

Week Two (Trinity XIV)

Loving our neighbours

Lectionary readings

Proverbs 21:1-2, 8-9 and 22-3
Psalm 146

James 2:1 – 17
Mark 7:24 -37

Collect

Almighty God, whose only Son has opened for us a new and living way into your presence: give us pure hearts and steadfast wills to worship you in spirit and in truth; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Justice for the oppressed

'Whoever sows injustice will reap calamity... those who are generous are blessed' (Proverbs 22:8-9). Proverbs also says that; *'He who oppresses a poor man insults his Maker'* (Proverbs 14:31).

Can we think of ways in which we are oppressing others - in our local communities, for example? Or in the ways we in the rich West are oppressing other parts of the world?

The psalmist develops this theme by reminding us that God the Creator (*'who made heaven and earth, the seas and all that is in them'* Psalm 146:5) *'gives justice to those who are oppressed and food to those who hunger'* (Psalm 146:6).

The primary driver of human induced climate change is the belief that prosperity depends on limitless consumption of earth's resources. Today the challenge is to seek a different, sustainable economy, based on the values of human flourishing and the wellbeing of all creation, not on the assumption of unlimited economic growth, on over-consumption, exploitative interest and debt. (Climate Change and the Purposes of God)



The Letter of James reinforces the teaching of Jesus: *'You do well if you really fulfil the royal law according to the scripture; you shall love your neighbour as yourself'* (James 2:8).

Professor Michael Northcott, Professor of Christian Ethics, Edinburgh University, writes:

'Global warming is the earth's judgement on the global market empire, and on the heedless consumption it fosters.' (A Moral Climate, 2008, p7)

Professor Tim Jackson, who was an Economics Commissioner for the Sustainable Development Commission (disbanded by the Coalition Government) writes:

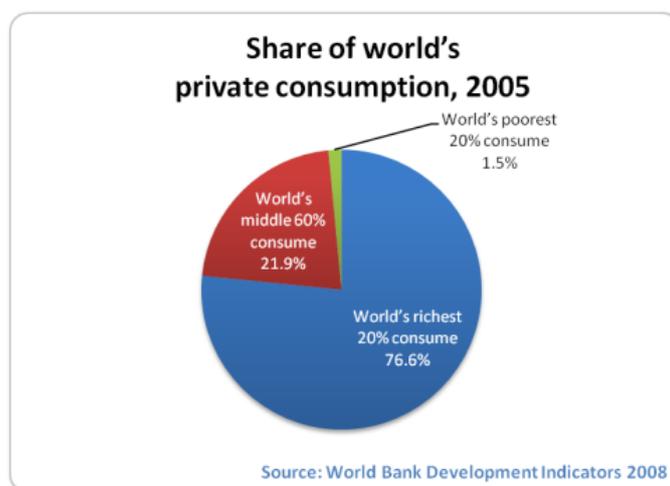
'A more appropriate response is to question the underlying vision of a prosperity built on continual growth. And to search for alternative visions – in which humans can still flourish and yet reduce their material impact on the environment....the requirements of prosperity go way beyond material sustenance. Prosperity has vital social and psychological dimensions. To do well is in part about the ability to give and receive love, to enjoy the respect of your peers, to contribute useful work, and to have a sense of belonging and trust in the community. In short, an important component of prosperity is the ability to participate meaningfully in the life of society.'
 (Professor Tim Jackson (2009). Prosperity Without Growth, p7)

Sharing resources



James writes about the sharing of our resources, especially for the good of the most disadvantaged. *'What good it is my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill', and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.'* (James 2:14-17)

*Humans made in God's image, have unique responsibility for the wellbeing of creation (Genesis 1:26; 2:15). We are to care for the earth because it is gift, the product of God's love. No sparrow falls without God knowing. Humanity has always had the capacity to destroy our environment, but today we have this to an unprecedented extent. Whereas previous generations did not know the damage they were causing, we do. We must use our power wisely to promote the flourishing of future generations and the diversity of life on earth. This is the responsibility of every Church and every believer.
 (Climate Change and the Purposes of God)*



In April 2012, the Royal Society produced a Report called *People and the Planet*. It called for consumption levels between developed and developing nations to be rebalanced alongside a stabilisation of the world's population by voluntary methods.

Scientists have no clear idea of how many species - from algae to blue whales - live on earth. Estimates are up to 100 million of which only about 1.8 million have been named so far. Humans are but one of those species. Though the exact number is impossible to determine, an unprecedented mass extinction of life on Earth is occurring. Scientists estimate that between 150 and 200 species of life become extinct every 24 hours. That is at least 100 times the natural extinction rate, and they warn that this may increase to 100 to 10,000 times the background rate in the coming decades.

There have always been periods of extinction in the planet's history, but this episode of species extinction is greater than anything the world has experienced for the past 65 million years – since the vanishing of the dinosaurs. This mass extinction is due, in large measure, to humankind's unsustainable methods of production and consumption, including the destruction of habitats, expanding cities, pollution, deforestation, global warming and the introduction of "invasive species".

Climate change is forecast to become the biggest threats to biodiversity - if we continue with our unsustainable patterns of activity, one-fifth of all species could become extinct in the next two decades.

Source – The United Nations Environment Programme, 2010

http://www.unep.org/geo/geo4/report/05_Biodiversity.pdf

<http://www.unep.org/wed/2010/english/biodiversity.asp>

Who is my neighbour?

Jesus demonstrates the inclusiveness of God's love in his welcome to the Greek Gentile woman from Syrian Phoenicia (Mark 7:26). He shows how God's healing touch sometimes comes through the ministry of others (*'they brought to him a deaf man...they begged him to lay his hand on him...'* Mark 7.32).

Our 'neighbour-love' is to cross barriers of race and culture; our sharing in God's healing ministry is a cooperative endeavour.

Christ teaches us to love all our neighbours, not just our own family and friends...As nations fight over dwindling energy resources, Christians need to bear witness that the way to life, and not death, is the way of non-retaliation. In future Christians may also be called to receive into their communities refugees forced to leave their lands through climate change.

The love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit overflows in our love and care for all God's creatures. (Climate Change and the Purposes of God)

Further questions to discuss and explore

1. How do we feel about the extinction of species, caused not by our intentional evil, but by our way of life? How do we think God feels about it? What should be our response?



The golden toad of Costa Rica, last seen in 1989, is the first known casualty of climate change

2. 10 million people live just 1 metre above sea level in Bangladesh. One metre is a very feasible estimate of the rise of sea level this century. Per person, we produce 50 times the carbon emissions of an average Bangladeshi. What does loving our neighbour in Bangladesh involve?

3 James calls us to put our faith into action through works. What might this mean in the context of loving our global neighbours?

The wisdom of Mother Teresa

Mother Teresa once said; 'There are no great acts, just simple acts with great love'.

Lord, break our hearts for the needs of others, and help us stand together- show us what we have to offer. Break our hearts for communities in our own country affected by recession, debt and hopelessness- for our friends, neighbours, and those we do not know personally.

Lord, we pray too for those in the majority world experiencing poverty and lack of food, those without education, healthcare and vulnerable to disaster and exploitation. Fill us with compassion and a sense of solidarity as one people.

Prepare our hearts to love, our hands to serve, and our mouths to speak against injustice- simple acts, with great love.

The prayer of St Teresa of Avila

Christ has no body on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours; yours are the eyes through which to look with Christ's compassion on the world, yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good, and yours are his hands with which to bless us now

A closing prayer

Almighty God, you have created the heavens and the earth
And made us in your own image;
Teach us to discern your hand in all your works
And your likeness in all your children;
Through Jesus Christ our Lord,
Who with you and the Holy Spirit, reigns supreme over all things,
Now and for ever.