

Trinity 1 – Environment Sunday
St James, Colwall, 6th June 2010

Oh to be in England, now that April's there

We all know Robert Browning's poem, *Home thoughts from abroad*, but actually, my favourite month is May, and there is a great deal to be said for June too. But whatever the month, spring is a wonderful season. The trees are coming into leaf and the whole world is painted a vibrant green and is bursting with life. We have a nest box on our garage and the blue tits in it fledged last Sunday. First one little bird poked its head out of the hole, teetered on the brink, looking at the world for the first time, and then suddenly with a flutter of wings it was off. Then came the next; and another; and another until in 10 minutes the family home was deserted – and I was late for church!

Our blue tits were early this year – we normally reckon that they will fledge in the first two weeks of June, not the last week of May, but the seasons are getting earlier aren't they? The trees are coming into leaf earlier and the weeds in my garden are certainly sprouting very vigorously. The changes in the seasons are very slow and almost imperceptible, just like the other changes in the environment about us. I was talking with my father-in-law the other day and he said that when he was a boy you could find bird's nests at almost every yard along a hedgerow. Now, you are lucky to find one within a whole field. Another change someone else pointed out to me is that in the old days, when farmers were ploughing, they were always followed by a flock of seagulls. How often do we see that nowadays? It is certainly several years since I did. And the reason is that there are fewer worms in the soil.

Are these changes worrying? After all having an early spring sounds like a good idea, particularly after the hard winter we have had. But these changes are symptoms of our exploitation of the environment. We are used to thinking of the environment as being able to meet any of the demands we are placing upon it. But these are warning signs that we are reaching the limit of what nature is able to deliver. Species are going extinct; rainforests are shrinking; water supplies are drying out; deserts are extending, all as a result of human exploitation. This is no way for Christians to treat the God-given environment.

But it is also very stupid. We are changing the climate. As a result sea levels are rising, the severity of storms is increasing and the whole pattern of life on the planet is under stress. I was interested to read that in 2006 the Indian island of Lohachara disappeared under the waves. It was home to 10,000 people. Never heard of it? Well neither had the Indian authorities who only noticed it had disappeared from satellite images. I presume the inhabitants had migrated before the island was inundated but I am sure it was a tragedy nevertheless. And a tragedy which went unremarked in the world and is destined to be repeated for other low-lying islands and coastal areas. We are losing land to climate change: not a large amount, indeed quite a small proportion of the whole, but it happens to be a very heavily populated part because most civilisations have grown up in coastal areas. And we are also losing land to desert extension too. Each of these losses gives rise to migration and extra pressure on the remaining food production areas. It's a recipe for conflict whose effects will be felt throughout the world.

Climate change is caused by industrial activity which has largely taken place in the West but whose major impact is felt elsewhere. The major effect will also be felt by future generations rather than ourselves but this long term and distant effect lies at the

heart of the problem. Depending upon what action we can take to reduce our emissions currently, I would expect major and notable effects to occur by 2050. I don't expect to live to see that date myself, and perhaps not many of us will do so, but our children and our grandchildren will. What kind of a future are we leaving them? Personally, I think the effects of climate change will be a dominating factor in their lives in a similar way that the second world war was in mine. It's not the end of the world but it is a very big problem and we need to do something about it.

Climate change is slow acting but this does not mean that we have plenty of time to sort it out, because the actions we must take are also very slow to build up. We have to enhance our energy infrastructure, make our housing more energy efficient, develop zero carbon transport and improve our energy efficiency generally. These are not small changes and will take decades to bring about.

Now I guess most people's reactions to this will be to say that it is up to the politicians to sort out, and I would agree with this, but this does not mean that we can do nothing about it. We expect leadership from our politicians but leaders cannot be too far ahead of the electorate. So the most important thing I want you to do today is to recognise the scale and extent of the problem and the difficulties of tackling it. When we were at war in 1939 the threat was very clear and obvious to everyone and this enabled the government to bring in the measures that were necessary for mobilisation. That's the kind of attitude we need today. We won't make any progress tackling climate change if most of the populace just hopes the problem will go away.

So attitudes are important, but actions are too. If you really take this on board then I think you will want to modify your lifestyle. Now, this is where I become a spoil sport. You have to think about your holidays. One intercontinental flight will double your carbon emissions for the year. It is not something that you should do lightly. I am not saying that air travel should be absolutely forbidden but you really ought to think seriously about the benefits you expect to get and compare that with the costs for the environment, and not just the airfare.

And how about your car? Is the point of your large car just to say how important you are? Well I don't want to be a spoil sport again – who's to say it is wrong to own a car for fun? I am not, for example, going to condemn Carl's Bentley! But it is worth thinking about exactly what you want from your car. The car ads sell dreams, and some of these dreams are foolish and costly. If you are simply interested in getting from A to B comfortably, it may be cheaper to take a taxi and travel first class by train than it would be to go by car, and better for the environment too.

Respecting the environment is about doing things as much as not doing things. And Colwall Greener has lots of things for you to do. There's the car club which can help you to avoid having a second car. Try out our electric bikes. Get the home energy advice service to give your home an energy makeover. Join the orchard group and have fun restoring neglected orchards. Join the allotment group and grow your own fruit and veg. And if that's not enough, there is plenty going on over the hill with Transition Malvern Hills. Lots of these are fun things to do, but all contribute to protecting the environment.

But the great thing is to enjoy the environment, in all its diversity and beauty. It says something about God. Let's not spoil it and make it say something about man.