

Hinde Street Methodist Church
Sunday 18 July 2021
11.00am Rev Peter Cornick

Hope in a crisis

Based on Romans 8: 18-30

For the partnership Sunday with Leipzig.

Greetings to you all in the name of Christ. I well remember my visit to you and your hospitality. I am sorry you have not been able to come to London this year. Hopefully, it will be possible when the conditions are right.

Pope Francis tells the story of speaking to a missionary. The missionary told him of a time when, he was travelling by boat in the South Pacific. Seeing a tree in the middle of the ocean, he asked, why the tree was planted there. The answer came back; it wasn't planted there – that was an island. Pope Francis reminds us that governments in the South Pacific are buying land on higher ground, to relocate their people as sea levels rise.¹

If we were unsure whether climate change is already having an impact on people and natural habitats, this simple testimony is our proof.

Pope Francis attempts to understand the cause of this catastrophe. The sin is human; but it is because we have lost our sense of place in creation. He writes:

¹ Pope Francis, *Let Us Dream*, London, 2020 p31

It's the sadness of a humanity rich in know-how but lacking the inner security of knowing ourselves as creatures of God.²

There is a link too, between the climate crisis and the coronavirus crisis. Humans have disturbed habitats. One scientist writes:

“Rodents and some bats thrive when we disrupt natural habitats. ... The more we disturb the forests and habitats the more danger we are in.”³

The virus which has caused so much chaos to us all, seems to be a product of our disregard for nature – our abuse of the environment. An ecological theologian puts it succinctly: ‘The virus is not a random, unforeseeable event that befell us ... We made it.’⁴

The link between our current crisis, and the climate crisis, is clear. Humans have considered themselves superior – have misunderstood their place. Pastor Friedbert in his sermon today, makes a good point: the crown of creation is not the making of humans – it is the day of rest; the sabbath. And the sabbath is to worship God. We have forgotten this and worshipped ourselves.

Paul, writing to the Romans, is not aware of a climate crisis – there was little effect on the planet by humans then. So why does Paul recognise the decay of creation? Why refer to its futility? Why look forward to it being set free from bondage? Perhaps he looks back to the Genesis story. A perfect creation, which humans spoil, through disobedience and trying to act like God. They are thrown out of the

² Ibid

³ Keller, Catherine, *The gallop of the pale green horse, pandemic, pandemonium and panentheism*, in Ed. Hampton, Alexander J. B., *Pandemic, Ecology and Theology, Perspectives on Covid-19*, Oxford, 2021 p42

⁴ Sideris, Lisa H., *Listening to the pandemic, decentering humans through silence and sound*, in Ed. Hampton, Alexander J. B., *Pandemic, Ecology and Theology, Perspectives on Covid-19*, Oxford, 2021 p116

garden. The writer of Genesis and Paul could not have realised how close to the ecological truth they would be.

What Paul is meaning is this: as creation has decayed, so too have humans. Both creation and humans – and it is interesting that he means ‘both’ – require the intervention of God in Christ, to redeem them.

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. Roman 8: 23

Paul is quite precise: the ‘whole’ creation has been groaning. Is Paul, in this passage, trying to remind us as humans, of our ‘place’ in God’s creation? We are part of a whole. The crown is the sabbath; not us; but God.

We often talk about the climate crisis, without offering solutions.

Naturalist David Attenborough, in his book *A Life on Our Planet* gives a personal testimony to how humans have populated and pressurised the planet. But he gives solutions. Our lifestyle is unsustainable – 50% of the impact on the planet is by 16% of the human population.⁵ Our fixation on growth as an economic goal must end and green energy is where we should be investing. He argues for rewilding the sea and the land and farming differently which means eating differently.

So, global warming is but one crisis threatening the planet. ‘We must’, David Attenborough writes, ‘rewild the world!’⁶

So, there is hope in our crisis. In hope we were saved. The hope of Christ, who redeems the whole of creation. And if we pray as we

⁵ Attenborough, David *A Life on our Planet* London 2020 p126

⁶ Ibid p121

ought, the Spirit helping us in our weakness, we might hear the groaning of the whole of creation. We might remember the sabbath, our place in creation, and worship God.