

November 15th talk Hope for Creation in Christ

The original sermon was prepared by Revd Dave Bookless, National Director, A Rocha UK, for Churches Together in Britain and Ireland.

Creation Time resources 2008 from the A Rocha website

This year we have not asked a visiting speaker to talk to us, but we are going to present to you a talk entitled "Hope for Creation in Christ", based on a sermon by the Rev Dave Bookless, one of the founders of the Christian environmental group A Rocha.

We will give you Dave Bookless's own introduction and conclusion, and members of our "Green group" will try to cover the rest of the sermon in their own words.

Introduction

Every now and then something happens which gives you a completely new perspective on life. It may be an experience – from the wonder of falling in love to the pain of dealing with bereavement, or it may be a new concept or idea. Sometimes a scientific discovery is made which changes how we see everything. Imagine how threatening it was when Copernicus realised that the earth was not the centre of the universe but that it – and all the other planets – revolved around the sun. At that time, some church leaders accused him of heresy and for many more it was a profoundly uncomfortable shift in their world view.

Today we are at one of those moments. As a global community we need to change completely the way we see planet earth and our place upon it. As Christians, we also need to change how we see the 'Gospel' and our 'mission'. In both cases we have been guilty of putting ourselves as humanity right at the centre, of seeing everything revolving around us. We have seen the earth simply as resources for our consumption. We have seen the Gospel as simply the story of God and people. In both cases, we are beginning to realise we've been wrong and need to change.

From Iris Neel:

We have heard two parables, superficially rather similar, both dealing with vineyards, which must have been very familiar to Jewish listeners in the times of both Isaiah and Jesus.

However the subject is different in the two tales. The subject of Isaiah's vineyard is the disobedience of God's chosen people, who, having been provided with everything they needed, rebelled, turned away from God and did evil.

God chose a people to be his own. They were to be an example to the nations around them and eventually to the rest of the world. The Jews were meant to show others how to relate to God and how to live within the land, but as we saw in Isaiah, they failed and were punished by a foreign invader, probably the Assyrians, who laid waste to their land.

Jesus describes his vineyard in a similar way to Isaiah's but this time it is the vineyard which is important. Calling this the Parable of the Tenants misreads the story. That would put people right in the centre, but here the vineyard is central. Jesus is thinking of the bigger picture, creation or the earth, our environment. The vineyard is vital to God's purposes.

So Jesus goes much further in his parable than Isaiah does. He warns in Matthew 21 verse 43 that the Kingdom of God will be taken away from the Jews and given to people who will produce fruit. Jesus tells us that God trusted the people who rented the vineyard to look after it, he didn't interfere with them, but he did expect to receive the harvest. He was very patient

sending messenger after messenger to the tenants until finally he sent his son, Jesus himself, to appeal to them.

Is there a message for us today?

From Aline Ongley:

We could say that God has lent us His world and regards us as His tenant farmers.

As outlined in Genesis 1 we were made in the image of God and this involves looking after His world

In fact, the very first command and commission given to mankind was to look after and develop His creation as His trusted stewards.

God has not abandoned His world, or, as it is referred to in this parable, His vineyard but rather created us and entrusted us to look after it.

However, instead of nurturing the fruits of His creation and recognising that it is God who provides the bounty, and therefore giving praise to Him before taking only what we need, we have become proud and tried to usurp God by treating creation as if it belongs to us. This has led us to use and abuse creation and treat the produce of Gods' vineyard as if it was our own. We have ignored the many voices both past and present that cry out that our misuse of creation is in fact an act of rebellion against God himself.

Finally, God as owner of the vineyard sent his Son to show us how to live a proper relationship with God, our neighbours and with creation. However, He was put to death by the people at that time.

Jesus's story of the vineyard ends here with the killing of the Son and the judgement that the owner will bring upon the tenants. But let us see what happens if we continue the story to the end of the New Testament.

From Janet Holdstock:

We know that although Jesus died, three days later he rose again, defeating death, and we celebrate the resurrection.

As Christians this gives us hope and a new start and covenant with God.

That, then, leaves us with the problem of the vineyard, the world, as this is part of God's purpose for his whole creation.

Bishop Tom Wright says "God will redeem the whole universe. Jesus's resurrection is the beginning of new life, fresh grass growing through the concrete of corruption and decay in the old world. This redemption is when heaven and earth are joined together at last."

God sent Jesus to give us this hope. So we can be changed as people and changed in our care for creation.

We are failed tenants of God's creation. Paul says in Romans chapter 8 it is a painful transition for us to stop the decay and carelessness we see around us.

We are God's children and his tenants, but have forgotten to act on instructions in Genesis chapter 1. This was God's decree to care for his world.

Jesus tells us that there is a new hope for creation - all of creation: people, creatures, and the environment that supports us all.

We can do this in his power. The church, that is us, need to have the vision and mission in our Christian life, with the guidance of God.

Conclusion

There is hope for the planet. That hope does not lie in better science and technology, although those will help. It does not lie in political decisions, although those are vital. It does not lie in frantic, desperate attempts to save a sinking ship. It lies in the person and work of Christ, the one by whom and for whom all things were made, and in whom all things hold together), and it lies in Christ's people rediscovering their vocation.

Let us recommit ourselves to doing that together, to being those for whom the creation is waiting in eager expectation. Let us be God's people working in the vineyard of his creation to his glory.