

## *Bible readings*

### **Romans 8.18-25,38-39**

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

### **Matthew 11:25-30**

At that time Jesus said, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'

### *Sermon by Debby*

Last year, I went down south for the funeral of Alfred. Son of a Manchester vicar but for most of his working life a mixed farmer near Reading. He retired to Kintbury with his wife Edna - shortly before I became Priest in Charge there 25 years ago. Lived next-door to the church and very soon became Churchwarden there. He used to say of farming "a good farmer leaves his farmland in better condition than it was when he arrived".

Farmers steward the land they are responsible for. The bible says that God made humans in his image (meaning character not visuals) to steward the land and take responsibility for it. Alfred was a good farmer and a good steward of churches too. They are transferable skills. A lovely writer, Satish Kumar, who wrote the world peace prayer, says that if you tend your soil carefully, it teaches you how to tend your soul carefully and that prepares you to tend society carefully. That's a kind of stewarding too. He wrote a book "Soil Soul Society" all about that.

So what would Alfred say now about our planet? Think of Earth as a giant farm. Humans should leave planet earth in better condition than it was when we arrived. But humans have done so much damage to earth. Industrialisation over the last 150 years - CO2 from fossil fuels blanketing the earth and trapping heat. Extreme

weather events far more common. Habitats for wild creatures being lost so many species including many of our garden birds, bees and butterflies becoming extinct (did you watch David Attenborough's "Extinction: the facts" 2 weeks ago? - and his "Climate Change: the facts" a couple of years ago?). Hunting wild animals - for bushmeat.... Causing diseases to jump species to humans, including Covid-19 .... Pollution of the atmosphere from transport and factory - and, until the Clean Air Act, from coal fires. And a large increase in human population. And then there is plastic - most of which has only been invented in my lifetime and much of which cannot be used more than once. (Did you see Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's "War on Plastic"?). Even in St Paul's days, he had a sense of the unity of all life - here's a line from the first reading today **"We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now"** and I think that line rings especially true this year when not only we but all people are experiencing pandemic disease, disruption of community and even home life, insecurity of work and education. But with us, all the other creatures for whom we are God's appointed stewards suffering in so many ways.

How do you feel, knowing this? If you have children and grandchildren, how will Earth's climate be for them? We heard Anne Atkins say that her grandson aged 3 always turns all the lights off in his home. He says when asked "I am saving the polar bears". Many teenagers across the planet took part in school strikes last year inspired by Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg. They believe they are saving the climate. There's a line in today's gospel like that - Jesus speaking to his heavenly Father **"you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants"**. Are the grown-ups learning from the children these days too?

Earlier, I used an unusual confession prayer, where I encouraged you all to pray as representatives of humanity, not just as yourselves. Did saying a confession on behalf of all humans feel strange? Maybe - but it is the first step to turning things around. Can knowing we are stewards of planet Earth make a difference? Maybe - but the task feels so vast. Still, every journey needs a first step. There's a line "Be the change you want to see in the world". Everything begins in prayer.

Certainly pray for the planet and its people - and for all life on earth. Thank God for them - but also lament for the damage and the lost habitats and the species facing extinction and plastic waste. And pray that God will help the humans to heal the planet. And pray for and support the charities and NGO's caring for the planet and its creatures and working to reverse global warming. So prayer - all of us must pray, most of us do.

We have an environment group here and are just beginning to examine our life together as church here at St Paul's, using the Eco-Church Environmental Check-up questions. Many other churches are doing the same. Part of that is looking at our individual lifestyles. Lifestyle isn't set in stone - little by little, each of us can reduce our impact on the planet, what we call carbon footprint. I know some of you live lovely simple lives - and others have more complex lives, consume more energy and have a much higher carbon footprint. But all of us can walk step by step

into a more Jesus-shaped lifestyle. **“Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light”.**

Here is a great way to make small changes that count - the Seven R's

1. **Rejoice** - next week is Harvest - time to say thank you to our Creator God  
how about beginning to say grace before meals too?
2. **Refuse** - where did all the shopping come from? We can refuse to be influenced by adverts. We can choose what we want to buy. Can shopping be an addiction? Retail therapy is a lie.
3. **Reduce** - less shopping, less travel, less pressure to do too much, more being less doing.
4. **Re-use** - stop using disposable wipes, nappies, use charity shops, Freecycle
5. **Repair** - don't throw away. Learn those old skills
6. **Rent** or borrow - share tools, books
7. **Recycle** - better than landfill, but better to find a new home or use. Ecobrick.

Later in this service, we have a chance to join in Wild Worship. You can make a bird-feeder to **feed the garden birds** as winter approaches.

You can try to **grow native tree** seeds and if one or more germinates, you can plant it out - we can help you to find a good place for it. Trees absorb CO2 and release O2.

You can **pray** for a species of animal or plant - or for planet Earth.

You can commit to your **next step** towards healing the planet.

There is a word for this - metanoia - Greek for changing your mind - but in the NT it means conversion. God is calling humanity - one by one - to be converted to his true purpose for us, the stewards of planet earth and all its creatures - animal, (including human) and plant, fungi and microbes. Will you join me in prayer and lifestyle that makes us able to say that we leave the planet in better condition than we received it?