

A time to mourn, a time to mend

In March this year, as lockdown started, and an uneasy quiet descended, I received a phone call from a member of Green Christian. “It’s so important how we respond to this” he urged, “we just can’t let things go back to how they were”.

Green Christian was responding. Paul Bodenham was already piloting “Radical Presence”, an online discussion group helping people to reflect prayerfully and creatively on the impact of the pandemic, and what it was revealing. The course drew new people to join us, one of whom, Staffan Engstrom, writes enthusiastically about his experience.

My caller’s urgent message, echoed by many around the world, is reflected in this issue. This horrible disease is causing suffering, loneliness, poverty and grief. But as Christina Nellist explains, the transmission of Covid-19 to humans is linked both to trade in bushmeat, and also to the destruction of natural habitats to support our unsustainable habits of consumption. It is not a “natural disaster” but yet another indication of our broken relationship with the natural world.

And Radhika Bynon describes how racial injustice, highlighted by the Black Lives Matter protests, is also reflected in who is suffering most, whether from climate change or Covid-19; she calls for a greater diversity amongst decision-makers, and for those who are routinely excluded to be heard.

So as politicians and public health experts struggle to contain the spread

of the virus, and so-called normality continues to unravel, can this time of upheaval offer an opportunity for change for good? Mourning for our mistakes and misguided priorities, can this become a time to mend our understanding of how we could live? Can we collectively begin to imagine a more hopeful future for all the Earth?

Writers in this issue reflect the stark reality of how much hangs in the balance. Rich Gower spells out how the response over the next 18 months, particularly in the values we embrace, and how we act, as individuals, communities and countries, will determine the trajectory of human development over the next decade – a crucial decade in determining whether the rise in global carbon emissions can be rapidly reversed and the worst of climate chaos averted. This is a time for making history, a time for choices, write Katherine Trebeck and Jeremy Williams.

For the pandemic has revealed to us that change is possible.

As flights were grounded, traffic hushed, and life stripped down to essentials, we learnt new ways of living and working. From tree planting on the West coast of Scotland to making videos on the shores of Lake Victoria, included here are stories of how lockdown inspired new ways of being community. As Christians we already speak a language of community and compassion, and perhaps it was in quietly contributing to a mutual aid group, or shopping for your neighbour that you discovered a new meaning of “being Church”.

Green Christian is also adapting creatively: we cannot hold our retreat this year but instead are offering an online festival – see GC News pages for more details, and look on the website for unfolding news of speakers and workshops.

Healing for the world is bound up with justice for all people, and all of Creation, so that ‘the “polyphony” of all the echoes of the creative Word, is released to be what it can and should be’, to borrow Rowan William’s wonderful image. An uncertain future lies ahead; for those of us who have a voice, and the power to act, let us use these privileges wisely; silence is not an option. ■



Clare Redfern,
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Some artwork in this issue is from the collection at art.350.org which features artwork that showcases the urgency for solidarity, community, and action, and available to download and share to support a “Just Recovery” at this time.