

Caring for Creation

“Can you not buy two sparrows for a penny? And yet not one falls to the ground without your Father knowing.”

The environmental crisis unfolding across the world confronts us with the physical consequences of our mistreatment and neglect of the fragile planet which God entrusted to our care.

Jesus shows us that all creation speaks of God, therefore all of creation matters. It is not just stage scenery for us. Indeed, God's unconditional love for us calls us to love all that he created and loves. He gives humans a unique capacity to engage with the rest of creation and the freedom to do so positively or negatively.

Modern science even lets us glimpse something of the unity of creation. It reveals at a molecular level our close and interdependent relationship with all life, and thus with the planet's life support systems. When we contemplate the natural world, we meet God there: in the mind-boggling complexity that arises from apparent imperfection and simplicity; in the interplay of power, beauty and vulnerability; and in ourselves - each an integral part of creation's vastness yet each unique at the same time.



Pope Francis asks us to consider whether we truly cultivate and care for creation, or exploit and neglect it

The words 'human' and 'humility' come from 'humus' or earth. We must acknowledge that we are firstly of the earth, even though our relationship with God lets us transcend this. We need humility if we are to use our technological power wisely, and if we are to balance our inherent spirit of innovation with a sense of limits.

Damaging the planet diminishes us all spiritually. The poorest suffer most, not least because reducing the area of fertile land in a region can lead to conflict; an example of what Pope Benedict called 'an inseparable link between peace with creation and peace among men'.

In caring for creation, we may need to check some of our assumptions, for example about how much energy we really need, how much travelling we have to do, and why we value 'cheap' or 'convenient' more than 'sustainable'. The issues are not trivial or easy.

For instance, how do you judge the 'air miles' of traditionally grown produce from Africa against the environmental costs of machinery, fuel and the manufacture and use of fertilisers and pesticides for UK or other European produce? How do we choose fairly between different sites for new housing? Is providing jobs for people in developing countries better or worse than 'buying local'? Can technology, business and ethics ever come together for the common good?

There is no support in the Gospels for a throw-away society, yet our economy seems based on endless consumption. We can become enslaved in a culture where having is more important than being, and where shopping is a national hobby: *Tesco ergo sum*.

We buy more than we need and throw away the surplus, squandering finite resources for nothing. Wasted household food in the UK comes from land roughly the size of Wales; the water in this food is about 6% of the UK's total water budget; and the carbon in it equates to about 25% of UK domestic car usage.

In 2012 1.4million bananas, 1.5 million tomatoes, and 24 million slices of bread were thrown away per day in the UK.