful are blessed. Happy, he says, are the poor in spirit, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, those who mourn. This is a culture clash – in head-on collision with our culture – that says, 'Happy are those who can buy cheap flights; happy are those who shop; blessed are those who live in big houses.'

Jesus teaches clearly that to pass through the eye of the needle, we need to be embracing the things of the kingdom of God. In giving something up, we are invited to take something up. Instead of feeling helpless in the face of climate crisis, we are invited to respond to the questions Jesus raises. How do we value our possessions? How do we value our neighbour? What kind of community do we want to build, locally and globally?

Where, in the climate crisis, might we find new life? How might we do things differently? How can we share our resources creatively? Is there potential for friendship with our immediate neighbours? What might we do with the extra time we have if we were forced to slow down? Would we actually be worse off taking the train rather than a plane to do a short journey?

The opposite of obsessive and exploitative wealth is not poverty. Christian Aid believes that poverty is a scandal and has no place in God's culture. Poverty, like wealth, is a physical and spiritual problem.

God's kingdom is a challenge to our values. It challenges us to see that our material wealth and others' material poverty are both spiritual diseases. But we can engage in healing. By supporting projects helping communities to adapt to the effects of climate change, making lifestyle changes, and lobbying our government to cut UK carbon emissions and help poor countries to mitigate and adapt to climate change, we are taking action so that together we may share in the fullness of life and be wholly sustained.

The message of the gospel is challenging but at the same time encouraging. When the disciples are astounded and ask each other, 'Who can be saved?', Jesus looks at them and says, 'For mortals, it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.' The things of the world can constrain us. Yet it is always possible, by the grace of God, to cut loose and enter into the freedom that Jesus inhabited and which is the lived experience of the kingdom of God; a kingdom beyond the domain of possessions and riches but where all know the worth of community and relationship.

Where is God inviting us into new life? What is it that Christ is asking us to let go of or set aside? Listen to your heart.

If you are including this meditation in a service, you may like to invite people to write a word or phrase or draw an image on paper of something they feel called to set aside. People may wish to place this under a stone around a large cross, as a symbol of the burdens that block our relationship with God. People may then like to take a flower as a symbol of the new life that we are offered by Christ.

Endnotes

1 Comment by a delegate to the World Social Forum in Nairobi, January 2007.

2 'The 50 things that will save the planet', taken from the Environment Agency's 'Your Environment Extra' Issue 17, Nov 2007 – Jan 2008.

3 The Five Marks of Mission were first formulated by representatives of the Anglican Communion in 1984 and were affirmed by the Lambeth Conference of Bishops in both 1988 and 1998. They were adopted by the Church of England General Synod in 1996 and a number of other denominations have also 'affirmed' them. Their purpose was to enable Christians across the world, coming from many different contexts and cultures, to have a common focus in their Christian life and mission. The Church of Scotland states on its website that 'it is concerned that climate change poses a serious and immediate threat to people everywhere, particularly to the poor of the earth; and that climate change represents a failure in our stewardship of God's creation. We accept the need to reduce the emissions of greenhouse gases urgently to avoid dangerous and irreversible climate change; and to promote a more equitable and sustainable use of energy'.

4 'Faith and the Future of the Earth', downloadable from the Diocese of Liverpool website, liverpool.anglican.org from the section 'Bishop James' speeches, cited in Paula Clifford, *Angels with Trumpets*, DLT/Christian Aid, 2009, p28.