

Worship for Sunday 13 September 2020, Climate Sunday

Trinity 14, Proper 19

Benefice of Rural East York

Welcome

Words of welcome from Revd Nick Bird, finishing with this prayer:

The Creator of the Universe calls us to leave the darkness behind and live in the light.
Our Lord Jesus Christ who lived and died and rose again greets us this day.
The One who danced at Creation's birth calls us now into His presence.
So come let us worship.

Responsive prayer

Call us out of our sleep;
Awaken our hearts and minds to the reality of so many lives.
Awaken us to our connectedness as a global community.
Awaken us to a future free from poverty and climate change.
Father, call us out of our sleep.

Call us out of our sleep;
Awaken us to the suffering of others.
Awaken our hearts and minds to our choices and their impacts.
Awaken us to be renewed with creation.
Awaken us to the joy of enabling others to live life to the full.
Christ, call us out of our sleep.

Call us out of our sleep;
Awaken our hearts and minds to your hope.
Awaken us to be renewed with creation.
Awaken us to the joy of enabling others to live life to the full.
Holy Spirit, call us out of our sleep.

During the pandemic, many of us have found solace in nature, spending time in our gardens, going for walks or cycle rides, or seeing pictures of flowers, trees and landscapes as part of these video services. So now:

Let us praise God for his wonderful works!
Together with the roaring of the winds
With the silence of the deepest sea;
With the blazing sun and the shining of the stars
Let us sing God's praise!

Song - How Great Thou Art

O Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder
consider all the works thy hand has made
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,
thy power throughout the universe displayed

*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee:
how great thou art, how great thou art.
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee:
how great thou art, how great thou art.*

When through the woods and forest glades I wander
and hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;
when I look down from lofty mountain grandeur,
and hear the brook, and feel the gentle breeze.

Then sings my soul...

And when I think that God, his Son not sparing
sent him to die, I scarce can take it in
that on the Cross, my burden gladly bearing
he bled and died to take away my sin

Then sings my soul...

When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation
and take me home, what joy shall fill my heart;
when I shall bow in humble adoration,
And then proclaim: my God, how great thou art

Then sings my soul...

Interview with Colin

Angie - "Hi Colin, great to see you, and thanks for volunteering to record this conversation."

Colin - "No problem!"

Angie - "So, first question, why are you here anyway?"

Colin - "Because it's Climate Sunday! And the climate, indeed the environment more generally, is something I'm passionate about. As you know I'm an ecologist at the Uni of York, and quite a lot of my research is focussed on the impacts of climate change in the UK and in East Africa: I've seen first hand the impact climate change is having on wildlife and people across the world. I also think it's an issue that ALL Christians need to care about, which is why I think Climate Sunday is a great initiative.

Angie - "So what is Climate Sunday?"

Colin - "Climate Sunday is an initiative of the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland and is an attempt to bring together Churches all over the country in the run up to the next big intergovernmental conference on climate change. That was going to happen in Glasgow in November, but has now been postponed until 2021, which gives the Churches a bit longer to consider what our response will be.

Angie - But why should Churches and Christians like yourself care anyway?"

Colin - Well, for me there are multiple reasons: environmental messages are spread throughout the Bible from God giving humans stewardship of creation in Genesis, through the prophet's repeated warnings that human sin wreaks environmental destruction on the land, to Paul's note that the whole of creation is groaning as it await's Jesus' return. As stewards, we're really not doing well at fulfilling God's commands. But it's even more than that, because environmental problems, and climate change most particularly, are fundamentally an issue of justice: we in the richer nations have an overwhelming responsibility for causing climate change, but the impacts are being felt mostly by those in poorer nations: small island states where sea level rise is set to completely submerge entire nations, or dryland countries like Tanzania subjected to ever more extreme droughts and floods, while in the UK, you know, a little bit warmer could be quite nice at times! As a Christian I'm convinced we need to take God's command to care for creation as seriously as we do making disciples of all nations, and I think crying out for environmental justice is absolutely at the heart of the mission of the Church.

Angie - OK, so why now - we're in the middle of a global pandemic, don't we have other things to worry about?"

Colin - well, I think there are two things that make right now a really good time! Firstly there's the international conference coming up: if Churches are able to reflect on their own activities and make sacrificial promises of action, we can challenge the government to act similarly, showing the Church's leadership in this area. Secondly, the interruption to normal activities caused by COVID actually seems like a unique opportunity to change how we do things: tackling the climate crisis is going to need radical changes to the way we as individuals act, as well as how governments and businesses use fossil fuels. After all the life-style changes we've seen during the pandemic, it is no longer possible to say 'no-one can be persuaded to do that', because we've all seen that when people take a crisis seriously, radical action is possible, even at considerable cost to ourselves. We shouldn't be talking of 'going back to normal'; that 'normal' was never sustainable in the first place, now is the perfect time to think about how we as individuals and nations want to rebuild a just, fair and sustainable society.

Reading: Matthew 18:21-35

The parable of the unmerciful servant

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?'

Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.'

'Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.'

'At this the servant fell on his knees before him. "Be patient with me," he begged, "and I will pay back everything." The servant's master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go.'

'But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. "Pay back what you owe me!" he demanded.'

'His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, "Be patient with me, and I will pay it back."

'But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.'

'Then the master called the servant in. "You wicked servant," he said, "I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?" In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.'

'This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.'

Homily 'Forgiveness as a Way of life', by Revd Canon Terry Joyce

The conclusion to that gospel reading doesn't seem to present forgiveness as a choice, but rather a way of life!

Martin Luther King said "Forgiveness is not an occasional act, it is a permanent attitude".

I can't help but think about the reference to forgiveness right at the heart of the prayer that Jesus taught us: "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who trespass against us." It was right up there in Jesus's priorities – and we say those words without necessarily realizing that being forgiven is the nice bit. C.S. Lewis said "Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have something to forgive". That can be really hard!

We all need forgiveness, because we all mess up, but part of the deal, according to Jesus, is that we all need to forgive too.

I remember a clergy colleague who back in 2005, having lost her daughter in the terrorist attacks in London, announced quite publicly that she needed to step back from her ministry because she couldn't see, at that point, how she could forgive the bombers. My heart bled for her. It's really hard!

But when you step back and ask why forgiveness features at the heart of the Lord's Prayer, it's surely because it's at the heart of the gospel and God's love. It's about the grace of God being able to change us, mould us & shape us and the way we live.

You might remember the name Corrie Ten Boom, who helped Jews escape the Holocaust, saving over 700 lives, wrote in her book 'The Hiding Place' after many years of serving and suffering for God in the name of Jesus "Forgiveness is the key which unlocks the door of resentment and the handcuffs of hatred. It beaks the chain of bitterness and the shackles of selfishness. The forgiveness of Jesus not only takes away our sins, it makes them as if they had never been".

We are talking about something that is transformational and revolutionary, unless you are the unforgiving servant in our gospel reading.

The most touching story I have kept in my files about forgiveness is this harrowing story from South Africa:

In a Cape Town township community in November 1996, a 70 year old woman has been called to testify before the Truth & Reconciliation Committee concerning the activities of a policeman in her township. He had come one night with some others and, in front of this woman had shot her son at point blank range.

Two years later, the same policeman had returned to arrest her husband, whom she assumed had been subsequently executed. Some time later, the same policeman came yet again. This time he took her to a place where he showed her her husband, still alive. But as her spirits lifted, the policeman doused the husband with petrol, set him on fire and killed him.

As the woman concluded her harrowing testimony, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, trying to keep his own emotions under control, asked her "What would she like to be the outcome of the hearing?"

After a long pause, the woman asked for three things. First, she asked to be taken to the place where her husband was burned, so she could gather up the dust and give his remains a decent burial. Second, her husband and son were her only family. So, she asked that this police officer would become her son, to come twice a month to her home and spend a day with her, so that she could pour out on him whatever love she still had inside her. And third, she wanted that officer to know that she offered him forgiveness, because Jesus died to forgive her.

So she asked to be taken across the hall so that she could embrace him and let him know that he was truly forgiven. As people led her to him, the police officer, completely overwhelmed, fainted. Officials helped him, whilst the woman's friends and neighbours, most of them victims of the same sort of violence, began to softly sing 'Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me'.

Pray to God that we will never know the unbearable cruelty endured by that wife and mother who has everything precious taken away from her, except her own soul.

So this homily has the title 'Forgiveness – a Way of Life'. And in that vein, I'd like, in conclusion to link to Climate Sunday. You might think forgiveness and Climate Sunday are poles apart – I did for a minute or two.

The climate change imperative demands a radical change of priorities for us all, to continue to experience the richness of life that God wants for all his creation and that the earth can provide. God wills for us to live in a way that cherishes and protects that, just as Jesus' teaching about forgiveness is about flourishing ways of life and relationships. In fact, a good place to start in thinking about the climate is in recognising our present and past failings, in the harm we have done and continue to do. So that we develop a deep passion and concern for care of the

environment. God gives us all a way forward – through forgiveness, but this has consequences for our actions.

Rowan Williams, the previous Archbishop of Canterbury, made the same point when he joined Extinction Rebellion protesters last week. He said “People of faith should be here because they are people of faith. That is, they believe they can make a difference of some kind and that that difference is worth making. At the moment we’re at a remarkable moment of opportunity. People are talking about building back better. We have to take the opportunity. It’s not just recovering what’s been lost but building again something that is genuinely more sustainable”.

Isn’t that what the Gospel is about and why forgiveness and reconciliation are so high a priority for Jesus?

God bless you.

Confession: Stewardship of creation

Holy God, Creator and Lover of all that is,
we confess to you that we have sinned.
We have failed in our care for the land and its creatures,
we have been greedy, destructive, and wasteful
of the resources you entrusted to us.
Polluted air and water,
eroded soil and salty earth,
birds and animals deprived of habitat,
and neighbours left hungry and thirsty by our selfishness:
all these cry out against us.
We do not know how to restore what we have damaged,
and we repent in sorrow and distress.
Forgive us, we pray, and have mercy.
Give us grace to change our ways,
to make amends,
and to work together for the healing of the world,
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
Amen

Absolution: Restoration of creation

Our Saviour died and rose again
so that for all who live in him
there is a new creation.
Therefore we declare:
our sins are forgiven,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen. Send out your Spirit, O Lord.
Renew the hearts of your people.
Renew the face of the earth

Collect

Living God, you call us to be good stewards of this earthly home, strengthen us to care for your creation; forgive us when, through our greed and indifference we abuse its beauty and damage its potential. Empower us, through your Spirit to so nurture and love the world, that all creation sings to your glory.

Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in Heaven

Hallowed be your name

Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in Heaven

Give us today our daily bread

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and for ever

Amen

Interview with Angie Creswick

Colin - OK so now it's your turn Angie, thanks for chatting to us!

Angie - Well thank you Colin for asking me too. Like you, care of our beautiful creation and social justice - the impact of climate change on the most vulnerable in the world - are my concern. But I also find that how we witness to our communities is a major driver for why I feel called to be involved. As you know, I'm an engineer and project manager and a conservation specialist so I understand the challenges and complexities of that in a heritage environment.

Colin - what are the top practical things that churches and individuals can do to help at the moment?

Angie - As an individual, like we've all been doing, is noticing the natural world around us - I think that's been the blessing in the last few months, and giving thanks for what we see. I personally find Reduce Re-use Recycle helpful in my own life. And there are some really engaging resources. GreenChristian has a LOAF initiative which is about how we eat and it's: Locally grown in season; Organic; Animal friendly; and Fairly traded, and they have another initiative which I really appreciate: Joy In Enough.

From my uh professional role in the built environment, reducing means looking at insulation, electronic controls or smart controls of our building are a lot more than just programmable timers now. And maybe managing people's expectations of their environment: we don't need saunas in church! With regards how we heat and light our spaces, there are all sorts of decisions we can make to improve our carbon footprint. I'm particularly excited about the potential for using renewables such as roof PVs. Our churches are orientated east to west so there's always a south facing roof slope. Transportation is another major thing obviously. Lift sharing, walking, cycling, and zoom meetings – who knew the impact that could have on how few journeys we make!

Colin - So, if you just had to pick one thing for us to do individually or as a church what would that be?

Angie - I'm not going to pick one! But I think we really seriously should look at building back better. So, things we've learned over the last few months... We should consider retaining things like some of the zoom meetings. I'd love us to look at journeying on A Rocha's EcoChurch initiative: I like the breadth of it, how it's incremental, and I'm also interested in how we might manage our churchyard sustainably. Caring for God's Acre have some great resources for helping to invite our communities in. Overall, I hope we listen to our young people and join in with their passion for our environment.

Colin – Excellent, some concrete ideas to get us started.

Intercessions

In the York Mystery Plays we are told of God's promise to Adam and Eve that Earth was the place

*That I have granted of my grace,
To have your dwelling in.
Herbs, spice and fruit on tree,
Beasts, fowl, all that ye see
Shall bow to you herein.
It is called Paradise.
Here all your joys begin,
And if that, ye be wise*

We know Adam and Eve were not wise and ate the forbidden fruit, so humanity was expelled from the Garden of Eden. But this Climate Sunday we are facing an even greater lack of wisdom which will mean there may be no herbs, spices, beast or fowl for future generations. We have come to ask God for His mercy and guidance in addressing this existential question.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, you have given humanity the gift of intellect and scientific enquiry. We know from those most blessed with these gifts that the melting ice, escalating temperatures, disastrous storms and floods, devastating typhoons and fires out of control are not accidents of nature, but the direct result of our failure to care for your world. Yet powerful conglomerates and amoral leaders, for financial gain and immoral reasons, refuse to cease their destructive behaviours. We pray that the Holy Spirit will speak to all those in authority so they recognise we need action now to save the world that it might be enjoyed by future generations.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

We pray, Lord, that our benefice might act as a catalyst in the local community in a continuing debate on what the people of our villages can do to reduce our burden on your planet. Give us collectively and individually a challenging approach as to how we might, by even incremental changes to our lifestyle, show more respect and regard to your gift of earth by adopting ever more sustainable lifestyles.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

We pray for those who are in greatest immediate danger from the climate emergency because we know that established patterns of global poverty and environmental degradation are exacerbated by climate change. Our injustice and inaction mean that Bangladesh and Fiji rather than Belgium and Finland are on the front line of the global crisis.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, bring your peace and healing to those suffering in body, mind or spirit; the lonely, the frightened, the abused, the refugee, the prisoner and those we know personally who are in special need – and those who care for them.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

We ask, Lord, that your Church would act as a leading prophetic voice throughout the world requiring all of humanity to care and protect your precious gift of creation.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

We bring all these prayers in the name of Jesus Christ our Saviour. **Amen.**

Song: Come down, O Love divine

1.
Come down, O Love divine,
Seek thou this soul of mine,
And visit it with thine own ardour glowing;
O comforter, draw near,
Within my heart appear,
And kindle it, thy holy flame bestowing.

2.
O let it freely burn,
Till earthly passions turn
To dust and ashes, in its heat consuming;
And let thy glorious light
Shine ever on my sight,
And clothe me round, the while my path
illumining.

3.
Let holy charity
Mine outward vesture be,
And lowliness become mine inner clothing;
True lowliness of heart,
Which takes the humbler part,
And o'er its own shortcomings weeps with
loathing.

4.
And so the yearning strong,
With which the soul will long,
Shall far outpass the power of human telling;
For none can guess its grace,
Till he become the place
Wherein the Holy Spirit makes his dwelling

Discendi, amor santo Bianco da Siena (died 1434) translated Richard Frederick Littledale (1833-1890)

Blessing and Dismissal

May God bless us with wonder at creation's glory.
May God bless us with fury at creation's spoiling.
May God bless us with courage at this critical hour.
And may the blessing of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
rest upon us and on all creation,
this day and for the future to come. Amen.

Many thanks to the people who contributed to the service

Revd Nick Bird - Welcome & Blessing
Revd Canon Terry Joyce - Homily
Alison Gilmour - Reading
Ged Murray - Intercessions
Beale Family - Lord's Prayer
Colin Beale and Angie Creswick - Interviews
Laudate music group - song 'How Great Thou Art' and David Marles for mixing the track
St-Martin-in-the-fields – song 'Come Down O Love Divine'
Anna Lewis, Colin & Victoria Beale
for Planning, Presentation and Production

Further information from:

<https://www.climatesunday.org/>
<https://ecochurch.arochoa.org.uk/>
<https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/>
<https://greenchristian.org.uk/>