

Thank you for inviting me to preach this morning. I've been getting very expert at live streaming in my own church, but I must confess that this is the first time that I have done a virtual sermon or a remote sermon. I very much hope that you feel that I am with you and that the environmental benefits speak for themselves.

May I speak in the name of God: father, son and holy spirit. Amen.

“What life is this / if full of care / we have no time / to stand and stare
No time to stand beneath the boughs / and stare as long as sheep or cows
No time to see when woods we pass / where squirrels hide their nuts in grass
No time to see in broad daylight / streams full of stars like skies at night
No time to turn at beauty's glance / and watch her feet how they can dance
No time to wait till her mouth come / enrich that smile her eyes began
A poor life this is full of care / we have no time to stand and stare.”

This poem by W. H. Davies reminds us of making time, the need to make time, for things that truly matter: appreciating the wonder, and the beauty, in nature; paying attention to others, and making them feel valued, delighting in the experience of loving and being loved.

And the poem stands as a warning, against what I call their “chop chop busy busy work work bang bang” approach to life, that many of us experience today.

This excessive busy-ness is just one symptom of a world buckling under the pressure of wrong priorities. We know, only too well, what the other symptoms are: climate change, species loss - a huge rate; a crisis in mental health amongst young people. But what particularly strikes me is that 3.1 million children in this world die every year because of malnutrition, whilst other people have wealth that surpasses most small countries. Something is wrong with the system somewhere.

I share these things with you, not to make you feel guilty or to distress you, or to make you feel powerless, but in order to suggest that the answer to the question that your EcoExtravaganza is asking - what on earth shall we do? What on earth can we do? – is to be prophetic.

The parable that we have just heard reminds us of the dangers of getting our priorities in the wrong order, and in particular the danger of defining the meaning of life in terms of accumulating wealth.

Now, please don't get me wrong: whilst money cannot buy happiness, it certainly can make the difference between a life of miserable desperation, and a life which at least has the potential for enjoyment. And as individuals we live in a system that we can't detach ourselves from, so please don't feel guilty about saving for the future, or that little nest egg that you need to feel comfortable, but in our world, in our society today, we would have seen the man, who is building his bigger barn, as someone admirable: a goal-oriented, ambitious man, doing well in life. But according to God he's a fool.

He's forgotten that all the money in the world doesn't make a person immortal. He has lived his life in the pursuit of wealth that he never gets to enjoy. We think he's admirable; God thinks he's a fool. God's ways stand in marked contrast to the ways of the world, and when this is the case, and when we realize that this is the case, the job of the church is to be prophetic. It means we need to warn society that it's getting things badly wrong; and what the consequences of the errors might be.

So what does this parable say to a world, which is predicated on unlimited, unsustainable, and ever-increasing economic growth?; Even though we know that there are limits, and even though we know that we can't keep going on like this.

What does this parable say in a world where, carrying on creating, and distributing, or not distributing, wealth the way that we are, is causing suffering in the presence? Remember those 3.1 million children; people losing homes and livelihoods; people forced into migration because of climate change. And we're offering a bleak future for the generations to come.

There's something called intergenerational justice: why are we creating the wealth in the first place? It's because we long to pass it on to our children and our grandchildren, but what good is all the money in the world if the world has been wasted and destroyed? And if, when they stop to stand and stare, they see only destruction instead of beauty.

We need to be living, and acting, and showing, and telling, and maybe even remembering those 3.1 million children, screaming and shouting, that this has to stop; that we have to think again, that yes we haven't got all the answers, but carrying on the way that we're carrying on certainly isn't one.

We can be prophetic by attending to ourselves, by being examples. The impact of individual action is not just the reduction that we make in our own carbon footprint, which on a global scale will be quite minimal, but it's what we communicate to others by doing it. We act as a catalyst to politicians, to businesses; we are exercising our right as consumers; we are saying do something; and we stimulate conversation; we cause other people to think about their actions. And it snowballs.

Resisting the “chop chop busy busy work work bang bang” is an act of prophetic resistance, as well as a means of grasping some spiritual health, and maybe experiencing some beauty and some joy.

Pray and fasting for the climate; writing to MPs; writing to newspapers challenging people when we think that they've got it wrong. Even taking to the streets is prophetic. And the prophetic is what is required. We need to say, as individuals, and as a church, to the world: we need to stop building better barns, and try and build a better world.