

It's been quite a roller-coaster preparing this talk for today
A roller-coaster of thoughts and emotions

I started by looking at sermon suggestions on the Church of England website
There are lots there - and there are sermon outlines on the websites of Tearfund, Christian Aid, Faiths4change, Green Christian and so on
There's no shortage of material documenting the facts of climate change, its disproportional impact on the poorest people in the world and the need for urgent, radical, action.

But then I came across research published by the Institute for the Study of Civil Society
It's entitled *Radical progressive activism and the Church of England*
It argues that in giving so much attention to issues like climate change the Church of England has lost its moorings -
has drifted from its core purpose
If they are right, we shouldn't even be having a Climate Sunday!

Then last Sunday I was talking with some friends about climate change, the church's response and what hope they have for the future
Phil is an engineer and very much into sustainable energy
But he told us that he has no hope at all for the future of the planet
He's totally pessimistic about the outcome of COP26

I asked him why he bothers with all his eco actions
His answer was simply that it's the right thing to do –
even though he thinks it will achieve nothing.
That left me quite depressed

Our reading from Hebrews suggests a very different line of thought
It speaks of Jesus as the one “through whom God made the universe”
and the one “sustaining all things by his powerful word”.
And in our Gospel Jesus tells his disciples “Do not worry about tomorrow”
Some Christians use these verses to argue that there can't even be a climate crisis
There can't be - God is in control!

So, it's been a roller coaster!

I decided to check out what A Rocha say about all this
A Rocha, you will know, is the environmental charity that promotes Eco-Church

On their website I came across three lectures delivered at a worldwide Zoom meeting that they hosted in June
The speaker was by a Canadian scientist – Professor Katharine Hayhoe



She is Chief Scientist for the Nature Conservancy and her field is climate change
She's recently published a book entitled, *Saving Us – A Climate Scientist's Case for Hope and Healing in a Divided World*,
That looked promising!

In the first lecture - *Talking climate change with Christians* - she establishes the facts of climate change –
and it's impact on the poorest in the world

In the third one - *Dealing with disagreement* - she looks at objections that some Christians make to any focus on climate change

The second lecture was entitled *Finding hope*
And I'd like to share just some of it with you this morning

So where does a Christian climate scientist look for hope?

Katharine starts by telling us where she does **not** find hope

She does **not** find hope in the scientific studies

She fully accepts that climate change is caused by humans – notably by the rich nations
And that it's leading to massive problems

Melting ice caps, rising sea levels, drought in many places, unprecedented flooding in others, heatwaves, wildfires, peoples having to migrate to sustain their lives,

She quotes UN studies that suggest that climate change is set to undo 50 years of progress in reducing world poverty and inequality



She does **not** find hope in politics

Donald Trump's presidency was an environmental disaster

And while Joe Biden has re-joined the Paris agreement she is disappointed that his administration is starting to play down the problems

And she sees a similar failure to take climate change seriously in Canada, the UK, Australia and elsewhere.

She does **not** find hope in the social discourse on climate change

She is continually bombarded on social media by people saying that she is a disgrace, she should be arrested and locked up, that she's a fraud –
all for encouraging people to face the facts and take action



She concludes this section by admitting that the science is bad
The politics is bad
And the discourse is bad

She goes on to talk about hope
And the fact that to many environmental activists hope is a dirty word

They say that we don't need hope
We need courage, energy, anger, - but we don't need hope.
They fear that having **hope** would take away the motivation for action

But Katharine argues that this is to misunderstand what hope is
Hope is not something out of the old book Pollyanna
About the girl who refuses to entertain negative thoughts,
Who only looks at the positives,
And then insists that everything will work out well.

Neither is hope sticking your head in the sand -
refusing to think about the problems - so that you can stay hopeful



In contrast she looks at the Christian understanding of hope
in this verse from Paul's letter to the Romans

“we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, **hope**. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us”
Rom 5:3-5

Paul does not base his hope on the belief that all is well
His hope starts by acknowledging suffering
For Paul hope comes out of suffering.
And for Katharine, Christian hope starts by acknowledging that the science, the politics
and the discourse are all bad

What gives her hope in spite of all this?
She mentions three things

First, she sees that a huge amount is being done already around the world to combat climate change.

By individuals, by voluntary groups, by churches, by businesses, and, yes, by governments.

And she gives examples of these.

So while she acknowledges that her own individual action is like her trying to push a huge boulder up a hill, she sees that millions and millions of other hands are pushing on that boulder with her. She even suggests that the boulder of climate change has reached the top of the hill and is about to start rolling down the other side.



She points to the fact that in 2014 for the first time more renewable energy capacity came on line than fossil fuel energy.

She shows how solar energy is transforming lives in the developing world where people have no access to coal, oil and gas.



She talks about massive investment funds switching from fossil fuels into renewables.

So she says that people can **begin** to see that what they do can make a difference. And when people see that they gain the motivation to make changes.

The **second** thing that gives her hope is children and young people.

She gives examples of what children and young people are doing – ranging from demonstrations and protests to coming up with their own scientific ideas.

But her hope is not that children will fix it for us.

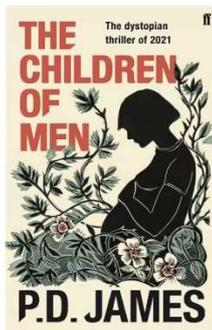
It's the very fact of having children, grand-children and great grand children.

To explain what she means she refers to a novel by PD James.

It was published in 1992 but was set in England in the year 2021.

It tells of a pandemic that sweeps the world and results in mass infertility.

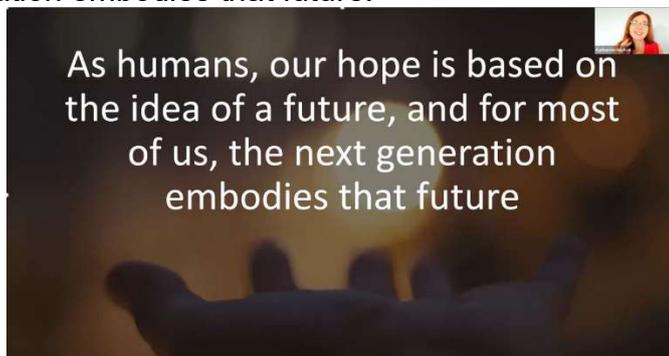
So that bit, by bit, as the pandemic rolls on, there are no more children.



It was reasonable to struggle, to suffer, perhaps even to die, for a more just, a more compassionate society, but not in a world with no future where, all too soon, the very words 'justice,' 'compassion,' 'society,' 'struggle,' 'evil,' would be unheard echoes on an empty air.

Katharine Hayhoe quotes one of the characters:

“It was reasonable to struggle, to suffer, perhaps even to die, for a more just, a more compassionate society – but not in a world with no future where, all too soon, the very words ‘justice’, ‘compassion’, ‘society’, ‘evil’, would be unheard echoes on an empty air”
As humans, our hope is based on the idea of a future, and for most of us, the next generation embodies that future.



The **third** ground for Katharine’s hope is her Christian faith.

It’s woven through everything she’s mentioned but here she focusses on it specifically. And she refers to what, for her in this context, is one of the most important verses in the New Testament

It’s in Paul’s second letter to Timothy.

Paul writes:

“For God has not given us a spirit of **fear**” 2 Timothy 1:7

She says that overwhelmingly, the messages that are used in the media to communicate climate change are based on fear.

And if we feel that people aren’t taking climate change seriously we dump even more scary data on them

But unless people have hope this is entirely counter productive.

If people feel there’s nothing that they can do about climate change they just give up
And no action results

But Katharine says that in this verse God has given us a litmus test

If we are feeling gripped by fear, that is not from God.

Instead, he has given us three incredible gifts

“For God has not given us a spirit of **fear**,
but of **power**
and of **love**
and of a **sound mind**”. 2 Timothy 1:7

He has given us **power**
Today we'd speak of being **empowered**
Paul is saying that by God's Spirit we are empowered
We are made capable of taking action
We don't have to withdraw or give up
We are able to act.
What that action is will vary greatly from one of us to another
But in the body of Christ we have all been given something to do for the common good.

What else has God given us?
He has given us **love**
Love that enables us to think of others, not just ourselves,
To act out of compassion for the needs of others – particularly the poor who He loves

And Katharine says that as a scientist she loves the last gift.
God has given us a **sound mind**
Minds to analyse the facts that are available
and on the basis of those facts make sound decisions that are good for us
and for the planet

This is what God has given us to confront all the troubles and disasters in our world
Not a spirit of fear that will ultimately paralyze us
But a Spirit of **power to act, love to have compassion** on others and a **sound mind to make decisions** for the good of all.

Lord Jesus, fill us with that Spirit, your Spirit, we pray.

Amen

1720 words

Andrew Thompson-Smith