

## Grieve

There is a price attached to living gratefully today. Inevitably we encounter the loss which comes from seeing what we value destroyed.

In the case of the environment, what makes the loss harder to bear is our own complicity. People who join CEL often come with a sense of despair. In such circumstances denial can make a beguilingly comfortable home. Governments are adept at sparing us the costly truth – even the UK with its pioneering climate legislation is persisting in plans for a huge expansion in airport capacity. The system it serves cannot risk us grieving for the truth.

Our grief is essential to the planet, and it is the cross which makes grief possible. The suffering in creation, in our own hearts, and in the Crucified must be found to be one and the same. We owe it to the Earth to acknowledge the extent of our grief, secure in the knowledge that it cannot take us anywhere Christ has not been before. We must refuse all easy answers and guard against every false hope. There is no Easter without Gethsemane.

### “Blessed are you that weep”

- ▶ **Remember** when you have felt a sense of loss at the destruction of nature
- ▶ **Praise** God for what once was. Identify your part in its loss, and the part others have played, but blame no-one
- ▶ **Tell** God the fear, rage and sorrow you feel; perhaps even tell a trusted friend or relative.

## Hope

In the Gospel a strange thing happens. Death is confronted and disarmed. Jesus is the seed which falls into the ground and dies, and yields its fruit a hundredfold. He said so himself, knowing that he would have to fulfil every word in person.

Our ecological predicament is only a symptom of a deeper spiritual crisis, and it is there that the breakthrough awaits us. It is in the grave that hope is born.

This is not a cheap hope which reassures people that “God will make it alright”. It is we who must make it alright, and that requires us, as God’s people, to seek out Jesus in our suffering world, trust in his resurrection, and allow a new humanity to come to life in us.

Even then we do not know what the future will bring. Hope is not the same as optimism. It may not even feel like hope, because as TS Eliot said, “hope would be hope for the wrong thing”. It does not depend on the choices we or others make. It might seem to have no relation to reality, but eventually we will



recognise within it, in a chink no bigger than a keyhole, just enough to be able to plan a transformation.

### “All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God”

- ▶ **Meditate** on this verse (Isaiah 52:10) and write on paper your assumptions about what it might look like, and what it might require of you
- ▶ **Ask** God for the freedom to let go of your assumptions – you might like to burn or shred the paper you have written them on
- ▶ **Read** Matthew 16:21-28, in which Jesus sets his face towards Jerusalem, and consider what it means to follow him now.

## Act

In his last words on Earth, Jesus urged his disciples to “preach the good news to all creation”. At Pentecost the believers received the Holy Spirit equipping them for the task. Now it is we, the church, who are the body of Christ.

More than that, we, the church, are the new creation. Olivier Clément says, “There is not a blade of grass that does not grow within the church, not a constellation that does not gravitate towards her, every quest for truth, for justice for beauty is made within her.”

As Christians and as a church, action to safeguard our planet is a mark of our sincerity in fulfilling our baptism and following the way of the cross. You will not hear secular environmental agencies put it that way. But while the language may differ the action we take will be much the same.

CEL encourages people to take part in campaigns led by better-known organisations such as Friends of the Earth or WWF. We collaborate where possible. What distinguishes us is that we have a hope, a costly hope, which inspires and sustains our campaigning.

### “You are the salt of the earth”

- ▶ **Pray** for your secular environmental group, if you are a member
- ▶ **Start** an *ecocell* in your church or with your neighbours (see back cover)
- ▶ **Commit** the outcome to God.

### Life of the baptised

The cycle of experience described above is simply the outworking of the promises Christians make in baptism. We emerge from the water, and the dynamics of Christ’s life are ignited, just as the Holy Spirit came on him after he was baptised. On behalf of the earth, we are awakened from the terrible sleep which has chloroformed our society. In us our species stirs into consciousness, and with us the whole creation.

The most frequent excuse for complacency is “My little bit won’t make any difference”. It is a symptom of our eroded, atomised society that we can presume to think so – and such thinking is utterly lethal. There is an uncomfortable message for those, like me, who have been hurt by the church which baptised us: it is only through church, whether hidden or revealed, that the world will be saved. Only together, wiffully reconciled with the Creator, the rest of Creation, and each other, is there a future for the miracle we are privileged to inhabit. ●

### Join the awakening

Does the cycle “See, Grieve, Hope, Act” make sense to you? Does it enable you to live more faithfully in prophetic discipleship? Does it fit your experience? A blog has been set up as part of CEL’s Community of Prayer for people who want to explore from the inside what it means to be a disciple today. Please post your comments and reflections there, and read what others have to say. Visit [www.christian-ecology.org.uk/spirituality](http://www.christian-ecology.org.uk/spirituality).