

God's love of creation

There are many bible passages which refer to the creation. In Psalm 104, the psalmist describes the beauty of creation, declaring, '*O Lord, what a variety of things you have made! In wisdom you have made them all.*' The author understood how creation works. They knew where the birds nest, and where the mountain goats live, the great skill of a lion as it hunts its prey, and the vast array of creatures living in the water. They knew creation intimately: they must have spent time observing and learning how all things fit together, and as a result they were inspired to worship! Verse 31 says that God rejoices in his creation. The beauty and variety of all he's made brings him joy! Similarly, in Mark's Gospel, Jesus demonstrates his understanding of creation. He describes the issues that can hinder the growth of crops: he knows how drought can cause plants to wither, or how rocky ground prevents the development of roots. Even though he was a carpenter, he knew the importance of nutritious soil for a bountiful harvest. Jesus has an intimate knowledge of the workings of creation. This shouldn't be a surprise to us; the Bible tells us how all things were created for Jesus and by Jesus. In him, all things hold together: he's Lord of all creation. It's not a surprise that Jesus considers it important to observe the creation around us. But Jesus shows us something else too. He teaches us that not only does he have an intimate relationship with creation, but that also we can learn about our heavenly Father through it. Whether it's through the relentlessness of weeds, the character of birds or the power of a mustard seed, time and again Jesus points to the Father and the way he works through creation. We live in a busy world and often fail to take time to observe creation, but as the writer of Proverbs advises, '*Go to the ant... consider its ways.*'! From the psalms to the gospels, we see the ways creation can reveal more of God's character and inspire us to worship, and we see how God delights and finds joy in all he's made!

How we've damaged creation, and how that is impacting people in poverty

But when we look at the world today, we see how we've damaged this beautiful gift God has given us. The ways that we live, work and consume have pushed creation to breaking point. In Paul's letter to the Romans, we read how creation is in bondage to decay, trapped in frustration and crying out for liberation. Whether it's plastic pollution littering seas and the poorest communities, or species going extinct at record rates, or the climate crisis making droughts, floods and storms more frequent and severe, we've misused and damaged this beautiful gift of God. We're feeling some of the effects in the UK, but the impacts are hitting people in poverty the hardest and it's hard to grasp what that really means: it's big and abstract.

So let me tell you about a lady called Orbisa, a mother who lives in Afar, Ethiopia. A few years ago, Orbisa could rely on the rains: now, because of the changing climate, they are far less predictable. So she walks up to ten hours a day, every day, to find water for her family to drink. Her livelihood depends on selling livestock – but drought has killed nine of her ten cows. She's lost nearly half her goats too. The stark reality is that Orbisa is paying the price for emissions which have mostly been generated by developed nations like ours. This is what she said to an Aid worker: 'We used to get rain every four to five months; the area was very fertile and green. But it hasn't rained for six months and I don't know when it will rain next. I feel worried for the future.'

Around the world, millions of people like Orbisa are being pushed back into poverty because of climate change. In 2016, world hunger started to increase for the first time in a decade and has continued to increase every year since and that's because of climate change and conflict, with climate change exacerbating the risk of conflict. The science is clear: the climate crisis is being caused by us, especially us in developed nations, and the impacts are accelerating. We are running out of time and have to act fast and change the way we live, and governments have to be much more ambitious. But right now, we have a unique window of opportunity. How the government chooses to rebuild after the pandemic will shape our economy, climate and society in the decades to come. This is a crucial moment. In the Bible Jesus tells us the most important

commandments are to love God, and to love our neighbours. Tackling the climate crisis is vital to both of these – honouring God by protecting his creation and loving our global neighbours who are hit first and worst by what is now a climate emergency.

The hope we find in Jesus

Our world is broken, but God is at work reconciling and restoring. He sent Jesus to begin the restoration of the world to how God intended it to be. To make all things new. Jesus values creation, shows us how it reveals the love of the Father, and brings restoration and healing. So we can have hope that all things can be made new; everything sin has broken and corrupted is being restored and reconciled to God. And what's more, we can all be part of it. The world is crying out and we're invited to join in a ministry of reconciliation – reconciling people to their Father, but also reconciling people to the creation we've been given to steward, and seeing it restored.

An invitation to respond

So how can we respond? To answer that question, let's turn to Esther in the Old Testament who in the face of a crisis responded with faith and courage. In the book of Esther, the Persian king makes plans to wipe out the Jews, but Esther's uncle, Mordecai, warns her about the plan. Esther's response to the news of the threat to her people is remarkable. She tells Mordecai to gather people together to pray and fast. While they do so, she will approach the king and ask him to reconsider – even though she knows that it is unlawful and she could lose her life. She says to Mordecai: *'Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.'* Esther teaches us that following Jesus requires us to speak up against injustice, even when it's costly to ourselves – and that we should act from a foundation of prayer.

So I want to invite you this morning to commit to both of these things: **to prayer and to action**, so that we can address the huge injustice of climate change and its impact on the poorest people around the world.

Several charities focussing on climate change are calling on the UK government to lead the world in delivering a post-coronavirus recovery that is healthier, greener and fairer and one that puts us on track to tackle climate change. They are calling for greater support for people in poverty who are most vulnerable to climate change, and for more investment in renewable energy around the world.

We are at a turning point, and the decisions we make now will affect our economy, society and the climate for decades to come. Remember the words of Greta Thunberg, “no one is too small to make a difference” and no act is too small to help in stopping the effects of climate change. So, keep recycling, keep saving energy, keep wearing your clothes for longer, keep reducing your carbon footprint and you will be making a difference.

We must also continue to pray about the climate crisis. As we contemplate the scale of the climate crisis, it's important that we keep our eyes fixed on God ~ the God of justice and restoration, who cares for the poor and is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.

Let's stand alongside Orbisa, and all of those impacted by climate change around the world, in our prayers and by taking action. ⁱ

Let us pray....

ⁱ Father God, we thank you that you are a God of justice. Thank you that you know Orbisa and her family, and all those already impacted by climate change. Jesus, we are sorry for the ways we've damaged your creation. Help us make changes in our own lives to love our global neighbours well. Holy Spirit, would you stir the hearts of our government, Guide them in all their decision-making, and inspire them to protect the most vulnerable. Amen