

Session 4: Fourth week of lent

Environment

Worship

Responses

Make way for the one who comes in the name of the Lord,
the creator of the earth, the stars and all the wonders beyond.

What does the Lord require of us?

To do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God.

Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread,

because it is the Lord your God who goes with you; God will not fail you or forsake you.

What does the Lord require of us?

To do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God.

Prayer of Confession

For those times when we have been poor stewards of your creation,
squandering the gifts we have been given, with no thought to the future:
Forgive us and renew the face of the earth.

For those times when we have been selfish with your gifts,
leaving others in poverty and crushing need:

Forgive us and renew the face of the earth.

For those times when we have recklessly or deliberately damaged the earth,
through our constant demand for more material goods:

Forgive us and renew the face of the earth.

Silence

Jesus was, in the beginning, with God the Creator and without him not one thing was made.
Later, when human beings had broken the world and the Creator's heart, he came into the
world to remind us how to love God and our neighbours and he brought grace and truth and
forgiveness into the world in a new way.

Hear then, his words of grace:

Your sins are forgiven.

Amen, Thanks be to God.

Prayer

Gracious God,
Creator of all,

We offer thanks for the beauty, diversity and abundance of your creation. We remember today the damage that human beings have caused to the earth. We pray that those who have power to make decisions which have consequences for generations to come will be wise and compassionate. Help us to play our part as good stewards of creation, generous to those in need and careful to use well your many gifts to us.

In the name of Christ.

Amen

Scripture reading

Luke 15 v1-3, 11b-32

Reflect:

Picture in your mind the most beautiful place on earth you have ever been. Imagine the fullness of its beauty, the colours, the sounds, the smells. Then picture the same place destroyed, ravaged, without life or colour. How does this make you feel?

Some Thoughts and Background:

The story of the so-called Prodigal Son is a story we think we know so well! What if we look at the story in a slightly different way? The Father in the story is God (as per the traditional interpretation) but in this telling, God's two offspring are The North and the South...

The North came to God and asked for their share of the inheritance. God gave it to them and The North used the resources they had been given to develop, burning fossil fuels to meet the demand for energy. Markets flourished and more and more goods were produced to satisfy demand. Advertising was invented to create even more demand and for a while the dream of a better life was sustained by The North's belief that they could buy happiness and fulfilment.

Meanwhile The South continued at home with the Father and lived as they had always lived before. As The North became more and more hooked on the dream of development things started to fall apart. Someone predicted that their fossil fuels would soon run out. Then someone else brought forward evidence that all the North's activity had changed the climate. All this started to niggle at The North's conscience. For a while The North was able to argue that it was just a natural cycle of the Father's resources that was occurring. However as more and more information was gathered the truth became inescapable: what The North was doing was the cause of the problems. Furthermore it was now affecting The North's sibling, The South, and their Father too. The North realised things had to change.....

Quite how this particular interpretation of the story ends remains to be seen! However it remains at the heart of Christian belief that the Creator has given stewardship over this earth to humankind. How then is it possible that humankind has so dramatically and systematically destroyed it through misuse!

It is widely accepted that the increases in storms and violent events of nature which have been seen around the world in recent times have their causes in human-made climate change. This forces us to ask how, as humans, we need to live in order to avoid having a negative impact on how nature and the climate develop. Changes in the climate are not just an environmental issue they are a justice issue and an ethical issue too. The developing world is suffering most, but it is the developed world that has caused most of the damage.

The ethical stance we choose to take in relation to climate change will affect both our own lives and those of generations to come. The actions we are prepared to take and those we do not or will not take will have dramatic consequences for the present and the future. Part of the problem of course is that we can just about get away with thinking that it doesn't affect us here, in Europe, in the UK, in London. Although many of us will know people in other parts of the world whose lives have been affected by natural disasters. Yet the call to repentant action which is at the heart of the story of the Prodigal Son is one which we can all respond to in the choices we make and the decisions we take. We are not helpless however much it might feel like it. Do we walk or drive? Do we take our own bag or pay 5p for a plastic one, do we turn the lights off when we leave a room? These are small examples. But in so many respects, whether or not we are talking about our local community, our church community or the world, the actions we take now will affect the future. Earlier this year it was reported that Air Pollution limits for the whole year had been breached in London within a few hours of the New Year!

The second son was angry that the first son had squandered the gifts that his Father had given him. It is easy to understand and relate to his anger. So what will it take for us – the first son, The North - to come to our senses? For us to fall before God and confess 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your child'?

London Environment stats

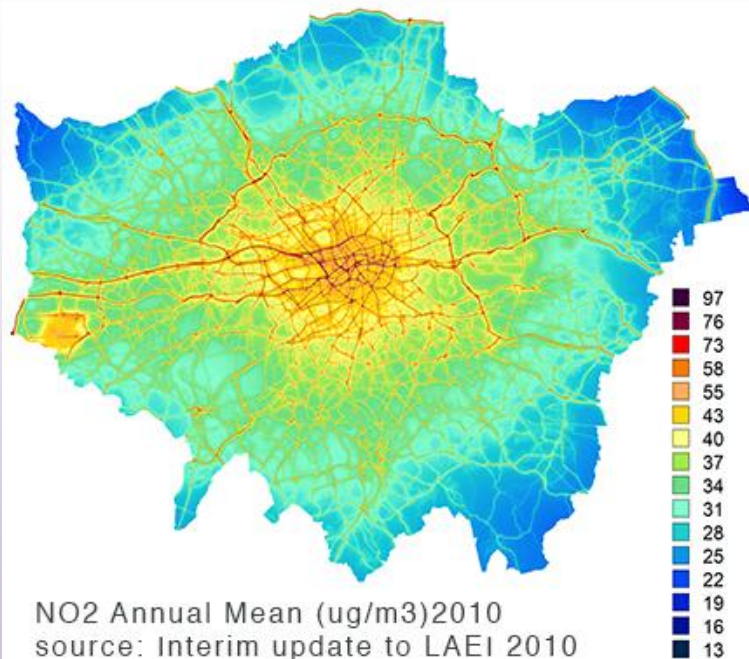
Around a third (34 per cent) of the capital's household waste is recycled. This is below the national average of 43 per cent and reflects the difficulties of recycling from London's greater number of high rise properties

The total area of London is 607 sq miles and a population density of 13,467 Londoners per sq mile London's most populous borough, Croydon, is home to around 363,000 residents. Eight other London boroughs have populations of more than 300,000 (by way of comparison the population of Leicester is 319,000)

During most years we currently have enough water to meet London's needs. But the climate is changing and our population is growing. Climate projections suggest that our rainfall will become more seasonal – drier summers and wetter winters. This is expected to affect both our supply and demand for water

London's air pollution gained it an 'F' for Fail. Air pollution has been at illegal levels since 2005, however no European capital gained an 'A' rating

This map shows nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) levels in London. Pollution is worst in the centre of the city and along major roads:



This summer's Capital Clean-up campaign ran from May until September 2015. There were Clean-up events happening all over London

Foodsave supported over 200 food organisations in London to prevent food waste and put surplus food to good use.

Discuss:

- What changes in your own natural environment have you noticed in the last 10 years?
- To what extent does climate change bother you and why?
- Repentance in its truest sense implies a total change of heart and mind, it is a total turning around of life and patterns of behaviour. In what ways do we need to see repentance in order to prevent further environmental destruction? In society, in the church, in our own lives?
- Can you think of other examples of repentance on a global scale (or a transformation of an ingrained attitude and behaviour) that have taken place in your life time?

And finally.....

What specific stories, experiences or points relating to the environment would you like to bring to the attention of the Mayoral candidates?