

# PCI Climate Sunday 2022

## Introduction:

While the island of Ireland largely experienced a summer of relatively normal weather, it was a different matter elsewhere. Large swaths of England, Wales and Scotland saw spells of extremely hot weather to the point of breaking records, with devastating fires and prolonged dry spells leading to widespread drought. Further afield the situation has been even more extreme with many countries experiencing unprecedented high temperatures with consequent damage to natural habitat, human wellbeing, and social infrastructure. While it is a common mistake to equate occasional or localised weather fluctuations with climate change per se, the overwhelming scientific consensus is that the cumulative effect of human activity since the onset of the Industrial Revolution in the mid-eighteenth century is the single biggest factor in the climate crisis now upon us.

It is true that climate change is only one of many issues that faces humanity. The perennial mission of the church is to bear witness to the glory of God in the grace of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Yet how that witness is to be borne may demand distinctive themes being emphasised within specific situations as things change and the need arises. The climate crisis is self-evident and inescapably important. Whatever the ways in which others respond to this issue our primary concern here is with what PCI may say or do or be at this crucial juncture. The following resources may be helpful to you as we encourage you to designate at least one worship service as *Climate Sunday* in early Autumn. As last year, we ask you to focus on climate change and its related phenomena at a Sunday service sometime between early September and late October. You may wish to incorporate it into your Harvest Thanksgiving services since the themes are intimately related or, better still, dedicate a specific service to the climate crisis theme and how we as the church may faithfully respond.

## Biblical and Theological Perspective:

The gospel entrusted to the church is perennial, indeed eternal. As we face the contemporary phenomenon of climate change some aspects of God's good news may be coming to the fore as never before. From the wealth of biblical material to hand, perhaps the following three concepts are particularly apt for reflection and action. For alliteration they all begin with the letter "K".

1. *Kabod* – this is the Hebrew word for 'glory' and speaks of God's utter supremacy and sheer splendour as Creator, Ruler and Redeemer. In overflowing love God wills to share something of this intrinsic glory with a creation made and called 'good' and with humanity created in the divine image. The relationships between humanity, creation and God are no longer 'right' due to human sin but God's covenant desire to save and restore is brought about by his Son and his Spirit. The golden thread of God's glory weaves its way from Genesis 1-2 through Psalms 19 and 24, to Isaiah 6, to John 1, to 2 Corinthians 4 and on through to Revelation 21-22. The glory of God is the beginning, the centre, and the end of all that God is and does.
2. *Kenosis* – this is the Greek word that Paul uses in Philippians 2 to describe the self-emptying or divestment in which Christ Jesus gives up the glory he shares with God from all eternity to become a servant in his work of salvation. The parabola of grace then sweeps up again through his resurrection and exaltation to the glory he shares with the Father. In doing so he redefines our previous notions of the nature of glory which is no longer to rule through domination as Genesis 1 has often been wrongly interpreted but rather by the humble service of tending and caring for the entire creation, whether the earth and the other elements, or our fellow humans and other creatures. When humanity as a whole or certain individuals or groups take too much power, abusing others on our shared

planet, God's holiness is infringed, human righteousness is distorted, and the entire creation is threatened and damaged. Philippians 2 reinterprets the false understanding of the role that God commands and expects of humanity in Genesis 1-2. The glory of God is manifest in the grace of Jesus. Kabhod is incarnate in the kenotic form of Christ.

3. *Kinesis* – this is the Greek word for movement whether that be the sending of God's son Jesus on his mission of salvation or the sending of the Spirit in the work of empowerment and sanctification. Both the Son and the Spirit are the agents of God's glory in the salvation of this sin-shattered world. Dependent on and within the embrace of their mutual ministry, the church is energised to witness to the gospel of the Triune God with a particular accent now upon the whole creation being held together and reconciled by the cosmic Christ of John 1, Ephesians 1, and Colossians 1. The glory of God (kaboth) is known in the self-emptying grace of Christ (kenosis) and the empowering movement of the Spirit (kinesis).

Given the above three aspects the following three features should feature in the church's faithful response to God amidst the contemporary climate crisis:

- (i) *Simplicity* – the phrase 'enough is enough' spells this out nicely. It indicates that we are called by God to appreciate that we have enough for our needs and are not to be tempted to covet or claim an excessive amount of goods, resources, or power. The life of Jesus is the clear embodiment of this. The phrase also indicates that God is angered by the human desire to live beyond our means at the expense of our fellow humans, fellow creatures, and the manifold creation itself. By doing so we are both contradicting the will of God and threatening to the point of destruction our shared life on planet earth. A stark statistic may focus our minds – the average person in the UK consumes as much in six days as an average person in Malawi does in one year.

- (ii) *Empathy* – Jesus’ great commandment is that we are to love God with all our faculties, and our neighbour as ourselves. The concept of neighbour can legitimately be extended to include all aspects of the planetary home (neighbourhood) that God has blessed us with. Since it is the object and arena of God’s love, we are called to love creation too with a heart-felt desire to care for every individual, entity, and aspect with Christ-like respect and compassion.
- (iii) *Humility* – we human beings were created from ‘humus’, the very dust of the earth that God breathed life into. However wonderful our spiritual status before God we are also intimately connected to the soil from which we came and should never get above ourselves in proud arrogance over people, creatures, or creation itself. To be ‘earthed’ and humble, is not something to be despised but is the very way in which we demonstrate our true humanity as Philippians 2 makes clear. The common linguistic roots of the words ‘humus’, ‘human’, and ‘humility’ are deeply instructive.

These three qualities of simplicity, empathy, and humility are part of the ethos of the church. When Christians live like this they are doing so to the glory of God, in obedience to the kenotic Christ, empowered by the kinetic Spirit who transforms our lives. This does not spell out specific policies or legislation. That responsibility lies with PCI’s General Assembly. But it does indicate some guidelines and directions for our present and future life as a church amidst the climate crisis now upon us from which policy and legislation may emerge. Finally, one more statistic worth bearing in mind - a recent survey revealed that 40% of young people in the UK feel acute climate anxiety.

Some Suggested Biblical Texts:

Genesis 1-2; 3; 6:10-9:28

Exodus 16:17-17

Leviticus 23; 25

Deuteronomy 14:22-29

Job 28; 38-41

Psalms 1, 8, 19, 42, 65, 67, 84, 89, 95, 98, 104, 147, 148

Proverbs 8

Song of Songs

Isaiah 1, 5, 11, 24, 35, 55, 65:17-25

Jeremiah 14:1-9; 17:5-13

Ezekiel 37

Hosea 14

Joel

Amos 9

Matthew 6:25-34

Mark 4:1-20; 26-34

John 1: 1-18; 15:1-17

Romans 8:18-25

1 Corinthians 3:1-9

Ephesians 1:3-14

Philippians 2

Colossians 1:15-20

Revelation 21-22

Some Suggested Praise Resources:

*Irish Presbyterian Hymnal (IPH):*

5 Morning has broken

17 All creatures of our God and King

18 All things bright and beautiful

19 Fairest Lord Jesus

20 For the beauty of the earth

26 Let us with a gladsome mind

30 'O bless the Lord, my soul!' I sing

31 O Lord of every shining constellation

32 O Lord of heaven and earth and sea

33 O worship the king, all-glorious above

34 There are hundreds of sparrows

35 Think of a world without any flowers

36 Who put the colours in the rainbow?

37 God in His love for us lent us this planet

38 Lord, bring the day to pass

39 Sing praise to God on mountain tops

40 We cannot own the sunlit sky

41 All beautiful the march of days

42 Fill your hearts with joy and gladness

43 Lord of the changing year

44 Mercy, blessing, favour, grace

46 The earth is Yours, O God

Harvest Hymns: IPH Hymns Number 50-60

110 All the ends of the earth

541 I, the Lord of sea and sky

628 Beauty for brokenness

Songs from the album *Doxecology* by Resound Worship

Many other praise resources can be accessed via the internet.

#### Sample Prayers:

1st Prayer: God of creation, Lord of the cosmos, as the psalmist reminds us, your beloved creation renders praise. Since morning has broken, and darkness recedes, so our eyes are opened and our hearts awoken, to the wonder of your power, to the splendour of your love. Rivers and oceans clap their hands, hills and mountains sing for joy, valleys echo to the jubilation and celebration of a world that you cradle in the hollow of your hand. And joining this cosmic choir, we, your children, praise you gladly, voices raised in ancient psalm, in treasured hymn and in modern song. Lord God, help us to better understand the intricate ways in which your good creation has been called into being, and continues to flourish, nourished by regular pattern and changing process. And as our knowledge grows, or older wisdom returns, may we come to realise our own part in our planet's peril. May we learn the pathos of lament, practice the necessity to confess and repent, for we have spent our time, our energy, our money, on dreams of plenty at earth's expense. Heedless of the damage done to your precious creation with

its delicate ecosystems: we ask for your forgiveness. Careless in our regard for the poorest of peoples, who are least to blame and yet most vulnerable, for the devastation we have done: we ask for your forgiveness. Mindless in our pursuit of self-concern for creature-comforts, impoverishing the dear gifts of our shared home: we ask for your forgiveness. May the words of Jesus echo in our ears: to consider the world around us as freely given, and therefore not the object of greed, or avarice or exploitation. Let your rule reign in our lives, as Jesus lived it; and may your Spirit so empower us that the way of Christ may be the pattern of our lives and the path to a better future. Let us relearn that deep instinct to celebrate your goodness, to appreciate your providence, to practice some measure of Sabbath rest. May we slow down enough from the rush and fret of weekly worries to be in sync with a different rhythm, the rhythm of Jesus walking at a leisurely pace; the rhythm of unhurried conversation with the people we meet; the rhythm of taking the time to get to know ourselves better in the light of your love, and the gift of your grace. Amen. [or ending with *The Lord's Prayer*]

2<sup>nd</sup> Prayer: Generous God, God of the Open Hand, we turn to you with gratitude, glad to return our thanks, for all that you have given in the past, provide at present, and promise to bless us with in a future yet to come. As Creator, the Living Source of goodness, beauty, and truth, we praise you for planet earth, your precious gift, our beloved home, no ordinary world, but full of wonder, splendour, and awe. This speck in outer space, this sphere of green and blue, is a place of stable physical laws, of fine-tuned ecosystems, whose intricate interactions we can but marvel at. Yet now we know, as never before, that the ground we stand on is fragile and fraught, fought over for its assets, vulnerable to the assaults of human rapacity. We lament, O Lord, the ways in which we have abused your good creation, for now, we dimly begin to see how our desire for more, our obsession with consumption, have damaged our shared home to the point of crisis. Moved by your Holy Spirit, may we repent of self-centredness, learning afresh that



enough is enough; that there is greater sense and satisfaction in restraining our hand, in curbing our excess, for we have lived in a manner that is unsustainable, indeed, destructive. We pray that our planet's life-systems, now under such stress, may yet regain their well-being, replenished by the dynamic of your restoring power. We recall that Jesus himself, though full to overflowing with the abundance of your glory, yet lived a frugal life, a disarming mix of the simple and the celebratory, yet never at the expense of the neighbour beside him, or creation around him. May we, like him, live light upon the earth, treading with a gentle strength, amidst the cares, and hurts and dreams of those we daily encounter. And for those most vulnerable and troubled at present, we pray your presence and your peace . . . *specific intercessions* . . . God of the highest heavens, beyond our ability to see or imagine, we thank you that you are also down-to-earth, an abiding, nearby presence, as Jesus was and is and always will be. We bless you for your sending of Jesus, coming into this good creation which you have made through your Son and Spirit, redeeming it from within when glory had turned to tragedy, so that by his grace, your beleaguered but beloved world might yet become a new creation in Christ our Lord. Amen.