

Theme: Why we should care about saving the planet

Our first reading from Genesis chapter 2 verse 4 starts, "These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created." The first half of verse 4, which I have just read out, refers us back to chapter 1 which clearly tells us that God created us, our world and all that is in it, and indeed the whole universe, because chapter 1 contains the creation story. Moving on to Genesis verse 7 here we are told, "Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being." And now jumping down to verse 15 the last verse of our reading from Genesis, we are told, "Then the lord God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and guard it."

The wonderful thing about human beings is not only that God made us in his own image, but he also made us with a specific task in mind, it was to cultivate the earth and to guard it or as the NIV Bible has it, "to care for it". As creatures of the earth not only are we blessed with the unique and intimate knowledge and love of God our creator, but we have also been honoured with a divine purpose in life to care for God's beautiful creation. The requirement to look after our planet is enshrined in Genesis chapter 2 verse 15, and the ancient Israelites realised this as well, Psalm 115 verse 16 reads, The heavens are the heavens of the Lord; but the earth he has entrusted to his children.

However, since the creation story we have become more industrious, we no longer restrict ourselves to tilling the soil, and it is mainly in the activities of industry that we began, unwittingly, to adversely affect the climate. Industrialisation of course was inevitable given our nature, intelligence, and creativity. Eventually the effects of intensive farming and industrialisation, and its adverse effect on the ecology had become known, and although initially unwittingly done, the effects were ignored, and in some cases still are in the light of the profits that were and can still be made.

But today hopefully we are more enlightened to the needs of our world, the effects of industry on global warming, and in the way we produce energy for our homes. We are also aware of the effects of intensive farming on our ecology, and the need for change in the way we grow, gather, and distribute the worlds food supply.

However, there is I think another compelling reason for looking after and caring for our planet, it is a combination of love and fear for our children, and grandchildren, their children and grandchildren and our desire that they should be able to inherit this world in all its beauty and diversity as we did.

I want to move on now to look at Matthew chapter 6 where our first verse reads, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear." Worry, anxiety, stress are words that describe a feeling of inner turmoil as we think about the future of our planet and what the future will be for our children and their children's children. But Jesus does not want us to be anxious

and be full of worry. He wants us to live life differently; he does not want us to make decisions based on fear. That is why Jesus said, 'do not worry', and that is not Jesus making a suggestion, that it is Jesus making a command; Jesus is commanding us not to worry. Jesus did not say, 'try not worry'. Jesus said, "do not worry".

The reason Jesus said that to them and to us is because they and in many cases we have forgotten that God is in command, God is in control, God is still, and always has been, the master of his creation, we are not to worry but to obey, to obey God in all things. We will only be effective stewards of God's creation through obedience and love, worry will get us nowhere.

These verses from our reading from Matthew's gospel are also one of the keys to looking after our environment, because if we stop worrying about having all the latest material things, and being content with what we have, then industry will slow down. When I was a boy my family didn't have a freezer, a vacuum cleaner, a clothes washer or dish washer, a telephone, let alone a mobile phone, or a television, and yet all these things are now classed as essential to us who have them. We need to think about our possessions, because it is our possessions which drives the world's industries, some of which are contributing to the problem of global warming.

I want to skip now to verse 33 of our reading from Matthew's gospel which reads, "But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well". By using the word 'strive' and the word 'first' Jesus is placing the kingdom of God above everything else that we could possibly want, Jesus said, "but **strive first** for the kingdom of God", that must be our first priority, why! Because Jesus told us to, and he didn't say that for his benefit but for ours. This verse is an incredible promise, but don't, as many people do, focus on the second part of the sentence, "and all these things will be given unto you", but focus on the first part, "but **strive first** for the kingdom of God and his righteousness," because when we do that everything else falls into place.

You may ask, 'yes that's all very well, but where is the kingdom of God, how do I find it; quite simply the kingdom of God, is where the king lives, and reigns. Incidentally Jesus uses the phrase kingdom of God and the phrase kingdom of heaven in roughly equal measure and are two names for the same place. Jesus said as recorded in Matthew chapter 3 verse 2, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." How could Jesus say that? He could say that because he is the King, and where the King is, there is his kingdom, and to become a part of his kingdom, we need to recognise Jesus as our king, and to let Jesus into our lives.

St Paul wrote to the Ephesians starting at chapter 1 verse 18, these words about Jesus. "So that with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power." That is what it is like in the kingdom of heaven, richly glorious; and with Christ in our lives, and with his immeasurable greatness and power the task of looking

after our planet could well be within our reach, because through faith in Christ all things are possible, because for God all things are possible.

On Sunday the 23rd May 1940 we had a national day of prayer for the British army stranded at Dunkirk. Soon after Hitler ordered his troops to stop the advance on Dunkirk for three days, and during that time 338,000 British and allied troops had been rescued, and a tyrannical Nazi regime was eventually defeated. The point here is that we are not on our own in battling against global warming, God has just as much interest in what happens to his world as we do, if not more so. We need to pray and get to know God's will and work with him looking after our planet, rather than against him as we have in the past and in many cases still do. Also, at this time of crisis when global warming is threatening our planet and animal diversity is beginning to shrink, now is the time for the whole Christian community worldwide to turn to prayer. We need to support and encourage people like Greta Thunberg the young Swedish girl, and many more forward-thinking young people, who will inherit this world when we are gone.

Before I move on to the conclusion of this sermon there is possibly another reason to look after our planet. I've been listening to Professor Brian Cox and his programme on planets, and he puts forward a very strong case for believing that our earth is probably unique, not only in our galaxy but possibly in the whole universe. If that is true, that God only created one planet suitable for the diversity of life that lives here on earth, then this too is another good reason to look after it.

So, to answer the question, "Why we should care about saving the planet." I believe there are three very good reasons, but all three of them require love and obedience to Christ. Firstly, it is because God created us and placed us here on earth for that very purpose of maintaining and looking after our planet, as enshrined in Genesis chapter 2 verse 15, and which has been known for generations certainly by the psalm writers. Secondly, because we owe it to future generations of our own children who will inherit this planet, and who should be able to enjoy its beauty and diversity as indeed we do in our generation. Finally, it is possible that our planet may be unique, and therefore should be especially loved and cared for.

Revd. John White