

Prayer points – June 2023



Called to love as God loves

(from a sermon for Trinity Sunday by Revd Margaret Bullitt-Jonas)

At its most basic level ... what it means to be a Christian ... [is to be] someone who, through the power of the Spirit, connects with and trusts in the ever-flowing love of God that is circulating everywhere. Someone who bears witness in very tangible ways – even in the face of suffering and death – to the ongoing love, power and presence of God that fills the whole creation. Someone who knows... that we are made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26), who is a dance-around of love – which is why, when we give and receive love, we feel most joyful and alive, and most truly and fully ourselves. The so-called “dominion” that God gives to human beings in the Genesis story is permission not to dominate or exploit the other creatures of the earth, but rather to love as God loves, to exercise a dominion of love that protects the wellbeing and integrity of God’s creation.

So in the face of the climate crisis, we Christians have a chance to show who we really are: people whose very nature and truest identity is to love as God loves; people who are willing to face squarely the most challenging, even devastating facts; people who can reach into our reserves of courage, faith, and hope and can step out to bear witness to the God who entrusted the world to our care.”

Giving thanks for effective action

“We have taken positive actions, and we’ve had real climate benefits that we can understand with models. I think this should give us hope... it should encourage us that action on climate is possible and it can have an effect in the next couple of decades.”

These were the words of Dr Mark England, lead author of a study on the impact of the Montreal Protocol, in which 197 countries agreed to eliminate the use of substances that harmed the ozone layer. The Protocol, signed just two years after scientists discovered a ‘hole’ in the ozone layer over Antarctica, [has led to](#) the phasing out of nearly 99% of the main ozone-depleting substances, so that the ozone layer is now on track for a full recovery.

But that’s not its only success. Many of the substances that harmed the ozone layer were also powerful greenhouse gases, and scientists believe their elimination has helped to avoid about half a degree of global warming. The new study [shows that the Protocol has had a particularly positive impact on Arctic sea ice](#), “avert[ing] more than half a million square kilometres of Arctic summer sea ice loss by 2020 by limiting warming in the region” and delaying the first ice-free Arctic summer by about 15 years.

Delaying, but not averting. We are still in desperate need of further urgent action. But it can be helpful to be reminded that countries can act together for the common good – and can do so effectively. We give thanks for this, and pray that the success of the one treaty will inspire faster action to address other critical issues.

Tackling Plastic Pollution

At the start of this month, [negotiators are meeting in Paris](#) for the second in a series of conferences designed to [lead to a treaty tackling plastic pollution](#). Plastic pollution currently occurs on a vast scale: the UN [estimates](#) that around 8 to 10 million tonnes of plastic wind up in the ocean each year, causing damage to animals that eat or get caught up in the waste and harming the whole marine ecosystem. Plastics are also related to climate change: over their lifetime, plastics [are responsible for over 3% of greenhouse gas emissions](#) – and plastic pollution can exacerbate the impact of extreme weather events. In Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, [extreme plastic pollution means that heavy rains have a higher chance of causing devastating floods](#).

Pray for the [people negotiating the plastic treaty](#) – and especially for the work of countries and groups seeking to limit the production of plastics. Fossil-fuel companies would like to see more plastic production, as it’s an alternative use for their products. Pray that a [growing High Ambition Coalition](#) and its partners in business and the third sector can ensure that [limits on production are included, as “we cannot recycle our way out of this mess.”](#) Pray also, [with our friends at Tearfund](#), that the treaty will include the perspective of waste pickers, who help to ensure that plastic gets recycled, but often work with little pay or recognition and in dangerous conditions.

Psalm 104: 25, 27-8, 31,33

Here is the sea, great and wide, which teems with creatures innumerable, living things both small and great ... These all look to you, to give them their food in due season. When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things ... May the glory of the Lord endure for ever; may the Lord rejoice in his works... I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being.

Drought in East Africa

In April of this year, the scientists at World Weather Attribution analysed the causes of the current drought in East Africa. [Their finding?](#) *“Climate change has made events like the current drought much stronger and more likely; a conservative estimate is that such droughts have become about 100 times more likely.”* This drought, which started in October 2020, has left [23.8 million people needing humanitarian assistance](#) to avoid hunger.

As a coalition of charities working in the area [noted](#): *“The combined carbon emissions of Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya reach a mere 0.1% of the global total, whereas the carbon emissions of the G20 countries account for 76%. In other words, people in the Horn of Africa are suffering the consequences of a climate emergency they did not create.”* Despite this, a recent UN pledging event, designed to raise money for humanitarian aid, ended up with [commitments for only about a third of what is needed](#) ... and most of those commitments were not new. Lord, we pray for people suffering because of the drought – and lament the injustice that leaves the most vulnerable paying for a situation they did not cause. We pray for a renewed commitment to assist people living amidst the crisis, and for progress towards a more just world.

Moving away from fossil fuels

This year, for the first time, solar power investment will outstrip investment in oil production. *“If these clean energy investments continue to grow in line with what we have seen in the past few years . . . we will soon start to see a very different energy system emerging and we can keep the 1.5C goal alive,”* Fatih Birol, executive director of the International Energy Agency, [said to the Financial Times](#). That’s good news – as [Pope Francis recently reiterated](#), the world *“must listen to science and institute a rapid and equitable transition to end the era of fossil fuel”*. But countries with fossil fuel interests continue to lag in their commitments to fossil-fuel phase outs – and there are concerns that holding the next climate talks [in a petroleum-producing state, with Sultan Al-Jaber, CEO of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, as its president, may make progress towards phase-outs difficult](#). We give thanks for the way in which the transition is accelerating and pray earnestly that God will smooth the way for further progress at the UN talks. More broadly, we pray for all preparing for the next UN climate talks – may God give those working on national policy positions wisdom, courage, and a willingness to work for the common good.

Adieu to flights ...

France’s [ban on short haul flights within the country to destinations that are well served by trains](#) took effect on the 23rd of May. The proposal arose from a Citizens’ Assembly, but had faced opposition from groups representing airports. The French Government [invoked an article that allows an EU country](#) *“where there are serious environmental problems [... to] limit or refuse the exercise of traffic rights, in particular where other modes of transport provide a satisfactory service.”* It is the first time that an EU member state has done this – and the European Commission ruled that the ban could go ahead. Will this have a huge impact on emissions? Not really – as not many routes are affected at this point. But it does have a significant impact in changing mindsets. We give thanks for that – and pray for an increased emphasis on low-carbon transport options worldwide.

Trinity blessing (from St Patrick’s Breastplate, tr Cecil Frances Alexander)

I bind unto myself the name, the strong name of the Trinity,
by invocation of the same, the Three in One, and One in Three,
of whom all nature hath creation, eternal Father, Spirit, Word.
Praise to the Lord of my salvation: salvation is of Christ the Lord.