

## Four Resources in the Church for Facing the Climate Crisis

Christchurch West Methodist Church

Sunday 2 July 2023

Preacher: Silvia Purdie

### Readings:

Hebrews 2:9-13

Matthew 10:38-42

I want to highlight four resources, four taonga, treasures, that the church has that enable us to be effective in a changing climate.

The first is a big idea - **God's glory revealed in creation**. We start with God. Our primary resource is God. We are God's people. God is the primary agent. In relationship to the natural world we relate to God as creatures among other creatures, with a unique capacity to honor the Creator. This gives us eyes to see God's presence within creation, which we describe as glory. God's glory within creation.

What comes to mind for you when I talk about God's glory within creation?

I know that many of you experience this glory both in the little things and the big things. The little things of growing plants and appreciating flowers. The homeyness of God's creation. God invites us partnering with God in the creative process of growth. Then there are the bigger things of appreciating God's glory in mountains and rivers and oceans. The wonder of creativity enables a growing capacity to love and honor God.

I wonder if we take this for granted sometimes. It can just slip into the backdrop of our lives. But we need to honour and treasure this, and cultivate it as a powerhouse of compassion and energy. We absolutely need this when we are confronted by threats and damage to creation. It gives us energy to face the ways in which the glory of God and creation is diminished and threatened by pollution and waste and destruction.

The second resource is our **story of sustained courageous action**. I want to remind you this morning of your ancestors in the faith, the women of the Methodist Church in Christchurch, who helped to lead the national campaign for the vote for woman. The Methodist Church in Christchurch and North Canterbury was the powerhouse behind the suffragette movement. They started with a petition in 1881. For twelve years they kept campaigning and organising, and then in election year, 1893, they got the signatures of a quarter of eligible women, a far higher percentage in Canterbury where over 4,000 women signed.

In August the team brought the petition to Parliament, lead by a staunch Methodist woman from Papanui by the name of Mary Carpenter. They decided that rather than carrying in a stack of papers they would create a more dramatic moment. So one of the women took the head off her broom and together they made paste and glued all 500 sheets of the petitions end on end and rolled them around her broom handle. The enormous roll was put in a wheelbarrow and wheeled to parliament. And then MP Sir John Hall tipped it out of the wheelbarrow at the door, with impressive accuracy, so that it rolled the entire length of the debating chamber to end with a loud thump against the speaker's table. What a moment in New Zealand history, all wrapped around a broom handle and all powered and initiated by your ancestors here in the Methodist Church in Christchurch. So be proud of the

perseverance that those woman showed and what they achieved for our nation - and leading the world.

A similar level of courageous perseverance, and sustained action is now required. The Methodist Church is calling on you to commit to a 10 year program for climate justice. That's the focus of the Connexion - not just for one year but for 10. There will be opportunities for you to get involved in sustained climate action.

Not just going on a march occasionally, though maybe marching could be a good experience to support the kids and their climate strikes. But not just to pray, though prayer is important also. I also invite you to tackle a campaign, get informed about climate issues and make a contribution. If you'd like to be a little even more brave, you might like to consider more direct action, such as restore passenger rail or other forms of nonviolent direct action.

What's our theology of sustained courageous action? The theology is that the Holy Spirit stirs up the people of Christ to respond to significant threats to God's world. We have heard the warnings of climate change, we desire for sustainable living future, for our world and for our communities and for other living species. God calls up his people to act in the face of injustice, and to stand in the gap for a world as it steps into a crisis.

Jesus calls us to lose our life in order to find it. Jesus calls us to value faithful discipleship more than harmony, even in our own families. Jesus calls us to welcome prophets - and find that as we welcome prophets we also welcome Christ himself.

The third resource to highlight is **wellsprings of hope**. Any research - and there is plenty being done at the moment - will tell you that most young people are deeply pessimistic about the future. Young people are emerging into a world of significant threat. I was born into a time of optimism, when we believed that we were making the world a better place. My father believed in the progress and the capacity of humanity. People hoped that their children would have a better life, that the world was becoming be a safer place, a more just place. Unfortunately, this whole worldview is crumbling in our time and replaced with hopelessness. We are leaving our children and our children's children with huge debts financially and the debt to the planet of all that we have taken from the earth during my lifetime. This leads to despair. And it's fairly inevitable to me that hopelessness will increase to pandemic proportions. This has major implications for many aspects of our society and for mental health. One of the few places in our world where hope may be found, is in the church

Why? because the church holds the taonga of hope. We believe passionately that we are not in this alone, that there is a God who has a bigger plan for the world and for our individual lives. More than we can know or control. We believe that the weight of responsibility does not lie entirely on our shoulders.

But wait, there's more! The hope is of glory. Our hope is of restoration. The hope is ultimately for resurrection. I am calling on the church to recover our vision of resurrection. not just our own individual destiny, our eternal salvation, as though we might be floaty bits of mist in a cloud, but that the whole of the universe might share in the resurrection of Christ, that all things come together in Christ, in whom one day there will indeed be a new heaven and a new earth.

Can I ask you - what is your hope? How might you speak to a young person who says there's no point in going to university? There's no point in having children. There's no point in having a career because the world is so bad and will just get worse?

My final point and perhaps most our important resource is **the church knows how to care for one another**. This is the fundamental call of Jesus: "Love one another as I have loved you. By this shall the world know."

We know how to care for others. We know how to be a people. We know how to do family. We take this for granted and we assume that this is a shared experience and shared skills. But sadly that is not the case. We in the church must value and treasure our ability to create community. For this will be needed in the years to come more than ever before. Disaster can create community in the crisis but only the church can sustain community across generations, with diverse people, where all are welcome. We are uniquely equipped for community. Why does this matter in a climate crisis? Absolutely matters in a climate crisis. Our body memory will enable the church to be a vital resource for community resilience.

So, four resources that the church holds that are incredibly important for facing climate change:

The first: God's glory in creation – our love and enjoyment of nature, our passion and compassion for the beauty of it all.

Second: why was I reminding you of the suffragettes? Because their story is also your story, and it is a story of courageous sustained action. Brave determination. Keeping on keeping on despite being abused and belittled, until they won the day.

Third is Christian hope. Not hope that governments or business or strategy will save us from climate change, but hope that is a bottomless well springing up from the heart of God, hope for what God will do ultimately one day, which God is already in the business of getting on with in our time.

And fourth, caring for one another and being community.

I am hoping you might agree with me that these four are pretty impressive resources. In fact, they are all we need to be effective in our time as missional communities, as the people of Christ, here and now, no matter what disasters come our way.