

Creationtide 1, Year C

Isaiah 32:14-18, Philemon 1-21, Luke 14:25-33

Well, hasn't the summer been beautiful? And, as well, I have been fortunate enough to visit the Swiss Alps and see the magnificent mountains and glaciers in the sunshine too. I have been constantly thanking the Lord.

Of course, we know that there are places where the summer has not been good with wildfires, devastating floods in Europe and drought and famine in Africa. Global warming means that glaciers are melting and raising sea levels, threatening the submersion of some Pacific Islands.

But while we are, hopefully, concerned by these matters, I don't think that we should feel guilty about enjoying the sunshine.

Nevertheless it is not surprising that the Theme chosen for Creationtide this year is ***Peace with Creation*** or it could even be Peace for Creation. A scripture passage has been chosen as the theme, taken from Isaiah 32. Mark read it earlier and I will read it again now. It is also printed out on paper which you may have picked up this morning:

*¹⁴ The fortress will be abandoned,
the noisy city deserted;
citadel and watchtower will become a wasteland forever,
the delight of donkeys, a pasture for flocks,
¹⁵ till the Spirit is poured on us from on high,
and the desert becomes a fertile field,
and the fertile field seems like a forest.
¹⁶ The Lord's justice will dwell in the desert,
his righteousness live in the fertile field.
¹⁷ The fruit of that righteousness will be peace;
its effect will be quietness and confidence forever.
¹⁸ My people will live in peaceful dwelling places,
in secure homes,
in undisturbed places of rest.*

The prophet is saying two things. First that the flourishing fruitfulness of creation is synonymous with God's justice and righteousness living in the land.

So conversely, a suffering earth is out of sync with God's justice and righteousness. And secondly, and encouragingly, Isaiah says that the prophesied devastation is reversible.

These are verses of hope, not doom.

The context in which the prophet is speaking is the unacceptable behaviour of the people. God says they have been evil and ungodly, telling lies about God, withholding food and water from the hungry and thirsty and withholding justice from the poor and needy, destroying them. Sound familiar?

The Diocese of Edinburgh writes: "This description of devastated cities and wastelands eloquently stresses the fact that human destructive behaviours have a negative impact on the Earth."

Now the tendency, and the tradition in Creationtide, is to interpret this injustice, what the Diocese describes as human destructive behaviours, more or less solely as the direct abuse of the planet by humankind, and specifically by ourselves in our lifestyles.

And there is merit in this. We, as humankind, have been given responsibility for the management of the Earth as we read at the beginning of Genesis. It is right that we recognise this and respond appropriately.

But limiting injustice and a lack of righteousness to the way we farm, the cars we drive and the products we use - to limit lack of righteousness to these things - is, I think, to miss Isaiah's point. For Isaiah the devastation of the land is broader than this. It is a side-effect of the lack of a God-fearing personal morality and care for the disadvantaged that was - and still is - present in the community.

The state of Gaza is clearly an example of both. The ongoing war is resulting directly in the devastation of cities, homesteads, hospitals and agriculture. It is preventing humanitarian aid reaching the suffering people. There is hunger and thirst and injustice as regards the poor and needy. Land, cities and people are devastated.

But what about nearer to home? We don't have to read very deeply into the news to see that there is injustice and lack of righteousness in our society.

Is God's justice and righteousness living in our land? Can we say that? And where it is not, are we culpable as well as others? Maybe by inaction rather than action, but nevertheless...

There is a well-known couple of verses in 2 Chronicles 7 (13&14) when the LORD appears to Solomon at the dedication of the temple he has built. Here the LORD says:

"When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

It is uncomfortable to think of God as having a hand in the devastation. Easier to blame humankind for its abuse of the earth than to face up to the fact that our own approach to justice and righteousness may play a part. Lack of these are also expressions of human destructive behaviour, are they not?

I think that as the Lord's people we have a responsibility to pray and seek God's face on behalf of our own land and countries abroad. And to do so humbly, recognising that we are not perfect and have personal and collective sins of which we too need to repent.

And, like Daniel and Nehemiah, to repent on behalf of those with whom we do not share direct responsibility.

In Ezekiel (22:30), concerning the threatened devastation, God says *"I looked for someone among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found no one"*.

There is undoubtedly devastation that is caused directly by humankind's actions that affect the climate and the planet. And we do right to look at ourselves and see where we can change so we contribute less to this devastation.

In many ways it is more reassuring to concentrate on this than to face up to what Isaiah and Ezekiel teach us, which is that it is not only humankind's lack of justice towards the Earth itself that results in devastation but so too will lack of justice - and a lack of concern for justice - for people themselves, for those in Gaza, for the homeless on our streets, for those caught up in modern-day slavery or abuse of power.

We can feel overwhelmed by the scale of climate change and that any changes we make are a drop in the ocean. After all, UK emissions contribute less than 1% to global emissions. But we still have a responsibility,

But even more we have a responsibility to stand in the gap, to humble ourselves and turn from sinful ways, seek God's face, and pray for healing justice, pray that Holy Spirit is poured down from on high to reverse the devastation. Of course, it may be poured down on us to empower us to take practical steps.

In our epistle Paul is urging Philemon to go the extra mile and act with Christian love and compassion towards his runaway slave.

And in the gospel Jesus is urging his followers to be salty, self-denying contributors to his kingdom.

And when we are and we stand in the gap, it can be with much more hope and expectation than that changing our cleaning products will impact global warming. Because we have the Almighty with us. We have God's transactional promise that if we do he will heal the land. We have God's promise of the outpouring of Holy Spirit with resultant, justice, righteousness, peace and prosperity.

The way we often approach Creationtide can leave us feeling guilty and despondent. But what's not to like about partnership with God Almighty to see the outpouring of Holy Spirit to bring change and restoration?

Could we not pray together to this end from time to time?

I wonder...

Amen

Chris Shaw, 7 September 2025