

Everyone is our neighbour

He asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?” *Luke 10:29*

What do these countries have in common? Costa Rica, Congo, Maldives, Mali, Cambodia, Ghana, Egypt and Mexico? They are among 15 countries experiencing the hottest-ever national temperatures during the first half of 2024, with Mexico the highest at 52°C. One expert said, *“This amount of extreme heat is beyond anything ever seen or even thought possible before.”*

Why is this happening? Climate change, caused by carbon emissions. Just one example of the kind of extreme weather which is becoming more frequent and intense across the planet.

What do these countries have in common? The USA, Russia, Canada, Australia, and Saudi Arabia? They are among the relatively-rich countries which generate the most emissions per head of population. European countries, including the UK, are generally in the middle of that league table, though historically they were near the top.

Then there are these countries: Somalia, China, Philippines, Pakistan, Kenya, Ethiopia, India,

Brazil, Bangladesh and Malaysia. The countries where Oxfam says the largest numbers of people had to flee their homes in 2023 because of climate-related floods and droughts. And these countries: Vietnam, Japan, India, Bangladesh, and Indonesia. In each of these countries, over 10 million people’s homes are at risk of being submerged by future rises in sea levels.

The climate crisis is real and inescapable; and it’s both local, and global. Local, because storms, floods, heatwaves, wildfires, crop failures, and environmental damage can and do happen anywhere, as they have in our own country.

But it’s also global, because the impact of climate change is greater in some countries than others. And the overall



pattern is that the richer countries which have produced the most climate pollution in the past are less impacted, and better able to cope. Whereas the poorer countries which have produced the least climate pollution are being impacted more, and are less able to cope. Which is why people talk about the need for climate



justice as well as climate action. 'The Good Samaritan' is one of Jesus' best-known parables. He told it in answer to a lawyer's question, "*Who is my neighbour?*" Jesus challenged his followers to embrace a new and much bigger idea of the 'neighbours' they must love. Everyone was their neighbour; everyone must be loved; foreigners, strangers, people they despised or rejected, even their enemies. They were all equally important to God.

I believe that today God is once again challenging us to open our minds to a new and much bigger idea of the 'neighbours' we must love. They must surely include people who are suffering or at risk from climate change. God wants us to love them. How can we best do that? In two ways, I think.

First, there are the things we can do ourselves. All Saints' is an Eco Church, which gives us a good framework for action to help the climate and the environment, as a church and as individuals. By committing ourselves to an environment-friendly way of living, we are helping to address the root causes of the climate change which affects so many of our human neighbours. Eco Church is love for

neighbours in action; love which makes a real difference to the lives of others.

But there are some things which only governments can do. The best hope of limiting the increase in global warming is if countries work together to achieve it. The only hope for poorer countries to adapt to climate change impacts, and change to a greener economy themselves, is if there is an international plan to help them. And here in the UK, government investment is needed to move away from fossil fuels, to develop greener technologies, to insulate homes, and so on. We need to encourage our politicians to take action.

Some people suggest that politics and religion should be kept separate, and that churches shouldn't get involved in politics. The late Archbishop Desmond Tutu's reaction to this was: "*When people say that religion and politics don't mix, I wonder which Bible it is they are reading.*"

Because the struggles between the Israelites and other Middle Eastern peoples in the Old Testament were political. Jesus was killed for political reasons by the Roman and Jewish authorities. The world will never change,

from how it is to how God wants it to be, unless governments take action. Although it would generally be a mistake for churches to get involved in party politics, for Christians to call on politicians, regardless of party, to do the right thing for the sake of love and justice, is sometimes both justified and necessary.

God is challenging us all to think afresh about the 'neighbours' we must love – by helping those affected by climate change, now and in the future, through a combination of practical action and, where necessary, political pressure.

This is the first of a two-part article based on a sermon by Roger McFarland during the Season of Creation in September 2024. The second part will be in February's 'in touch'.

To find out more or to share your ideas on Eco Church please go to the website www.allsaintsspringfield.org.uk/church-life/eco-church or speak to one of the Eco Church Group – Roger McFarland, Nicky Morecroft, Chris McFarland, Ian Poston, Dave Gauld, Beth Cornish, Ann Salmon.

This month's eco suggestions

- ☑ Make **one small lifestyle change** in January that will be better for the environment – like changing something you usually eat, or something you buy, or how often you use a car
- ☑ Try to **do the same next month**, and if you can, in March, April, May !

Our front page picture:

It shows Tuvalu's foreign minister making his video speech to the COP26 climate conference. He is knee-deep in water, to highlight the impact of rising sea levels on his island nation.

Bell Ringing at All Saints'

Does the peal of bells from the tower
give your heart a lift?

Come and talk to us about joining
our friendly team of ringers.

Enjoy learning a new skill,
supported by expert teachers.

For further information contact Philip Saunders on
07764 355917 / saundersp4@sky.com

Or come along to our practice night at the church
on Mondays 7.30pm to 9.00pm

