

World Environment Day - Floods and Foundations

Next week sees World Environment Day. Global warming has become a very real issue for everyone and we begin to see the increasing frequency of floods, and storms and raging fires and drought - these natural disasters no longer happen in just the poorer, undeveloped countries of the world; it is not just the homes and lives of the marginalised which are at risk any more, not just the weak whose futures are at stake. The whole world is now involved. There was a conversation between the pig and the hen. The hen was saying that she and the pig played a role in the provision of the traditional English breakfast. 'Yes', says the pig, 'you contribute - but I am involved!' We really are involved in a race to save the world - it is not too hyperbolic to say so.

This isn't only an issue of stopping global warming of course, it is also an issue of economics and justice. Speaking of justice, we can see that many in the West who never really recognised the plight of the poorest are now involved in actually taking steps to end poverty; many who had no reason or means of really seeing injustice in the world began actually trying to understand life from the under-side up.

There are world dangers - injustice and poverty can breed the sort of terrorism we have seen in Northern Ireland - 9/11, 7/7 and so on. And Jesus called us to do justly, and love mercy.

Is it too late to hear words of warning, understand our relationships with other countries and recognise our national as well as personal responsibilities. Ideas of who we are and what we therefore do are vitally connected. It seems to me that practical action is almost too late.

Matthew's Gospel has been called the Gospel for Christian leaders. Matthew is keen to teach a right ethical use of Old Testament Law. For him, that right use is found through the overwhelming authority of Jesus Christ, in whom he sees the affirmation and fulfilment of all the hopes, predictions, history, ethics and religion of Old Testament Israel. For Matthew, everything comes together in Jesus Christ.

Everything is now related to Jesus Christ. The age of preparation for the Messiah - the Old Testament period - has now become the age of the fulfilment of all God's promises, and nothing will ever be the same again. The Law is now transformed by the teaching and life of Jesus; love, mercy and righteousness are to become principles of living, and gone is the pharisaic legalism that the Law had become. Jesus said so often that the law was not intended to tie God's people up in knots - he wants us to have life - life to the full.

The parable of the house built on the sand brings to the end Jesus' teachings on the sermon on the mount. Jesus' 'sermon' has concentrated mainly on the nature of discipleship which are key to the nature of the kingdom. In this big body of teaching Jesus speaks to those who are self-deceived and unaware that their discipleship does not match up to his criterion of judgement for kingdom life. The Kingdom life, it is totally clear, involves practical obedience and personal relationship to Jesus.

In the parable of the two builders, we can see the vital importance of the hearer's response: the hearing **must** be followed by the doing. It is no good just making a mental note of Jesus' words. There must be understanding and action. Otherwise superficial discipleship will, like the house built on sand, collapse under pressure. No matter how many urgings from the pulpit people hear, they will not keep their Christian house up without **acting** on what they have heard. Nothing, however religious or pious it might seem, is a substitute for obedience and personal relationship with Jesus. You will remember Jesus' discussion with the disciples about who he was.

Listen to what the Gospel records in Matthew 16: “But what about you?” Jesus asked. “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

For many years Christians thought that Jesus was making Simon the foundation of the Church by naming him the Rock - Petros. But the truth of it is that the foundation of the church is the great statement "You are the Christ, the son of the living God."

We sing the hymn - "The church's one foundation is Jesus Christ Our Lord." And that is what Jesus is saying. A Church built on a rock will not be swept away by persecution or fashion, or theological wranglings. It is built on an eternal rock which will withstand all of that. And you and I can stand firm against the typhoons and floods of temptation and sin, if we too stay rooted and grounded in Jesus. Jesus provides us with the foundation for being and living out the distinct discipleship to which he calls us, and for which we pray with the words “Your kingdom come.”

Today’s Gospel reading provides us with a clear warning to live out our discipleship with distinctive principles. They are given to us by the one who died to bring us back, justified and redeemed, into relationship with God and with one another.

Discipleship is a question of being and doing, speaking and acting, integrating God’s life as modelled in Jesus into our daily lives and relationships. Jesus lived by the law of love; he was always guided by love, righteousness, faithfulness and mercy,. Our lives must be too. We shall be seen to be Christians in all the ethical decisions we make. Our Christian discipleship will be revealed to the

world at large in what we choose to do, the importance we give to living in serious obedience to God and God's Word.

And, if we are to bring in the Kingdom of God we must live lives - foundational Gospel based lives fully built on the rock of Jesus Christ, the son of the living God. And although we not feel able to achieve much, it is our duty to push as hard as we can for a proper ethical stance on planetary issues too - I may only save a ton of carbon before I die - but if I can lobby my MP, write to key decision makers, publish my sermons on the Worldwide web, maybe God will use my words and my example. And maybe he will use your lives and examples to change the world. It has to start somewhere - so let it be here.