

## **One World reflection for 10<sup>th</sup> October 2021. By Tessa Carrick**

None of us can be unaware of the fact we are part of one planet – just thinking about the Covid-19 pandemic brings this home to us very forcibly. We know that it is just as important that the people in Brazil and Kenya and Afghanistan are vaccinated as that we are. We are all in the world together.

The messages coming from David Attenborough and Grete Thunberg emphasise the fact that we are One World. We know that the melting of ice at the poles because of global warming will cause sea level rise and that already some people have lost their land. We have heard that many coastal cities will be affected. We cannot avoid the realisation that what each of us does have global effects.

It is said that the fluttering of a butterfly in the USA reverberates across the planet. The way we live our lives, the choices we make not only affect us ourselves but have consequences across the globe.

The oft quoted prophetic poem written by John Donne in 1623 *Reflection XVII* still rings true today:

*No man is an island entire of itself,  
Every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.  
If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less ....  
And it continues ...  
Any man's death diminishes me,  
Because I am involved in mankind.*

A little bit of autobiography: Some of you may know that when I was 22 I went to Massachusetts as a postgraduate student. My scholarship paid for my travel and my national insurance and I paid for my place in the college and my board in a hall of residence by working as a teaching assistant.

My first job there was to go collecting newts for students to study them. Someone remarked there weren't as many newts there as there had been in the past. They had been collecting newts in this same place every year for 40 years! They didn't make the connection that their activity was having an impact on the population.

Move on a dozen years to the early 1970s and I was training biology teachers at Reading University. I also ran a course in Environmental Education. I had a wonderful mix of experienced teachers – senior primary teachers, 3 very experienced rural studies teachers who were all exceptional naturalists, 3 students from The Gambia, 2 from India and a British student who had been studying the Benin Empire in Nigeria – he became a Professor of Geography

later on. An American so-called environmental education expert came to talk to my students. He told them he loved the countryside and with his family every weekend he drove over a hundred miles each way to his country house. One of my students broke in quite indignantly, “How could he come to talk to us about looking after the environment when he mistreated the environment so badly, using resources by making this weekly journey in his guzzling car and running a second large freezer continuously.” This illustrates the dilemma we are all in – we value our environment, yet the way we live our lives has a big impact on it. The message about the adverse way we have affected our environment is not new – it is just more urgent and better understood.

We have known about the harm we have been doing for so long, but now when things are so desperate, no-one can ignore the damage we have and continue to do to the environment. We now understand that animals and plants coexist as part of an ecosystem. Since 1970 populations of wildlife across the globe have declined by 60%! When some species are lost or decline, these ecosystems fall apart.

Environmentalists talk about ecosystem services, the way in which an activity of an ecosystem benefits humans – that is, ideas such as the facts that bees and other insects pollinate our crops and so help produce food, that trees can influence the movement of water through the ecosystem, and so on. If we use chemicals which kill off both harmful and beneficial insects, what happens about pollination; if we cut down forests this, too, has an impact on climate both locally and globally.

The Old Testament lesson I chose has often seemed confusing to me – even in utopia, a lion is not likely to lie down with a lamb. But reflecting on the passage, I see that in a world in balance there is the possibility of populations of one species living alongside another species, a kind of equilibrium between the populations.

In an undisturbed environment different species live alongside each other. Any disturbance to the environment causes a reaction –so you suddenly find that a new species entering a community, brought in perhaps with our food, will displace another species. Along our Spadesbourne stream alien Himalayan Balsam or Policeman’s Helmets displaces other plants. In the stream the small, highly tolerant freshwater shrimps become more numerous at the expense of other less tolerant species. Food chains get out of balance. A warming climate has meant that caterpillars develop earlier and have become adults by the time the nestling birds need them as food; the seasonal pattern is disrupted. Excessive fishing removes small sand eels in the North Sea; their decline in numbers affect both larger fish and sea birds. The equilibrium is disturbed in

each of these examples. By joining one of the environmental organisations such as the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust we can help protect the countryside but there is much more we need to do.

What **can** we do? A small group from the Mission Committee is looking at what we can do as a church and we are now registered on the Eco Church site, with the backing of our church council, the DCC. As you know, we have developed part of our grounds to enhance wildlife. We will try to fulfil all the criteria for becoming at least a Bronze Level Eco Church. In some aspects like use of our land we are doing well. In others we have a long way to go to become more environmentally friendly. We can do our utmost as individuals and as a church to adapt our buildings, our homes and our way of life to reduce our energy usage and particularly our use of fossil fuels; we can make better attempts to use local produce which has not travelled across the globe – but even that is complicated because it may affect others' way of life in a far off country. If we use asparagus from the Vale of Evesham, what is the impact on the asparagus growers I met in Peru? Is the motto "Think globally, act locally" a sufficient guide? All these things I have mentioned are quite small scale – they may help, but the most important thing we can do is to put pressure on our government to act on a grander scale, to change technologies and legislation. So get writing to your MP, to Sajid Javid, and let him know how important it is that the government act in this country and work with other countries to make a difference NOW.

We know that many species have declined; many are heading for extinction; we can see that the global climate is changing, affecting countries across the world; some land is being lost already as sea levels rise. We cannot wait to act, we need to do all we can now – alone we do not make much impact; together we can make a huge difference by putting pressure on the country's leaders. We must not lose hope that things can change. Let us resolve to act NOW.

Looking at today's Gospel, the story of the rich young man and his feeling about what he must do to follow Jesus, is reflected in my own feelings about what we need to do to look after our planet, God's creation. I really don't want to manage without some things I have grown used to – travel, a wide variety of clothes, possessions, etc. I don't want to pay more for recycled toilet paper and fairtrade goods. I don't want to wear my clothes longer between washes or always to be thinking about environmentally friendly choice of fabrics and use of the world's resources. I am reluctant to change to take the steps to move to an environmentally friendly energy source or to make the effort to write or lobby our MP. We are all caught up in this struggle between what our heads and hearts say we ought to do as a church and as individuals for God's world - our instincts are to go for the quickest or simplest mode of travel, the cheapest

option, or the one which we really want for ourselves – we all face the conflict between what we know is right and our dreams and desires. Each of us has to make choices all the time – and as followers of Jesus I think we have to consider what is right for God’s creation at least as much as meeting our own desires. It’s tough but we cannot wait – it won’t get easier!

In the recent Songs of Praise, Pam chose *Beauty for brokenness*. The 4<sup>th</sup> verse reads;

*Rest for the ravaged earth,  
Oceans and streams,  
Plundered and poisoned,  
Our future, our dreams.  
Lord, end our madness,  
Carelessness, greed;  
Make us content with  
the things that we need.*

....

*Come change our love  
From a spark to a flame.* (Graham Kendrick way back in 1950)

**That seems a good message for us today.**

**The Old Testament lesson is from the Book of Isaiah, Chapter 11, verses 6 to 9.**

The wolf shall lie down with the lamb,  
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,  
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,  
and a little child shall lead them.

The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together;  
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,  
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder’s den.

They will not hurt or destroy  
on all my holy mountain;  
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord  
as the waters cover the sea.

**Gospel:** Mark 10: 17-31 as set in the Lectionary and on the Red Reading Sheet.