

Sermon Knox Church Christchurch Sunday 6 May 2018 Climate Change

Readings: Deuteronomy 8: 7-10 Genesis 1: 27-31

Rev. Margaret Garland, Minister of Opoho Presbyterian Church

Who? By Tui Bevin

Who among us cannot say:

I drove
 even though there was a bus?
I used takeaway cups and disposable nappies
 even though I had alternatives?
I kept doing what I've always done
 because everybody else did?

Who among us can say:

I did my best
 even though it was difficult?
I did without
 even though it put me out?
I did my bit
 even though many may not?

Who among us will:

be another one to
 make the harder choices?
be another one to
 stand up for future generations?
be another one to
 be a voice for the earth?

Who?

We pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight O God, our rock and our sustainer. Amen.

Last Sunday we gathered in Opoho to worship God and chose to focus on the gnarly issue of care for our environment – and it was wonderful that some of you from Knox joined with us - really special. Our service then, like today, concentrated on the issue of climate change and our response to it. Matthew preached a magnificent sermon, we sang some of the wonderful hymns we are singing today, our liturgy spoke of the challenges we face and the answers God gives us which we have yet to grasp –all of the service confronted us with our lack of respect and valuing for the world God created and entrusted to our care.

In the afternoon, we again sat in the church – a seminar this time with a mixed bunch of people from all walks of life, some with particular expertise, others with agendas, some hoping for answers, everyone looking for a way of responding to the climate catastrophes that are finally, finally making themselves heard across the nation and over the world and, dare I say it, in the church.

I've had some time since then to absorb, to ponder and reflect on what was said on the day - and to hold conversations with people, mainly those outside the church, who are excited that we, the church, are finally doing something. Most of these people that I talked to don't actually think the church has much of a voice on the important issues like climate change – and they want to help us fix that. They see where the church could be so effective and such a vehicle for change and want to encourage us to be part of the solution, to work with us and alongside us. Now I didn't see that coming - that was an unexpected perspective for me? And heart warming. But the question did arise - when did we get to be so far behind the ball game that

others can see our possibilities better than we can? Where did we lose our connection with the huge issues of the world – and where has gone our passion to heal and make whole the brokenness of the world? I am aware that I am speaking in Christchurch, in a city that full well knows the brokenness and hurt of disaster striking. The energy, the compassion, the healing that is needed in this place has been immense and continues to be so. And I give thanks to God for your faith and your love and your serving in the face of such pain.

But I wonder, as a now Dunedinite, and as a north Cantabrian before the earthquakes, just how close, how immediate the disaster needs to be before I actually take note? Because I think that I have failed – failed to recognise the scale of this climate change disaster because it hasn't immediately impacted my life in my small corner of the world. I have heard the words of concern in the church – but more as an exercise in compassion than with any real understanding of the agony of the earth and my place in its restoration. But now I am beginning to take note. And so I ask today – is the church also beginning to take note? So I am going to move from the personal to the community of faith that we are part of – and ask all of us - where are the voices for the earth in the church? Have we forgotten our first charge to protect the earth as God calls us to do?

The readings chosen for today leave us in no doubt of God's delight in creation and of our charge to care for it and nourish it. That God abundantly provided for us was clear – that we can eat our fill and bless the Lord our God for the good land that is given us is true – for some of us. Yet we, as a people of faith, have a commission: to cherish and nurture, build up and protect, share and grow. To provide for future generations and make decisions that respect God's good creation for its own sake. Not sure we have got that sorted really. Maybe we have let that little phrase 'dominion over the earth' become a permission to use and abuse and subjugate to our purpose! It feels that way sometimes for sure. We have to take responsibility. These words from the campaigning group Earth First resonate for me– 'The earth is dying, it is being murdered and the people murdering it have names and addresses!' Harsh – but a wake-up call none the less.

Let us just look at this country of Aotearoa – underpopulated (by world standards), fertile, with a variety of climates and rich flora and fauna. A perfect Eden for those early settlers, tangata whenua and European. Yet now our waters no longer run clear, pollutants fill the sea, our skies are choked and our earth has no chance to rest. God weeps at our abuse of the creation entrusted to our care - in Aotearoa. And when we lift our eyes from our own little corner and see the pain of the whole earth – we need to do something! The whole world, and most desperately the vulnerable people in it, are already paying the price of not just our exploitation but also neglect and disregard – our 'uncaring' for creation. We, the church, the people who heed the word of God, are desperately needed to be voices for the earth!

Yet let us be real about this – part of the inertia is around the sheer scale of the issue – even when the urgency finally hits, the 'how' becomes overwhelming. It is understandable that we hunker down, hope that God has some miracle waiting in the wings. Well so God does! He tangata, he tangata, he tangata. It is the people, the people, the people.' You and me! We are the answer.

So I want to turn to the Easter story – the story that changed the face of the world as we know it –and more specifically the way in which the people responded to the dire events of those few days – and see if we can find some hope and purpose that helps us now.

The people who had followed Jesus were faced with an absolute catastrophe – Jesus had been betrayed by the very people one might have expected to welcome him, he had failed to make a difference in the way his followers expected and had been disgustingly and uncaringly hung on a cross by those whom he had come in love for. There is some resonance with our treatment of the earth is there not? Betrayal of the land, lack of understanding and living to God's vision, creation hung out to dry!

We remember the way the people of the way responded. They locked themselves in rooms, turned inwards, walked away, gave up – immobilised by despair. And they didn't believe it when the dead Jesus appeared to them again, when he spoke to the women, walked on the road with them, came into the room with them and said 'peace be with you'. It was too hard to imagine, too much to understand or see what it meant. It took time for the news of Christ-with-us to penetrate, for people to be convinced, for the hope to take hold. But

when it did – the absolute belief that in the risen Christ the world could be turned upside down, love could triumph over death, justice was not just possible but demanded – when it did we have the fire that filled the bellies and set the hearts alight to transform the world and reconcile us to God and each other. What a vision!

You see in the end, the people who followed Jesus, who saw him crucified, who had a hand in his death, who turned away in despair - in the end they got it! They recovered their belief that, in Christ, all things are possible and that the morass they, and we, find ourselves in now had an answer –if we would but trust in the power of God to love us and to change the world through us then amazing things can happen.

Our words, our actions, our tears and our voice can change the direction this world is taking – but we have to exercise them! Can we do that – can we move out of the Easter Saturday doldrums, work our way through the kernel of hope that grew slowly out of the empty tomb and erupt with the conviction and energy of the Pentecost presence to change the disaster that is killing this beautiful creation we call our world?

I finish with this prayer:

Creating God, you have given us a vision of a new heaven and a new earth....

Resources conserved

Earth Tended

Atmosphere cleansed

Trees planted

Injustice ended

Oceans teeming

Nations at peace.

Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer

Alert nations, enthuse churches,

Receive our commitment and so entwine our live with your purpose

Earth and heaven will then sing of your glory.

Amen

Margaret Garland