

## **Set your hearts on God's kingdom first and all these other things will be given to you Matt 6:33**

In Britain, we do like to talk about the weather, we are famous for it, but this summer's intense heatwaves and the recent catastrophic floods in Pakistan are perhaps conversations we wish we didn't need to have. With temperatures soaring this summer to 40.3C in Coningsby, Lincolnshire, and one third of Pakistan covered in flood water, these are not weather events to take lightly. Indeed 1,569 people have died because of the floods in Pakistan with countless more suffering and dying because of the diseases such as malaria and cholera that are spreading in the aftermath. Lives and livelihoods have been turned upside down.

As we discuss the weather, our readings this morning offer comfort, but also warn us and challenge us; and we are left with a question, what should a Christian say in a conversation about the weather?

It is comforting that our readings remind us that the whole of creation belongs to and is governed by God. In Genesis we read that God beholds all of creation and sees that it is 'very good'. The entire created order has been fashioned by God, is loved by God and is sustained by God's love. In Matthew Jesus' message is 'don't worry, trust God'.

St Paul, similarly, encourages us to have hope that the whole of creation will be restored to its primal perfection. However, Paul's central message in these verses is a warning. Paul reminds us that the perfection of the created world was marred by the fall of humanity, by Adam and Eve turning from God. It is this turning away from God and from our created nature that has brought us to this place of suffering. So, Paul warns us that even now humanity makes creation suffer, we make creation suffer because of our carelessness, our self-interest, and a determined protection of our chosen way of living. If we have a look at verse 23, we can see that Paul's warning goes further, he writes 'even we groan inwardly', in other words our true nature is distorted when we separate ourselves from the rest of creation. When our view of creation is utilitarian, we become less of what God created us to be; and not only that but we fail to see creation clearly for what it is :the 'heavens telling the glory of God' (Psalm 19). When our view of creation is utilitarian, we see creation through our own self-interest and insatiable consumerism.

With Paul's warning echoing in our ears, Jesus' message 'don't worry, trust God' is less a panacea and more a challenge. Jesus' words do not give licence to a careless lifestyle but challenge us to turn back to a reliance on God, to take responsibility for our role in creation and to live our lives according to the values of God's Kingdom. Matthew's gospel was written for a Jewish/Christian audience, an audience which recognised the value of relationships, an audience which understood the bond of love between God and humanity, an audience which saw its purpose within that covenant relationship. So, for Matthew the Kingdom of God is not some future hope to be aspired to, it is a present reality to be lived within. Jesus' call to us to 'set your hearts on His Kingdom first and on God's saving justice' is a call to a lifestyle which recognises our place within Creation and our relationship and responsibilities within the created order.

So, what about the weather? In the aftermath of the summer's soaring temperatures, the catastrophic fires in California, the Gironde region in France, and in East London (which destroyed 23 homes); in the aftermath of the unprecedented floods in Pakistan which affected 33 million people, 'what should a Christian say about the weather?' Well, we are a people of justice and a people of hope. If our conversations about the weather and about climate change are begun with words of justice and end with words of hope, we are on the right track.

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