

Some of you will know that the Bishop has appointed me to be the Diocesan Environment Officer. In that capacity, on Tuesday last week I was in London at a meeting of faith leaders, with two scientists from the Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change. This is a branch of the United Nations, which produces solid scientific evidence, tracking the impact on the environment of climate change. Because they have to convince all the nations who have signed up to the UN, their work is thorough and irrefutable. It has been through the most rigorous of scientific scrutiny. In March 2014 they produced the definitive report, upon which the December 2015 Paris conference was based.

We should be scared. Very scared. The evidence all shows that the earth is warming at an alarming speed. The seas are rising, threatening low lying communities, and becoming more acidic as they warm. Biodiversity is reducing, with species dying out for want of habitat, because of human need and greed, because of an inability to adapt to changing climate. Climate changes mean a lack of water in some parts of the world; too much water and more violent weather patterns in others. The greatest cause of climate warming is the emissions of carbon into the atmosphere. CO₂ is the greatest culprit; methane another. Methane is produced from intensive agriculture; CO₂ from fossil fuel extraction and burning. And that's down to us – to humanity and its consumption of fossil fuels for energy. The word for it is anthropogenic, which means caused by humans.

The Paris agreements of December 2015 achieved a miracle – the agreement of all the nations to sign up to reducing global warming to 2 degrees – or lower – by 2050. We're going to have to achieve this. The way we are heading now is closer to 4 degrees by the turn of the century, which would cause severe, even catastrophic destruction to life as we know it.

Now we all know people who deny this. Indeed some of you might. There are many reasons for denial. Self-interest. Ignorance. Apathy and unwillingness to change. But the greatest reason for denial is, to my mind, fear. Fear and anxiety.

And it's then that readings such as our gospel need to speak to us. We need to hear the message of Jesus that we should not worry, or be anxious. Fear is a great demotivator. If we are overwhelmed by fear we start to lose heart. We give up hope. And that we really mustn't do. We who have faith in a God in Jesus who brings faith, hope and love must not be afraid. We must trust and do our best to do God's will.

The message of the gospel is not to stop worrying and give up because it's all in the hands of God anyway – which some might argue. What will be, will be, they might say. I don't think that's God's will for us, for his Creation. When I read some many passages from the Bible – Old and New Testaments – I hear of God's gift of a gloriously beautiful creation into human hands, and the injunction that we care for what we are given. That we are stewards of the rich resources that God gives. Listen to that passage again from Ecclesiasticus:

By the word of the Lord his works are made; And all his creatures do his will.

The sun looks down on everything with its light, and the work of the Lord is full of his glory. How desirable are all his works, and how sparkling they are to see!

Creation is not given to us to squander, to use and abuse, to exploit, to destroy. Creation is a gift of God that we are called up to revere, to cherish, to desire and care for, as God cares for us.

The joyful thing about last Tuesday was the number of people of different faiths – Hindus, Jews, Muslims, Christians – who all share a sense and passion for the environment, for its safekeeping, for our responsibility as human beings to preserve what we have received for future generations.

When I was little in the 1970s, the impact of intensive farming was only just beginning to be felt. Still there were many English birds in the hedgerows. Streams were full of fish. Hedgehogs were a common sight. Moths and insects were in abundance. That was the normal I remember. Now, our children today, know a different norm. They know a world where pigeons are all over the place, not sparrows – which have virtually disappeared. They are disengaged from nature – from the ability to sit quietly and marvel at a frog in a pond – and instead are served a rich on-screen feast of exotic wildlife that they can enjoy in the comfort of sitting room or bedroom.

What can we do? We can encourage the children we know to come with us on a nature walk. To grow flowers, vegetables, in the garden. We can help them to cherish and care for the natural world around them. The real, not virtual, creation that is God's gift.

We can do other things too. We can actively reduce our reliance on energy sources that emit carbon into the atmosphere. We can invest in new technologies that provide energy from renewable sources.

And here at the Cathedral we can lead the way. Today is the first anniversary of the launch of Eco-Church – an initiative to encourage churches, cathedrals, dioceses to be much more aware of their impact on the environment. It's an award system that gives us bronze, silver or gold, depending on how green we are. It's there, as part of our Vision and Strategy. I'd like to encourage us to take this seriously over the year ahead. As Christians, alongside other people of faith, we have much to say to commend the beauty and wonder of creation as a gift that cannot be squandered.

Last week, as I preached, I asked you to close your eyes in prayer. I asked you to see the maroon red behind your eyelids. And now, today, please do the same. This time, see the green highlights that sparkle amidst the red. The green lights that speak of God's life. God's abundant, green life that springs up eternal, as hope does. Give thanks for the gift of abundant life as you breathe the pure, clean air of God's life and love, as we pause for a moment or two, praying with St Paul that

we may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that we may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as we bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God.

