

Sermons at the Anglican Church of Luxembourg

Preached by Rev. Geoff Read on Sunday 8th September 2019 (Creationtide 1)

Text: Jeremiah 18:1-11

Introduction

We often hear people say that we must care for Creation. In reality the Environment is well able to care for itself. Where there is a wound Nature heals itself. If humans were exported to Mars, the planet would quickly recover. What we need to do more is to care about what is happening to the planet. We need to care that we are producing excessive amounts of carbon, air pollution and plastics. We should care about the effects on vulnerable communities and on species at risk.

When we start caring about what is happening to the Earth, we inevitably end up needing to examine ourselves and our lifestyles. If we do this honestly, we will be motivated to campaign against ourselves – to reduce our insatiable greed, our uncontrolled desires, our own selfish demands.

And as we begin Creationtide we start with the vital theme of the cost of discipleship

The consequences of lifestyle challenges us to care about what is happening and to examine how our lifestyle might need to change.

Hearing the Word

Comments on Jeremiah 18:1-11

Why does God allow drought, famine and floods? Our OT passage gives us some hints.

The image of the potter shows God as the potter and the people and nations as the clay. God's sovereignty is balanced by our responsibility. God's plan was to create a perfect creation, but humans resist that plan: we are the flaws in the clay of the perfect pot that God was creating.

From a human point of view, it seems the best thing to do would be to scrap the faulty pot and start again

But with God, his ultimate plan – a perfect creation – is never thwarted. He is committed to renewal and remaking

The choice is ours: do we bring disaster on ourselves, or do we change our ways now to avert that future and allow God to re-mould us.

As we consider the fate of the Earth, this image of the potter is powerful. The Old Testament prophets saw the natural world as being responsive to human actions (Jeremiah 12:10-13; 22:6-9; 31:12-14; see also Isaiah 24:4-7; Hosea 4:1-3.)

In our modern culture we see environmental abuse only in economic, political or technological terms.

In doing so, there is a profound spiritual dimension that we often miss:

As Michael Northcott writes, in his book *A Moral Climate: the ethics of global warming*:

‘When read in the light of Jeremiah’s theological reading of the imperial geopolitics of ancient Mesopotamia, global warming, like the exile of ancient Israel, represents both the threat of judgement and the promise of a better way of living on God’s earth than the neoliberal vision of a global market empire.’

Humans and other creatures form a complex web of interrelationships – our actions will bring consequences- negative or positive. Ecological abuse will have negative consequences on the future generations and the most vulnerable will be most impacted. Ecological responsibility can have the very opposite both for us and those yet to come.

Preaching the Word

When we consider God’s creation, there are many voices to listen to – firstly those living with the consequences of climate change and environmental destruction right now, but also scientists, economists, campaigners, theologians, and future generations. The costs of inaction are becoming clearer every day – because inaction is a path of “business as usual”, and as Christians we are called to a path of transformational love.

The blessings from listening to God’s call to care are tangled up in struggle and costs to our current way of life – but the invitation to follow, and find new fruitful life, is there too.

Why should we therefore make the huge changes to our lifestyles that are necessary for climate change to be slowed down? Jeremiah particularly points to the issue of Human responsibility

The story of the potter shows us that although God is Almighty, yet he allows us as human beings to make choices. Climate change and environmental degradation are results of the choices that individuals have made in our personal lifestyles and governments have made in their choices around economics and technology.

Although the situation is bleak, it is not yet too late, the clay can be remoulded. Romans 8:19 reminds us that “Creation is standing on tiptoe for the children of God to be revealed”. Our

individual choices make a difference – and when those many small changes are networked with multitudes of others, they can lead to transformational change.

Living the Word

Where can I start? The environmental challenges are so huge and what can one person do?

The South African writer, Rachel Mash, suggest that the place to start is here: follow your heartbreak. We cannot all be involved in all the environmental issues, so identify the one breaks your heart.

Perhaps it is climate change and the face of drought and famine. Educate yourself about the impact of climate change on a country or community where you have links. Commit yourself to doing an electricity and fuel audit of your home and your church. See how you can make small changes (geyser blanket, lift sharing, changing light bulbs). Get others involved in bigger project – solar panels for the church or school – and find out what your politician’s stance is on renewable energy and challenge them in letters to the press. Get your Church denomination to divest from investments in fossil fuels. Look at where your pension money is invested, can it be taken out of fossil fuels?

Perhaps it is plastic which breaks your heart, clogging our oceans and lands. Commit yourself to stop using plastic bags for shopping. Reduce one-use plastic for your family. Start a campaign at church! Get the local churches in your community to put pressure on supermarkets to stop using plastic bags. Sign a petition to get the Minister of the Environment to ban plastic bags – as has been done in Kenya and Rwanda. For example churches, like ours, have decided to stop using plastic cups. It is possible to remember, but it does take effort to bring your cup!

Or perhaps it is the loss of biodiversity that breaks your heart, as animals and birds die out due to our neglect and greed. Commit yourself at home to stop using chemicals and products that kill insects. Promote them at church and school. Start an organic garden. Find a part of Creation near you that you can care for and encourage others to get involved in (river clean -up, local park or nature reserve). Get involved in an international campaign to protect an animal you care for.

The needs are huge – but the principle is this: start with what breaks your heart. Find an action you and your family can take. Inspire others, join networks. Research tells us that transformation change come when networked individuals change. And have fun!!- God is with you.

Based on material from Rachel Mash, South African, sustainable preaching