**Creationtide Reflection for Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity**

**Sunday 20th September 2020**

**Matthew 20.1-16**

May I speak in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Since I moved to Shoreham nearly seven years ago, it’s been a privilege each year to witness skeins of Canada geese flying over the area every spring and autumn. A few weeks ago I heard the familiar honking sounds early morning and looking out my bedroom window saw the wonderful V-formation they make, with the leader at the arrow ‘tip’ as it were.

Geese make preparations to migrate in the autumn as soon as the mornings and evenings start to get cooler. Whether these geese will fly off to warmer climes or not (some apparently stay resident in the UK all year round), their instinct is to prepare for flight. A God given instinct, one of many we find in nature.

Despite what is happening worldwide with the Covid-19 pandemic, these amazing birds, part of God’s beautiful creation, continue to do what they are designed to do…

I’m sure during lockdown many of us have been aware of similar examples of the wonders of nature, as we have had the time to stop and appreciate the small things, and to be grateful for the opportunities we have to marvel at the beauty of creation.

From 1st September to 4th October, Creationtide, or the Season of Creation, is the period in the annual church calendar dedicated to God as Creator and Sustainer of all life. It begins with the Day of Prayer for Creation and ends with the Feast of St Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology. Christians worldwide come together to care for our common home, Planet Earth. This year’s theme is “Jubilee for the Earth: New Rhythms, New Hope,” and during this season we enter a time of restoration and hope, a jubilee for our Earth, that requires radically new ways of living with creation. It is a time to consider the vital relationship with our Creator and all creation.

This year the need for just and sustainable systems has been revealed by the far-reaching effects of Covid-19. As Christians, we share a common role as caretakers of God’s creation, and in this season especially we have the opportunity to care for our common home, the sisters and brothers who share it, and with all that lives and breathes.

Most people know now that Climate Change is the disruption of the global climate and weather systems, due especially to the emission of greenhouse gases from burning fossil fuels. The consequences include the warming of the atmosphere, land and oceans, and the increase in frequency and intensity of storms, floods and droughts, all of which are now being experienced throughout the world.

Climate Change is not just an environmental matter but also a social one, because it is already causing food shortages, loss of livelihoods, increasing impoverishment, forced migration of peoples and other economic and political crises, as well as further destruction of natural habitats of animals.

It can no longer be viewed as someone else’s problem! The future of life as we know it on this planet is at stake. Covid-19 is not the only worldwide crisis we are facing today!

This was made very clear by Sir David Attenborough in his BBC programme ‘Extinction’ last Sunday, when he said,

“We are facing a crisis, and one that has consequences for us all.”

The programme’s focus was on the damage humans have wrought on the natural world, showing footage of monkeys leaping from trees into a river to escape a huge fire and a koala limping across a road in its vain search for shelter as flames consume the forest around it. And heartbreakingly, only two white rhinos that remain in Central Africa, a mother and daughter, the last of their kind – thousands having been pushed to the brink of extinction by habitat loss and hunting.

However, Sir David remains positive, “If we make the right decisions at this critical moment, we can safeguard our planet’s eco systems, its extraordinary biodiversity and all its inhabitants.”

Which brings me to our Gospel reading this morning…the parable of the workers in the vineyard. The message of the parable is that we should serve and let God be concerned about the rewards. God’s economy of grace is not the same as the natural order people expect. Even those who have been standing around all day doing nothing are invited to work in the vineyard at a late hour and are rewarded. God wants us all to bring in his Kingdom, and is generous to all, however much we can each do.

So let’s not wait to be hired! You don’t have to have been an eco-warrior for decades! You can start right now, right where you are, taking one step at a time to commit to your role as caretaker for God’s creation.

Because is it right that my generation and those before me get to reap the rewards of all the beauty of the earth, but my daughters and those who come after them don’t? Is it right that those of us in the western world stay only marginally affected by climate change while those already impoverished suffer from further famine and flooding? The parable in Matthew’s gospel is about people responding to the opportunity to work in the kingdom when the invitation is made to them, and God alone knows the value of each person’s service for his kingdom. We are called to love our neighbours and this means developing sustainable ways of life for all.

In the Gospels we see Jesus who was continually challenging the traditional dualisms by which people lived their lives: male over female, rich over poor, health over sickness. His compassionate love and justice embraced all of creation, and led him to cross all kinds of boundaries of his day. Climate Change, like Covid-19, reminds us that we are all in this together. I believe we as Christians should be at the forefront of redressing the effects and changing the course of Climate Change.

Ruth Valerio the environmentalist, theologian, and social activist, who has recently been appointed to the honorary position of Canon Theologian at Rochester Cathedral says: “We are facing an unprecedented climate emergency and we all have a calling to be part of the solution and to care for God’s earth, remembering we are not living for ourselves, but are part of a wider body of humanity and the natural world.”

I’m currently putting a team together at St Martin’s to get on board with some of these issues on a practical level, with the opportunity to reach out to the community, raise awareness and encourage people to look at their lifestyles. We will be registering as an Eco Church which is an award scheme for churches in England and Wales who want to demonstrate that the gospel is good news for God’s earth.

We will be filling out an online survey which will help us to see how we are currently doing (a base line) and in what ways we can improve our environmental impact/awareness. Supporting resources will help to equip our church to express our care for God’s world in our worship and teaching; in how we look after our buildings and land; in how we engage with our local community and in global campaigns, and in the personal lifestyles of our congregation.

So please look out for and get involved in our proposed future projects, which will be included in the weekly Benefice newsletter. There are some links in this week’s newsletter where you can find lots of information to celebrate the commitment to tackle Climate Change across the Creationtide season.

In the words of Sir David Attenborough, “What happens next is up to every one of us.”

I’d like to finish with a prayer by Pope Francis…

**“A Prayer for our Earth”**

All powerful God, you are present in the universe  
and in the smallest of your creatures.  
You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.  
Pour out upon us the power of your love,  
that we may protect life and beauty.  
Fill us with your peace, that we may live  
as brothers and sisters, harming no one.  
O God of the poor, help us to rescue the abandoned  
and forgotten of this earth, so precious in your eyes.  
Bring healing to our lives,  
that we may protect the world and not prey on it,  
that we may sow beauty,  
not pollution and destruction.  
Touch the hearts  
of those who look only for gain  
at the expense of the poor and the earth.  
Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,  
to be filled with awe and contemplation,  
to recognize that we are profoundly united  
with every creature as we journey towards your infinite light.  
We thank you for being with us each day.  
Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle,  
for justice, love and peace. Amen.