

## **Sermons at All Saints Anglican Church of Luxembourg**

**Preached by Rev Geoff Read on Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> September 2024, Creationtide I**

**Text: Romans 8:18-25**

*Q: What is the main feeling you have about the climate crisis and people's responses to it?*

2021 research by Climate Psychology Alliance: the second most reported feeling is anxiety but the primary one is sadness, "climate grief"



Both are mentally healthy responses to what is happening

People are anxious and sad because of the climate crisis for two reasons: one is environmental, about what is happening to the environment

The other is relational – not only is it human caused but also there is sadness, anxiety, and frustration because of other people's reactions to it

48% young people said they felt dismissed, not listened to by older others – either they faced denial or while parents etc acknowledged its they also minimised it – don't worry technology will sort it

The eco-psychologist Caroline Hickman says this:

"Whilst we need to develop practical and technical solutions to the current crises, they will not be enough on their own. If we are going to find sustainable solutions then we have to find a way to grasp the paradox that it is only through facing our vulnerability, painful truths, collective denial, grief and loss that we will be able to develop the emotionally informed and sustainable action that we need to take to save ourselves as well as the planet. ... We need 'inner' as well as 'outer' activism."

That inner work involves acknowledging and addressing our real and valid feelings. Out of that comes a principled response of action

She calls this combination "radical hope" rather than naïve optimism or escapism

I like the term "radical hope", and I think she is onto something

However, as a Christian I want to bring some added value to what hope is

For Christians hope is always a relational term – we don't hope about something, we hope in someone

We hope God wants to act in love to bring about His good purposes for us and our world and we hope He has the power to do so

We're going to use our passage from Romans to help us explore hope

But first a bit of background ...

Right from the start of creation there has been pain for the creation because of human choices

In the story of origins called Genesis, the misplaced choice for independence by human beings, Adam and Eve, symbolised in eating an apple has led to that pain: “cursed is the ground because of you ...” God says to Adam (Gen 3:17)

By chapters 6 through 9 that human dysfunction is so great that God sends a great flood, overwhelming creation and human beings but preserving Noah, his family and 2 of every living creature – the seeds of something new

And crucially as the water recedes God promises this with a covenant: “I will never again curse the ground again because of humankind.” (8:21, 9:1-17)

And the sign of that covenant: the beauty of the rainbow, strange light and colour in the darkness of rain

That means that God is for us and the creation, and He is powerfully working out those good purposes ... even when it may seem otherwise

This is the additional relational dimension we as Christians bring to the shared task with others of facing the climate challenge, what we bring to radical hope –

The invitation to hope in the One making the promise that the future of the created order is good, remains, good, the same word God pronounced when He first made it

Let’s bring that understanding of hope to Romans 8 and the three ways the creation is described there by the writer, St Paul

Paul uses three metaphors or word pictures

Creation in bondage to decay (v21)

Creation groaning in labour (v22)

Creation waiting with eager longing (v19)

Look at the first one in v19: creation in bondage to decay



Another word for bondage is slavery – forced, exploited, abused by another and for the benefit of another

Think for a moment: that’s a powerful image of the creation as we see rain forest disappearing so we can eat cheap beef, seas filled with micro-plastics so we can use the health and beauty products they contain...

That bondage to decay, Paul says, is part of the bigger curse, the collateral damage of humankind's self-centred choices

But behind the scenes, Paul says, there is hope. See how the word is slid into v20 – God working “to set creation free from its bondage to decay”

How about Paul's idea in v22, creation groaning in labour?

On Friday we celebrated our grandson's first birthday. I was facetimeing with my daughter at the precise time she went into labour a year before – a labour that only lasted an hour

This is another powerful image about creation, but a very different one: not about a negative, destructive groaning like slavery, but a positive one from which something, someone amazingly new emerges

Yes, this little boy is new and different, but with a family likeness

Pauls is a Jew, and so with him let's think of the original Genesis story: Noah and the animals who, as they step from the ark step into a renewed world

And what is true of that world is true of them: both new and different from before, but with a family likeness

What, as we look at the ecological destruction around us, might Paul mean about creation groaning in labour pains?

What is coming to birth in the created order?

Paul's third image of creation is a beautiful one – standing on tip toes



That's what v19 means: “the creation waits in eager longing”

Like the other two pictures Paul uses about creation this is poetic language that expresses longing, excitement, can't wait for something to happen

And what is creation waiting for?

READ v19

That phrase “children of God” repeats in v21

Creation is waiting for these “children of God” to be revealed and to share in what they have: freedom and glory

We're back to hope rooted in relationship

When the followers of Jesus asked him to teach them to pray, in what we now call the Lord's Prayer, he said: When you pray to God, say "Father"

Unprecedented in religious thought, Jewish or otherwise

And what do you say to that Father?

"Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven ..."

Children of God are those who know God to be a perfect father, who can be 100% trusted: our hope is that He wants to His promises and that He is able to keep His promises

His promises to do what?

To bring about in our here and now created order, gripped as it is by this climate crisis, the renewal of God's original good purposes for life, wholeness and flourishing for the whole creation

And to bring about in us, and our finite understanding and imaginations about all that is going on in the climate crisis, to bring about in us hope: a growing awareness of the infinite possibilities of God's good purposes, the Father who Paul calls, elsewhere, the One "who does so much more than we can ask or imagine" (Eph 3:20)

This is the calling of the children of God, to hope in this way:

Yes, to mourn, to lament, to be angry at injustice

Yes, to think and act for changes to care for creation, even when it is costly, inconvenient and ongoing

And also Yes to hope in this relational way, hope in the heavenly Father who has not given up on His world and is striving to bring this about



As I end I want to introduce you to a fellow German, Jürgen Moltmann

We meet him in 1945 in a British POW camp, captured as a teenager after being forced to fight in the last throes of the Nazi madness: defeated and now, like all Germans, forced to confront the horrors of the death camps, shown photos of Auschwitz, Dachau

Hopeless, one day the chaplain of the camp gave him a Bible and he began to read the gospels

And there he encountered the God, who in Jesus, steps into the created world and suffers with it to the point of death

But who then who is raised to new life by the Father who does so much more than we can ask or imagine

In 1964, now a pastor and theologian he published his first book, by then facing not the hopelessness of Nazism, but the sense of hopelessness with which many of us here grew up, about the threat of atomic war

And the book's title: ... Hope

In it Moltmann describes hope like this ...

**“Christian hope draws the promised future into the present day  
and prepares the present day for the future.”**

In the coming Sundays we are going to be exploring more about this hope and what it means ...

... what it means to draw that hope into our present day, especially as we face the climate crisis – in other words how we pray

... and also what it means to prepare the present day for the future – in other words, how we act.

And how we do both with hope