

Impossible Situations

Carbon and Sin – March 6th 2024



What is colourless, odourless, arises from the personal and corporate activities of people, and has a devastating effect on the world? Yes, you guessed it – sin. Or were you expecting it to be carbon dioxide? Strangely similar, aren't they?

On a recent trip to a heritage steam railway (yes, I'm one of those) I was interested in a display about where they sourced their coal, and how much they used. The information was keen to tell me that the total carbon output for the whole year of locomotive running was equivalent to a single Boeing 747 return flight to Miami. I wonder if we might compare our imperfect and sinful lives like that? Who are you as good or as bad as?

I make the comparison because almost all rational thought around the issue of global warming proceeds according to comparison. Every individual, every home, school, church and hospital has a 'footprint' as they say. 'Never mind what others are doing, each of us can reduce'. Perhaps many of us are, but it's hard to measure, then there is also the temptation to claim we are wasting our time whilst other people and places which are negating our efforts.

When we come before the cross, we are quite sure that we are repentant before Christ for *our own sins*. That said, even organisations can be contrite and seek to be closer to the picture of Christ. But the cross is the symbol *par excellence*, of personal sacrifice. We can envision the relevance of the cross for us individually because one person, Jesus Christ, died there for the whole world. Recall the beautiful words of Jesus from John's gospel. '*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.*' (Jn 3:16) So surely, we would not say that it's worthless confessing our personal sins because someone else is more sinful than us. That would be quite ridiculous.

You may not immediately think of the cross as an invitation, but it is. Confession is an entirely positive thing to do, and we should want to. We should want everyone else too as well. The great value of salvation is in the self-reflection, the realisation that we fall short of being the fruitful and faith

people that Christ calls us to be. We are more likely to amend ourselves by being repentant. Confession requires much more of us than rolling away one big stone. Being confessional presents us as people good for the world and our neighbours, whereas the opposite is selfish, deluded and unremorseful people are not good for anyone other than themselves. Such poor-minded people may not immediately realise it, but they personally add to the background of a humanity which collectively brings damaging implications on everyone. That sounds a bit like carbon emissions doesn't it?

I don't know the solution for global warming. Yes, there are emerging technical solutions and frequent high-level international conferences, but hope seems hard to find. St Peter had all the good intentions to start with, but Jesus knew a time was coming when all his followers would be counted. Peter declared to Jesus, *"Even if all fall away, I will not."* (Mk 14:29) Yet it would be less about what he said and more about what he would do. How many times has the cock crowed over us on global carbon emissions, despite our good intentions and promises? It's enough to make you weep bitterly.

Yet the problem of sin, arguably of much greater magnitude than other global concerns, has a well-established solution in Christ. You don't need to wait for technology, government subsidies or any more convincing reports about glaciers. In fact, you can make a great difference to the world as you sit there today reading this.

In a recent sermon we were reminded of the covenant Rainbow that God set for himself after the flood of Noah. That was the last time God would intervene in creation in such destructive way and thereafter promised never to repeat it. If the world is irreparably damaged because of carbon emissions, then it won't be God's fault. But it is true to say that only God can change the world, and through Christ on the cross he did. We don't need to look to anyone else before we embrace the cross and resurrection of Christ. No governmental or corporate agreement is required, and it's not someone else's responsibility.

It's down to each of us individually.

Rector Chris