



## Sermon outline on Climate Change and the Purposes of God

*If you feel uncertain of the sermon format, consider a question-and-answer session with the minister as an alternative. You can jointly prepare some Q and As. covering key topics. This will work best if the minister is sympathetic, well-briefed and has time to prepare ... otherwise opt for the sermon!*

*Find out how long you have and stick to it – it's better to leave them wanting more. Ensure you have a strong beginning and ending. Make eye contact and smile. Vary your pace and mix ideas with stories, quotes etc.*

*This sermon refers to the document *Climate Change and the Purposes of God*, so try to have copies for people, either in the pews or else to take away with them. It may be helpful to be introduced as the speaker earlier in the service. If the minister asks you about *Climate Change and the Purposes of God*, you can explain what it aims to do, summarise the content, and tell people about who has produced and signed it. This will provide a good introduction, making it easier to follow up with the sermon.*

*A video clip may help if technology allows (see video links sheet and 'Why should Christians care for Creation').*

*The sermon below is simply an outline. It needs stories, examples, humour and quotes. There is no set text, but you can use one or more of the *Climate Change and the Purposes of God* texts. Remember to also introduce some of your personal experiences and convictions as you will communicate these with the most authority.*

*Scripts of some sample sermons by Bishop David Atkinson are available from Operation Noah. Michael Northcott's *Cuttlefish, Clones and Cluster Bombs (DLT, 2010)* is a collection of sermons on environmental and other matters.*

*Also try A Rocha's Peter Harris <http://www.arocha.org/int-en/3287-DSY.html>.*

*These sermon notes attempt to: establish shared value frames and common ground in the Bible and church tradition; introduce ON; outline the climate change problem; and then help folk find a Christian framework for longer-term action.*

**1 Introduction** – prayer, thanks for the invitation to be here, your name, what is Operation Noah.

### **2 Enjoying creation brings us closer to God**

- Think of a place or plant or a person or anything in the natural world that you find beautiful
- Common experience to enjoy the beauty of nature
- Genesis Chapter 1 tells us no fewer than 7 times that 'God saw what he had made and it was good'
- So God felt pleased and enjoyed the things he had made. And if God enjoys nature then so can we, whether it's marvelling at its ingenuity, playing in the snow or looking at an amazing view and saying a worshipful 'wow'

Appreciation of the material physical world and its beauty – and sadness at its destruction – brings us closer to God; it has a spiritual element. For lots of people that is common sense, but for others it presents a problem. They want to say that the material world and the spiritual world are separate, and to confine the spiritual world to a private secret inner world, but in saying that they are following a Greek line of thought not a biblical one.

**3 Our Bible** is based on Hebrew thought not Greek. Material matters. In the Bible the first time we hear of God, his Spirit is hovering over the waters and creating a physical world which reflects God's values and creativity, rather like a great piece of music points in part to the character of the composer.

And then, as the Bible story goes on, we see God continually having to choose whether or not to intervene, until the point where he comes right into the human world as the Son of Man, Jesus. This background is important as we think about such a big threat to the natural world and human life as climate change. And our Christian faith can help shape our response. The first step is to look at what God has made, and see it is good, enjoy it and say 'wow'. Through creation we see a reflection of the character of the great divine landscape gardener.

#### **4 Operation Noah is a Christian charity with a Christian response to climate change**

- Christians reflect our culture
- Most hope climate change will go away, or treat it as a one-off problem like an earthquake or tsunami
- Or that there will be a quick fix

There is a permanent temptation to exploit rather than care for nature as we're commanded in Genesis 1. But it's not going to go away, it's here for us to grapple with for the rest of our lives, and although there may be some technical fixes it's very unwise to trust in such an uncertain hope. So, just like wider society, the churches have been a bit slow off the mark with climate change too.

**5** *(This section might be omitted)* Sometimes in **Christian history and tradition** Christians have had a better understanding of our relationship to nature. For example, St Francis, St Benedict, St Augustine (use some possible quotes from these sources ... which could lead on to modern quotes such as John Stott or Pope Francis). Often our hymns reflect this understanding better than our sermons. There are lots of great hymns which sing of God in nature. But in recent years Christians have often regarded the Christian faith as being just about God and humans – and have forgotten that the Bible talks a great deal about the natural world too. The passages are there, and we know them well, it's just that we've got so used to them that we interpret them narrowly. We should remember that Jesus' mission is to the whole of creation not just humans. Illustrate this with texts, eg, John 1; John 3:16; Colossians 1:15-20.

**6 Climate Change and the Purposes of God is an attempt to remind us that creation is about much more than Darwin and DNA.** You'll see on the back that it's signed by Christian leaders from across the UK, and we think churches need to rediscover this part of faith which is so relevant to one of the biggest issues we face today.

- Quote part of the text which gives some idea of the problems climate change is leading to.
- Introduce a personal note – and tell people why you have got involved.
- Describe in more detail one or two elements of Climate Change and the Purposes of God - perhaps Listen, Repent or Love our Neighbours - and expand on this here.

#### **7 So what can we do as members of Christian churches?**

It's tempting to look for quick and easy responses, such as change your light-bulbs or less flying or write to your MP, but while these aren't necessarily bad responses, they don't do justice to what we find in the Bible. They don't reflect God's love of his world / kosmos, and they tend to be negative. What we're looking for is something deeper, longer-term and more positive:

- Learn more about the issues [expand on each of these a little]
- Simpler lifestyles
- Pray for God's world
- Shared action

We're looking for people to make caring for the world a part of their Christian journey not a knee-jerk response out of fear or guilt.

You may want to take time to explore the science more, or to do more of the theology, or both. We've got some materials to help. Maybe you could use the text this week as a devotional aid and spend time with it and pray through it. Or as a home group spend some time with one of our Bible studies. Ask God to help you see what you can do. Maybe you can help Operation Noah and find ways to talk to others about the problem. Finish with a thought or a quote and a prayer.