

*'In Christ all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven; making peace by the blood of his Cross.'* Colossians 1:19-20

All too often, though, the Church has focused solely on God and humanity, but actually the Bible rings out with a bigger picture; another message which the Church has been slow to see.

*'Reconcile himself to all things, all creation'*. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible proclaims the value of God's creation, God's love for all that he has created, and the importance of right relationships between God, humanity, and the entire created order.

Psalm 104 overflows with it, as in verse 24: *'O Lord how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all.'*

The Psalm contains thirty-two verses describing creation as the glory of God; we are called to sing about it in verse 33.

Then in the final verse, it ends with a swift condemnation of anyone who sins; strange words, perhaps.

We could ponder about what is a sin in regard to creation; instead, let me tell you a story:

When I was growing up in the 60s and 70s, the Warwickshire landscape was changing rapidly. The mighty Elm trees, which marked hedgerows and fields were being attacked by a fungus, spread by a beetle. This left skeletons of trees everywhere. Twenty million trees lost from our country; a whole species removed from before our eyes.

Another fungus reached our shores eight years ago and may wipe out 80% of our Ash trees, there are also sick Horse Chestnut trees all around us. Three years ago, I walked a pilgrimage route in the south of France and was appalled to see other trees, species I didn't know, dying. This on-going story becomes a huge subject, but it is also very simple.

We are in the middle of a crisis which will make the Coronavirus look like just a little scratch, in comparison to what ever-increasing climate change will bring.

There are not that many tree species altogether, and there is only one planet for us, and it is changing rapidly, as a result of human dominance and power. Since the Industrial Revolution, we humans have increased in number and impact, exponentially. We are very skilled at staying alive. A few years ago, we had reached a point where there were more people then alive, than had ever existed before. Since the Industrial Revolution, each one of us has been making more and more impact on the planet, a hundred times greater than ever our long-dead ancestors did, ripping though resources laid down over millions of years.

Deeply Tricky. But **not hopeless.**

St Paul, in his Letter to the Colossians, reminds us that God, by the Cross (verse 13) *'has rescued us from the power of darkness, and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.'*

Is environmental pollution a sin? I'm sure that it grieves God, and it certainly needs turning away from by confession; putting right; and yes, forgiveness.

Like sin, it involves us both as individuals and as a society. (Just like discussion now emerging about slavery.)

Does it help to feel guilt, or anger? Yes, **if** it leads to Action and Change.

That is needed urgently. But that will not be sufficient.

***We need a change in our hearts, in our outlook, in our understanding.***

As Christians we are called upon to respect every member of Christ's body; each vital. Paul's writing to the Colossians here opens our eyes to a greater dimension; we are learning that all creation is part of that body, Jesus is its head, its centre.

This crisis is Not Easy. We can think that there is too much to take in. so we tend to bury our heads in the sand.

We have the answer, in Jesus. Not an excuse to do nothing.

Colossians tells us that Jesus was at the heart of creation. Verse 16 tells us *'all things have been created through him and for him.'*

Creation contains things that we struggle with, like volcanoes; viruses; snakes; spiders; ants; fungi. Wow.

Yes. We need to take a step back, take a long deep breath, and be still.

Awe. Respect and yes, fear of God. That is the beginning of wisdom.

Rather than arrogance, greed and human power, we need to explore humility, and interdependence.

We are a body with creation which only Jesus can reconcile; he has given us each other. We need each other. To treasure the gift that we are to each other.

(Hebrews 12 verses 16-17)

*'See to it that no-one becomes like Esau, an immoral and godless person, who sold his birthright for a single meal'.*

Esau did not value his birthright, which he was being given to care for and look after. He wanted a quick feed and instant gratification.

*'You know that later, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, even though he sought the blessing with tears'.* This is a scary picture.

I don't believe that we are doomed, or that we should ever give up on this Earth and just wait for heaven.

Jesus taught us to pray for God's kingdom to come on Earth, as it is in heaven. Much of the Bible talks about heaven, going to be on this earth. The New Jerusalem coming down here, prepared by God. (All creation matters to God. Jesus is at the very centre of it all.)

We all need to reflect on and **love** all creation, here and now. That is a big ask. Only Jesus can change our hearts to be big enough for that. This will affect everything, our views on every aspect of life, whether housing; shopping; medical practice; holidays; church.....

I know that I have lots still to be converted in this regard.

My cleverness or my self-righteousness is not going to change this. No subject or part of life should be off-limits.

Population; Rationing; two further contentious ones: just off-the-cuff.

We need to change, as individuals, as a church, as a society.

To turn.

We need an eco-conversion.

A radical transformation.

Yes, time is short; life is precious.

We all need to act, not from guilt, but from love.

God's love of us and of all the world.

This, like the Cross will be painful, but it will be fruitful.

This Lent, there will be a section in the newsheet for you to share ideas. I have put a simple starter question and suggestion in there for you, and to find out about your church. Please give me and each other suggestions to share, this Lent. Will you become part of a *Benefice Care for Creation* action and prayer group?

This will all only be possible through Jesus' sufficiency.

Lord, your love is so much greater than we can imagine.

Bring us Jesus to you, to your Cross, empty us of all that is selfish.

Help us to turn deeply to you, to desire to be changed, to be disciplined and to learn of you.

Only in you was God pleased to reconcile all things to himself, making peace through the blood of the Cross.

Redeem us: we pray.

**Amen**

*Colossians 1:13-20 N.R.S.V., Anglicised*

*<sup>13</sup> He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, <sup>14</sup> in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.<sup>[a]</sup>*

### ***The Supremacy of Christ***

*<sup>15</sup> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; <sup>16</sup> for in<sup>[b]</sup> him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup> He himself is before all things, and in<sup>[c]</sup> him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. <sup>19</sup> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup> and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.*

### **Footnotes**

- a. *Colossians 1:14 Other ancient authorities add through his blood*
- b. *Colossians 1:16 Or by*
- c. *Colossians 1:17 Or by*