

Storm of hope

2019

Living in Hope with Green Christian

Beginning in Distress

Climate and environmental emotional distress is a very real phenomenon, often going unacknowledged. As people come to terms with human impacts on Earth, our common home, and realise that environmental degradation and climate-hostile activity appears to be increasing, rather than decreasing, they – we – begin to feel helpless and hopeless. Other emotional reactions include terror, anger, guilt, blame, despair, even suicidal thoughts. Some decide never to have children, from worry about the future, or guilt about the past. Most people who understand the issues try to modify their behaviour, to live more lightly on Earth, while at the same time feeling that what each individual does is just a drop in the ocean.

Climate and environmental issues can no longer only be seen as physical, economic, scientific or technological problems; they are signs of a moral, ethical and spiritual crisis.

**Christ, alpha, omega,
avatar of hope,
whose heart in spite of all
hopes on in spite of us,
hopes on for us, in spite of us –
rain, rain on us
untamed, unconstrained
Your wildfire storm of hope.**

**From *That Intransitive Being*
by Daniel Berrigan**

Green Christian's Aims

We affirm our belief in God as Creator of all things and in Jesus Christ as Lord, looking to the Holy Spirit for guidance through the Scriptures, and seeking to hear God's voice in the challenges of the present time.

We are responsible for our impact on God's Creation. Since 1982 Green Christian has been helping members to understand and relate our responsibilities to our faith. Green Christian supports Christians from all backgrounds and traditions.

We offer insights into ecology and the environment to Christian people and Churches, and we offer Christian insights to the Green movement.



Community Wildlife Garden at Mickleton, Glos, set up by Green Christian member Mark Boulton and friends

Inaction and denial

If these feelings described above are not acknowledged they can lead to paralysis and inaction. We may feel unable to act, believing that anything we do can't possibly make a difference. It seems impolite or controversial to express our feelings; perhaps we believe others will regard us as weak or deluded, or we don't want to distress people. So we bury these powerful emotions, keep our heads down, and just try to keep going in our everyday lives. We often continue in destructive behaviours – buying too much stuff, flying on holiday, using our cars when we don't need to, for example – perhaps out of ignorance or a sense of hopelessness, sometimes wilfully ignoring the facts.

Sociology and psychology show us that when we don't see other people around us changing their behaviour, then the urgency to do so goes away, and we don't feel we need to either.

It takes courage to go against the tide and to act and speak out when others don't. In Christian terms, this is prophetic witness, showing the world what God requires.



Jeremy says:

I've recently been involved in setting up a project growing free food in neglected plots of land around Luton. It is easy to feel overwhelmed by global climate breakdown, but there is enduring and visible hope in the everyday miracle of soil, rain and sun. "Plant gardens and eat what they produce" as my namesake Jeremiah advised. "Seek the peace and prosperity of the city."

Ellen says:

I find hope in Pope Francis' call to hear "the cry of the Earth and the cry of the Poor" which provides Christian leadership on seeing environmental diminishment as a moral issue; in young people – from the university students demanding fossil-fuel divestment, to children demonstrating for climate action; in parish communities becoming Eco- and Livesimply parishes... and I believe that God is with us in the best and the worst of times.



Lament

In Christian belief forgiveness is at the heart of God's love. We are encouraged to seek forgiveness for the things we have done wrong, wittingly or unwittingly, and to forgive others.

It's difficult to feel personally responsible for this global emergency of climate disruption and environmental degradation, even though we know we are all somehow involved. We are not personally responsible for oil spillages, or species extinction, or deforestation; yet we know that our Western privileged lifestyle has fuelled these outrages, and encouraged poorer countries to want what we already have. We may feel we need to ask for forgiveness, but we know that more than that is needed.

A powerful way of approaching God with these overwhelming concerns is through the ancient practice of Lament.

Biblical lament cries out to God, honestly and specifically naming what is painful, wrong, or unjust. It may express sorrow, remorse, weariness, anger, disappointment, or doubt. It expects a response from God, and includes an expression of trust in God.

This understanding of lament makes it easier for us to apply the Psalms of lament to our own lives and the life of the world. Indeed, we begin to see that biblical lament is necessary in a world that does not always operate according to God's purposes.

Lament is a way of grieving over the wrongs of the world, and acknowledging before God our distress. We can bring before God huge issues such as deforestation, and give God our grief, our anger, our sense of responsibility and blame and guilt, our fear and terror – all the incredibly powerful feelings it's not normally polite to express, even in church.

It takes courage to do this, to stare into the abyss, to weep before the Lord, to allow ourselves to feel these strong emotions. It is not a quick or easy process, and it will often be painful, but it is profound and powerful. Are we brave enough to start on this journey?

An amazing thing happens when we do this. When we are honest with God, God is able to take the depths we find ourselves in and transform them into hope and action. When we are honest, we find ourselves transformed from fearful individuals who dare not act, to a community of courage and insight.

One of Green Christian's regional days in 2018: Green Christian on the Road Together in Bristol (see back page for 2019 events)

Christian truth

What is the Christian response to this utterly valid reaction to arguably the most difficult and intransigent problem the world has ever faced and for which humans alone are responsible?

The Christian truth/story, of God-with-us, the Incarnation, Jesus at once human and divine, is at heart a story of hope, in its widest and deepest sense. God tells us that there is nothing we have done or could possibly do that will ever separate us from God's love. God's love is the ultimate in healing, reconciliation and hope.

But how to get from despair to hope? How can we begin to believe that in God there are the answers to what seems impossible? How can we begin to believe in healing for our planet and justice for all, including the natural world, those elements and creatures St Francis of Assisi called our brothers and sisters, and which others have called the more-than-human?

Donations to Green Christian are always welcome. In 2019 we need more money to finance our efforts to reach out to new members and the wider world with our message. Please click the BT Donate button on our website to contribute.



Christian Hope

Hope is not the same as optimism. In human terms we may not be feeling optimistic about the future, but Christian Hope is rooted in the faithfulness of God. This empowers us to live in hope and to act in hope, leaving behind our negative and hopeless feelings, redoubling our endeavours to live faithfully and urgently to recover our human calling as God's image-bearers in responsible care for God's Creation. Christian Hope is linked to the incarnation of Jesus – God becoming a human being – and His resurrection, and is rooted in the redemption and healing of the whole of Creation.

At the same time as our Annual Members Meeting in London in November 2018 when Bishop David Atkinson addressed the need for rediscovering Christian Hope, nearby was evidence that hope was being experienced by thousands of people of all ages, races and genders. This was one in a series of peaceful demonstrations by Extinction Rebellion, the international social movement aiming to drive radical change through non-violent resistance in order to minimise species extinction and avert climate breakdown. Those taking part – many of whom were people of faith – while feeling hugely concerned about the lack of progress by Governments in acting on climate change, had not given up hope. It was hope which brought them onto the streets, just as it was for those in the suffragette and civil rights movements.

‘Our human responsibility as God’s image-bearers, in union with Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, is to keep open the pathway to all human flourishing and to the healing of Creation’ (*Hope Rediscovered*, page 199, David Atkinson, Ekklesia 2018).



James says:

What keeps me going in the face of the climate crisis? I draw strength from my faith and the knowledge that God created us in love, to live as brothers and sisters. I'm inspired by the generosity, courage and compassion of others, especially pilgrims with whom I walked to Paris (2015 UN climate talks). I'm encouraged by the growth of the fossil fuel divestment movement and the rapidly falling costs of renewable energy.

Action

We have seen that Lament, far from being from a negative process, is a profoundly positive and liberating spiritual discipline, which frees us to genuinely hear God's voice and, with the rediscovery of Hope, to act in accordance with God's will for Earth and all its inhabitants. No longer oppressed and overwhelmed by pain and distress, healed by God's Spirit, we become deeply enabled to act and speak out for the healing of the world.

And it is in coming together that we can do this most effectively.

Keeping company with others who understand God's message of love, forgiveness, hope and redemption gives us strength and courage. We can genuinely grieve and lament the injustices done to the natural world, to environments, to wildlife and future generations, and move from lament to hope and joy, knowing that God hears us and responds with the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the example of Jesus. In response to God, listening to His Wisdom, we are enabled to act in hope, joy and peace.

Let's allow the environmental crisis of our time be a wake-up call to live differently, provoking us into hope-filled transformative action and into a different way of living, informed by God's Wisdom.

Green Christian offers many opportunities to do this. You will see on page 4 a list of events in 2019 and programmes such as the Way of Life Community and Joy in Enough which are there for you to explore. In doing so you will be

certain to meet with fellow Christians for whom the care of God's Creation is a fundamental element of their faith. And you will recognise that it is possible to move through the process of Distress, Inaction and Denial, Lament and Hope to Act as a community of believers in healing God's beautiful and broken world.



Green Christian resources inspire Hope and Action. Printed copies of most leaflets are available on request. Many are also downloadable from greenchristian.org.uk

Blessing

May God the Father
prepare your journey,
Jesus the Son
guide your footsteps,
The Spirit of Life
strengthen your body,
The Three in One
watch over you,
on every road
that you may follow.

Join us

Since 1982 Green Christian has been working with Christians, Churches and the green movement to witness to hope in the ecological crisis.

We welcome new members. Membership online starts at just £2 a month. Please go to greenchristian.org.uk/join-us/. Or use the form below to send your details to: Green Christian Membership Secretary, Flat 1, 31 St James Terrace, Buxton SK17 6HS.

To find out more visit our extensive website: greenchristian.org.uk. Sign up for our free monthly news email, *Prayer Diary* or JIE News, or contact us for a free introductory pack.



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Key Green Christian events in 2019 – for more details visit greenchristian.org.uk

Green Christian's annual retreat: Signs of Hope

22-24 November 2019, Launde Abbey, East Norton, Leicestershire LE7 9XB. An opportunity to meet other Green Christian members in beautiful, reflective and friendly surroundings. Revd. Kevin Durrant will lead Bible studies, looking at themes of his book, *The Earth will Teach You*. We will also explore ways of building up our own faith and spirituality with the help of music, art and poetry and to share in the work of Green Christian and the Way of Life which is at the heart of our discipleship. All welcome. For further details please contact Brian Davis, Chair of Launde Abbey at revbdavis@aol.com.

Green Christian on the Road regional events. A series of days exploring Green Christian's ethos and work. Open to all. Days being planned in 2019 for **Stroud, Cheltenham, Shrewsbury and Manchester**.

If you are local to any of these places and would like to help please get in touch!

Please see the website for more details or sign up to our mailing list: <http://www.greenchristian.org.uk/connect/sign-up/>

Annual Members' Meeting Saturday 9 November 2019, 1pm – 5pm. Followed by a talk, open to all. An opportunity to contribute to the work of Green Christian, and to gain inspiration for your own. Keep an eye on the website for details of venue.

Green Christian brings together people in the UK and beyond who seek to tell a new story for our times. We offer:

Gatherings: conferences, retreats and workshops every year.

Local groups: 11 groups directly affiliated to Green Christian. We offer support, advice and materials to others.

Prayer: a daily *Prayer Guide* available by email or on our website (published monthly).

Campaigns: LOAF promotes food which is Locally Grown, Organically produced, Animal friendly and Fairly traded.

Joy in Enough promotes an alternative economy free from growth, debt and the obligation to consume. joyinenough.org

Way of Life Community: a dispersed community which values and lives by the disciplines of Daily Prayer, Living Gently on the Earth, Public Witness and Encouragement.

Green Christian Magazine: a full-colour magazine published twice a year, packed with news, thought-provoking articles, reviews of books and other media, and resources.

Exhibition materials: a range of leaflets, banners and posters giving a Christian perspective on environmental topics.

CELINK: a discussion forum and social network for members for the exchange of news and advice.

E-news: regular emails for members and non-members on events and resources from Green Christian and other Christian environmental organisations.

Website: greenchristian.org.uk

Further details at www.greenchristian.org.uk or contact our Information Officer at 10 Kiln Gardens, Hartley Wintney, Hampshire, RG27 8RG



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