

Storm of hope

2024

Finding Hope with Green Christian

Where is the Hope?

It is estimated that 2023 was the hottest year in 125,000 years (The EU Copernicus Climate Change Service, 9 November 2023), and was an unprecedented year for climate-related disasters. At the time of writing, atmospheric carbon dioxide is at 421.31 parts per million (daily reading, Mauna Loa, Hawaii). A decade ago (395.64ppm) climate scientists were concerned about what would happen if we passed the 400ppm mark. Atmospheric levels of the greenhouse gases carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide are higher than at any time in the past 125,000 years, with a sharp recent spike (climatelevels.org). Also in 2023, the IPCC stated that global warming can no longer be limited to 1.5C.

COP28, the 2023 United Nations Climate Change Conference, was held in Dubai, in an oil-producing country, with the president of the conference also CEO of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company. More nations than ever called for a phase-out of fossil fuels, yet a powerful lobby of over 2,400 fossil fuel executives seemed to hold most influence. The final agreement to transition away from fossil fuels and reach net zero by 2050 (far later than needed), is non-binding, and holds many uncertainties.

At times like these, people wonder what “hope” can mean, in a world where serious deadlines and plans to stabilise Earth’s rapidly destabilising climate are overtaken by events, or ignored.

Christians often encourage each other not to lose hope, to remain hopeful. But it’s not always clear what we mean. Can hope simply be shorthand for optimism? And if so, what are we being optimistic about? Do we believe that God will step in with a miracle? Or do we put our hope in yet-to-be-invented technologies: green consumerism, a worldwide green awakening, population control, geo-engineering, veganism, carbon taxes or carbon credits? Some even dream of a return to the past.

These kinds of hope veer dangerously close to “magical thinking”, in which people wait passively for their favoured solution to solve all the issues, without taking active responsibility for their own personal actions.

In Christian thinking, faith, hope and love go hand-in-hand. As with love and faith, hope has many aspects. We explore some of these in this edition of Storm of Hope.

In the climate emergency, beyond hope and despair, lies a time between worlds: level ground to live and act with courage, love and equanimity. Together let us go there. *Borrowed Time: Green Christian’s climate grief and eco-anxiety project, which provides resources for church ministers and congregations.*

borrowedtime.earth

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.



Jane says:

At this challenging time, when there is so much fear about the future, I think it’s vital to come together in community for solidarity and focused prayer. We need to dig deep into our spiritual resources, for guidance, courage, and hope. My church held a “Vigil of Hope” ahead of COP28. We invited members of our local Transition Town movement to participate and created a prayer tree as an expression of our hopes for COP28.

Revd Jane Bartlett
Associate Vicar, the Good Shepherd Church,
Shoreham

Hope is not...

- ▶ optimism, the feeling that somehow everything will be all right. This often goes hand-in-hand with a kind of denial, a refusal to look closely at the facts and the issues
- ▶ dedication to one particular solution, whether technological, scientific, or social
- ▶ blind belief in God’s miraculous intervention
- ▶ blind belief in another as-yet-unknown intervention
- ▶ faith only in an afterlife, without working today for God’s Kingdom on Earth
- ▶ a pious wish
- ▶ a desire for something good to happen
- ▶ a nice thing to say.



Pond dipping
Mark Boulton, 2013

Is it honest to speak of hope now?

There has been a tendency to assume that *hope* alone leads to action. For many of us today it's hard to know what to hope for. The relative climate safety of the 20th century will not return for many generations. Our challenge is to slow and limit the increase of harm and build resilience, and minimise the risk of runaway breakdown. What kind of hope is that? Has hope become a false prospectus?

- ▶ **Is it honest to speak of hope now**, given how dangerous climate change is likely to become? We can no longer campaign for a better world, only for a less worse one. Is hope just a privilege for the rich who can afford to protect themselves?
- ▶ **Is it sustainable to advocate hope as the motive for action?** Evoking hope in people, while possibly effective in the short term, may over the longer term increase rather than reduce the risk of despair, and may foster burnout and disengagement.
- ▶ **Is hope the only possible motive for action?** Other motives are love and grief (intimately related), and anger and courage (also related). These “new motives” are fostered by Extinction Rebellion through a “regenerative culture”.
- ▶ **Does despair inevitably fill the space left by hope?** Only if we cling to a hope conditional on results. Such conditional hope inevitably becomes a tyranny. When its weight can no longer be sustained, the rebound places our mental health at risk.

Colin and Mary say:

Hope is...

Heart: love for our Common Home; soul uplifting, mindful enjoyment from walks/cycles in the countryside.

Opportunities: local conservation volunteering; engaged members of “Greener Basingstoke”; attending walks/marches/vigils/prayers for Climate/Nature; growing veggies; embracing renewable energy technologies.

Perseverance: inspired by others leading the way, our moral passion to “Love our Neighbour”

Encouragement: Green Christian members/groups/talks/resources/actions; solidarity of many faith groups/NGOs for climate justice; positive innovative sustainable projects.



Sunrise. Vanessa and John Purdy.

Three kinds of Hope

1. Hope FOR an outcome, a dream of inexorable progress. It assumes that human improvement will be achieved through the conquest of nature, that we have a right to find each succeeding year better than the last. But this modernist hope is bankrupt. It has infected our theologies, in which we believe God is the guarantor of progress.

Hope For can easily tip into despair. Hope For requires ever more demanding effort and stridency which cannot in the end be sustained, so despair becomes the inevitable companion of Hope For, its shadow side.

2. Hope IN a quality or practice – human creativity, divine providence, planting a tree, an alternative culture. These things are of course right to do for their own sake. But Hope In is also vulnerable to despair when it seeks an outcome. Will there ever be enough people to change the system; is there time? The risk comes when we use Hope In as a proxy for Hope For: when we use Hope In as a place to retreat to when Hope For has collapsed. Thus Hope In can itself be an expression of despair.

3. Hope BEYOND is not what our culture means by hope at all. It is an outlook on the present, rather than the future. It is sober about our predicament, and will not be drawn on what the future holds. It is a hope that empties us of our attachment to ambitions and claims. With this hope we can navigate the collapsing certainties and surging crises of our times with equanimity. It liberates us to dream, plan and build, even as we repent and accept that we may still fail. This hope is free from the future in order to be free for the future.

Hope has two beautiful daughters; their names are Anger and Courage. Anger at the way things are, and Courage to see that they do not remain as they are.

St Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD)

Do you not know?

Have you not heard?

The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He will not grow tired or weary,
and his understanding no one can fathom.

He gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak.

Even youths grow tired and weary,
and young men stumble and fall;

but those who hope in the Lord
will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.

Isaiah 40:28-31

What hope can be

Authentic hope is not passive, but active. Authentic hope engages deeply with issues and tirelessly seeks solutions, rather than waiting for something better to come along, or for someone else to provide answers. Grounded in reality, wisdom, imagination and love, it asks: *What are the possibilities in this situation we find ourselves in? What is the roadmap for a different future?*

In Christian belief every human is made “in the image of God”, so we possess creative attributes such as the ability to think about our past, present and future, and the capacity for moral and spiritual reflection and growth. Being made in the image of God includes compassion, love, truth, wisdom, mercy, justice, foresight, courage, and creativity.

By nurturing and exercising all these qualities, hope can be made authentic, strong, and powerful. Exercising these qualities can bring hope where at first glance there is none. It will not be easy, will require all our strength and courage, but we can create a new way of life, and a new and creative response to the world's biggest challenges.

Authentic hope creates connections and community, and imagines and works for a better world, even when this requires sacrifice, or makes us unpopular. Everyone can join in. Rooted in love, faith, and courage, **authentic hope** thus becomes a profoundly spiritual practice with tangible and far-reaching outcomes.

Donations to Green Christian are always welcome. Please click the Donate button on our website to contribute.

If you care about the climate and ecological emergencies and making the world a greener and fairer place – why not join Green Christian? We also have local groups. Membership begins at £2 per month. Church memberships available.



Hundreds of Christians in St John's Waterloo – standing room only – with overflow outside, ahead of the 1,400-strong prayerful Christian pilgrimage to Parliament Square at the beginning of The Big One protest, in April 2023. Numbers surpassed expectations.

Deborah Tomkins, 2023



Jules says:

I'm lucky I find 'hope' every day in Nature. Even when suffering from solastalgia, I'm uplifted by the rhythm of life continuing around me. And when I experience its fragility and innocence and can step in and help free a trapped fawn, nurse a bird, feed a bee or plant a felled tree's seeds, the wonder of that connection restores my soul. I feel blessed by God for each and every encounter.

Green Christian's Way of Life Community

Green Christian invites members to join the Green Christian Way of Life Community, and to witness to authentic hope in four daily disciplines.

Prayer and Devotions

Prayer and Bible study connects us with God who sustains us and all the world. Jesus is the Vine, we are the branches, and we draw nourishment and strength from him. The Green Christian monthly *Prayer Diary* contains daily topical pointers for prayer and reflection, and can be downloaded from the website.

Living Gently on the Earth

Many people are disconnected from the natural world, yet humans are embedded in creation and cannot live without it. Green Christian leaflets such as *Nine Ways to Live Gently on the Earth*, *LOAF*, and *Seven Tips for Respecting Creation* provide helpful and hope-filled ideas. Working in community, we can encourage others to live more gently too.

Public Witness

Jesus trod lightly on the Earth, fed the poor and spoke powerfully against injustice, often saying what people did not want to hear. There is so much we can do: give *Storm of Hope* to friends or at church; arrange a *LOAF* meal; invite people to events; write to local politicians, clergy and other leaders; take our prayer onto the streets; become involved in local projects; become a speaker at local events, and much more. Green Christian's *Joy in Enough* project is a powerful witness against the death culture of relentless consumerism.

Encouragement

Much language around the climate and ecological crises deals in guilt, blame and fear. But Christianity brings the reality of forgiveness, restoration to wholeness, and a new way of life. Companions of the Way of Life Community support and encourage each other, in prayer and in person, regularly throughout the year.

Of the Christian virtues of love, faith and hope, the greatest is love, which underpins everything.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails..... And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7, 13

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/ to join online. 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 about Green Christian visit our extensive website: greenchristian.org.uk. Sign up for our free monthly news email, prayer diary or Joy in Enough news, or contact us for a free introductory pack.



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Some key Green Christian events in 2024

Green Christian events are open to all, unless specified otherwise.

Green Christian on The Road Together regional events, exploring Green Christian's ethos and work, including the Way of Life, Joy in Enough, and Christian Climate Action. The first is near Coventry, 9 March. If you would like to host a Green Christian day, please get in touch! greenchristian.org.uk/on-the-road-together-running-a-local-green-christian-event/

27 Jan 2024: Green Christian Way of Life Day, London. A day to explore the Four Disciplines of the Green Christian Way of Life. For members.

14-24 February 2024: No Faith in Fossil Fuels Lent Vigil for Climate Justice. Alongside the Salvation Army, Tearfund, CAFOD, and others, GC is planning a ten-day 24/7 vigil outside Parliament, to lament our climate complicity and call for bold action.

27-29 September, Gathering: Being the Still Centre on the Radical Edge. Bradwell-on-Sea (Essex), and online.

Annual Members' Meeting: Autumn 2023, London. Shared lunch, meeting, and talk. An opportunity to hear about the work of Green Christian, and gain inspiration for your own.

Please see the website for more information, or sign up to our mailing list.

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: many groups are directly affiliated to Green Christian, and we offer support, advice and materials to others.

Prayer: a daily *Prayer Guide* available by email or on our website.

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 who value and live by the disciplines of Daily Prayer, Living Gently on the Earth, Public Witness and Encouragement.

Borrowed Time offers **Deep Waters:** an eight-week shared journey providing support in navigating climate grief and eco-anxiety; **Cloud and Fire**, an eight-session programme for clergy and those in pastoral responsibility; and a **Lent Course**. borrowedtime.earth

Online discussions, courses and workshops. Open to all.

YouTube channel, for recorded talks and discussions.

Green Christian Magazine: a full-colour magazine published twice a year, packed with news, articles, reviews, and resources.

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

CELINK: a discussion forum and social network for members.

E-news: twice-monthly emails on events and resources from Green Christian and other Christian environmental organisations.

Website: greenchristian.org.uk

Further details at greenchristian.org.uk or from info@greenchristian.org.uk



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