

## Sermon: Trinity 9 2022

Jesus says, “You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?”

One of the fascinating things for me about the cathedral is our churchyard – Cathedral Square (or to most of the people in the city, Pigeon Park). We find ourselves custodians of the only large green space in this part of the city centre. It’s also one of the busier parts of the city, and we certainly get to hear what is going on in it. One of the challenges for us is to communicate, gently and appropriately, who we are (the inside if you like) to the outside. And, of course, part of this is by continuing a welcome to those who are vulnerable or who have no money to spend.

It might not have escaped your notice that it’s a bit hot today. Those of us wearing robes are jealous of those of you in shirt sleeves. Interpreting the signs of the times. The hot spells and the droughts show that climate change is upon us. If there is any doubt, we just need to listen to our sisters and brothers from around the world. It was humbling to meet athletes from Vanuatu at the Commonwealth Games – that nation of small volcanic islands is beset by rising sea levels and more frequent and more devastating cyclones. The consequences of climate change for our children and grandchildren and the lack of action and urgency by governments is frightening. Interpreting the signs of the times – but as Christian people, let’s do this in a way that is full of love and full of hope.

Later today, we have a chance to make the most of a summer afternoon by gathering for a Eucharist outside on the Common Wealth Table. This will give us the opportunity to enjoy the Table together – to break bread both liturgically and for tea – and to commit ourselves again to caring for God’s creation, to our stewardship of the earth.

The Church of England has committed itself to being Net Zero by 2030, and we seek to play our part in that as the cathedral. Pete Foster and Kathryn, our architect, are well on with plans for the building, and there is a challenge for us as a cathedral community to really own and live this journey. We will have corporate opportunities to work on this together – in a month we will celebrate Harvest. This is a chance to commit ourselves afresh to what Pope Francis calls “our ecological conversion”, seeing our journey with Jesus as being fundamentally bound up with the good of the environment.

Thanks to our friends at Grand Union who are celebrating Harvest with locally grown food on the Friday, we should have a marquee – if anyone is interested in being part of a small group to help me plan our Harvest, let me know. We are looking at partnerships to make a difference. Working with Grand Union and the Council, we are hoping to fill the city centre with edible plants (we see a small beginning to this with the herbs growing on the Common Wealth Table). We’ve seen the extraordinary popularity of the Chelsea Garden. All this is vital, especially in this time of increasing food poverty.

It also points to the truth that hope and love encompass eating together, fun, laughter, the joy of company. (Many of you can see the Ascension Window behind me. Jesus going up into heaven points to the essential importance of bodies, of the corporeal for our faith).

Reading the signs of the times. Environmental crisis. Let's commit ourselves to playing our part. Like the rest of the Christian journey, this involves sacrifice, but it also involves a lot of fun. And let's not lose hope. Gerard Manley Hopkins, who received his Christian formation a mile or so from here, wrote these words a little over a hundred years ago:

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.

It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;

It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil

Crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?

Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;

And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;

And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil  
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;

There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;

And though the last lights off the black West went

Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —

Because the Holy Ghost over the bent

World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.