

Sermon for Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> September 2024 at Holy Trinity at 9am

## **First Day of the Season of Creation- Daring to Hope**

*Texts: Deuteronomy 4.1-2, 6-9; James 1.17-end; Mark 7.1-8, 14-15, 21-23.*

Today marks the first day of the Season of Creation. This is a special time in the Church's year which runs from 1 September until 4 October, the Feast Day of St Francis of Assisi. Together with our Christian brothers and sisters from many denominations around the world, we are called to pray, to campaign and to make a real effort through the transformation of our lifestyle to care for creation.

Each year, the ecumenical group of Christian leaders including the Archbishop of Canterbury, choose a theme to inspire and guide us during the Season of Creation. This year's theme is '*To have hope and act with creation*' based on the passage in St Paul's letter to the Romans in chapter 8vv 19-25 and from which the visual image of this year's theme "the first fruits of hope" which you will see at the top of our order of service also comes.

Now I don't know about you, but "hope" feels a strange word to be applying to creation and the environment at this time. For, as we look round the world, we appear to be faced on every side, by impending environmental catastrophe. Last year was the hottest year on record, and as records were broken around the world, so too we saw a rise in accompanying disasters- raging forest fires, growing numbers of typhoons and other forms of extreme weather; further loss of precious biodiversity and increasing threats to people's lands and livelihoods as seas levels continue to rise.

How in this context, can we be expected to talk of hope? And indeed, how can we, as Christians, do so with any integrity or conviction?

I want to show you today that as Christians we are not only called to proclaim hope but also to live it so that we literally incarnate it. Why and how?

Let's start with the "Why?" We have hope because at the end of the day, it is God's world not ours and for that we rightly thank God. Although we have caused terrible devastation and unleashed forces of destruction that we threaten to overwhelm us, we are followers of Jesus Christ and our ultimate faith is in Him. At the very foundation of our Christian faith, we believe that through his death and resurrection, Christ has redeemed us and ultimately, all creation. As St Paul writes, "So if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation; everything old has passed away: see, everything has become new!" (2 *Corinthians* 5.17).

None of this mitigates or diminishes in the slightest, the scale of the crisis which faces us. Nor does it remove from us the terrible responsibility we bear along with the rest of humanity, particularly in the West, for the damage which we have inflicted. But what it does do is reassure us that in Christ, however hard the path ahead may be, there is hope and the way of life is stronger than the path of destruction and death. Above all- it challenges us not to wallow in a sense of futility ("Why should I

change since we're doomed anyway?") to proclaim instead that things can be very different if we are willing to act.

One of the very key truths of which we are reminded during the Season of Creation is that we are all part, of what we might call 'a cosmic family'. That is, we are bound together, not just with our fellow human beings wherever they may live throughout the world but are also integrally linked with all creation – plants, animals, the physical terrain where we live and the seas and rivers which bring us life-giving water and food. As our knowledge and understanding of our physical world has deepened through advances in scientific research, we've come to glimpse just how finely tuned it is and how much each part of creation relies on the rest.

And it is in the context that we are called to be bearers of hope. This is our vocation, given to us by God in our baptism when we are adopted as his children and empowered by the Holy Spirit to do just this.

Part of being a bearer of hope is recognising that we are called to action. St Augustine wrote that "Hope has two beautiful daughters – their names are Anger and Courage. Anger at the way things are and Courage to see that they do not remain as they are".

This call to action has two aspects. First, it involves us, each one of thinking about the environmental crisis, its causes and then looking honestly at our own current lifestyles. Asking ourselves, "How is the way I am living now, contributing to the current suffering of creation and what steps can I take to make a difference?".

For example, we may be grieved at the huge quantity of plastics and micro plastics in our oceans and rivers which are threatening the entire eco system. Then think about how we use plastics every day of our lives. What can we do cut down our use and seek alternatives? Next February, I hope that we will join, as a church, in a project run by A Rocha in Switzerland to spend a 'plastics- free' February. It would be great if we can do this together as a church community. But in the meantime, there is a lot we can each do now, if we are willing.

Or we may be deeply concerned at the continued use of fossil fuels and how they are contributing to the continuing rise in global warming. There are simple yet effective steps we can each take – for example to if we are travelling, to consider if there are journeys we can do by train rather than plane and to use public transport, walk or bike instead of driving whenever we can. Each step we take in this direction, each little shift in our life-style decision, really can and does make a difference.

During the Season of Creation, we're going to explore some of issues and how we can change. But there is another powerful way in which we, as Christians, are called to be bearers of hope and that is by speaking out on behalf of others, especially those who are most vulnerable and are suffering most because of the impact of climate crisis.

One of the images which St Paul uses in his letter to the Romans is that of Creation groaning (Romans 8.22). In our current content, Creation is certainly groaning in anguish because of the terrible damage we have inflicted on it and continue to inflict.

But St Paul also uses the image in relation to childbirth, where the pains of labour point to joy and hope to come as new life comes into the world.

Caring for creation invites us finding a voice and learning to use it effectively to bring good change. During this Season of Creation, there are two special things which I invite you to do.

The first is in relation to challenging the continuing practice of fossil fuel extraction and use. It's estimated that thirty percent of the greenhouse gases that are having such a terrible impact on the environment, are created by fossil fuel extraction and use. Although at the last UN Climate Change Conference in Dubai (Cop28) last year, there was an agreement about the need to reduce fossil fuel use, the agreement was weak and didn't set the targets needed to keep global warming below 1.5 degrees Celsius.

It is really important that this year's climate conference (Cop 29) takes far more decisive action on this. That's why in the Season of Creation this year, faith communities are urged to hold and participate in events to call upon political leaders to sign the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty. We'll be planning to do just that on a special Day of Action on 21 September.

The second is that we need equip ourselves with the skills and confidence required so that we can be effective campaigners for change. This is why we are running a short course on Advocacy at Holy Trinity this autumn. In the first session, starting on the evening of Wednesday 11 September, Blair Matheson of Franciscan International is going to talk to us about the work the Franciscans do worldwide in advocacy for the world's poorest people – practical ways to get governments and political leaders to help those living in extreme poverty or suffering discrimination, often linked to the impact of environmental problems on their way of life.

In the second and third session, one of our former chaplains, Mike French, who works in the field of advocacy for the World Lutheran Federation, will introduce us to the tool kits available to each one of us to run an effective advocacy campaign and will show us how to put this together and run a small campaign locally on an environmental issue. This will be hands-on experience and will mean that we will be far more equipped to have our voice heard as Christian community as we stand up for environmental justice. I pray that you will commit to take part and make a difference.

St James urges us to be true to ourselves and not to forget in whose image we are made. We are God's children, made in His image. As such we are called to be bearers of hope, striving ourselves and urging others to make those vital changes we need to make for the sake of creation. He uses the wonderful image of looking in the mirror – in our case, fixing our eyes on Christ who offered himself for the world.

And as St James points out, words and pious intentions are not enough – they simply reveal that we have taken our eyes off Christ and instead have focused on ourselves. We are called to act – to be 'doers of the word' and if we do so, he promises that we will bring forth 'The first fruits of hope' which is a gift of the Holy Spirit.

It is an amazing calling and invitation to us by God. This Season of Creation, may we, not just honour God with our lips, but seize the precious opportunity he offers us “to hope and act with creation”.

**Amen**

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**The Revd Canon Dr Daphne Green**