

changing church

CLIMATE CHANGE

PRIORITISING CREATION:

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GOSPEL ISSUE OF OUR TIME



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Prioritising creation: Climate change is a key gospel issue of our time

Climate change is a key gospel issue because the good news of Jesus is about the renewal of all things. Human beings are made for connection, with God, with other people and with the world around us. We can think about the critical importance of climate change through these three relationships.

These connections are established in the creation account in Genesis 1. On the first six days God creates the heavens and the earth, land and sea, plants and animals, and God created all things good. To crown His creation, God created human beings and places them as His partners to steward and cultivate all He had made. Humanity is created to be priests of God's garden temple.

The health and wellbeing of our connection with God and the people around us is linked to our connection with God's creation. In Genesis 3 we read about the fractures that occur as a result of humanity ignoring God's vision for human flourishing and establishing for themselves what is good and evil. Humanity is ejected from the garden and the ground is cursed. As the story of scripture unfolds, humanity far more often abuse and exploit creation rather than steward it to flourish.

As God establishes a people through whom He will bless all nations, we continue to see how our connection with God and other people is linked to our connection with creation.

The people of Israel are promised a land to steward and cultivate. God instructs Israel that every seven years they are to give the land a year of sabbath rest. The people of God are not to exploit the land, but to lovingly steward creation and bring it to flourish. Sadly, despite the wisdom of God's instructions, we find that the land is mistreated and becomes desolate rather than fruitful.

Into this landscape, the prophet Ezekiel speaks words of hope, promising that "this land that was laid waste [will] become like the garden of Eden" (Ezekiel 36: 35), and the prophet Isaiah speaks of a time when God will "create new heavens and a new earth" (Isaiah 65:17). The promised restoration involves reconciliation between God and humanity, between people, and between humanity and God's creation.

At the heart of the story of scripture is the mysterious and joyful moment when the one through whom all things were created took on flesh and made His dwelling among us (John 1:14). In the person of Jesus, the creator comes to His own creation as one who is created.

Paul sums up the purpose of Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension when he writes to the church in Colossae that through Jesus all things, things on earth and in heaven, will be reconciled to God (Colossians 1:19-20). No part of God's creation is left out of His grand rescue plan. Through Jesus' subsequent sending of the Holy Spirit, the people of God again receive the promise that one day there will be healing and wholeness for all creation. Significantly, Paul connects the redemption of humanity and new life in the Spirit as being intimately related to the liberation that the whole of creation is longing for (Romans 8:21-22).

Isaiah's language of new creation continues in Paul's letters to the church in Corinth. Jesus' resurrection is referred to as the first fruits (1 Corinthians 15:20-23), providing a foretaste of what's to come with the promised new creation. Paul also exhorts believers in Corinth that if they are united with Christ, they are new creations. The echoes of Isaiah find their fulfilment in Revelation 21 as John describes a vision of a new heaven and a new earth, one in which God declares he is making everything new.

As people who are united in Christ, we are called to partner with God's Spirit in this work of renewal. We embrace our partnership with God to steward and cultivate His good creation into all that it was created to be. Our relationship with God requires us to treat His creation with love and care as we partner in the Holy Spirit's perfecting of all things.

Tragically, God's creation has continued to be exploited and abused and we're seeing the disastrous effects of this around

the world, often affecting the poorest and most vulnerable. Climate change is having devastating consequences for our global neighbours, whom Jesus calls us to love. Loving our neighbours requires us to live in ways that will see creation be a place of flourishing for all people.

We have been created to live in connection with the world around us. As communities of the new humanity in Jesus, we are called to offer glimpses of the life of the age to come. That includes living in relationship with creation in ways that will see it flourish, offering a glimpse of a time when God will make His dwelling amongst His people and will declare that He is making everything new. As the Lord's prayer says, "Your kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven."

As we participate in God's mission of making all things new, through loving our neighbours and caring for creation, we witness to the God of love Himself. Our acts of love and sacrifice point to the one who gave up everything, allowing Himself to be killed on a cross so that through Him, all things would eventually find healing and wholeness. The more we understand how creation care ties into the gospel as a whole, the better we can communicate this good news to others.

