



ST CHRISTOPHER'S 'CATCH-UP CHURCH' NEWSLETTER

Sunday 27th September 2020 – Harvest Festival

NEWS UPDATE

Change of Thursday Service time

A reminder that starting this week on Thursday 1st October our midweek Holy Communion service moves from a 10.00am start to 10.30am. I appreciate that the church website, Facebook page, and Roadside board will need updating to reflect this change.



Meeting of the Church PCC

Last week the PCC met on Wednesday evening via Zoom video-link. Topics of discussion included the recommencement of Junior Church, the steady reintroduction of church hall users, and the forthcoming AGM on Sunday 25th October.

It was noted that our church finances are in a critical condition, due in part to our major loss of hall rental income. The Blackburn Diocese are making some redundancies to their central staff, given that they anticipate large losses in parish share contributions from the parishes (including ours). Last year we met £20,000 of our requested parish share assessment of £27,376. Based on current projections we may finish 2020 on £10,500, which is obviously lower. Whilst the Diocese are soaking up this loss for the time being, we should bear in mind that the loss of some central diocesan staff is sad and will affect the level of support available to all the churches. And when we do emerge from this pandemic, the Bishop may have to question the viability of some churches given that central cash reserves will be run dry.



Thank You

I can only encourage you in the meantime to continue supporting us so that the damage of this pandemic is limited. I am grateful for the continued generosity of all our supporters, and recognise that these are difficult times for everyone. If you do wish to modify or amend your regular planned giving, the best person to contact is Hilary Holderness our administrator by phoning 01772 724384, or by emailing admin@stchristopherslea.org.

Particular thanks is due to Debra Foster and Hilary Holderness who have been working hard to enable the safe reintroduction of some of our community hall users. Not only is this helpful for us financially, it also enables some community life to continue at St Christopher's in some shape and form.

Do also say a prayer for Louise Walton, our youth and children's work coordinator, as she continues to work on the Risk Assessment for Junior Church. She is wading through the pages of government

guidance, and working out (in partnership with others) how this guidance will apply to the activities in our premises.

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

Church finance is always a challenging topic. Today's Harvest message will challenge you in a different way, as we think about the Christian responsibility to care for our planet. Each year at harvest time we celebrate that the earth brings forth the food we enjoy. As we do, we surely we have to think about the condition of our planet and the impact that human activity is having upon it. I hope that today's message, with its environmental focus, will inspire us all to care for our planet through the choices we make, and in the way that we live.

Harvest Festival in the 21st Century



Harvest festival hasn't felt the same this year with our reduced numbers and social distancing. This is especially true for St Christopher's given that we usually invite pupils and parents from Lea Endowed School to join us, making harvest festival our busiest service of the year – busier than Christmas or Easter!

I am going to be honest and admit that I am actually a bit relieved that we are not going through the usual motions. Every year I struggle with harvest festival, because I don't think that we in the UK fully appreciate the privilege of having food on our plates, and neither do most of us understand how it gets onto our supermarket shelves. Harvest festival is an ancient tradition which our forebears established, having themselves physically grown the crops in a nearby field. They understood that a good yield and a bountiful supply was not something to be taken for granted, and so they were thankful.

Today our world food system is far more complex. If we knew what really went on with our food production, and how it reaches our supermarkets, would our first response be to bring up a few tins of baked beans to the front of church once a year? I doubt it. This is an enactment of a tradition, rather than a thoughtful response to a proper awareness of our food supply. This year more than ever I feel challenged to understand this subject better, having watched David Attenborough's BBC documentary on Sunday 13th September, entitled '*Extinction: the Facts.*' David Attenborough and his panel of scientists told the truth plainly. Attenborough is not known for dressing things up – he just tells it as it is.

The documentary lasts an hour, and can still be watched on BBC iplayer. I am going to summarise the main points, with the following text taken directly from the programme.

EXTINCTION: THE FACTS



“Over the course of my life, I've encountered some of the world's most remarkable species of animals. Only now do I

realise just how lucky I've been. Many of these wonders seem set to disappear forever.

The UN panel of experts has found that one million animal and plant species face extinction. It is worse than expected, this is happening much faster than we've ever seen before. Today we are the asteroid that's causing many, many species to go extinct simultaneously. The evidence is that unless immediate action is taken this crisis has grave impacts for us all.



We're not just losing nice things to look at, we're losing critical parts of Earth's system. And it's threatening our food, our water, our climate. We're encroaching further and further, every day into wildlife habitat and that drives emerging diseases. If we carry on like this, we will see more epidemics as bad as this and some of them could even be worse.

It's never been more critical for us to understand what is driving this crisis. Scientists have identified the key ways in which we humans are destroying the ecosystems on which we depend.

1. Illegal Wildlife Trade

There are many ways to remove pieces of the puzzle. The most obvious way is to kill something, and we do a lot of that. We're talking about millions of animals being snatched from the wild, from thousands of species.

2. Over-Fishing

We have massive and widespread overfishing. We're completely destroying the natural balance of fish in the world's oceans.



3. Population and Consumption



In the 1960s there were three billion people in the world. Today it is nearly eight billion, which is pretty startling. Population growth is much, much higher in the developing world than in the developed. But it is problematic just to talk about population because there are two things that are going on, it's population but it's also consumption. And in terms of impact on the planet, what's much more important is the growth in consumption levels and these are far higher in the

developed economies.

4. Pollution

While in a country like the United Kingdom we have some very strong laws on how to reduce pollution, we do have to realise that we are no longer a major industrial country, most of the things that we actually use are produced abroad in countries where the laws can be non-existent so we are simply



moving our footprint on destroying nature to another country.

5. Destruction of Natural Habitats

Many people imagine there's this untouched wilderness because they see it on their TV screens but the reality is, there's really not a lot of wild left out there. We've converted 75% of the land that is not covered by ice. Three quarters of the terrestrial surface has been changed a lot just to feed one species.



6. Climate Change



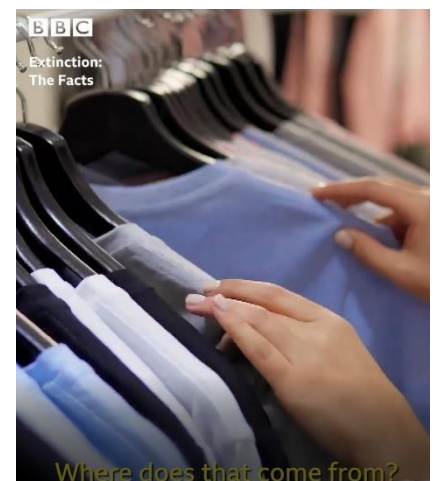
All of the calculations show we're on track for a three to four degree world. And the more the Earth warms, the worse the problem is. There are lots of ways that climate change will impact on species. These are no longer predictions, we are seeing it happen.

HOW CAN WE MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

1. Consume less and responsibly

For those of us who care about the future of our planet, we have to look at our lifestyles and we can't look away from our own behaviours. Forty years ago people consumed a good deal less in the United Kingdom, but there is no evidence that we were unhappier then, than we are now.

We can be more diligent about thinking about what we're consuming and when. It's really digging down and saying what's going on here? Where does that come from?



2. Eat meat and dairy responsibly

We need to think about meat and dairy consumption. That's not to say that none of us should ever eat meat or should cut all dairy out of our diets but we have to demand that they are produced sustainably. We also need to start producing affordable food without expanding any further into the forests. This is indeed quite possible.

3. Reduce Food Waste

One of the biggest problems is incredible, we actually waste about 40% of the food that is produced. If we could reduce that food waste it would go a long, long way to make a more sustainable agricultural system.



4. Education

It's not just about our current lifestyle, but about the education of our children on the way nature works. If we don't act now the youth of today and the youth of tomorrow are going to look back on this generation with absolute horror – what were you thinking?

We have a moment when we can change our world, and make it better. This is that moment. What happens next is up to every one of us.



BIBLE READING – Deuteronomy 8:7-18

For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land where you may eat bread without scarcity, where you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron and from whose hills you may mine copper. You shall eat your fill and bless the Lord your God for the good land that he has given you.

Take care that you do not forget the Lord your God, by failing to keep his commandments, his ordinances, and his statutes, which I am commanding you today. When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, an arid waste-land with poisonous snakes and scorpions. He made water flow for you from flint rock, and fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know, to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good. Do not say to yourself, 'My power and the might of my own hand have gained me this wealth.' But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today.

A Christian Perspective on the care of our Planet

As Christians, how do we reflect on the huge environmental challenges we are facing? And more importantly, how do we respond? This is a question I have been pondering a lot since watching David Attenborough a few weeks ago. The BBC documentary is presented as science, and there is no suggestion that our planet is in fact the creation of a good and benevolent God. I was struck by the line above stating that three quarters of the earth's surface has been cleared in order to feed *'just one species.'* To a scientist this is what we are – just one more mammal – but our Christian perspective says that human beings are not quite the same as the other creatures in God's created order. The creation story in Genesis teaches that we are uniquely made in the image of God, in a way that is distinct from the rest of the creation. Genetically

speaking we may be very close to apes, yet in practise we are worlds apart. I would ask, how many other creatures on our planet are making TV documentaries about all the others?

Does the fact that our Christian beliefs differ at times from a scientific worldview mean that we should feel any less responsibility towards the natural world? Not at all! Our Christian convictions should create in us a deep desire to care for our world. In the bible's teaching we are set apart as creatures made in the image of God *in order that we may care for the rest of creation*, as God's representatives here on earth (Genesis 2:15). And when we consider Jesus' teaching, he taught that we should love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love our neighbours as ourselves. The way that we treat our planet has a direct impact on both of these.

Loving our Global Neighbours

It is not hard to see how the mistreatment of our planet causes suffering and harm to our neighbours around the globe. For example, climate change as a result of our carbon dioxide emissions causes deserts to expand. Crops then fail, people starve, and communities are displaced. Fires, floods, and landslides are also increased by global warming. Much of the CO2 emissions that are causing these disasters have emanated from wealthier people in parts of the world who are not directly affected by the problems. This is plainly an injustice, given that the perpetrators are not the ones who are suffering.

When we buy products that are produced in a way that harms the planet, we worsen the environment in which those people live. We might wish to say that this is the fault of the producers, who must learn to produce these products that we buy more responsibly; however it costs more money to manufacture products like clothing (for example) in a way that is environmentally friendly, and these producers may lack the funds for this because they are not being paid a fair price for their work by those who supply our retailers here in the UK. Unfair trade therefore contributes to environmental harm in poorer countries, where many of our products are made. An example of this is the mining of tin metal in Indonesia for smartphones. The conditions are squalid in many of these quarries, with children found among those who work there. Apple has claimed that these unregulated, illegal mines are not supplying metal for their smartphones, but these tin mines are obviously supplying someone. If not Apple, then who? Samsung? Huawei?



Loving God by Loving his Creation

The idea that we can sin against God, and not just other people, is something that only applies to a religious worldview. Personally speaking, this makes a big difference to how I think about this subject. The natural world that God has made is truly beautiful, full of wonder, and awe. It is quite simply amazing! David Attenborough would certainly agree with us on this, even though he may not share our faith. Furthermore,

the bible teaches that creation reflects the glory of God. Like a mirror held up, we see God's imprint in the natural world.

Let's suppose I was to visit the Louvre Art Gallery in Paris, and while I was there, I defaced the painting of the Mona Lisa by covering it in spray paint. How would you feel about this? I would certainly be arrested!! The painting is a masterpiece, painted by the celebrated artist Leonardo Da Vinci. Any artist will tell you that they put their very heart and soul into their work. What a huge travesty it would be, and a total disrespect to Leonardo Da Vinci, if I were to abuse his painting in such a way (don't worry, I wouldn't get past the security guards).



Should we not feel the same about harming God's creation? And shouldn't God be the most celebrated artist of all time, when we look at everything he has made? When we consider the beauty of the natural world, God's glory, splendour, and holiness, is embedded within each magnificent detail, like the way in which an artist's brilliance shines forth from each and every brush stroke. What a great disrespect we do to God when we wilfully harm the natural world. When we sin against the creation, we are sinning against the creator.

This is the perspective of faith, which not everyone today shares. Could it be that people have failed to respect the natural world because they have forgotten about its creator? It is not so very different to the words we have read from Deuteronomy chapter eight, when God spoke to his people all those centuries ago. When we have eaten our fill, built our fine houses, and our wealth has multiplied, the risk is that we exalt ourselves and forget the Lord our God who provided all these things. *Do not say to yourself, 'My power and the might of my own hand have gained me this wealth.' But remember the Lord your God...*

Is Ignorance bliss?

You may know the expression, 'ignorance is bliss.' In many ways my life was more blissful before I became aware of all the wrong I am able to do towards God and my global neighbours through my lifestyle and my consumer choices. Am I being unkind today by speaking the truth about these things? Surely not, when you consider that one person's ignorance is certainly not bliss for someone else! And if I choose to remain ignorant because it feels too hard facing up to these issues, what excuse will I have when I one day stand before my maker? What excuse would any of us have?

We have lived in ignorance, though scientists have been trying to tell us of these things for several decades. Going forward we must not despair, but take practical steps. There is a need for more research, and sensible advice. We need to know where we can buy food that has been sustainably produced, and what we should avoid. Likewise, we need information about where our clothes and other products are made, and whether they are made in a way that cares for the planet. If we are financially able to make more ethical choices, then we really should.

An Urgent need for clearer consumer choices

Changing my consumer choices, and making adjustments to my lifestyle, feels overwhelming, like setting off at the bottom of a large mountain. But mountains are climbed by taking lots of small steps, and this is what we must do, starting now. There are all sorts of ways by which we can adjust our behaviours. We need individuals at St Christopher's and Emmanuel who will help research ethical consumer choices, so that as a church we can pool our knowledge and equip each other to live lives that take better care of God's creation. Our churches should be places where people can come and learn about fair trade shopping, low-carbon living, and buying sustainable products, but at present my knowledge is limited and I wouldn't know whom to ask amongst our congregations. Would you?

We've got a lot of work to do. Will you work together with me in this, so that we can practise what we preach? It can be difficult obtaining truthful information, because the wealthy corporations who sell us things like to provide 'evidence' from their own scientists, who give their own version of 'the facts.' But the truth is out there if we really want to know it. The question is, do we care enough to seek it?

For those who have Netflix, one thing we can do is watch David Attenborough's 'Life on our Planet' programme that is scheduled for release on 4th October. According to the trailer, Attenborough will be telling us how to work with nature, not against it, and I for one will be listening keenly to what he has to say.

Prayers

Creator God, at this harvest time we thank you for the wonderful world through which we are fed, and in which you have given us so much to enjoy. As we are all becoming more aware of the damage that has been done to your planet, make us ready to repent and change our behaviours, starting today.

Lord in your mercy;

Hear our prayer.

God of all wisdom, grant us the desire to seek greater understanding, and to uncover the truth about the choices we make. Lead and guide us into cleaner, more responsible living, and raise up people in our churches who will possess expertise in this area.

Lord in your mercy;

Hear our prayer.

Holy God, give us hearts to love you deeply, and to love everything you have made. May we also love all our neighbours as ourselves, including those in other parts of the world with whom we are linked through our global markets. Let your Holy Spirit within us cause us to hunger and thirst for justice and righteousness.

Merciful Father; **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**