**A Sermon by one of our vicars, Rev Helen Burnett (St Peter & St Paul’s Chaldon) drawing on the links between Climate Justice & Racial Justice**

**Readings**:

Psalm 133

Isaiah 54: 1-14

Luke 13: 31 – end

Psalm 98 **(Music)**

I feel a bit of a split personality today - at our morning services at St Peter and St Paul’s in my parish in Chaldon we were celebrating Black History Month and here I am with you this evening to celebrate the Season of Creation. I suspect I am here because I have a bit of reputation as an activist priest when it comes to the threat of climate change.

These ‘seasons’ are of course in grave danger of being ‘tokenistic’ as both promote causes and ideas that should be part of our daily lives; racial equality and climate change demand our constant attention.

The two issues come together not just in my day of services but sadly as a shared wound because climate breakdown disproportionately affects the global majority world and black and brown communities. So yes, climate change is racist.

It is hard perhaps on a wet Sunday evening, in a world where we can see with our own eyes the very real effects of biodiversity loss and global warming, to feel celebratory - but I hope to bring inspiration to Creationtide here, from our focus in Chaldon on BHM.

One of last year’s (2024) BHM advocates - Cherron Inko-Tariah reflecting on her own story says this:

‘be a chess *player*, not a chess *piece*’

Now I have a very, very rudimentary understanding of chess but I think the pawns are the easily expendable ones, so presumably no one wants to be a pawn, if being a pawn means you are sacrificed to save the king.

In the light of clear and visible climate breakdown and of negligent inaction by those who have the power to make policy decisions for good, it is easy for us all to feel like the pieces, *not* the players, and lowly pawns at best.

But the whole of Jesus’ teaching here is about being a player:

‘Listen I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow and on the third day I finish my work’.

By enabling and encouraging the lowliest to have agency, Jesus works miracles in the world. Jesus lives out the prophecies of Isaiah, a book he refers to more than any other.

And remember that Jesus does not do this by having access to the corridors of power, Jesus has neither economic nor political power, and yet he proclaims the good news.

So, if in the midst of a climate and biodiversity emergency, we feel like pawns lacking in agency, consider what it feels like for those living in the areas most affected? Those who have done the least to create this emergency.

We live in a world where the lives of the poor are sacrificed to ensure the lifestyles of the rich, and here I don’t mean just the super-rich, I mean myself. The very comfortably off woman with money for holidays, and travelling, and treats. So, the decisions I make about purchases, travel options, diet, heating, pensions and investments give me agency.

But more than that, my faith; our faith gives us agency to act for God’s will, and in the Season of Creation we are reminded to consider care for creation through the lens of Holy Scripture.

To use this lens is to think theologically about climate change and creation care, to be at the juncture where the heart of the Christian faith meets the messy realities of the collapsing world we live in.

As people wishing to live out our faith we need to approach life in 2024 with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. Doing so results in a life that is grounded in Jesus - a life that like Jesus, is not content with ‘business as usual’…not content to be at the beck and call of the Herods of this world.

Scripture calls us to stir things up, to challenge the comfortable, and disrupt the status quo.

This is prophetic living, it is stepping out in hope even though we do not know the future, even though we may not ourselves see the future. We do this for future generations.

The prophetic community speaks truth in a world that often doesn’t want to hear it.

It cuts through denial and addresses the realities of injustice and oppression head-on.

Theology aligned with God’s Kingdom doesn’t sit on a shelf or stay in a sermon.

It’s lived out.

It’s a theology that brings hope to those in despair and justice where there’s oppression.

It’s not afraid to get messy and step into the hard places.

It listens to the cries of the earth, of the poor, of the oppressed and then it responds with action, not just words, rooted in the radical love

that refuses to let injustice and despair have the final word.

The big question is – who is listening to this good news? What if our pleas for change fall on deaf ears? If so, so be it - for it is surely always better to ‘sing to the Lord a new song’…better to ‘light a candle than to curse the darkness’… to ‘step out in hope’ rather than sit at home in despair.

For some taking action, speaking out can lead to persecution. Our siblings in the indigenous communities that protect vital areas of land are arrested and murdered for their attempts to protect the integrity of creation.

As Jesus knew only too well, in Jerusalem the truth tellers were stoned. The truth tellers of *our* age are legislated against because their words and actions defy the status quo of money and power.

The abolitionists of the 1800’s are now lauded as heroes but at the time they were vilified and persecuted.

Being prophetic can be costly.

Your website, and your spire pointing so clearly to a higher authority, proclaim your church for a sustainable future.

How do we combine sustainable and prophetic lives here on the ground, in this community?

Well, here we are gathered. Gathering, community, and worship are all sustaining actions, and our Psalm this evening calls us to ‘sing to the Lord a new song’. Music sustains us and our Psalmist points frequently to the natural world.

Nature left to itself will be fine. If you have watched David Attenborough’s film, his ‘Witness Statement’ you will understand that. If you have left a patch of ground alone for long enough, you will know that.

It is our human activity that has put us out of sync, out of balance, and in so doing we have failed our siblings in the most climate vulnerable areas of our world. And, we have destroyed the habitats of our plant and animal neighbours in the rest of creation.

But every step we take to redress that is a step back towards the kin-dom. This is a place where kinship, not kingship rules….

where in the words of Isaiah we enlarge the site of our tent, stretch out the curtains of our habitations, lengthen our cords, live generously because even now there is enough to go round. There is enough land, enough ingenuity, enough love so that all nations can thrive.

Isaiah’s song of the suffering servant turns into the eternal covenant of peace - a peace borne out of justice, this is a vision of harmony and inclusion. Each action we take towards that draws us closer to the heart of God, to the heart of the matter.

Just as the victims of the Transatlantic Slave Trade believed in and were sustained by the constancy of God, so can we draw on that steadfast love that will not depart from us.

The ‘Season of Creation’ is designed to remind us to live out the fifth Mark of Mission:

‘To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth’.

The season is drawing us back to the work that we are called to do, not diverted by others, or by greed or by fear - we too can be steadfast. Just as Jesus will not be drawn by Herod’s threats so we must resist the threats that send us running back into our safe hiding places. This is not a time to hide from the truth - this is a time to be truth tellers. To be the people gathered under the wings… the ones who do not turn away from the cries of the earth but who know the protection of God, the mother hen, the steadfast one.

A sustainable future is…

one where all are gathered under the wings,

one where foundations will be sapphires.

It is one where the desolate woman is on a level playing field with the rest of the world, where our stones are set in antimony and our pinnacles are rubies.

This world is still possible, this future is possible. Here and now, you have a part to play in bringing that future closer, and you can be players - not pawns - in the story of the future that your steeple points towards. One that you may not see, but that scripture reveals to us.

The writer of the Book of Isaiah at least 800 years before Christ said this:

**‘For the mountains may depart and the hills may be removed but my steadfast love will not depart from you’.**

The son of God, Jesus Christ in the 1st century said this:

**‘You will not see me until the time comes when you say ‘blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord’’**

The great 21st century thinker and writer Arundhati Roy said this**:**

**‘Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day I can hear her breathing.’**