

2024 TALK 22.9.24 CREATION 3, (GEN. 2:4-10A, 15&16/JOHN 3:1-8,16&17)

GOD'S GOOD CREATION: THE AIR WE BREATHE

I went into a pub in Boxmoor this week and asked for a packet of crisps and a glass of water. Sorry this is not a joke...! The only punchline to this story is the disappointed look on the publican's face. As I said the other Sunday, we take water for granted don't we? Jesus said, 'Blessed are you if you give a cup of water in my name to the least & the lowest among people'. The gift of water is such a blessing – to us and to our world.

There's something else in creation we take for granted. It's not something mentioned in the first Genesis creation account, as such. It makes no appearance in the first 6 days of creation, but *is* introduced in another way in chapter two. I'm talking about, of course, the air that we breathe. This is something that we came to value much more during the Covid pandemic. Those difficult days made the ability to breathe more precious. Likewise, people with life-long breathing conditions, like asthma for example, tend to be more conscious of something most of us do automatically, without thinking.

So, it's no surprise that life & air & the breath of God are so closely associated in this account of God creating the first human being. It is the breath of God into his nostrils which animates Adam & gives him life. Important to add that God's breath was also involved in creating the whole of creation. Not in quite such an intimate way... But God's breath was clearly involved in the way that our Heavenly Father spoke (or even sang) all of creation into existence.

The air that we breathe. The breath of God – God's voice. The wind of God's Spirit. All life-giving. All essential to our life on earth. I shall never forget taking a ski-ing trip to Austria when I was a student. One of the most memorable things to me from that week, was not just the incredible 'Sound of Music' scenery. Ski-ing in such surroundings *was* truly amazing. But here's what also took my breath away – just how clean & pure the air was in those mountains. Taking a lung-full of that air seemed so invigorating & health-giving.

Now this might seem a bit of a leap – but here's a question for you. What is life-giving, what is invigorating for our church? We've been thinking about this as part of our Vision for Mission meetings in recent months. One of the measurements we took of Carey was against the 'Seven Signs of a Healthy

Church'. These were some of the research findings of those involved in the Church Growth Movement.

No time to go into this in much detail. But the seven marks are: 'Energised by faith in God, having an outward-looking focus, seeking what God wants, facing the cost of change & growth, operating as a community, making room for all and doing a few things well' ... It's interesting: the significant differences between perceptions of the church 10 years ago, compared with this year...

(More?)

The 'breath of life' for Carey BC, in these terms, are all seven of these 'marks of life & growth'. The first of these is very important, or arguably the most important. That personally & corporately, we are each animated & inspired by our faith in God. Loving God is our life-breath. Equally the church cannot exist without this second mark of good health: an outward-looking focus. Sharing our faith with those beyond our fellowship is the very bread & butter of the church (or should I say, the very bread & wine of the church...).

So, let us once again remind ourselves of Carey's new mission statement, which we have agreed, but we are still learning. (SCREEN) No harm in reminding ourselves. Helps to re-enforce this. (And as I say, anyone who can repeat this to me over coffee will get a chocolate prize, or the prize of another type of sweet if you are allergic to chocolate or milk...!). SAY TOGETHER – AGAIN !

And let's remind ourselves too, of the four love-actions we have agreed, which flow from this overall mission statement. Here is our recently agreed more specific, four-fold mission statement. Each of these is important. Each of these involves us – our actions. We are encouraging each other to love God & our neighbour in four different ways. And I will summarise these. By adopting these statements we have agreed together to:

- Live out our faith ...
- Open our arms to our community ...
- Value children & young people ...
- Engage in preserving our environment

There is much to unpack from each of these. This is something, God willing, I plan to do in a preaching series on the body of Christ, during Oct & Nov. But

today, during this season of creation, it seems appropriate to focus on our fourth mission statement. Indeed, as Jesus put it, 'the last shall be first'...! This is perhaps the least obvious of our mission statements, but it is nonetheless the most pressing one: Caring for creation. There are those who might understandably think or say – 'How is this Christian mission?'

Some would say - Isn't our mission about calling human beings to repent of their sins & to turn to God?' And we would say: 'Exactly true!'. That's precisely what our mission to care for creation is all about. All human beings have sinned & fallen short of the glory of God. All human beings need to change their behaviour towards God, other human beings & also our behaviour towards God's creation. Loving God means loving God's creation. The vision of our Saviour Jesus, was for a world-embracing mission. As John puts it so pithily in John chapter 3: Jesus came, not to condemn our world, but to save our world.

Increasingly, people are coming to see the need for a more joined-up & wholistic understanding of our life together on this planet. Recent research has shown that 40% of young people in the States want to see more action to combat climate change. That figure is probably higher in the UK. And of course, it's not just about young people. No doubt many people more advanced in years are seeing - & personally experiencing – the damage that global warming is already doing... To our world, our own communities, even our own homes. Even to our own bodies. ***This being so***, it is important that any Christian church whole-heartedly embraces caring for creation as an intrinsic part of Christian mission. This is not adapting the good news to modern thinking. So we can be 'hip' & 'trendy'... No! This is the church re-discovering an aspect of the good news that has always been there, but too long overlooked & not preached.

Christian mission is about the air that we breathe. It's about – among other things - making sure us humans produce less carbon dioxide & ensuring that creation produces more life-giving oxygen. I learned something new this week, which I should have known before. The phrase 'carbon footprint' was originally invented by the fossil-fuel industry. As a way of helping us see that we all share in the damage that's being done to the planet. Although the richest nations do indeed have bigger carbon footprints than the poorest. Thankfully, the

language of carbon footprints, is now being used as a tool to think creatively about individually & corporately combatting climate change.

Finding ways for each of us to produce less CO₂, and creation more oxygen, is healthy & life-affirming for all. I am very pleased that, as part of this process of drawing up a Mission Action Plan, that Carey is looking to re-vitalise our call to be an EcoChurch. To identify particular actions to achieve silver status as an EcoChurch soon... & to aim towards Carey becoming carbon neutral in the years to come. Praise God for this vision & ambition!

Jesus calls us to adventure with the wind of God's Holy Spirit. Who knows where this will take us? But in this world of death & destruction, we can pray towards a bigger vision for a new world. A vision of a new church too.

There's a book recently published by someone who loves the oceans. She is from the US. Her name is Ayana Elizabeth Johnson. The book she has written is meant to inspire us to imagine a new world. Not to dwell on the dire warnings & the visions of doom & gloom. But instead to imagine what might be. Imagine what our world could look like, if we get better at this life & death struggle between global damage & global greening. Her book, which isn't yet in our church library is simply titled: 'What if we get it right? – Visions of climate futures' (BTW, there are several other Christian books on the theme of caring for creation you might like to think about taking home to read)...

At the risk of being very unpopular, I would like to finish by giving you all some 'homework'. (VENN DIAGRAM – handed out)... Remember venn diagrams...? I'm sure you would prefer to forget the days of bringing work back from school. Although many of us, of course, bring homework home from work!... But this is just a single sheet of paper with three simple questions:

'What are you good at? What brings you joy? What work needs doing?' And the intersection of these three questions should help you to arrive at what might be best for you to do personally to combat global warming & climate chaos. Remember – this is personal. Climate chaos has got it in for me, for you, for everyone here this morning. A wonderful little tool to help our thinking.

These questions could relate to anything we would like to change. But this exercise is specifically about climate action. I invite you to keep this sheet and think about it this week & fill it in. No need to put your name to it. But I would ask that as many as possible bring your filled-in venn diagrams back for our

Harvest Service next Sunday. (A big ask, but it should be possible for many of us...!) Whatever climate actions we come up with, can together form part of our worship, next Sunday, as we give thanks to God for creation & harvest.

May God breathe life into us now, as we remember Jesus, who came, not to condemn our world but to save it. We celebrate God's goodness by eating & drinking bread & wine, which represents both the bounty of God's creation & the wonder of God's love shown us in Jesus. Thanks be to God... (John 3:16)...