

WHY SHOULD YOUR CHURCH COMMIT TO A LIVING LENT?

Sunday 17th March
Second Sunday in Lent.

Genesis 15:1 -12, 17-18

Luke 13:31-35

Philippians 3: 17 - 4: 1

Psalms 27

Lectionary themes:

Throughout the lectionary readings this week there is a theme of generational responsibility: Abram hopes for and is promised future generations and a land for them to be in; the psalmist comments on God's faithfulness even if their father and mother forsake them; Jesus comments that he longs to gather the children; Paul comments on his modelling of faith for the next set of believers.

This gives the living lent preacher the opportunity to reflect on how different generations may feel about living in an environmentally friendly way: younger generations may feel they have inherited a situation that wasn't caused by them and leaves them desolate, where older generations may fear that their offspring won't have somewhere to exist safely.

The obvious eco-links: Philippians 3: 17- 4:1

Philippians looks at those whose 'destiny is destruction' and whose minds are on earthly things not heavenly. This asks the question about whether we should be concentrating on the earth in Lent, and it might be a time to address those within your church community who have these concerns. Here, the suggestion is that as Jesus comes from heaven to earth we will all be transformed. The implication is that Jesus and the kingdom of heaven is something that comes to earth, so salvation is something that encompasses and transforms the earth. The psalm highlights this present tense nature of salvation in its prayer "I remain confident of this; I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living".

The gospel in light of Living Lent: Luke 13: 31-35

This passage of Luke sees Jesus lamenting over the nation's lack of response to God and its impending abandonment. This is something we might feel is ecologically true.

The Pharisees come to warn Jesus of Herod's negative intentions towards him. In response Jesus calls him a fox, a term which implies someone who is deceptive, or someone who is a destroyer. The imagery of a fox prowling over ruins is used in old testament imagery such as Ezekiel 13:4 or Lamentations 5:18. As Living Lent preachers, we might wonder if there are corrupt power structures or people today who gain from destruction.

Similarly, we might want to think about the personal cost of being prophets. Jesus suggests that he is safe until he gets to the city, where prophets meet their destruction. Jerusalem is symbolically significant as it represents the wider nation. Jerusalem is shown to be a place which kills the people who are sent to warn them, yet the double vocative in the Greek 'O Jerusalem, O Jerusalem' shows a sorrowful tone as well as prophetic (just like in Jesus calling to Martha in Luke 10:41), which suggests that despite the destruction, the city is a place and people that Jesus loves. Here it is suggested that whatever our actions to others, God still loves us and wants to reach out for us.

This is further emphasised by Jesus's desire to gather his children like a broody hen. God is often described with the imagery of a bird in the Old Testament. This is interesting in itself, for eco-preachers, as God uses images of creation to show his love of us. But the key point here is that what prevents God from showing the protective care over his people is not his desire to do so, but their refusal of his affection and protection.

This rejection by Jerusalem means that the house they inherit will be left to them bare. In Matthew's version and the psalm of our lectionary today, the language is explicit that the house is left empty and unprotected and Jerusalem's inhabitants will not see God's messenger until he comes as a messianic figure who brings God's deliverance and justice.

How does this prophetic conversation relate to living in an eco-friendly way this Lent?

We might wonder at how we have treated those who have prophesied the nation's desolation and destruction before, especially in the context of climate change, and whether our refusal to hear the warnings that have been spoken over us leave us with an exposed house, rather than under God's protective care. We must, as a powerful nation, acknowledge the way we have not heeded the warnings of the past and the present and changed our actions. We might look to powerful leaders in politics and business as foxes, people who can gain from devastation and ruin, and yet we must not miss that the religious leaders of the day were in comfortable conversation with these leaders. Jesus' life was at risk for what he was saying and doing, but the Pharisees did not seem to be.

- This leaves the question of whether we are willing to take our place amongst the prophets with the potential personal destruction that might entail?
- How do we raise these issues in our nation so that people can hear the potential for change and for receiving God's love?

This refusal of people to accept God's care of them suggests that God cannot protect the planet and us unless we let him. We might feel that we are in an impossible place in climate change with what we have inherited, and that we have inherited a house that is bare, but the love that Jesus has for Jerusalem, despite their destructive tendencies, suggests that there is salvation available, and that there is still a future chance to meet the coming One who brings deliverance and justice. The question is whether we want to be on the side of the prophets or those who do the stoning?



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