

The Pro-Cathedral of Holy Trinity Brussels
7.00pm - 6th September 2009
'Creation in Crisis'
Matthew 6: 19-34

It was the loveliest of houses – stunningly beautiful – and with every facility you could imagine. It had been purpose built by the builder for the family. And very well built indeed! It met the family's needs perfectly. It had just the right number of bedrooms, the right number of bathrooms, plenty of space for expansion, it was very welcoming, it was perfect for parties, it had lots of coat pegs for visitors, lots of places to put things and just lots and lots of cupboard space.

It was warm, and light, and very comfortable. The lighting was perfect, there were plenty of electric sockets...and when you flushed the toilet downstairs the shower upstairs maintained its perfect warm temperature. There was no fear of accidentally giving someone a shock blast of freezing cold water in the middle of their shower.

Over the years the family grew. They scratched the paintwork. They made dents in the walls. They put a television in every room. They bought two tumble driers. They had air conditioning put in. They multiplied the number of electrical gadgets. They bought lots more clothes, and shoes and bags and coats. They filled every cupboard and still bought more. In the winter they liked to have the air conditioning on and in the summer the central heating. The family grew to like having two showers a day. In the summer they would water the grass and in the winter they would heat their outdoor swimming pool to 30 degrees. Gradually, gradually they reached the capacity of the electric cables – they would glow and hum with the heat. Gradually, gradually they reached the full capacity of the water system – and the pipes would rattle under the floor boards and the water would run a little slower. But all was well.

The house was fine... but year after year after year the family used everything at more than full capacity...and the gradually very gradually things began to change. The odd fuse would blow and the water in the shower would go cold when someone flushed the toilet downstairs. The windows and doors started sticking a little. The floorboards also started to creak...and then all of a sudden everything began to go wrong. Sockets started blowing off the walls, pipes began to burst and would bring down ceilings onto once beautiful carpets. In the winter the central heating would no longer get fully warm and in the summer the air conditioning would no longer keep everyone cool.

There came a day when it was really, really hot... when the three micro-waves blew up, the six washing machines bleached all the clothes, the front door stuck, the swimming pool sprang a leak, part of the roof fell in and the dog peed on the sitting room carpet, and then and only then the family decided enough was enough. They called a big family meeting. They all agreed that they could not go on like this – they all recognised that together they were putting the house under too much strain - but they could not agree what to do. They all blamed each other. The old said that it was the fault of the young and all their energy using gadgets. The young said it was the fault of the old with their love of central heating and air conditioning. But as they were arguing the side walls of the swimming pool caved in. Very hastily they agreed that they would have to be gentler with the house. They would all reduce their impact on their home by just enough to stop it falling down. And so that's what they did. They decided to keep seven televisions rather than ten, they would have two micro-waves rather than three, 1.567 showers a day instead of 2, the swimming pool would be heated to 26.5 degrees, they wouldn't eat meat on Fridays and the dog would be replaced with a cat.

And it just worked. Phew! The house just stabilised. Nothing got any worse. And everyone went about their business as normally as they could and with a great sense of relief.

Matthew 6:19

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves can break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven where moth and rust do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal, for where your treasure is your heart is also.

We have come to the moment in human history where the family of humanity is having to face up to some very unpleasant truths. For generation after generation not only have we been storing up treasures on earth, we have also been exploiting the treasures of the earth to such an extent - that the earth is under the most serious strain. The Creation is in Crisis.

This last week you may have seen on television the General-Secretary of the UN visiting the polar ice-caps to publicise that they are shrinking faster than anyone had predicted – leading to rising sea levels and the inevitable flooding of large areas of currently dry land. Also this week there has been a big UN meeting in Geneva of representatives from developing countries discussing what they need to do to cope with the climate changes that are coming their way already – flooding, drought, crop failure...

Both these events are just two of the many hundreds that will take place between now and December and the UN Climate Change Conference taking place in Copenhagen. If you have been able to ignore Climate Change issues thus far...from now on it will be pretty impossible. TV, Radio, the newspapers, the internet will all be full of the most serious predictions about the future of the planet. And the need to do something about it.

More than ever before the governments of the world recognise the problem of climate change and the need to do something urgently to save the planet from the direst consequences. But everyone blames everyone else and no one wants to make the sacrifices that are necessary.

The world of the climate change expert has developed a language all of its own. Tonight I want to remind you about four. Responsibility, Capacity, Mitigation and Adaptation.

Mitigation: the need to reduce our used of carbon-fuelled technologies urgently

Adaptation: the need for developing countries in particular to adapt the changes to the climate that are now inevitable

Responsibility: the need to recognise that we are all responsible to care for the planet – Not least the rich industrialised countries of the west – but also the developing Countries of the South

Capacity: the need for those who are capable of making the changes to get on and make them, whilst helping those to are not yet capable to have to capacity to change too.

You and I might only have limited capacity but we all have responsibility. We can all use our vote in general elections, we can also support those people who are working in the field of climate change and we can also take up our own personal responsibility to change.

I am much impressed by the emerging 10:10 campaign which is encouraging ordinary people and ordinary organisations to cut their carbon dioxide emissions by 10% by the end of 2010. Very simple and very do-able – and very appropriate for Christians to join

And here this talk could end. I have no doubt that it is Christian for us to recognise our care for a creation in crisis and to for us to use every means to join in with all that is happening to save the planet.

The Creation is in crisis – and we need to our change our ways.

I but need to say that this is only a partial Christian response – possibly an inadequate one – possibly sub Christian.

For we can never forget that the earth is the Lords and that he is intimately involved with it. That he loves it as Jesus reminds us: ‘For God so loved the world’. That God came into his world and made his home in the world. He dwelt among us and was full of grace and truth. That the ultimate destiny of the world is bound up with him.

The rest of our reading from Matthew reminds us that actually we can not save ourselves. We can not save creation anymore than we could create it. Jesus said:

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is life not more important than food and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, yet your heavenly father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you can add a single hour to his life?

Who of us can really add a single hour to the lifespan of the planet?

I fully support all that is being done to reduce our carbon dioxide emissions – and I pray that the Copenhagen discussions will exceed our expectations. But I worry that the best we will ever come up with is a patched up earth – that can never free itself from the consequences of human sin.

Salvation, Redemption, Deliverance, Liberation, Regeneration are fundamentally theological concepts. They are insights into the divine nature and activity of the one true God – the builder of the house.

Lets go back to the story of the house....

The story leaves us with the members of the family using seven televisions rather than ten. Two micro-waves rather than three, 1.567 showers a day instead of 2, the swimming pool would be heated to 26.5 degrees, they wouldn't eat meat on Fridays and the dog would be replaced with a cat. And it worked. Phew! The house just stabilised. Nothing got any worse. And everyone went about their business as normally as they could and with a great sense of relief.

The story ended with the family still in the house. The house is very different from the stunningly beautiful home that they had been given in the beginning. The paintwork is still scratched, the walls are still damaged and the family are still abusing it – but have agreed to abuse it less. And it is just working – just – it is still at risk – it wouldn't take much to push it over the edge. And there is no mention of the builder – he was forgotten pretty quickly after the beginning.

The 17th century writer Milton would have described this outcome as Paradise Lost.

The family had forgotten that they were only the tenants of the house. They only had a full-repairing lease. They were not the builders nor the freeholders.

In coming to their agreement to save their house they had completely lost sight of the bigger picture and were long out of contact with the builder who had so lovingly built them the perfect home.

Any of you who have been involved with DIY may recognise the phrase a botched job. The agreement of the family to save their house – was really about saving their lifestyles – it was not about restoring their house to its original beauty.

In Matthew 6:32 Jesus recognises that our heavenly Father knows all our needs – that he had not forgotten our needs for clothes, food and shelter – but he reminds his hearers:

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you.
Even more than worrying about the planet – we need to look to the Creator who so loves the world.

1. We each need to reconnect with the Creator to really fulfil our responsibilities to the creation.
2. We need to have a stronger grasp of time in eternity, of the flow of salvation history that meeting the best targets from the best scientists is the best that we can do humanly for a fallen, broken world....but it is only God who can truly redeem, truly restore, truly to make the world beautiful again. It is his promise, and his intention, and it sets our real perspective. It is both a challenge and a hope to every Christian and to Christian agency that important though they are international agreements that are just good enough scientifically are not our ultimate goal, our ultimate goal is the house being put back in to the hands of the builder – who rebuilds and makes all things new....

Check out your priorities

1. Do you need to be more serious in your response to the Crisis in Creation?
2. Do you need to be more serious in your response to the Creator.

Be concerned about the planet – but don't let that concern replace your concern for God – your concern to have more of God or for God to have more of you.

In Revelation 21 God's intention to renew the earth is made clear:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

He who was seated on the throne said I am making everything new. Then he said Write this down for these words are trustworthy and true.

And so I saw the builder return. He allowed the first house to be knocked down and cleared. And he built a new house – even better than the first. And from his office in the builders yard he called out to the family – I am going to live in the house with you. I will be your builder and you will be my family. There will be no more scratched paintwork or dented walls – and the electricity and the plumbing will both work properly – the old systems will be no more. I am making everything new. Put this on your website – so that you don't forget.

AMEN