

Sermon – 25th September 2022

Responding to the climate crisis with hope and love

Mark 12: 28-34

Good morning, on this Creation, Harvest and Climate Sunday.

How can we respond to something so overwhelming? Its effects so catastrophic for human life. So catastrophic for all life on earth. I'm not going to dwell on the science; I find the talk of 1, 2 or 3^o heating, carbon dioxide and methane, ecosystems and deforestation, famine and species loss somehow fails to land in our hearts.

The voices of scientists, naturalists, the UN, the environment agency, the UK's climate change committee all are more and more urgent. Code Red for humanity. The alarm bells are ringing. A litany of broken promises. I rather think they're running out of words!

In truth, deadline after deadline has been missed. We're beginning now to see the first-fruit of this heating climate, in events like this year's European heat-waves, massive floods in Pakistan and prolonged drought in East Africa. The crisis is unlikely be solved in the next few years or even the lifetime of most of us. And we, and more likely our children, will have to contend with famine and migration on a scale we've not seen before.

So how do we respond to something as overwhelming as the climate crisis? How might we respond with hope?

This sermon series is intended to answer that question. It takes us from beginning to end, Genesis to Revelation, creation to new creation.

We might recall – from a few weeks ago – God's Genesis mandate to humankind to rule as he rules; to serve as he serves; and to protect and guard all living things.

We might recall, as we saw three weeks ago, that it is through Jesus that all things were made, and that he loves all that he has made.

This week we turn to the way of life to which Jesus calls us.

Let's now turn to our passage. These words are so familiar to us, aren't they, read each week as we prepare for confession.

So there are three things I'd like us to notice this morning.

1. This is what life under the good rule of God looks like

In these extraordinary chapters, we find Jesus in Jerusalem, announcing the end of the temple worship system; from overturning the tables in chapter 11, to 'not a single stone

will remain on another' in chapter 13. Announcing in fact the end of the world as they knew it. And in this tense section of Mark's account Jesus condemns the chief priests, scribes and elders for their gross misrule; and the compromise of the Herodians the Pharisees and the Sadducees with Roman power.

Amidst all this, read to us just now, there is just this one bright spot of agreement. Jesus is approached by this scribe whom he can affirm 'you are not far from the kingdom of God'. You are not far, says Jesus, from this rule of God – this servant rule of God – that I've been announcing. For Jesus sees that the scribe has understood what's important and what's not.

Jesus' call – that 'you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength', and that 'you shall love your neighbour as yourself' – these are at the heart of the way of life he calls us to; they are at the heart of this kingdom of God, the good just rule of God Jesus is announcing.

This is first thing we take note of this morning: this call – to love God and love neighbour – this is central to the way of life of the kingdom of God, to this good just rule of God.

And in this time of climate crisis, living the life of the kingdom of God, may not be limited to but surely includes acting to limit climate change where we can.

2. To love God is to align ourselves with his purposes

The second thing we take note of is that to love God is to align ourselves entirely with his will and good purpose.

When we hear this – love the Lord - in our culture, there's a danger that we hear a sort of Beatles-Jesus. Love, love, love. All you need is love. And, of course, that's partly true. But only partly. It's not just love that counts, but *who or what* we love. There are some things we're not supposed to love. Like money. Or power. Or status. Or the good opinion of others. And there are some things which we can love, but as long as we love other things more, for example, family (think of Jesus' comments when he is told his family is waiting outside). Country or nation doesn't seem to get a look in!

So Jesus' call concerns not just that we love, but whom to love: 'you shall love the *Lord your God* with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength'; and we may take it that he is not calling us to have warm feelings toward God, but rather to align fully all of our being with God's good will and purpose for the world. This is to be our first love.

We align ourselves fully, with all our life and all our strength – in every aspect and with every fibre – with this same God, who created the earth and all that is in it. The One – we recalled earlier – who loves all that he has made. The one who mandated us, made in his image, to serve creation and one another; to protect and to guard all living creatures.

In this time of climate crisis, we may say that, as we cut the oil and gas that's doing so much harm out of our lives, we are aligning ourselves to the good will and purposes of God.

We can say that as we call on our councillors, MPs, government to enact change we are living out the mandate God has called us to, loving the Lord our God.

This is the second thing we notice today:

That Jesus' call is to align ourselves fully, in every aspect and with every fibre of our being, with the Lord our God.

And, in this time of climate crisis, aligning ourselves fully with the creator God, may not be limited to but surely includes acting to serve, protect and guard creation.

3. To love neighbour is to seek their good

And the third thing we take note of today is Jesus' command to love *our neighbour*

'And the second is like it "you shall love your neighbour as yourself"'. Again, is Jesus talking about a warm feeling toward our neighbour? No, it is surely rather a call to seek the good of our neighbour or welfare of our neighbour. Seek the good of your neighbour as much as your own good, the welfare of your neighbour as much as your own welfare.

With something like climate change, it can feel impersonal. But we might bring to mind perhaps our young neighbour next door, whose world will be so different to ours. Or perhaps the Ethiopian woman, Orbisa, and her family featured last year in Tearfund's prayer diary, for the whom the rains now seldom come.

Jesus' life and ministry was the very embodiment of the love of neighbour. So, we find, as we love our neighbour, we are not so much fulfilling his command, but joining with the God who seeks her good as much as his own; we may say we join in the love of God for humankind. We join with the way things are supposed to be. The way things are under God's rule, in God's kingdom.

We may say then when we give up a day to stand with others to call for change, we're joining with Jesus in loving our vulnerable neighbour.

This third thing we notice then is that Jesus' call is to seek the good of our neighbour, as much as our own.

In this time of climate crisis, seeking the good of our neighbour may not be limited to but surely includes acting to reduce the impact of climate change.

I want to take a moment here to acknowledge the impossibility of this way of life. We read these words before confession for a reason. So let us also be clear: they are spoken by the same Jesus who will a matter of days later go to the cross to pay for all that we fall short. How important that is! That our shortfall is forgiven! But also set free from the past,

empowered by the Spirit now given, the way is opened that we might possibly live this impossible life of Jesus' kingdom.

Summary and conclusion

We've taken note of these three things:

1. This call – to love God and love neighbour – is central to the way of life of the kingdom of God.
2. That in loving the Lord our God, we align ourselves fully, in every aspect and with every fibre of our being, with the Lord our God.
3. That in seeking the good of our neighbour, as much as our own, we are joining with the way the world is supposed to be.

And in this time of climate crisis, living the life of the kingdom of God, aligning ourselves fully with the creator God, seeking the good of our neighbour may not be limited to but surely includes acting to serve, protect and guard creation, and to reduce the impact of climate change.

What we need to do to avoid the worst of climate change is actually fairly straight-forward. We need to burn less coal, oil, petrol, diesel and gas, and then stop altogether as soon as possible. And we need to reduce our farming of cows and sheep quickly and stop as soon as possible. Here in the UK, as a society we need to halve our emissions in the next eight years.

If you're looking for a practical 'how to', the Climate and Ecology Team has started work on a 'how to' booklet for us all here at St Paul's.

To be clear: we all need to do all this.

Let us do them, not so much as a to do list, but because

1. This call – to love God and love neighbour –is central to the way of life of the kingdom of God, the good and just rule of God.
2. That in loving the Lord our God, we align ourselves fully, in every aspect and with every fibre of our being, with the Lord our God.
3. That in seeking the good of our neighbour, as much as our own, we are joining with the way the world is supposed to be.

And as we act let us find that we are not without hope, for it is the way of Jesus in the kingdom of God to love God with all our being and to seek the good of our neighbour.