



## Climate Change

A sermon by Rev John Castle,  
given at St Michael's Church, Sandhurst  
on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2019

Readings: Isaiah 55:6-13

Psalm 24

Luke 13:1-9

### 1. Introduction

#### Caring for Creation: the Story So Far

This is the fourth in our series of 4 sermons. Our sermon series so far has covered:

- a. Made in God's Image (John White) – an exploration of the role of humans in caring for the earth
- b. A Wildly Wonderful World (Dave Percival) – appreciating the wonder of God's Creation and the Creator
- c. The Story of Noah (John Castle) – the loss of biodiversity; we need to be like Noah and do what we can to save other species from destruction
- d. In addition we've had the lecture by Dave Bookless and studies in house groups

Today we come to the topic of Climate Change.

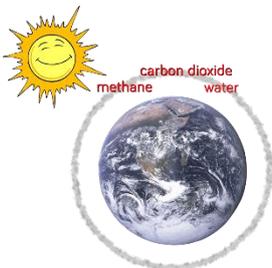
### 2. Two pieces of news in the past 10 days give us some context for considering this topic:

- The global school Strike 4 Climate on Friday 15<sup>th</sup> February and Friday 15<sup>th</sup> March;
- On the same day as the last strike, cyclone Idai struck Mozambique, Zimbabwe and other countries, causing massive devastation and loss of life.

The issue at stake is climate change caused by global warming. Scientists have come to realise that human activity has had a significant impact on this, with serious consequences for the future of life on earth. Let's have a little look at the science of this.

Carbon Dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) is the greenhouse gas emitted by human activities that has made the biggest contribution to global warming.

Why does CO<sub>2</sub> matter?



Surrounding the earth there is a natural greenhouse made of different gases which balances the incoming sunlight and the outgoing light and heat.

This greenhouse effect acts to trap the heat radiation generated at the earth's surface, and keeps the Earth warm. Without this effect life could not exist on earth.



But burning fossil fuels is changing the balance. We are adding more and more CO<sub>2</sub> to the atmosphere. That increases the greenhouse effect and leads to increasing temperatures.

Let's see how that works with 3 forms of transport that most of us use from time to time.



First let me introduce my 2 visual aids for today: a balloon and a crisp packet of Yorkshire crisps. I'll come back to the crisps later on.

The air in this balloon contains 4% CO<sub>2</sub>. But let's suppose for a moment that it was completely filled with CO<sub>2</sub>. Let's use this to illustrate the emissions from 3 methods of transport.

- The average car emits about 0.29 kilos or 8.12 balloons of CO<sub>2</sub> per passenger mile.
- If you travel by train, you are emitting only 0.02 kg per passenger mile, or 0.56 balloons – less than 1 tenth of the damage to the environment caused by a car.
- What about going by plane? It's 0.24 kg per passenger mile for a short-haul flight, or 0.18 for a long-haul flight. That's 6.72 or 5.04 balloons respectively. More efficient than a car, but remember that you are usually doing much longer journeys by plane, so more CO<sub>2</sub> is emitted overall.

### 3. Why should Christians care about all this?

"The earth is the Lord's" (Ps 24:1); Genesis 1 and Ps 104 and many other passages speak of God's wisdom in creating the universe, and his delight in it and love for it. The most important commandment, said Jesus, is *to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength*.

Imagine you have a garden, and you spend a lot of time and money designing it, creating it, clearing stones, building a rockery or a pond, planting flowers, shrubs, tomatoes or beans, weeding it, tending it. You go away for a week and come home to find that a group of hooligans has broken in to your property, driven over your flowerbeds with a motorbike, broken down the tomato or bean poles, used the rockery or pond as a toilet, and left rubbish all over the garden. How would you feel? If I was God, I think I'd have the same feelings about what human beings have done to the Earth. If we love God, then we need to care for his Creation.

Global warming causes habitats of many wildlife species to be damaged, threatening their survival. In addition, destruction of rainforests not only threatens the survival of hundreds of thousands of species, but removes a natural resource for converting CO<sub>2</sub> into oxygen.

The second reason comes from Jesus' command to *love our neighbour*. Climate change doesn't

**The poorest people suffer first and worst**



- Drought
- Floods
- Hurricanes
- Irregular rains
- Rising sea levels
- Water shortages
- Land erosion
- Poor crops
- Rising food prices
- Migration

 Climate Stewards

only affect plants and animals, it affects human beings. However clever we are, we still depend on the natural world for our food and our survival. Global warming makes extreme weather events more common. And where do cyclones happen? Not in Sandhurst, but in Mozambique, the Philippines, Indonesia and other poorer parts of the earth, places where the people are the least equipped to protect themselves, or to save themselves when disaster strikes.

And let's not think only of cyclones. Unusually high levels of rain caused by climate change wreck crops that poor farmers rely on for their food, and unexpected droughts destroy their prospects of having a harvest. Like the people in our Gospel reading, who were massacred by Pontius Pilate or killed by a falling tower, these people do not deserve what they suffer. Meanwhile we in the West continue to burn fossil fuels and consume the Earth's resources at an alarming pace. Loving your neighbour doesn't just mean giving him a handout when his crops fail or his home is destroyed by a cyclone. It should also mean changing our lifestyles so that we do not indirectly cause these things to happen in the first place.

#### 4. What should Christians do?

**The first thing we need to do is to recognise that climate change is not just other people's problem:** it is *our* problem: not just "people in the West" or "society", but you and me, sat here in St Michael's Church. We're all familiar with the phrase from John Donne, "no man is an island". We should also be familiar with St Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 12:

But God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it,<sup>25</sup> so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.<sup>26</sup> If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it<sup>1</sup>. (1 Cor 12:24b-26).

Our brothers and sisters in other parts of the world are affected right now by climate change; if they suffer, we should be concerned. Loving our neighbour as ourselves is not an optional extra in the Christian life.

Moreover, we need to recognise that as citizens of a country that has been burning fossil fuels in massive quantities for the past 200 years, and whose economy and standard of living has been built on industrialisation, we have a share of corporate responsibility for the current crisis. Last autumn we studied the letter of James in the NT, a letter whose theme is just dealings between people, and in particular justice for the poor. James 5 begins with these words:

Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you.

James goes on to talk about injustice caused by the rich to the poor and vulnerable, and says

You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. (NIV)

It has been calculated that if everyone in the world was to consume the same resources as a typical person in the West, we would need more than 3 planets. So, unless we are going to be like the man in James's parable who looks at himself in a mirror and then forgets what he looks like, we need to do some serious thinking about what we can do to stop living on the earth in luxury and self-indulgence: the planet, nature and our fellow-human beings just can't sustain our lifestyle. There's a biblical word for this, perhaps one that may seem severe, but I'm afraid it's spot-on: Repentance.

Isaiah 55 reminds us that God's ways are not our ways, nor are his thoughts our thoughts. If as Christians we are serious about pleasing God and doing his will, then it's our way of thinking

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<sup>1</sup> [The New International Version](#). (2011). (1 Co 12:24–26). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

that needs to change. We need to recognise that climate change is a crisis which is happening now, and that we need to take action now. If we as Christians can't get this message and do something about it, what hope is there for the world?

<sup>6</sup> Seek the LORD while he may be found;  
call on him while he is near.

<sup>7</sup> Let the wicked forsake their ways  
and the unrighteous their thoughts.

Let them turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on them,  
and to our God, for he will freely pardon. (NIV)

**The second thing we need to do is recognise how serious and immediate this crisis is.** We have been increasingly aware of the problem over the past 30 years, various conferences have been held, and commitments made by the nations of the world. But the levels of greenhouse gases emitted by human activity continues to rise. I'm sure you have already heard about some of the consequences of global warming continuing unchecked:

- polar ice-caps will melt, causing rises in sea levels that will flood many inhabited parts of the world. Sea ice also reflects light and heat back into space, but this cooling effect will be lost.
- the water in the oceans will become more acidic, causing severe damage to marine ecosystems, such as plankton which are not only at the bottom of the food chain but actually remove carbon from the atmosphere
- There will be more forest fires, destroying trees which absorb carbon and putting more CO<sub>2</sub> from combustion into the air
- The permafrost in arctic regions will melt, releasing masses of the greenhouse gas methane into the atmosphere
- Increased levels of drought will hit food production in warmer parts of the globe, causing starvation and mass migration to cooler places – such as Europe. The UNHCR estimates that there will be 200 m environmental refugees by 2050.



You Are Stealing Our Future: Greta Thunberg, 15, Condemns the World's Inaction on Climate Change

I'd like you to listen to Greta Thunberg, a 15-year-old from Sweden speaking to the UN climate conference in Poland just before Christmas.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HzeekxtyFOY>

In the parable of the Unfruitful Fig Tree in today's reading from Luke's gospel, Jesus gives a similar warning: we've had our chance to bear fruit (i.e. do what God wants), and we have one more chance to

take action before disaster strikes. Jesus' warning fell on deaf ears. Will Greta's?

**The third thing that we need to do is to take action.** As Greta Thunberg reminds us, hope is not enough. I have no doubt all of us are doing something towards helping the environmental crisis already. We are putting things in our recycling bins and a lot of it is packaging. But to produce that packaging has used energy, and energy will be used to recycle it. Transporting it to the recycling plant will create more CO<sub>2</sub>. When you shop, do you try to buy products that have less packaging? Not just vegetables, but other foods and household goods too. It's hard, but we can reduce our plastic consumption, and put pressure on our favourite supermarket to

reduce packaging quickly. George discovered yesterday that in Waitrose you can bring your own boxes to take away food you buy from the delicatessen counter.



And what about looking at where your food comes from and choosing apples that have come from Kent rather than New Zealand? On my way back from my retreat in Yorkshire on Friday I called in at a supermarket near the railway station (yes, of course I used public transport to get there and back) and bought myself a packet of Yorkshire Crisps. The packet says that the potatoes were grown in Yorkshire, turned into crisps in Yorkshire, packed and distributed by a supplier in Yorkshire. I bought them in a shop in Yorkshire. These are low-carbon crisps!

Here's a list of some practical things each of us can do. You may have other great ideas – if so, please share them!

- Shopping – reduce packaging by choosing loose fruit and vegetables, writing to the supermarket you shop at, or switching to a shop that uses less packaging.
- Meat – cut it down, enjoy vegetarian food! Meat production uses far more land than vegetable production, and vegetables emit less greenhouse gas than animals!
- Buy locally produced food where possible.
- Transport – walk, cycle, train, car-share. How many cars were used to get all of us to church this morning?
- Switch to a green energy supplier. As a church we are doing this, through the Church of England Parish Buying scheme.
- Use less electricity – no tumble driers, don't overfill your kettle, turn down the heating, etc
- Pray for policy makers, both politicians and the bosses of supermarkets and industry
- Talk to other people about this, raise awareness. Tell a friend or family member about this hard-hitting sermon, and about what you are going to do to reduce your carbon footprint.

Transport is a “biggie”. We saw earlier how cars and planes are adding to global warming. Yes, it's convenient to jump in your car to get around. But do you choose to drive when you could walk? What about cycling? Could you car-share to get to church, or to work? And what about carbon off-setting? Climate Stewards is an organisation set up by A Rocha to help us off-set the carbon emissions we can't reduce by supporting projects to plant trees in developing parts of the world. <https://www.climatestewards.org/>

George and I are going on holiday to Sicily in June. I used Climate Stewards' carbon footprint calculator which said the cost of off-setting our return flights was £25. That's a pretty small amount compared to the cost of the holiday. So we're going to pay for 2 other people on our flight who won't have off-set their carbon footprint for the trip.

## Conclusion

I have no doubt that many of you are already taking climate change seriously. As Christians we realise that we have a responsibility to care for this wonderful planet that God has entrusted to

us. Caring for his creation is an important way of loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

We also have a duty to love our neighbour as ourselves. Those who are hardest hit by climate change are the poor, like the people in Mozambique. Our neighbour also includes people of future generations whose lives will be blighted by the effects of our carelessness.

If you have already made changes to your lifestyle to respond to the crisis of climate change, that's good, but I have personally been challenged to do more. What's the next step for you, and will you be brave enough to take it?

### **Prayer**

Loving God, thank you for the gift of creation.

As we experience each day, may we take time to wonder and give you thanks.

From each sunrise to every sunset, in every season, and with every breath, may we celebrate our home in creation, and the glorious gift of life.

As the climate changes through our lifestyles, give us compassion to care deeply that people are suffering now, from drought, flood, wildfires and terrible storms.

Give us the imagination to see that many species, and future generations are in peril and may never know the beauty and diversity of creation that we enjoy.

Give us passion to act now, to pray for the changes needed within our communities, our churches, our nation, and among the nations, for climate change to be brought under control.

Guide us Lord, and guide our leaders, to act as you would have us act. May our prayer and our actions flow from our love for your creation, in all its beauty and diversity, a longing for justice for the poor, and our commitment to all future generations of your children on this Earth.

Amen.

from The Climate Coalition, *Show the love* campaign Feb 2019

<https://www.theclimatecoalition.org/show-the-love/>