

AYLESFORD NOVEMBER 18 CARE FOR CREATION talk at 10 am by Helen Longley, reader at St Peter and St Paul's Church, Tonbridge.

#### OPENING PRAYER:

Lord of beauty, help us now through the wisdom of your Holy Spirit to hear your word of truth;

Lord of love, help us to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is your love for us in Christ..

Lord of wisdom, help us through the power of your Holy Spirit to discern your way for each one of us..in the name of Jesus, servant king..

#### INTRODUCTION

Thank you for the privilege of being invited to share this glorious act of worship... Thank you Claire and Iris and the rest of the green team!

Now, what has this beautiful patchwork quilt to do with care for creation?..... Look at it... The history of patchwork is the history of recycling, sharing what we have and protecting the young and vulnerable!! Americans are about to enjoy Thanksgiving, when they remember the safe arrival of pilgrims leaving Britain and celebrate that first harvest. In every American school there are pageants with children dressed as pilgrim fathers in their tall black hats, fat turkeys strutting across the stage, bright yellow corn cobs and pumpkin pies in profusion!! But half those early colonists died during the first bitter winter – through cold, lack of food and lack of shelter.. patchwork quilting became their survival kit – scraps of material stitched together to make a warm covering; scraps of material shared among the women who would sit together as they stitched quilted bed linen; quilted jackets; quilted wall hangings; quilted crib blankets for babies – anything to keep the cold at bay and protect the young.... Protecting the future generation.. How appropriate that we are looking at our Christian responsibilities to care for creation today of all days - because tomorrow, November 19<sup>th</sup> a manifesto is being presented to the European Parliament by young people across the world – who want their voices – the future generation – to be heard. It's the result of a 3 year international project called Make the Link-Climate exChange. 3 years' research working together has left young people around the world in no doubt that our activities are directly affecting our climate. They are singularly unimpressed with the way adults are handling the legacy of God's beautiful but fragile earth.

The patchwork quilt is a vivid image of how by sharing what we have and working together, we can create something beautiful and life giving. This is a sampler patchwork each patch made by a different person – flowers; a beehive;

geese in flight . That lovely hymn we sang at the beginning of this service.. Lord of beauty, thine the splendour shown in earth and sky and sea....what a beautiful world God has created for us to live in, hasn't He? Have you stopped in wonder this month to gaze at some of the glorious rainbows by day and fiery red sunsets in the evening sky?

The rainbow – symbol of God's promise to his people....' As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest will never cease'. We've just been singing a hymn for the green earth with the words: Open our hearts to your grace now revealing; New ways to work and move, dream, share and thrive. Let us rejoice in your covenant rainbow'. joyful words of praise. The rainbow is the image chosen by Operation Noah on their leaflet entitled : 'Climate change and the purposes of God: a call to the church.' The challenge Operation Noah puts to us is not an economic one; it is deeply spiritual and rooted in God's covenant of grace. It's a call to repentance for our greed, our waste and our lack of compassion for those who have no voice – the poorest in our world who suffer most from our excess. It's a call to live more simply that others may simply live. It's a call to take up the cause of our Creator God to cherish His gift of life on planet earth. What does the Lord require of you, asks prophet Micah? To act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.' This is the key verse which has been chosen for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in January next year.

Act justly, love mercy and walk humbly....in the parable read to us from Matthew, Jesus pinpoints with devastating clarity what our King is looking for – not - how many times have you read the Bible, been to church, said your prayers.... But I was hungry and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger and you invited me in; I needed clothes and you clothed me... Jesus never said 'follow me for an easy life' He said ' follow me to the cross.... The way of sacrificial loving' HOLD UP CROSS OF BULLETS... the most poignant recycling of all – this is a cross fashioned by a soldier in WW1 – made out of bullets.....

But here's the thing: we have so much information to absorb that it overwhelms us – melting glaciers; water shortage; disappearing rain forests; too much CO2 because of oil consumption; landfill sites full of waste... This little book came out 5 years ago – 101 ways you can make a difference. You can save the planet! I read it, agree with it, plan to put the ideas into action and immediately I can feel battle fatigue and combat stress settling in. Where to start? Where is God's justice in all this? How do we determine what we can do individually and as part of the body of Christ on earth?

The song we are next going to sing puts it succinctly: if you want to change the world, then change your life... The patchwork quilt has each patch, separately sewn; but linked together it offers life-giving protection to others.

WATER is life giving. Over a billion people have no access to clean water and have to walk long distances to collect it each day. Here is a one litre bottle of water – most of us use 150 of these bottles a day; but in many countries consumption per person is only 5 litres...lack of clean water brings disease; lack of any water brings death.

At Aylesford Priory some years back, Michael Taylor, then head of Christian aid, gave a talk in one of the chapels there. He described how ten years earlier, he had visited a young priest in drought-ridden Kenya who had started to plant small trees, walking several miles each day to the nearest river to keep the plants watered. Michael said he'd looked at these bedraggled plants and couldn't imagine how they would survive. Ten years later he returned and didn't recognise the landscape – no longer a wilderness but rich in luxuriant growth – one man faithfully caring for the patch God had given him to tend, bringing life to the people he pastored and to the landscape they lived in.

What patch has God given to each one of us to tend? It might be sowing and growing plants to attract pollinators like bees..... (hold up seed packets... cosmos, marigold, fennel) Fennel... during the Middle Ages the seeds of Fennel were munched on during boring sermons! It might be carbon fasting - getting on the bike instead of in the car; giving what we save to help a vulnerable neighbour hundreds of miles away build a water tank. But the good news is that Claire and the environmental group are giving us a headstart. During the singing of the next song, slips of paper with 2 challenges are going to be given out to each of us – inviting us to tend a small patch of planet earth...If the challenge is inappropriate, we're not let off the hook, we have to arrange a swop with someone else! We all have to leave the church with 2 challenges to take on during the next week.

KIPLING: glory of the Garden

There's not a pair of legs so thin, there's not a head so thick

There's not a hand so weak and white, nor yet a heart so sick.

But it can find some needful job that's crying to be done

For the glory of the garden glorifieth everyone.

Oh Adam was a gardener, and God who made him sees

That half a proper gardener's work is done upon his knees

So when your work is finished, you can wash your hands and pray

For the glory of the garden that it may not pass away!

And the glory of the garden it shall never pass away