

Sunday 3rd October 2021
Harvest Thanksgiving (B)

Liverpool Parish Church

OT: Joel 2.21-27
NT: I Timothy 6.6-10
G: Matthew 6.25-33

Before I begin have two apologies to make.

The first is to Becky Selman who sent me a link with all kinds of information and resources showing how we can act regarding the climate crisis. I have decided to take a more personal approach so I hope I can still convey the essential message. However, I think it would be a good idea if that link could be published in the next bulletin for all of you to see.

My second apology is to all of you. I had hoped to practice what I preach and to find the courage to preach directly from my tablet but here you see the paper version before me. The nightmare of standing here with no words before me was too powerful. I need to keep trying.

May I speak in the name of the living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

When I was moving house this summer, a genuine concern was, What am I going to do about recycling? I had long rigged up a lazy approach to this with the blue bin suitably positioned just outside the small kitchen window. All I had to do was open the window, lift the bin lid and lash the item to be recycled. A good system but not one you can employ in a first floor flat! An old shopping bag now gets emptied into the blue bin on a regular basis.

When I last moved more than twenty years ago, no such consideration was needed. All the rubbish went into black bags to be left in the entry once a week for the bin men. When my grandmother was younger, the only separation of rubbish was having a metal bin specifically to dispose of the hot ashes from the fires; which was why all her life, she insisted on calling a rubbish bin, the ash tub.

We have come along way but they are baby steps when you consider what is needed.

Slowly, the phrase 'climate change' is being replaced with the more accurate 'climate crisis'.

The message that urgent action is required has entered mainstream politics and has become essential for all of us to consider; it's not just for The Green Party and the often mocked 'lentil brigade'.

For too long, societies have considered the problem, picked it up, taken a look and then put it back into 'the too hard to do box.' Many of us have been guilty of considering it to be a problem that our children or grandchildren will need to deal with because we felt that the impact of humanity on the earth was creeping at the pace of a glacier and not a surging river. Sadly, we are learning all too forcibly that this is not the case.

There are two men, born in the earlier part of the last century, two men who had the opportunity to see more of this world than most who have long been calling societies to act. Prince Philip was instrumental in founding the World Wildlife Fund, drawing attention to the threat of extinction of so many creatures because we were either hunting them to extinction or demolishing their habitat for our own uses. The symbol of the panda became a rallying cry to urgently take positive action to protect such species.

There have been some successes, poaching for ivory and the sale of ivory goods were banned, the Chinese established breeding sanctuaries for pandas to boost their numbers. Places such as Chester Zoo took on a significant role in conservation rather than just being there for our entertainment.

The other significant figure is, of course, Sir David Attenborough, who has challenged the world to consider our use of and reliance on plastic. Most houses have that drawer or cupboard where we stuff that unwanted selection of trivial items so they can't be seen and the house appears tidy. For years, humanity has been doing the same with its rubbish, hiding it in landfill or chucking it in the sea. Out of sight, out of mind.

But no longer. David Attenborough has forced us all to look again, not sparing our feelings with images of seals choked by plastic rings, whales miscarrying because the ingested micro plastics have damaged their unborn young. We can no longer pretend that our actions are not having an adverse impact on the world around us.

Today's scripture readings are beautiful and contain their own wisdom. I've used them in other sermons but in the context of what harvest means today and the message that I am trying to convey in this sermon, I am struggling to agree. Let me clear, trusting in God and his mercy and bounty is fundamental to who we are as Christians.

But I think the soil should be afraid, the animals should fear. In some aspect, we have lived our lives in a perpetual harvest, reaping what we have not sown, taking the riches of this planet and believing that there will always be more for those who follow us. In just a few decades, we've scoured the landscape mining for coal and digging out peat. We've set up

drilling platforms in the sea, taking out oil and natural gas all of which has taken centuries to form. We can walk into any supermarket, and if we have the money, we buy whatever we like from all over the world without thinking what it took for it to reach us. The recent food shortages in supermarkets, the lack of petrol and the rising cost of gas are finally causing us to think again about how we live. We've got used to buying asparagus in winter, filling up the car at our convenience, keeping our houses at summer temperatures in the depths of winter.

So how can we change? Well I definitely don't have all the answers, indeed I don't have many. But as I said before that we live in harvest mode. It is good to be thankful for all the good things we enjoy but it's time to switch from reaping to sowing. Listen to those who have thought about these issues, look at the advice and resources that are available to help us change how we use this world's riches.

If you can't buy food from local producers, supermarkets are good places to make a stand. Those of us who are old enough, remember when we stopped buying Cape fruit in protest against apartheid, finally forcing our Government to set up sanctions against South Africa. I long ago stopped using those awful rolls of plastic bags that were put out for the loose items of fruit and vegetables. I'm pleased to say they have disappeared all together and reusable bags are there now for your spuds or carrots. My current goal is to avoid buying items such as cucumbers and swede that are sealed in plastic and somehow challenging why so much food now comes in those plastic boxes. Wherever possible, let us buy produce in season which has been grown more locally, let us think of the airmails of our food.

And where such items such as coffee cannot be grown locally, let us buy fair trade so that the producers can receive a realistic price for their goods which enables them to care for their habitat. Small steps taken by many can go a long way.

A prayer for our world.

Fill us with peace, that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one. O God of the poor, help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth, so precious in your eyes. Bring healing to our lives, that we may protect the world and not prey on it, that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction. Amen.

The Revd Michelle Montrose