

Climate Sunday 11th July 2021

Ashkirk, linked with Ettrick and Yarrow, linked with Selkirk

WELCOME

Service today led by Rev. David Coleman, chaplain to Eco-congregation Scotland

OPENING RESPONSES

Through the warmth of the sun and the blessing of rain

With all that have breath we give glory to God.

As the sun and the moon shape the day and the night

So we children of earth tend and care where we live

Through fire, through water We pass on our way.

Bring us refreshment today!

HYMN Fill you hearts with joy and gladness

Fill your hearts with joy and gladness, sing your praise your God and mine!

Great the Lord in love and wisdom, might and majesty divine!

He who framed the starry heavens knows and names them as they shine.

Praise the Lord, his people, praise him! Wounded souls his comfort know;

those who fear him find his mercies, peace for pain and joy for woe;

humble hearts are high exalted, human pride and power laid low.

Praise the Lord for times and seasons, cloud and sunshine, wind and rain;

spring to melt the snows of winter till the waters flow again;

grass upon the mountain pastures, golden valleys thick with grain.

Fill your hearts with joy and gladness, peace and plenty crown your days;

love his laws, declare his judgements, walk in all his words and ways;

he the Lord and we his children - praise the Lord, all people, praise!

(based on Psalm 147, Timothy Dudley-Smith, reproduced from CH4 103)

PRAYER OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION led by Rev. David Coleman

Sustaining God
today, the stones are shouting
for the Lord's disciples have been silent.

Today the cycles of the seasons which tell of your faithfulness are gagged and stifled.

Today the very skies which tell of your glory the glaciers which reflect and protect
and the seas which you put in their place are all in wounded turmoil longing simply to praise you.

Yet we have locked these voices out and with them the human voices of those who are hurt first and
worst by emergencies, not just of climate but the injustice
on which our human societies have come to rely.

For what the rich do to the poor
Our species does to the Earth as a whole.

We acknowledge our part, and our knowing silence in these and more
sinful choices of today.

Food waste
Biodiversity loss
Plastic pollution
Deforestation
Air pollution
Mismanaged agriculture and factory farming Global warming from fossil fuels

Melting ice caps
Food and water insecurity.

Sustaining God,
as in Christ
you enter with mercy, energy and compassion
into the life of the Earth
speaking out wherever creatures are out of place or lost

Shout with the stones,
call us to account
show us the power we have
and how we continue to misuse it.

Set us free from imagined responsibilities
to keep things as they have been
And show us, with the energy of forgiveness the path of healing

for heaven and earth.

May our praise join the chorus of all that has breath
with a loud shout of challenge for we are your people.

Your people forgiven,
your people committed
for the healing of the Earth by God's grace alone

Amen.

Isaiah 55:6-13

Seek the Lord while he may be found,
call upon him while he is near;
let the wicked forsake their way,
and the unrighteous their thoughts;
let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.
For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.
For as the skies are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.
For as the rain and the snow come down from the sky,
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.
For you shall go out in joy,
and be led back in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you
shall burst into song,
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

Luke 13:6-9

[Jesus] told this parable:

A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none.
So he said to the gardener, “See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?”
He replied, “Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig round it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.”

REFLECTION

Selkirk's a Gold award was tempting: maybe I don't have to start from scratch

Which is attractive because truth withheld is not loving.

That's one of our biggest obstacles to environmental churches- that people have become hesitant to bring into a holy setting matters of life and death for which faith is actually well-fitted.

As if Christian faith concerned another universe entirely from that within we meet the maker of Earth and Heaven both.

In a world in crisis, the Good News Word of God that rains down from the sky, is that ***we are warned. I did look through, and noticed that*** much of the New Testament takes the form of warnings!

That ought to be sufficient reason for people of faith to go read signs and act upon both grim ***predictions*** of science - and the brutally immediate facts about the environmental crises in climate, extinction, ocean overheating, sea-level rise, biodiversity and more. No exaggeration needed.

Though neither have we any responsibility to ***water down*** brutal facts which by their brutality, already resist digesting. If the gardener can't cope with the smell of manure, what hope for the tree?

Within movement of EcoCongregation Scotland, award-winners ***have*** taken notice. In that cycle of praise and transformation we might call the kingdom, the Word is free to return to God through life and worship, repurposed, recycled, when stories and encouragement are shared.

It's striking how literally clear a view of the mechanisms of life permeates Isaiah's preaching. The Rule of the unified Creation of Heaven and Earth, sky and soil, is a Circle of Life.

Medicine, gives us the idea of haemorrhage: when circulating lifeblood becomes single-use. That's what global human culture has achieved: an urgent, life-threatening emergency, requiring prayerful and active intervention.

Of the many examples fossil fuels might suffice: carbon stored away for millions of years outstrips the capacity of trees and other plant-life to recycle. Greenhouse gases build up, with all that follows.

Yesterday I provided a reflection for the United Reformed Church General Assembly. They wanted something on a "Biblical character". I bit off rather more than I could chew, as I chose the Biblical character we call the Earth.

If you took out every page on which the Earth is mentioned by name, you wouldn't have much of a Bible left.

Take the hand-clapping trees out, along with the Cross, and the Tree of life that opens and closes the Bible, and you would have even less.

And frequently, when they're mentioned, the Earth is a character in their own right. Someone who can be consulted; but also deeply injured by injustice; someone with responsibility, someone who praises and serves God. Never someone to ignore.

Trees are a fruitful part of that: distinctive characters, landmarks and witnesses, giving hospitality to people, angels, even to God. Offering habitats to diverse birds of the heavens, linking as they do in our lived experience heaven/sky and earth/soil. Taking such a colossal part in the cycles of water, carbon, oxygen, goodness.

None of this is ***modern*** knowledge. Science tends to confirm what poetry long ago grasped. It's "***just***" poetry.

Yes, just poetry, that is, ***poetry infused with justice***.

Poetry built firmly on our lived experience of the sky above us, the earth below us. God all round and within us.

To help us *deal* with the threats we really do face.

And yet, in many hymns prayers and sermons I grew up with and perhaps, tragically, many of those written more recently, you really wouldn't know.

Fellow creatures might be valued *at most* for what they can tell us of God.... which doesn't seem much different in principle from letting a price-tag determine every action.

Never mind Isaiah- we are seldom more determined that *God must think our thoughts* than when we have a system of values to impose.

Matthew 10:29, NIV: "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care."

We "put a price on things". God... "values."

That's why it remains very easy for Christians both to collude but also unjustly be blamed for taking '*dominion*' - the pardonably imperialist King James word for just and responsible care which God gave humanity - to mean '*domination*'.

Yet when God *gives*, then God concurrently, and not exclusively *gives* food and habitat to *many* creatures. I first noticed this when I read of God giving a habitat to the wild donkey of the wilderness, in which so many other creatures live. God gave "Rule" to *us* alongside "Rule" to the sun and moon.

What God gives, ***when*** God gives, is diversity and collaboration . Not exclusivity.

Even when we approve of *gratitude for gifts*, Creation risks being demoted to an object handed over. Fellow-creatures are *still* described in mainstream Christian reference works as means to human ends, rather than respected partners in God's rainbow covenant.

But mindful of the steps forward *that* award winners may have taken, I will risk asking you to examine what you think you may have heard, even in church, and what you thought it was based on.

And to be prepared to let the Word of God, and the encouragement of our movement soak into your roots and continue to bear fruit as we courageously and cheerfully build on our past to welcome today

I'd like to suggest, we can be neither that fruitful tree in the orchard:nor even fully human, without accepting that humanity, exists *within* and depends *upon* a vibrant and diverse web of life.

Nor can any otherwise admirable concern with poverty and injustice between members of our species be meaningfully pursued without reference to the rights and happiness of life as a whole.

Nothing will endure that is based on the false opposition between human and natural flourishing

It's great to have religious leaders on board with this, and we've reached the stage where leaders think they need to look green. Though I've often noticed highly-educated, intelligent and well-meaning people admire what Pope Francis wrote about a relationship with the Earth, and still carry on *blotting out* the rights and the voice of the Earth for fear that voice might shout too loud and offend.

The science - and news - of our day leaves us no excuse *but* to hear groans of a Creation, waiting for those who might see themselves as the children of God to get their act together.

The leap from "it" to "who";

from dutiful maintenance of Earth as property... to a transformative heartfelt commitment for vulnerable relative you love, listen to, and also depend on... this is so glaringly obvious and urgent. Can we be a liberation movement for the Earth? Who can we bring with us?

That sort ***Care without consultation, that disabled folk have told me they're rather familiar with***, is a hallmark of those barbaric penal institutions which prioritise punishment over rehabilitation. They'd hate Isaiah.

***let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.***

But back to the Gospel story:

What responsibility has the tree neglected that we might wish to cut it down?

What has the Earth done to us, but housed us and fed us? What have the forests that we're burning and uprooting done, but enabled us to breathe?

These comments - quite simplistic - so I won't leave them without acknowledging, as Bible writers so frequently do, the struggle that life *does* involve; the robust interventions that it's *right* for us to make, as in the management of disease.

I won't deny the ancient Christian insight of nature's brokenness.

How arrogantly and romantically misplaced, then is a modern reading of Scripture which locates the opposition life faces - which attracts the name Satan - *solely* in *human* evil and chosen harm. Again, as if we were all that mattered for good or ill.

I've been quite happy to get my second COVID jab. No crisis of conscience at all. We rightly stand up against *anything* that diminishes the flourishing of life.

The problem of our age is that human activity on a scale to threaten the integrity even of Heaven is the *greatest* such threat.

We *are* predators. It's not honest to suggest we can live otherwise, though as has become abundantly clear, predators can have a hugely beneficial role in the balance that enables life's flourishing in a given habitat. How can we be what we are, yet *benefit* the life of the Earth? Perhaps Isaiah realised

Let the wicked forsake their way.

and the unrighteous their thoughts;

But how prepared are even the wise and sincere to think differently about our relationship with nature? Are those who might be gardeners prepared to get their hand dirty with that sort of dung!

In the last fortnight, an eminent colleague, told me that in their teaching, they were going still to prioritise people as the exclusive centre and pinnacle of creation, because that is what folk are used to and relate to.

Likewise, some dedicated colleagues supported the proposed coal mine in Cumbria, on the basis that it might bring some jobs and prosperity to their area, though in global terms, even if we only use the reserves of fossil fuels already on tap, we are inviting tragedies far greater than the death toll from heatwaves in North America this last month.

Likewise the favourite version of the Bible for some folks in my previous congregations behaves not unlike like medieval scribes who made holy women into men, and victorian artists, who made black faces white. I wish this were all in the distant past.

Instead I'm reminded of the shameful memory when in Barrhead we'd invited African refugees as guests of honour to a joint service and wondered where they'd got to, only to discover that the elder on the door had turned them away.

The still greater horror was that he had done so convinced he was doing the right thing and protecting the church.

If you can grasp what was amiss on *that* occasion, then there is little in the way of a continuing, wonderful transformative, enriching of your faith through hospitality, in prayer and practicalities, to the Life of the World. To the mountains, the hills the trees, and your human neighbour too. AMEN.

HYMN All creatures of our God and King

All creatures of our God and King, lift up your voice and with us sing:

alleluia, alleluia!

Bright Brother Sun with golden beam; Clear Sister Moon with softer gleam:

O praise him, O praise him, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

Swift rushing wind, so wild and strong; high clouds that sail in heaven along

O praise him, alleluia!

New-breaking Dawn, in praise rejoice, and Lights of Evening, find a voice:

O praise him, O praise him, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia

Cool flowing Water, pure and clear, make music for your Lord to hear,

alleluia, alleluia!

Fire, with your flames so fierce and bright, giving to all both warmth and light

O praise him, O praise him, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

Dear Mother Earth, who day by day, unfolds God's blessings on our way

O praise him, alleluia!

All Flowers and Fruits that in you grow; let them his glory also show:

O praise him, O praise him, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

Let all things their Creator bless, and worship him in humbleness,

alleluia, alleluia

Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son, and praise the Spirit, Three in One:

O praise him, O praise him, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

(St. Francis of Assisi, translated William Henry Draper, reproduced from CH4 147)

PRAYERS for OTHERS (by Jack Peers)

Oh God our Father with give thanks for your wonderful creation. You have made the earth as part of the infinitely larger universe to be in a harmonious equilibrium. The land, sea and sky support all the animals, insects, birds and fish that live there, including the people. Your great creation is a living organism developing over time. Earthquakes, volcanoes, seas and rivers have been slowly changing the shape of the earth and its weather patterns since the beginning of creation. This has caused all the earths creatures to evolve over millions of years.

We also give thanks for the creation of man, which has been for a short period of time, as a proportion of the earth's development. Man's influence on the evolution of the earth, particularly

over the last two hundred years, has speeded up many of these naturally slow changes causing faster climate changes and pollution to our land, sky and seas.

We pray for all communities throughout the world as these issues are affecting everyone. The weather patterns are changing with more heatwaves and flash flooding. This is a particular problem in developing countries where they do not have the infrastructure to cope with these changes. Their islands are washed away, they starve because the crops are not reliable, they have droughts and no clean drinking water.

The first world countries created most of these problems and they have more resources to cope with the changes although they still are very reluctant to cut back on further expansion and the creation of more pollution and generation of more greenhouse gasses. We pray for climate justice that the targets for improvement are stuck too and improved on, but that they also help the poorer countries to create a more equal and just world.

We pray for and support the campaigners and scientists who are trying to make everyone in the world more aware of the climate and pollution issues. These issues need to be dealt with locally by individuals but supported and encouraged by all governments to help improve climate justice.

We pray for COP26 coming to Glasgow in November, that this can be a positive conference where all nations can see others point of view and a workable compromise can be reached to support all people and nations.

Oh God our father please help us all to consider the environment in what we do each day, educate us in what the issues are, how each of us can play our small part in changing things, lobby governments and organisations with more influence than us to take up the baton for the benefit of mankind and encourage more research and development in greener ways of life, products and recycling.

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ Amen

HYMN: Christ the Tree

Christ the Tree, tight holds Creation
Sky soil water, nourish round
river's flow, and cloudburst freshing
God's the Reign that mingles, bound.

Christ the Word, sent earthwards, warning:
Urgent seeking: urgent change.
Love with eyes wide open, hiding
nothing scary, nothing strange!

Christ the gardener, last-chance saviour
dirty-handed for the world:
pruning grafting, fertilising
every wood: the straight, the burlled.

Christ whose thoughts, though we can think them
show us God's alternate mind
unifying what we fractured:
root and branch to heal inclined.

(David Coleman)

THE CREST BELL LITANY and BLESSING

Here's a tree - it's time they grew

we breathe, we feed, we climb, we build
the tree was one with Christ; the Cross
the vine, the branches, nations' healing
Look at all the trees, says Jesus

Here's a tree -it's time they grew

Here's a bird: it's time they flew

with urgency and song and nesting
eggs and poultry, feather bedding
flocks at sunset, insect-eating,
Look at all the birds, says Jesus

Here's a bird: it's time they flew

Here's a fish: it's time they swam

the oceans teem - or sadly, empty
with warming and acidic surging
currents fail, and glaciers melt
But Jesus spoke to calm the waters.

Here's a fish: it's time they swam

Here's a bell: it's time it rang

It's time we spoke the truth in love
It's time to sound an urgent note
To call injustice to account
To ring in ways to share the world

Here's a bell, now ring it loud!

Here's a church, whose time has come

to preach good news to every creature
care for earth and sea and sky
find our place and purpose, sharing
Jesus', shepherding, with love

Here's a church, whose time has come

let all be so

AMEN

Song as we leave: You Shall go out with joy!

You shall go out with joy, and be led forth in peace,

and the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you.

There'll be shouts of joy, and the trees of the field shall clap, shall clap their hands,

and the trees of the field shall clap their hands,

and the trees of the field shall clap their hands,

and the trees of the field shall clap their hands,

and you'll go out with joy!

(Stuart Dauermann, from CH4 804)