

Sunday 3rd October – Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity

Sermon by The Ven Elizabeth Snowden, Archdeacon of Chelmsford

Today is the final Sunday in the season of creation, or creation tide. A period set aside in the churches year to reflect on God as both creator and as sustainer of all life.

During September we have seen very disruptive protests impacting the M25 by 'Insulate Britain' and at the end of this month we will witness the gathering of world leaders in Glasgow for the start of COP 26. Increasingly the wider media is drawing our attention to issues of ecology and climate change. Many of us acknowledge that something should be done. Often however, we believe it is a question for government and economics. We also tend to see the solutions lying in new technologies. Nearly 20 years ago in June 2002 Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Bartholomew 1 of Constantinople issued a declaration on the environment within it they spoke about the need for a conversion of the heart.

"The problem is not simply economic and technological it is moral and spiritual. A solution at the economic and technological level can be found only if we undergo in the most radical way an inner change of heart....."

The starting point for that change of heart is to look to Jesus. Drawing on today's bible reading from the letter to the Hebrews let us examine the relationship of Jesus with creation and consider what this might mean for us who seek to follow Him.

At the start of Chapter 1 verse 2 in Hebrews, the writer identifies the different ways God has spoken before he declares that God "has spoken to us by a Son." Other passages in the New Testament give similar accounts, so for example, at the start of John's gospel, John identifies the Word; the Logos. Jesus is God's final speech to us. In other words to understand what God is saying to us we need to look to Jesus.

As Jesus followers we do indeed look to Jesus. We perhaps need, however, to widen the perspective of the way we understand Jesus. If we are to begin to think from a Christian discipleship perspective about ecology, then we will need to understand something of Jesus' relationship and work with creation. The writer of Hebrews goes on to say of the Son (Hebrews 1:3) "through whom he also created the worlds." John (John 1:2-3) similarly makes it clear that the Word was also active in creation. "he was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him." As we begin to think from a Christian

perspective about ecology these passages provide us with an understanding that Jesus is God's creative agent.

Secondly the writer to Hebrews speaks of Jesus sustaining all things. How is this possible? The writer describes the Son as (Hebrews 1:3) "He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word." Jesus is fully God but through his incarnation is also fully human. In being fully human he identifies with our humanity that is part of creation, made from the dust of the earth. To focus only on his human nature is to miss the significance of his work. The writer to Hebrews notes the impact of his powerful word in sustaining creation. Similarly, to focus on a narrow understanding of his redeeming work in our lives is to lose sight of his reconciling work for the whole of creation.

Jesus God's final word. Jesus God's creative agent. Jesus who sustains the whole of creation. For in Jesus suffering and death, in his resurrection Jesus is reconciling all things to himself. A Christian response to the ecological crises requires us to rethink what it means for us to be a follower of Jesus, a disciple. This entails us rethinking how we live day by day. To do so means we must come simply and humbly to Jesus; unencumbered with our attachments to our possessions and our current way of living. We need to become more childlike in our response to Him that we might more truly grow as his disciples.

We see this in today's Gospel reading (Mark 10:1-15) where Jesus challenges those around him about what it means to belong to God and his kingdom by taking children and blessing them. "Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." Perhaps we have been challenged by the young people who are walking in the relay across our nation to Glasgow and Copt 26. Or maybe we have been challenged by Greta Thunberg or the children and young people from our own nation and our local communities in their engagement with climate strikes. Jesus makes it clear we need to approach him and God our father in a child like way, humble and trusting.

Psalm 8 which is referenced in today's reading from Hebrews speaks of babes and children praising God, may we both in our words and our lives think hard and long about what it means to live as a disciple of Christ who is both the agent of creation and who also sustains creation. For in doing this we may join that song of praise and sing "O Lord our Sovereign how majestic is your name in all the earth."