

LIVING SIMPLY, SO OTHERS MAY SIMPLY LIVE:

a one day workshop on SUSTAINABILITY

FALMOUTH & PENRYN CHURCHES TOGETHER

'Being the Body of Christ' 2017 Study Day

Saturday, 28th January saw about 30 people in total from many of our churches gather at Emmanuel Baptist church for this year's FPCT study day. Four thought-provoking speakers were interspersed with short worship sessions and small group discussions. The topics covered were headed 'responsibility', 'respect', 'relationships' and 'reflection' and included climate change, ecotheology and sustainable living, economic injustice, migration and climate refugees, and living in relationship.

The three worship sessions were linked by verses of Graham Kendrick's hymn 'Beauty for brokenness', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OaMPE53uP38> with the chorus:

*God of the poor, friend of the weak, give us compassion we pray,
melt our cold hearts, let tears fall like rain,
Come, change our love from a spark to a flame.*

Worship included readings from the Gospel of Mark, chapter 3, 1 Samuel chapter 3 and Leviticus chapter 19, the last, with the words "Do not do anything that endangers your neighbour's life. I am the Lord. ... Love your neighbour as yourself" summarising rather well the message of the day that how we live our lives has an impact on everyone else and on the whole of creation itself.

The first two speakers, Richard Hopper and Luci Isaacson, focussed on our responsibility for climate change and the exploitation of the planet's global resources, the former from a scientific, political, biblical and ethical viewpoint and the latter from the practical approach of what we can do about it. Richard Hopper stressed that future generations face more injustice because of our generation's exploitation of the earth's resources: we are all complicit in this and the church is not immune. Our interpretation of scripture, he said, is skewed and in our capitalist, globalised and individualised world, where growth is paramount and GDP is king and where greed is not just individual, but is built into the structures of our economics and politics in a way that drives injustice, everything is reduced to its monetary value, even the creation of God. Technology can help, but human vision, human intention and human action are paramount. We have been led astray by our interpretation of the first chapters of Genesis, thinking that it is our job to rule, subdue and have dominion over creation, forgetting that as the word "Adam" comes from the soil, so we are **of** this planet and part of creation, giving a tight connection between the welfare of humanity and the land. Our view of God has become too human-centred: the Good News is that salvation is to do with God and the whole of creation. Luci Isaacson followed this up with an introduction to Climate Vision and the 10 pledges which we can adopt to reduce our carbon footprint.

In the next session after the coffee break Mary Conway, under the heading "Respect", introduced us via the Irish potato famine of 1850, the Pakistan floods of 2010, the Kenya drought of 2011 and the fears of Peruvian farmers in 2016 for the melting of the glaciers, to the concept of environmental refugees, who are not included in the Geneva Convention's 1951 definition of a refugee, which does not take account of the complexity of human stories. Since 2009, an estimated one person every second has been displaced by a disaster, with an average of 22.5 million people displaced by climate or weather-related events since 2008, but statistics are not always helpful and as Christians we have a

different understanding of human rights, because we believe that all are made in the image of God. Pope Francis in his 2013 Lampedusa speech stressed that everything is connected and that “we are not faced with two separate crises, one environmental the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental” and we must “hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor”. We must learn to be human, for “our lack of response to these tragedies involving our brothers and sisters points to the loss of that sense of responsibility for our fellow men and women upon which all civil society is founded”. “There can be no renewal of our relationship with nature without a renewal of humanity itself. There can be no ecology without an adequate anthropology.” The way we can start on this is by cherishing each thing and each moment, cultivating a culture of encounter. We then moved into groups to consider the 3 questions:

1. What is my identity? What makes me who I am?
2. How can we as Christian communities grow ‘a culture of encounter’ with refugees?
3. How can we enable estranged groups to talk about the good they hope for in communities and their duty towards neighbours?

Before lunch we sang another 2 verses of ‘Beauty for brokenness’, then adjourned for a well-earned break with Tickle Yer Tastebuds pasties and an opportunity to buy fairtrade products.

The afternoon session, led by Andrew Taylor-Browne, focussed on Relationships. To understand climate change and its effects we need to tap into the strengths of religious communities, rather than secular groups, because they can help people to adjust their lives to live more simply and “what we most need to do is to hear within us the sounds of the Earth crying”. We then had a practical exercise to encourage us to focus on someone else, by turning to the person next to us and each talking for 3 minutes without any interruption about our worst fears for the future and our resulting feelings: it was quite hard to listen without breaking in at all! He then spoke about some of our relationships, or “connected selves” and the vicious cycle of community erosion, which leads to our retreat into our own space. We therefore need to concentrate on love, which is “paying focussed and sustained attention to other than ourselves”, hence our little exercise. We can gain strength from all who have influenced us, which led us to our final group session reflecting on something good we may have done in the past which had had an influence and who helped us to gain the strength to do that. We shared our thoughts in the group before moving back for a concluding consideration of “Where next?” – “practise paying careful and sustained attention to all our relationships” and “Give ourselves time” – and the closing worship.

Further details of all the sessions and of follow-up resources can be found at <http://www.falmouthchurchestogether.org.uk/living-simply-a-study-day/>.

Sue Mills