

The Thirteenth Sunday after Easter - **Climate Sunday**

'The hottest May since records began'..... 'forest fires burning out of control in Australia'..... 'the most powerful hurricane to hit the Texas coast'.....' Summer melting of polar ice greater than for any previous year on record' ... and so on. What is happening? Why are we experiencing more extremes of weather? And why should that bother us as Christians ?

The world's climate is changing and extensive world wide scientific research over the last 25 years has concluded that the changes are being brought about by human activity. Whilst there have been many changes to the world in geological time, the rate of change has never been as great. The fundamental cause is the increase in the atmosphere of carbon dioxide and some other 'greenhouse gases', such as methane. Carbon dioxide is the gas that is given off when coal, oil, gas and wood are burnt. And when this is greater than the rate at which carbon dioxide is trapped in plants by photosynthesis, then the percentage overall increases. When the sun heats the earth, some of that heat escapes back to space, but the presence of these gases prevents as much heat escaping as it has in the past. To date the average world temperature is about 1°C above what it would have been without human activities. If we do nothing the world will continue to heat up, reaching 1.5°C by 2050. The potential consequences are great for all life on earth: tropical deserts will increase in size, rendering them uninhabitable; warming seas will reduce fish populations and increase the intensity of hurricanes; polar ice and other glaciers, will melt more quickly releasing water into the oceans and raising the height of sea level height flooding many low lying parts of the world, and so on. This is potentially disastrous for humans as well as all life on earth. It could lead to mass migrations from uninhabitable areas, conflicts over access to water or land and starvation for millions of people. And as with many disasters it is the poorest people who will be affected the most.

So what are our responsibilities as Christians? In Genesis 1: 26-28 'God said 'Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature so they can ... be responsible for fish in the sea and birds in the air, for every living thing that moves on the face of the earth' (The Bible - The Message translation) God has given us the intellect and curiosity to know that the climate is changing, but will he give us the willpower to remedy the situation? What can be done? This is a challenge for all governments, all organisations and all individuals. If we can get to a point globally that the amount of carbon dioxide we are adding to the atmosphere is balanced by the amount that is taken out of the atmosphere, then we will reach 'net zero carbon' and the climate will not get any worse and even in time improve. The UK Government has set a target of reaching net zero carbon by 2050. But many organisations and individuals are striving to achieve this much sooner. The Church of England, at its General Synod last February passed a resolution to reach net zero carbon by 2030, ie 10 years hence. This means that every church, vicarage, church school, cathedral and Diocesan office will be asked to reach net zero carbon by actions it takes over the next 10 years.

How can this be achieved in the churches of the Forest of Galtres Benefice ? For example could we burn less fossil fuel, use less electricity? Could we generate electricity, as Sutton and Farlington are doing already, using photovoltaic panels? Have we insulated as much as is possible in our listed buildings? Are all our lighting and appliances energy efficient? When we have done what we can we could then offset our carbon output by, for example, planting trees, or giving money to a charity that plants trees in another part of the world. This will be something that we will all need to work out over the next few years.

How can net zero carbon be achieved as individual Christians ? Transport is a major problem as we have become so used to being mobile. Have you ever looked at an aeroplane ticket in detail and noted how much carbon dioxide your flight is adding to the atmosphere? Or considered the effect of driving your petrol or diesel car? And what about the carbon footprint of your home? Or the carbon footprint of the food you eat, or the clothes you wear or your internet usage? Of course the Covid-19 pandemic is reducing our mobility and therefore some of our carbon outputs.

I am sure that we all want future generations to live in a peaceful and pleasant world. This will only be possible if we take on the responsibility for the earth which God has given us. We only have this Earth. There is nowhere else to go. We must change direction ie repent and with prayer and action do what is necessary.

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