

## **CHESTER CATHEDRAL “Caring for our planet”**

**Canon Chris Humphries 2.10.11**

**Readings: Isaiah 11 v 1-9; Matthew 6 v 25 - 33**

A vision of world harmony from the prophet Isaiah...

“The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”

You may have noticed that our hymns and special readings today home in on the theme of creation, as of course will next week’s service when we celebrate our Harvest Festival, with plenty of involvement from our Sunday School. Next week we shall be thanking God for “all good gifts around us” in this beautiful, fertile and fragile world. This week gives us an added opportunity to consider our own role as stewards of this wonderful world, “Caring for our planet”.

Out of the mouths of babes...

Before I was ordained I was a class teacher in a Junior school in Essex. Many are the times that words of children have startled and surprised me, made me think.

Here are some thoughts, letters to God, from 7 and 8 year olds...

They’re thinking about God, Humankind and life on Earth.

From Sam: “Dear God, why did you make so many people? Could you make another earth, and put the extras there?”

From Laura: “Instead of letting people die and having to make new ones, why don’t you just keep the ones you got now?”

I love Jeffrey’s question: “Dear God, How did you know you were God?”

Or from Amy: “Why don’t you leave the sun out at night when we need it most?”

And finally from Kevin: “Dear God, why did you make the sky blue and the grass green? Is that the only colours you got?”

Now of course it turns out that God’s plan in covering so much of the surface with green was a pretty comprehensive life-giving plan. Gordon, our Dean, sums up the scientific aspect of this neatly in his front-page article “Going Green” in this month’s Cathedral Newsletter.

He says this: “It’s really quite simple. All life on earth ultimately depends on sunlight, water and plants. The green pigment chlorophyll in plants not

only removes carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and replaces it with oxygen, but makes food for all living things in the process.”

But with the burgeoning population of the world, with rampant industrialisation now spreading from the West to vast, growing nations like China, India and Brazil, the human race, and indeed all living creatures, increasingly find that life on this planet is under threat. Yesterday was a glorious summer day in the season of Autumn with record temperatures of 30 degrees. It was wonderful for the Wedding held here in this Cathedral. Thank God that seaside traders and businesses can make up for poorer weather earlier on this year. But in other countries temperatures of 40 degrees plus with little or no rainfall lead to catastrophic drought and famine. Whatever the complex reasons for this, it does remind us again of the changing climate of the earth, the melting of the polar ice cap, rising sea levels and a host of problems that the international community must face together, and soon.

In facing these challenges, Green is a good label to use to summarise a positive vision and offer various ways in which ordinary people can feel that they are playing a part.

For Christians and others of faith we don't have to look very far to make strong connections with what we believe. Theologically, we affirm that this world is not a random gathering of molecules and particles, but the deliberate and conscious creation of a loving God. In today's Gospel reading from the sermon on the mount we find Jesus teaching his disciples that God's care for each individual can be seen in the intricate details of the world around. “Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin. Yet, I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.”

In times past, a case was made for us being the masters of the earth, clearly superior to other creatures in our ability to think and reason. Genesis Chapter 1 verse 26 was regularly quoted to back up this view: “Then God said “Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

The trouble has been that the word dominion very easily turns into domination and exploitation, where the world is seen as an infinite resource to be harnessed and used for the good pleasure and use of human beings. We have known for some time that this attitude cannot go on, but in any case “dominion” can be understood in a far healthier way. To have dominion need not mean that we dominate our planet, its plants and its

creatures. Rather we are to see ourselves as stewards, answerable to God himself for our care, use or mis-use of this created order.

That changes the whole outlook for you and me. Instead of a disconnected, exploitative view of the world, we affirm that everything is inter-connected and inter-reliant. We are God's children, loved by him, and in turn we are stewards of all that we see around us, called to act lovingly, thoughtfully and with care. In recent years there has been an excellent initiative from the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland called "Eco-Congregation". Several parishes in this area have joined the scheme, including one that I know of at Great Barrow. Chelmsford Cathedral in Essex is known as the first "Eco-Cathedral". Now, their building is not as old as Chester Cathedral and is more compact but there are lots of useful things that we in our ancient building can be doing. If we dream dreams, it would be brilliant to have solar panels on our cathedral roof, probably giving us enough self-generated power for ourselves with some to spare, but this is a Grade One listed building and planning bodies move slowly in these matters.

Much better to focus on things that we can be getting on with now, and a small group has been meeting with me over the past couple of months to see what can be done. We have set out to reduce the use of cars by staff and others coming to the Cathedral. Several staff have taken this on board and now either cycle or walk to work.

Heat and Light. Our Electricity bill for the cathedral is £2,500 per month, besides the oil for the main Cathedral boiler, and as we know, that just takes the chill off in winter, so there is great scope for improving things in this area.

Waste and recycling. There is a growing awareness that we don't have to print so many documents from our computers – save paper and save trees! I was interested to see that supermarkets in Wales now are obliged to charge 5p for each non-reusable plastic bag. Making us think. Helping us to value scarce resources.

This ancient Cathedral is not an easy building in which to think Green. Its a huge space. The roof isn't lagged; It isn't double-glazed. But there are things that Cathedrals and local churches can do. This then sends out a message to the wider community that we're serious about what we believe, and resolute in taking positive action together with people of all faiths or none who are concerned for the environment.

A real concern for Green issues immediately connects us with the concerns and fears of the wider community around us, and it shows that Christians have deeply held beliefs that can quickly translate into

practical action, both for individuals and the world as a whole. We care for people and we care for our planet.

Of course, this needs to be happening in our own individual lives and in our homes. Each day we make choices in the way we shop, in how fast we drive our thirsty cars, how we heat and light our own homes.

Its just one part of the outworking of our faith, or as Isaiah puts it, being “full of the knowledge of the Lord.”

I was encouraged to find that the Lambeth Conference, as far back as 1988 had included it in its 5 Marks of Mission.

Mark 1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom

Mark 2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers.

Mark 3. To respond to human need by loving service.

Mark 4. To seek to transform unjust structures of society.

And here it is

Mark 5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation; to sustain and renew the life of the earth.

Jesus mentioned “striving” in the last verse of today’s gospel reading: “Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” “Going Green” doesn’t mean we’re suddenly “New age” or trying to be trendy. It really is part of the mission that all Christian people are called to in today’s world.

I’ll finish with the prayer that the Dean has written at the end of his article:

“Our God and Father, you have revealed to us the secrets of the earth, the sea and the sky.

You have enabled us to discover the animal, vegetable and mineral resources of this planet.

Teach us now to use them wisely, effectively and to the benefit of all,

In justice, peace and prosperity;

Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.”