

Stewardship of Creation

Back in the 1980's Margaret Thatcher famously told Church of England bishops to stay out of politics.

Now, what I find so interesting about this is that, I believe, Margaret Thatcher is a Christian.

But for Margaret Thatcher, bishops were supposed to deal with matters of faith, whilst politicians were supposed to deal with politics.

If I've understood her correctly, she had bought into the idea that religion is a matter of private devotion or piety, but has no place in the public sphere.

Now, I have a problem with this on a number of levels.

For starters, how can a faith in the One who said "render true judgement, show kindness and mercy to one another, do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the alien or the poor" (Zechariah 7.10) fail to be involved in the public debate about how we order our society?

Whilst the Christian faith must be personal, in the sense that we must decide for ourselves how we will respond to Christ, it can never be private.

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father [God] except by me."

Now if this statement is true, then it has implications for the whole world. People living without Christ are lost to God and they need have the opportunity to believe in and follow Jesus.

If it is not true, then Jesus is a liar and we can all go off and follow some other religion.

But more than that, the whole bible, from beginning to end tells the story of God's plan for the entire universe.

And right at the centre of the bible, with cosmic implications, we find Jesus.

Let's go back to the beginning.

The assertion of Genesis 1 is that God created the world and that it was good.

Genesis 2 tells how God then put humanity in the world to rule over it on his behalf.

Like an emperor might erect his statue in various parts of his empire to assert his authority over it, so God creates humanity in his image and places him in the world as a sign of his presence and to help it flourish under his benevolent, kingly rule.

However, Genesis 3, humanity disobeys God, and as a result sin enters the world.

From this moment on, the whole of creation is subject to corruption and decay.

And instinctively we know this is true don't we.

There is something essentially good, something beautiful about a sunset or a rose.

And yet the scenes on our TV's of tsunamis and earthquakes show us that all is not well in the world.

It is in this context that God sends his Son into the world; yes, to create a way in which each individual human can be forgiven for their sins and be restored to right relationship with God through faith in Christ,

but also to release the whole created order from the mess that its in.

Romans 8.19:

“The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subject to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it.”

And so it is, that in the book of Revelation, chapters 21 and 22, after Christ has returned and judged all people, he creates a new heaven and new earth – creation is restored to perfection once more.

So, how does this understanding of the world help us as we today consider the subject of our stewardship of creation?

Firstly, we must begin with the basic premise that the world is not ours but God's.

But secondly, we must reckon with the fact that he has made us in his image, to be his agents in the world.

We are to “fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves on the face of the earth” (Genesis 1.28) but also to “till it and keep it” (Genesis 2.15)

So, we are not to rape and pillage the earth's resources, using them and abusing them to feed an ever growing greed, but rather to help the earth be fruitful and to show forth the praise of its rightful King, God.

Thirdly, as people who have met Jesus and fully expect his return to create a new heaven and a new earth, we are privileged to then lead lives that speak of the

coming new heaven and new earth – that point people to the perfect “re-creation” that those who follow Jesus will enjoy.

Now, so much for the theory, but what difference is all this going to make in practice?

Sadly in the few minutes I have I can't give more than a couple of almost derisory pointers; but I hope they will get you thinking and prompt further prayer and study relevant to your situation.

Firstly, then, when we help creation flourish, we are fulfilling our God given task of exercising dominion over the created order, and pointing towards the perfect re-creation to come.

Whilst I'm a little uncomfortable with “I'm closest to God in a garden” , there is truth in the fact that as we cultivate our gardens, work with the best kept village group, make our houses welcoming, even take care of our bodies and how we cloth them, then we are taking part in God's creative (and re-creative) work.

Secondly, we cannot ignore the effect our lifestyle choices have on the world around us.

Global economics are complicated. But to simply shrug our shoulders and continue buying the same sweat shop clothes, eating the same battery farmed meat products, consuming vast amounts of fossil fuel energy, banking with institutions that invest our money in unfair trade, strip mining in Canada or arms trading with oppressive regimes is simply untenable.

We can take an interest in how our choices affect the world around us, and change our habits accordingly.

Thirdly, as Christians we can help to bring influence to bear in our work environment, or in areas where we have influence.

I wouldn't presume to tell Christians in the medical world what to do about stem cell research, or financiers what to do about development loans to third world countries, or architects how to design buildings or government officials which services to axe in the current cut backs.

But I would want to urge you to think Christianly about how you can make what you do contribute most to the flourishing of the world around you; so that your effort might act as a pointer to the hope we have in Christ.

And I would want to offer you whatever support I can and encourage us as a church to be praying for you.

Next week in our stewardship month, we will get down to some of the nitty gritty of how we use our time and talents in the service of God, particularly in the context of the church.

But let's never forget that the scope of the faith we profess is cosmic, and should inform every aspect of our lives; and that the forty hours we spend at work each week, or looking after family, or being active in the community can and should be as much a part of our ministry for Christ as the work we undertake in church.