**26th March 2021 Eco Church 5th Anniversary Service**

**Bishop Nicholas Holtam’s Sermon notes**

**We are very grateful to Bishop Nicholas for joining us for our online EC 5th anniversary service and for sharing his sermon notes below.**

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**Matthew 5.1-14**

The Sermon on the Mount is central to Matthew’s Gospel, the most Jewish of the Gospels it is given by Jesus on a mountain and structured in a way as to remind its hearers of the Law of Moses.

I love the topsy turvy Beatitudes, blessings that transform, strengthen and encourage us. A friend once sent me a small card which said: The meek are getting ready.

And we are called to live in response to them as the salt of the earth, the light of the world.

5 years since the launch of Eco Church at a service in the crypt of St Paul’s cathedral with Ruth Valerio and Rowan Williams.

It has been a very creative work with over 3,000 churches registered.

It has spawned

Eco Diocese; Eco Circuit, Eco Synod…

Eco Synagogue

Eco Mosque

The links with Eco Congregation and other international movements are close. It is one of the strengths of church and of the faith communities that we are local everywhere.

It’s difficult to get the right metaphors but in those 5 years the environment has changed, the landscape is different. The urgency and pace is different. Love them or loathe them, XR were significant in changing the nature of the debate.

The UK Parliament has declared a climate emergency, as have many county councils and local authorities.

David Attenborough’s Living Planet caught the mood and shaped people’s concerns.

The growth in the production of renewable energy is remarkable. 10 years ago no one would have believed that in 2020 wind sunlight, water and wood generated 42% of the UK’s electricity compared to 41% from gas and coal. There have been periods when over 50% of electricity used in the UK came from renewable sources.

The Climate Change Committee and Citizen’s Assembly have created the framework of a plan to get the UK to Net Zero by 2050. To some extent they are examples of what Greta Thunberg called ‘cathedral thinking’. You have to start building before you know exactly what it’s going to look like.

Christiana Figueres is optimistic the world will meet the Paris deadline of Net Zero by 2050 because of climate leadership, market forces and digital technology.

The glass is half full and that is reflected by >3,400 churches registered with Eco Church and the recognition that the care of God’s creation is central to Christian life and discipleship.

And it is true that we are still off the pace, are not going fast enough with credible delivery plans.

The C of E’s General Synod’s decision to aim for Net Zero by 2030 was a recognition of this.

Tear Fund’s report that gave voice to young Christians who thought the Church is not doing enough was painful *and* encouraging because it was to some extent true.

*Only* 3,400 churches have registered with Eco Church.....

There’s still a very big job to do.

In a strange way this terrible pandemic has helped. Who would have thought we could change our behaviours so much? Six years ago in preparation for Paris we developed the language among the faith groups of doing things for the love of. Christians in particular are not empowered to change by fear but by love. We now know that fear is a very powerful motivator and we have changed our behaviour from a mix of fear about the harm of the virus as well as for the love of our lives, our families, neighbours and communities and out of respect for and for the love of those who care for us and protect the NHS for the good of all.

The pandemic has raised very important issues about what is our real wealth. Political choices have been made on the basis that our health matters more than the economy. All of that work on happiness and wellbeing, the Dasgupta Review about what else we should measure as well as or instead of the economic indicators is going to be really important as we build back better

We have learned again that we are global. The pandemic does snot know national borders. Me first or vaccine nationalism just won’t work. The third wave being experienced in Europe is going to wash up on our shores. This is a crisis in which no one is safe until everyone is safe.

There’s a very powerful cartoon that was doing the rounds in the Autumn of the waves of a series of crisis mounting ready to crash in successively on the urban shore: Pandemic, Economy, Environment, Climate.

The Pope is said that these are not separate issues but aspects of the same problem. Our relationship with God, one another and creation is wrong. We are behaving as consumers and not as co-creators with a responsibility for sustainable living, This is the territory of repentance, turning around and starting anew, classic evangelical territory.

Last September Pope Francis asked how we will get through the pandemic and the environmental and climate crisis. He said we will get through the pandemic by caring for one another.

We will get through the environmental and climate crisis by contemplation; by looking carefully at the beauty of creation and appreciating it. People who do that can no longer go on consuming and squandering the earth.

It is a hard time. The National Day of reflection focussed on those who have died, who are grieving and on those who have cared.

We’re doing this in Passiontide, as the Church moves to the end of Lent and our focus moves from the wilderness to the cross.

In John’s Gospel Christ is lifted up on the cross, in a way that shows the promise of the resurrection now.

God is with us in the crisis. We livein the power of the resurrection.

The Gospel began at an empty tomb and is being witnessed to in the care of creation. Many churchyards are Living Churchyards. They are being used to protect and develop biodiversity. They are educating communities about the care of God’s creation through living churchyards.

An anniversary service is a time for us to give thanks for what has been achieved through Eco Church.

It is also a time to look forward. It’s urgent. There’s a job still to be done.

In Passiontide we will be realistic about what is at stake and hopeful that in Christ all things are made new.

I love the simple prayer of Dag Hammerskjold’s:

For all that has been, Thanks.  
To all that will be, Yes