

**Seas & Oceans: Job 38: 1-3 8-11 Ps 95: 1-7 Matt 8: 23-27 –  
Preached on Sunday 15/09/2019  
8.00 & 11.00 at Christ Church & 9.30 at Good Shepherd**

[\*] We're thinking today about the seas and oceans. One of the issues we have to face is rubbish – the accumulation of filth, and in particular, of plastics in the oceans. A cartoon from *History Today* magazine caught my eye, alluding to King Cnut in the year 1028, who is alleged to have tried to stop the incoming tide. [\*] Are we equally ineffective against the tide of junk today? How do we end what is an eye-soar on the beach and a deadly threat to many sea creatures? We surely need to abandon our attachment to single-use plastics. One suggestion: instead of cling-film, use something called Bee-wrap, which is a bees-wax covered fabric. However we do it, we must ensure we turn the aspiration to reduce, re-use, recycle, into action. Otherwise the tide of rubbish will be unstoppable.

[\*] Over the summer you may have been to the seaside, perhaps enjoying golden sand and gently lapping ripples, or being awe-struck by mighty waves crashing on rocky promontories. You may have had the thrill of water sports – swimming, boating, surfing or whatever – or simply sat and gazed at the ever-shifting waters, or indeed watched the life that teems within them. There is something special about the sea. And for those who stop to reflect, we may well join with the Psalmist in saying, 'The sea is God's, for God made it,' as well as the dry land, the mountain peaks and the depths of the earth.

The true response to beauty and wonder, exhilaration, joy and delight, is to bow down in worship, to kneel before the Lord our Maker, for the Lord is our God and we the people under his care.

[\*] The sea also evokes a different set of images – those of the devastation it can bring. Over the past week or so, news programmes have tracked the path of hurricane Dorian and shown its extraordinary wrecking power: winds up to 185 mph; 36 inches of rain in one day; a tidal surge of 6 or 7 meters above normal. The devastation when the sea is driven on to the land is appalling, and we pray for the people of the Bahamas in its wake. Many of us may be able to give something to aid the relief effort. In the Bible the sea represents forces of chaos and destruction, but God, as it says in Job, fixes the limits of the sea, as it were, setting up doors against it and barring the entrance, saying 'this far and no further.' You would think nothing can stand against the power of the storm, but reality is that God keeps it in check.

[\*] Some people then may raise the question: if God is Lord of the seas, why does he allow storms to destroy lives? If Jesus calms a storm on Lake Galilee, why not on the Atlantic? I can't address the whole issue of suffering today, and we can never have all the answers anyway. One thing we have to recognise, however, is that this is part of how the world works. We are blessed with an amazing living planet of which the weather systems, including storms, are an essential part.

The molten core of the planet makes it habitable, and is the source of ocean currents, which are essential to life and from which we benefit. In this country we are in debt to the Gulf Stream for our temperate climate. The whole of creation is a delicate balance: the limits of sea and land are always going to be precarious. The real question is, if God's in the business of setting limits to the seas, why are we human beings intent on breaking them? If the boundaries between land and sea are ones of such sensitivity, why are we, by our lifestyles, warming the atmosphere, melting the glaciers and raising the sea levels? If God our Father loves oceans that team with life, why are we by our negligence and selfishness killing off so much?

[\*] Now, we can't prove any one storm is caused by global warming, but we do know an increase in sea surface temperature strengthens wind speeds and increases rain fall. We do know higher sea levels bring the potential for far worse damage from sea surges and coastal flooding. We also know polluted, plastic-infested and more acidic sea water damages many species of sea creatures. The artificial warming of the oceans must surely be the antithesis of God's desires for his world. Surely, we have a Christian responsibility to act. It's part of our discipleship.

[\*] What action? All the things we know about that reduce carbon emissions: of the 'Nine ways to walk gently on the earth' (the sheet given out a week or two ago) two stand out: travel light, and go fossil free. Travel light, because car exhausts and jet engines are two of the biggest culprits. Reduce journeys, car share, take the train; if you have to fly, offset the carbon.

Go fossil free: use a green electricity supplier; make sure your home is insulated; make sure heating is efficient; turn down the thermostat. Then, as I've said already, deal with the plastics. Back the big campaigns: this Friday, 20 September, is another global action day, trying to persuade governments to make this the number one priority. It must be number one.

Jesus, in the boat on Lake Galilee, slept through the storm. When his terrified disciples woke him, he asked why they were afraid. It's not right to say to anyone who's faced storm Dorian – or any other catastrophic weather event – there's no need to be afraid. It's us who need to hear those words. We need to hear them if we're frightened to adapt our lifestyles. We need to hear them when we think, I cannot possibly do without this or that. Jesus asks us, in that calm, quiet voice, what are you afraid of, that you find it so hard to take care of my world. Trust God, do what's right – for the sea is God's for God made it: and so is the dry land.