

Sermon 7.02.2021

“And there he was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.”

The Greek word for Transfiguration is metamorphoo-the root of the English word metamorphosis...ah, you will say I learnt that word in Biology at school, the change in form of a caterpillar to a butterfly or a tadpole to a frog-these amazing changes that take place in the world of nature. At the Transfiguration, Jesus was giving His disciples, for a fleeting moment, a preview of his glory.

The Feast of the Transfiguration falls in August but we also have the account at this time of year as it is the Sunday before Lent and the event happened just before Jesus began to prepare His disciples for His death.

The Orthodox Church uses the Feast of Transfiguration as their Creation Festival. As they give thanks for the harvest of grapes and other fruits and vegetables on this day they are also looking ahead to the ultimate transfiguration of all things in Christ and the flowering and fruitfulness of all creation in God's eternal kingdom where all will be transformed by the glory of the Lord.

We talked about heaven and how we envisage it at one of our Wednesday evening Zoom study groups with Simon ...and this event is a reminder that something good will come out of our lives, and gives us the greatest hope and joy as we anticipate the transformation of our lives and indeed of the whole of Creation in the fullness of time.

Following those events on the mountain Jesus and the disciples descend and continue on that difficult journey to Jerusalem and the long hard road to redemption. And we too must continue our journey of being God's hands in retrieving the health of God's Creation.

Because our Creation is suffering.. and USPG has been under pressure from its global partners to act and last Autumn's edition of Koinonia, the USPG magazine, recorded some of its efforts across the world to address the problem. The first article that I would like to draw your attention to is written by a lay missionary in the Lusitanian church and it gives us 3 good reasons why we should care for Creation.

1. After God had made this world and all that it needed in order to exist, the skies, light, water, trees, animals...God saw it and said that it was good! What does it say about our belief in and gratitude to God if we ignore our duties of stewardship in preserving and protecting Earth's biodiversity and ecosystems.
2. Jesus encourages us to care more about our spiritual lives than our material possessions...collect treasures in heaven rather than earth, don't worry about what you eat and what you wear. Yes, we need to eat and we need clothes to wear but as Christians we need to adjust our habits to be in line with the preservation of creation rather than squandering it in greed and obsessions which affect carbon emissions and choose products which take less from nature ..recycle, up cycle buy second hand, eat less meat, use our cars less.
3. According to WHO by 2050 250000 people will die annually as a result of climate change.(mostly in the southern hemisphere and so not exactly our close neighbours but nevertheless Jesus told us to love our neighbour as ourselves and these are our neighbours wherever they are . Climate change is affecting our brothers and sisters all over the world and we cannot close our eyes and look away. As Simon said last week God needs us to care enough that we cry out in desperation...as we would for

those nearest and dearest to us if they were suffering in the same way. That is what Christian love is like.

So now a whistle-stop tour around the world and firstly to the Caribbean where our attention is drawn to the formerly pristine ecosystems that have been undergoing alteration since the 17th century when the potential profit from the production of sugar drove colonial expansion and the aggressive clearing of rain forests in order to plant the cane, to fuel the furnaces and to build homes. When profits waned the mining of bauxite for aluminium took its place and large tracts of land were mined and then left derelict, no use for agriculture leaving nations like Jamaica indebted to international banks. More recently and despite the need for sustainable industry to retrieve some of the nation's prosperity the government is now more environmentally aware and striving to protect the last of the countries remaining ecosystems and watersheds against multinational companies which still see the potential for mining bauxite. The church has been criticised for avoiding the highly political issue rather than recognising its responsibility. Because from a spiritual perspective the Earth is sacred and is a victim of exploitation as are the most vulnerable human communities, the professor of Environmental studies at the University of the West Indies suggests that the Church **MUST** be more engaged in dynamic and various ways in contributing to a more just society and a sustainable future for everyone.

Remaining on the western edge of the Caribbean, Belize is a beautiful country in Central America, in fact as a nation it boasts in being "Mother nature's best kept secret". I have been fortunate enough to visit that country although I have to confess that I went particularly to see its coral reefs, the 2nd largest in the world and spent most of the time attached to a snorkel with my face under the water...it was unbelievable. But it's the youth encouraged by the youth coordinator of the Anglican Diocese of Belize who are campaigning, lobbying the government because they know that legislation is required to protect their dense rainforests, rivers and wetlands and huge variety of wildlife which is being spoiled by development as well as their coral reefs which are threatened by pollution.

Moving on to Tanzania the Bishop of Shinyanga writes that currently 70% of Tanzania's natural disasters are climate related and linked to drought and floods. He points out that it is the poorer communities who suffer most at these times. However the Government, supported by the Church is calling for Climate Justice and developing a National Climate Change Strategy, focussing on agriculture and food security. **The Church**, the Bishop says, **must admit that God's creation is in crisis because of our neglect and selfishness which have fostered a pandemic of poverty and environmental degradation. The work of renewing Creation starts with us being renewed in our own hearts and minds.**(again "crying out!)).

In Pohang, a southern port in South Korea, on 17th Nov 2017, an earthquake measuring 5.4 on the Richter scale caused loss of Church buildings as well as hundreds of homes. It was found to be man-made as **geothermal power plants** in that country produce energy by injecting fluid at high pressure to fracture the rocks underground and produce heat. These efforts are important in the production of renewable energy but also highlight the dangers of energy sources such as this and nuclear energy and the need to consider reducing our energy consumption.

And finally we move to Peru where Jo Sherwood went as a Gap Year student on USPG's "Journey With Us" programme. She taught English and Music in church Projects and learned while she was there that Peru is one of the countries in the World most vulnerable to the effects of climate change, as Lima, where 1/3 of the country's population lives, is dependent on the rapidly depleting glaciers of the Andes for water.

On her return she went to Uni but was also joined by others, and funded by USPG in forming “Hope for the Future”, an organisation which offers support and advice to Churches who want to respond to climate emergency in this country. Their endeavours are particularly directed at present to COP26, that is the 26th Conference of Parties to be held in Glasgow in November. At this conference countries will need to submit evidence of their commitment to limiting global warming. The UK as host country has a big influence on the outcome of this conference. We are responsible for high emissions, but also have the technical expertise and resources to decarbonise quickly. USPG’s global Anglican partners and Christians across the world are challenging the UK Church to act on climate change ahead of COP26 and to lobby our Government, as hosts, to show strong leadership in achieving a good outcome from the Conference.

So now, back in the UK, in Alderholt...what about us...St James Church Alderholt. What are we doing?

Three years ago Romey used the Ecochurch Questionnaire as a way of assessing how important in the life of our Church the environment issues are and we came out at bronze level because of the way, for example, we manage our Churchyard with wildlife in mind and in relation to our energy consumption. We have moved on since then and Simon and Jacky Dale had another go at the questionnaire recently and reckon we are in line for the Silver award! I have used the church of England Energy Footprint tool to guide us regarding our energy consumption and we come out pretty well (A / A plus!).

We are about to update our Church Hall lights to LEDs which are much more energy efficient (and cheaper to run!).

Simon preached during Creation Season last year on Climate change and what we can do for the Environment and has suggested that we sign up to USPG’s Hope for the Future programme mentioned above and I am now in touch through email with Rachel Mander who wrote about COP 26 in Koinonia. So in April we hope to start connecting and sharing ideas with other churches and will be given help in determining priority actions and engaging politically in the lead up to the COP26 conference in November.

But above all, each one of us needs to remember the 3 reasons WHY we must care!...God is our Creator, Jesus tells us to store spiritual treasure rather than earthly possessions and we must love one another wherever they are! Then we will have the heart to act.

Loving God, Lord of heaven and earth, this earth, our home, belongs to you. Give us grace to love it as you do. Give us courage to give ourselves, as you do, for the good of all people and all of your creation. Strengthen us to stand, as you do, with the vulnerable poor. Give us wisdom to know when we have enough, and the voice to say “enough” to all that harms creation and hurts the poorest. Amen

