



Climate Change and the Purposes of God

Session five: What can I do now to cherish God's earth?

Notes for group leaders

Purpose of this session

The purpose of this session is to reflect on the significance of our hope in God for informing our responses to the questions posed by climate change. Hope can lead to transformative action, empowered by God's spirit. What does that lead to in practice?

Professor Mary Grey wrote in response to Climate Change and the Purposes of God:

"This prophetic document from 'Operation Noah' comes at a kairos moment for the Churches, as ... it seems, the world has become apathetic about the real threat to the possibility of planetary life continuing, if we human beings are not committed to change our patterns of energy consumption. For Christians, the themes of this statement - joy, repentance, hope, justice and so on - are not optional: they are at the heart of our identity as Church. We will encounter them in the form of a question when we face God's judgment: "What did you do to cherish my creation in its hour of danger?"

Professor Mary Grey, theologian and writer. Emeritus Professor at the University of Wales.

Session five: What can I do now to cherish God's earth?

The life and ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus catches us up into a story of self-giving, betrayal, suffering, new life and new hope. It is a story about God's engagement with the world in Jesus Christ - a story in which our own personal stories have their place and in which they find their meaning.

1. The meaning of climate change

Various stories are being told to try to give meaning to the facts about climate change. The science is increasingly clear: what are the implications? Are either of the following your story?

A story about management and greed? For some people, the earth is a resilient place. Whatever we do to it, it will grow back. All that is needed to combat the

damaging results of climate change is better technology. We should use the earth as we want for our benefit.

A story about fear? For some people, the earth is a very fragile place. We have already damaged its precarious systems beyond repair, and are making things worse by the day. Rising temperatures around the earth will lead to devastating consequences, and we can do virtually nothing to prevent catastrophe. Be afraid - be very afraid.

In contrast to both these, Climate Change and the Purposes of God invites us into a story that is not blind optimism, nor dark despair. It is rooted in a realistic hope in God:

ACT WITH HOPE!

'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.' (Romans 15:13)

Hope in God motivates us to take action that can lead to transformation, for by God's power at work within us, God is able to accomplish more than we can ask or imagine. Despite the strong probability of very serious effects from global warming, for Christians despair is not an option. It is when we follow Christ and the way of the Cross, in response to his grace, that we experience the God of hope who gives us joy and peace. We are called to faith and action in trusting response to the God made known by the Holy Spirit in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the Lord of all life. As Christians we can live in hope, despite the dangers that threaten us.

Through God we hope for new life for all creation (Romans 8:19-25). Our planet, made new by the meeting of heaven and earth, will have an abiding value in the purpose of God (Revelation 21:1-5). We are called to live and work with hope in response to God's gift, and in the light of God's future: the promised coming of Christ's reign over all.

2. What are your concerns about the future?

? After reading the above extract from Climate Change and the Purposes of God, which of the following seems to address your concerns about the future most closely?

- God motivates us to act
- God's power at work in us
- Despair is not an option
- Follow the way of the Cross
- Trust in the God of resurrection
- Live in hope despite danger
- Live in the light of God's future.

3. Who are today's prophets?

At different times in the history of God's people, different prophets have had different messages.

In the 8th century BC, Isaiah interpreted the abandonment of God's will and God's ways like this:

The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers; the heavens languish together with the earth. The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. Isaiah 24:4-5

Another prophet, two hundred years later when God's people were in exile, wrote this vision of a new future:

I am about to create a new heavens and a new earth.... Be glad and rejoice in what I am creating... they shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit... the wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, says the Lord. Isaiah 65:17f.

? Who are the prophets about creation-care for today? What do you think God's message is for us today?

Climate Change and the Purposes of God says this

Prophets are those who speak truth, usually uncomfortable truth, to their generation. In ancient Israel, prophets were always shadowed by false prophets, representing the ruling powers. We must listen to the scientists warning us of approaching dangers, exercise discernment, and be wary of 'false prophets' representing the vested interests of the powerful.

4. Read Romans 8:18 – 25

This is Tom Wright's translation:

18. This is how I work it out. The sufferings we go through in the present time are not worth putting in the scale alongside the glory that is going to be unveiled for us.

19. Yes: creation itself is on tiptoe with expectation, eagerly awaiting the moment when God's children will be revealed. 20. Creation, you see, was subjected to pointless futility, not of its own volition, but because of the one who placed it in this subjection, in the hope (21) that creation itself would be freed from its slavery to decay, to enjoy the freedom that comes when God's children are glorified.

22. Let me explain. We know that the entire creation is groaning together, and going through labour pains together, up until the present time. 23. Not only so: we too, we who have the first fruits of the spirit's life within us, are groaning within ourselves, as we eagerly await our adoption, the redemption of our body. 24. We were saved, you see, in hope. But hope isn't hope if you can see it! Who hopes for what they can see? 25. But if we hope for what we don't see, we wait for it eagerly - but also patiently.

From Tom Wright, Paul for Everyone: Romans Part 1. Ch.1-8, SPCK 2004.

Look out for St Paul's view on

- What is going on in God's world now?
- What is God's purpose for creation's future?
- How does he understand hope ? ('labour pains' = 'waiting for God's new world to be born')

5. What can I be doing now to cherish God's 'groaning' creation?

? In our first week we looked at this spectrum of views. Are you in the same place now or have you moved? Can you say why?

<i>It doesn't affect me at all.</i>	<i>I don't believe humans are causing climate change.</i>	<i>It is all very scary and we cannot do anything.</i>	<i>We must act now, or it will be too late.</i>
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? What decisions for practical action have you come to throughout the Course - steps that you can take, or your church can take, to move God's mission for the world forwards?

? Here are some suggestions for practical action - which of these apply to you?

- *Become better informed about climate change*
- *Join a Christian environmental organization*
- *Hold an oil fast during Lent*
- *Work hard at reducing your carbon footprint*
- *Work with others to contact your MP: respond to Operation Noah's Bright Now campaign about our dependence on fossil fuels*
- *Strive to bring creation care back into the centre of the Church's mission.*

O God, who set before us the great hope that your Kingdom shall come on earth and taught us to pray for its coming: give us grace to discern the signs of its dawning and to work for the perfect day when the whole world shall reflect your glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Percy Dearmer).