**AFC 298
Genesis 1.1-5, 31
Revelation 21.1-4
28th February 2021

 Creation: God saw that it was Good**

Imagine you are an alien sent from our neighbouring galaxy of Andromeda on a quest to visit Planet Earth, observe the big issues of the day and then report back to your high command. What issues might strike you as being globally important to the people who live on this so called *third rock from the Sun*?

If the COVID 19 Pandemic was currently first on the list, my guess is that Climate Change with all it physical and social implications for us and generations to come, is the topic that is here to stay. And I’m sure our alien friend would instantly be aware of this issue on Planet Earth the moment he turned on the TV and heard Sir David Attenborough narrating *The Perfect Planet*, walked through Glasgow and saw the preparations for November’s COP26 United Nations Conference on the environment, or went for a takeaway coffee in Tring and saw that outside High Street Baptist Church there was a gold plaque awarded to them from EcoChurch.

There are, I think, so many reasons, why it’s good that today AFC joins thousands of churches in this country in having a Climate Sunday service. This initiative has been running from autumn last year and ends on September 5th this year. It’s a project that will be photographically and statistically documented and laid before the world leaders in the Glasgow conference that runs between 1-12th November, showing them how committed the churches of Britain are in addressing the issues brought about by Climate Change and Biodiversity Collapse.

The organisers of the Climate Sunday project are encouraging churches to do three things: Worship, Commit and Speak Up.

Giving thanks to God as the Creator and Sustainer of life has always been a big part of the Judaeo-Christian tradition of worship. Many of us love scriptures like Psalm 8 that speak of the wonders of God in creation: *O Lord our God, how wonderful is your name in all the earth and your majesty is praised as high as the heavens.*
And even townies like me see the theological significance of our annual Harvest Festival and that worship, praise and joy filled thanksgiving seems a natural response to experiencing a beautiful sunset or gazing into the intricacies of a flower.

The second strand of Climate Sunday is to *Commit* and one of the ways we have done this recently has been to join, along with 3,000 other congregations, EcoChurch. Hereford Cathedral has just received the 1000th award, gaining silver – here at AFC we have received the bronze award and we have high hopes that as we work our way through the EcoChurch questionnaire, revisiting its suggestions and prompts, that we’ll make more and more progress in making our building increasingly environmentally friendly, our energy usage more sustainable and together as a congregation share ideas, through Family News, Church Meetings and Life and Faith Groups, about how we might live with integrity as we play our individual part in facing these global challenges.

The final part of Climate Sunday is the invitation to make a response and to do that by signing *The Time is Now* declaration. This has been drawn up by the Climate Coalition which includes denominations like the URC, the Baptists, the Church of England, Church of Scotland, and Roman Catholic Church, aid agencies such as Christian Aid and Tearfund alongside well-known organisation such as the RSPB.

The *Time is Now* declaration petition will be presented in November at COP26. If you feel it would be right for you as an individual to sign please go to either my Blog or the EcoChurch part of the AFC website where you can access the petition in a few easy clicks and send it off.

On this Climate Sunday it’s good for us to once more affirm our belief that God created, sustains and delights in our world.

There have been times in Church history when those who’ve written books and preached from pulpits presented a dual understanding of life. Physical matter was deemed in some way to be fallen and bad whereas goodness and potential were seen as spiritual attributes. If you take that further, it explains why some people of faith historically took little interest in the environment thinking that a belief in God was exclusively a spiritual matter. Yet way back, in the twelfth century, that German Benedictine abbess, Hildegard of Bingen dared to disagree with the likes of St Augustine by writing: *holy persons draw themselves to all that is earthly.* Now that’s the sort of quote I might use if I were a teacher setting an RE essay at school: discuss!

The myth story of Creation in Genesis says again and again that God looked at Creation and called it *good.*

We now know that this *good world* has a natural fragility about it when things get out of balance. Just changing the average temperature of the planet, either through something like an Ice Age occurring over hundreds of years or global warming occurring through the ever-increasing industrialisation of just a few decades. Earth’s fragility – which means the loss of numerous habitats and species and the impoverishment of millions in countries that become ever more arid and desert like – is the *elephant in the room* for everyone who would claim that our generation can just go on living in the future as we have been in the past.

Not that this is an entirely new concept. Rabbie Burns says something very similar in his well-known and much-loved poem To a Mouse’:

*I’m truly sorry man’s dominion
Has broken nature’s social union,
An' justifies the ill opinion
Which makes thee startle
At me, thy poor, earth-born companion,
An' fellow-mortal*.

I’m afraid as someone born in Watford, I cannot read these words with the lilting Scots accent they so richly deserve!!

If, at its beginning, the Bible talks of a good, if fragile Creation, come its end, in the book of Revelation, it longs for a *new heaven and earth.*

We can, of course, interpret that in terms of Apocalypse, and the so-called *end* of the world and the beginning of a new creation. Yet the message of The Kingdom in Jesus’ teaching was always about bringing something of *tomorrow* into *today*. Theologians have a technical phrase for it and call it *Realised Eschatology*. In everyday life it means experiencing something of the love, joy and peace of heaven before we get there! So, can’t it also mean that we are not to wait, say, for the Ozone Layer to be patched up after the Second Coming, but we are to do everything in our power to enable that repair to happen now.

It's easy, maybe to privatise faith and make Jesus essentially a personal Saviour. I think that’s a good starting place. A personal faith is a great foundation for life, and it can, and should go further. Belief in a Cosmic Christ is about seeing God’s salvation as making whole our entire world, body, mind and spirit. And so, the idea of a *new heaven and a new earth* sees salvation not just in my personal walk with Jesus but also in my relationship with creation, which God calls *good*.

We human beings occupy, according to the Genesis story, an honoured place in that creation. To be *made in the image of God* surely brings with it the duty of being good stewards. To be, as it were, gardeners alongside God, in the work of *Continuous Creation*.

We are not having a Climate Sunday because its trendy. We haven’t joined EcoChurch because it’s the latest bandwagon. We do these things out of a deep conviction that God’s Creation is precious, and *being made in his likeness*, it’s our duty and our joy, in companionable fellowship with all creation, to live gently upon the earth and care for it.

We do this because our world is precious. We do it out of a sense of love and belonging.

I wonder if you’ve ever watched *The Repair Shop* on the telly. I think it’s a great programme. People bring their broken belongings, often belonging to the grandparents, into the barn to be restored by wonderfully skilled crafts men and women. A rickety old card table is brought back to life and looks just like granddad had it. An old clock works for the first time in decades and now the grandchildren will hear the same chimes as our old mum. It’s a programme that combines skill, love, and a sense of the value of both objects and community.

The call of Climate Sunday, of EcoChurch, of COP26 isn’t much different from that. We love this good earth and in church week by week we worship our good and loving creator, why wouldn’t we want to join in with the task of caring responsibly for this great gift bequested to us, our world? A gift we want to pass on, in good order, to succeeding generations.

May it be so, in the name of God, who is the:

Source of Life
Word of Life and
Breath of Life. Amen

Ian Green, Amersham, 9th February 2021