


# CITYtheology

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imagine a new  
future... We're called  
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**Revd Mark Powley**  
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about the Climate'



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# Home for Good?



**Mike Chesterton**, Regional Lead for Home for Good in the North and Midlands, reflects on the place of adoption in our faith and our lives.

One of my favorite verses in the bible is Matthew 5:6 that says, 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled'. I would paraphrase it as, Blessed are those who see that things aren't the way God intended them to be and so they live their lives as an example of (hunger and thirst for) the way God intended things to be.

You don't have to look very far today to see that things aren't the way God intended them to be.

**This year, over 37,000 children will come into care in the UK and that is one child every 15 minutes.**

Focusing a bit closer to home, Leeds City Council has around 1800 children in its care and there is an urgent need for 200 more foster families to look after them. I believe that we, as Christians, should be involved in a response to this situation and these people.

*For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will...*

This verse makes me ask, who better to care for vulnerable children than the Church who have been adopted into sonship?

Paul was speaking into a Roman ruled culture where, if there was no son born into a family, it was normal for a trusted and faithful male slave to be adopted as a son. This slave then became no longer a slave but took on not just the rights of a child but the rights of the firstborn son, in other words, he became the heir. This wasn't just about being adopted into a family, it was about taking the family name and being made the legal heir of all that the family owned. Who better to care for vulnerable children than we who, not by right or birth but **by adoption**, have been



made legal heirs in God's family?

In James 1:27 God gives us the wish-list for worship and at the top of it is caring for vulnerable, traumatised children ***Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*** In the context of the New Testament, widows and orphans were the most vulnerable people in society. They would struggle to provide for themselves and to have a voice in society. So, who better to care for vulnerable children than we, whose Father God continually tells us of his special concern for the most vulnerable in society?

Unlike the sonless Roman family, this isn't about God needing us as children and heirs; this is about us needing him as a father. In the same way, the needs of children in care today for a family and a stable loving home should then be sufficient motivation for us to care for these vulnerable children through fostering or adoption.

So, if I were to write a simple summary of James 1:27 it would say 'care for the most vulnerable and thus live a holy life as an example to the world around you of the way God intended things to be.'

**Who better to care for vulnerable children than we who have been shown radical hospitality as God welcomed us into His family?**

If God has welcomed us into his family, surely, as disciples and imitators we should welcome into our homes those for whom he has this special concern.

'Christians were helpless, in circumstances beyond their control when God adopted them. He did not choose perfect, but imperfect children in need of his love. Love is the primary motivation for adoption into God's family'. So, it could be argued that 'the adoption, or fostering, of children in desperate situations is the most transformative way to demonstrate the gospel to them – and to the community around them'.

Returning to Matthew 5; Blessed are those who see that things aren't the way they were supposed to be and so they hunger and thirst for, live their lives as an example of, the way God intended things to be. Will you be those who live their lives as an example of the way God intended things to be? And is God calling you to do that in the context of fostering or adoption.

If you would like to have an informal chat with one of the Home for Good team then please go to [www.homeforgood.org.uk/get-in-touch](http://www.homeforgood.org.uk/get-in-touch) or call 0300 001 0995.





# The Future Can Be Rewritten

Daniel Ingram-Brown, author, PhD student and designer for CITYtheology, explores understandings of identity and family life.

Remember that time, long ago, in the halcyon days of youth, when the world seemed tinted with a golden glow, when the scent of freshly cut grass lingered in the air, the taste of toffee apples dissolved slowly on the tongue, and cool, crystal river water flowed between your toes? It was a time when all things were right, when the world was one, whole and united. Children's literature often paints a picture of this idyll. In *The Poetics of Childhood*, Roni Natov names this the "Green World"; it is Frances Hodgson Burnett's *Secret Garden*, or Kenneth Grahame's river in *The Wind in the Willows*. It is a place of "harmony and grace", but it is also a vision that "suggests loss, and the longing to return to an earlier state, real or imagined." It is an attempt by adult writers to draw on memories that are always incomplete, partial and re-constructed, often "retrieved layer by layer, as shards pieced together metaphorically in bits of dreams, waking and sleeping." Much of children's literature is concerned with the fall from this state of unity to a place of shadows, what Natov calls the "Dark Pastoral", a landscape of witches and wolves, confusion and conflict. Natov relates this loss to:

The "first great loss, the body of the mother".





**The orphan or adoptee – Oliver Twist, Snow White, Harry Potter – is a staple archetype of children's literature, perhaps because such characters show, writ large, this loss of unity, the separation from the mother. It is a wound that we all encounter, but for those who have lost a birth parent early in life, it is a wound that can be deep and profound.**

Nancy Newton Verrier identifies this as the “primal wound”, a rupture which is “physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual, a wound which causes pain so profound as to have been described as cellular by those adoptees who allowed themselves to go that deeply into their pain.” The author, Jeanette Winterson, also an adoptee, agrees that “all my life, I have worked from the wound”, and in a study of stories of wounded protagonists, including Odysseus, Prometheus, Gulliver and the Fisher King, she concludes that:

*The wound is symbolic and cannot be reduced to any single interpretation. But wounding seems to be a clue or a key to being human. There is value here as well as agony.*

*What we notice in stories is the nearness of the wound to the gift: the one who is wounded is marked out – literally and symbolically – by the wound. The wound is a sign of difference. Even Harry Potter has a scar.*

Perhaps that's why it's the Biblical character of Moses who hears the name of God as I AM WHO I AM. Moses is adopted, placed in the bullrushes to be discovered by Pharaoh's daughter. He doesn't know exactly who he is. He is a child of two cultures, two families, his body the arena of a wider conflict. His identity is in crisis to the point where anger and pain spill over into murder and Moses flees into the desert. God's word to him there, His name, is a word of acceptance, a statement that what is, is good. God Is Who She Is, and we are made in Her image. We can be confident in who we are, no matter where we come from, no matter the situation of our birth or our childhood, no matter what our family background. Perhaps it took somebody who had experienced that wound of separation so deeply to be able to hear such a healing message, a foundation that led to the deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, to the establishment of the Law and the formation of a whole community's identity.

I'm an adoptive dad and also undertaking research for a PhD centred around an exploration of adoption

through creative writing. Perhaps one of my main reflections to date is that we need to be expansive in how we understand identity and family. Family is often pictured as a tree – a family tree – its roots deep in the earth of biology. The philosopher Deleuze challenges such tree-like thinking, which he suggests has “dominated Western reality and all of Western thought.” He argues that such thinking is hierarchical and stratified, organising knowledge into neat categories, a process that can be oppressive and exclusionary. Instead, he urges us to “make maps”, which are “open and connectable”, allowing a flow of knowledge between seemingly disparate elements.

**Perhaps it would be best to think of a family as a map rather than a tree, with room for both genetic and other types of connection.**

Jesus makes an invitation to expand our vision of family at the point of his own wounding:

*When Jesus saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, “Woman, here is your son.” Then He said to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” So from that hour, the disciple took her into his house. (John 19:26-27)*

Perhaps such an expanded view of family would also help us to avoid some of the clichés that fiction can sometimes fall foul of, making depictions of what is often a silent diversity more realistic, rather than merely using the adoptee or orphan as a plot device.





In my new book, *Bea's Witch: A ghostly coming-of-age story* (written as part of my PhD), the protagonist, Beatrice, is an eleven-year-old girl whose unhappiness with her new adoptive placement builds to the point where, like Moses, she runs away. Hiding in the forest of a local tourist park, *Mother Shipton's Cave*, where the 16th Century Yorkshire prophetess is said to have been born, she is intent on burning various objects

from her past, hoping to rid herself of her history. But while there, she encounters the ghost of Mother Shipton, whom she discovers was, herself, fostered as a child. The two trade stories, and as Bea begins to speak about her life, the anger and pain she feels starts to transform. In the closing chapters of the book, while Mother Shipton mixes a potion in a copper bowl, she says:

*'Took me a lifetime to accept that potion – the potion of me life – to drink it all down. When I did, towards end, it was strangely empowering. All my life, folk threatened to burn me, to blot me out. Funny thing was, most of time, I'd have given them a helping hand. I wanted rid of me twisted body, rid of me strange intuitions, rid of the conflicts. I'd have traded them all for beauty, social acceptance...a bairn, if it had been offered. But in end, this is who I was. What I realise now is, it was enough. More than enough, actually.'* She laughs. *'Irony, isn't it? They ended up calling me Mother Shipton. I'm one of most famous mothers in the whole world! The mother who was never a mother. But actually,'* she pours the potion into a little bottle and holds it out for me, *'I been lucky enough to be a mother to many.'*

This is an invitation for Bea to see the whole of the map of her life – the wounds and the gifts, not to seek to burn it away, but to say I AM WHO I AM, without shame.

And so, this exploration of original unity, loss and integration that is at the heart of children's literature can become a conduit of healing, allowing us to access that borderline territory between innocence and experience, between childhood and adulthood, between fantasy and reality. As Natov says, "The landscape of childhood, like the best of literary pastoral, is

integrative, rather than escapist...offering hope and renewal." Perhaps that is even more true as we follow the journey of the adopted child within literature.

**As we reach back into that realm of childhood, looking to reconnect with what has been lost, we are empowered to rethink and reimagine the future.**

As Ma Shipton says to Bea, *"The future can be rewritten, if you only learn how to tell its story."*



*Bea's Witch: A ghostly coming-of-age story* will be released 30th July 2021, published by Lodestone Books, available as paperback, eBook and audiobook. You can pre-order a copy online or from your local bookshop.

#### **Recommended reading**

*The Poetics of Childhood*, Roni Natov, 2003, Routledge

*A Thousand Plateaus*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, 1987, Bloomsbury Academic  
*The Primal Wound*, Nancy Newton Verrier, 1991, Gateway Press

*Why Be Happy When You Can Be Normal*, Jeanette Winterson, 2011, Vintage Books





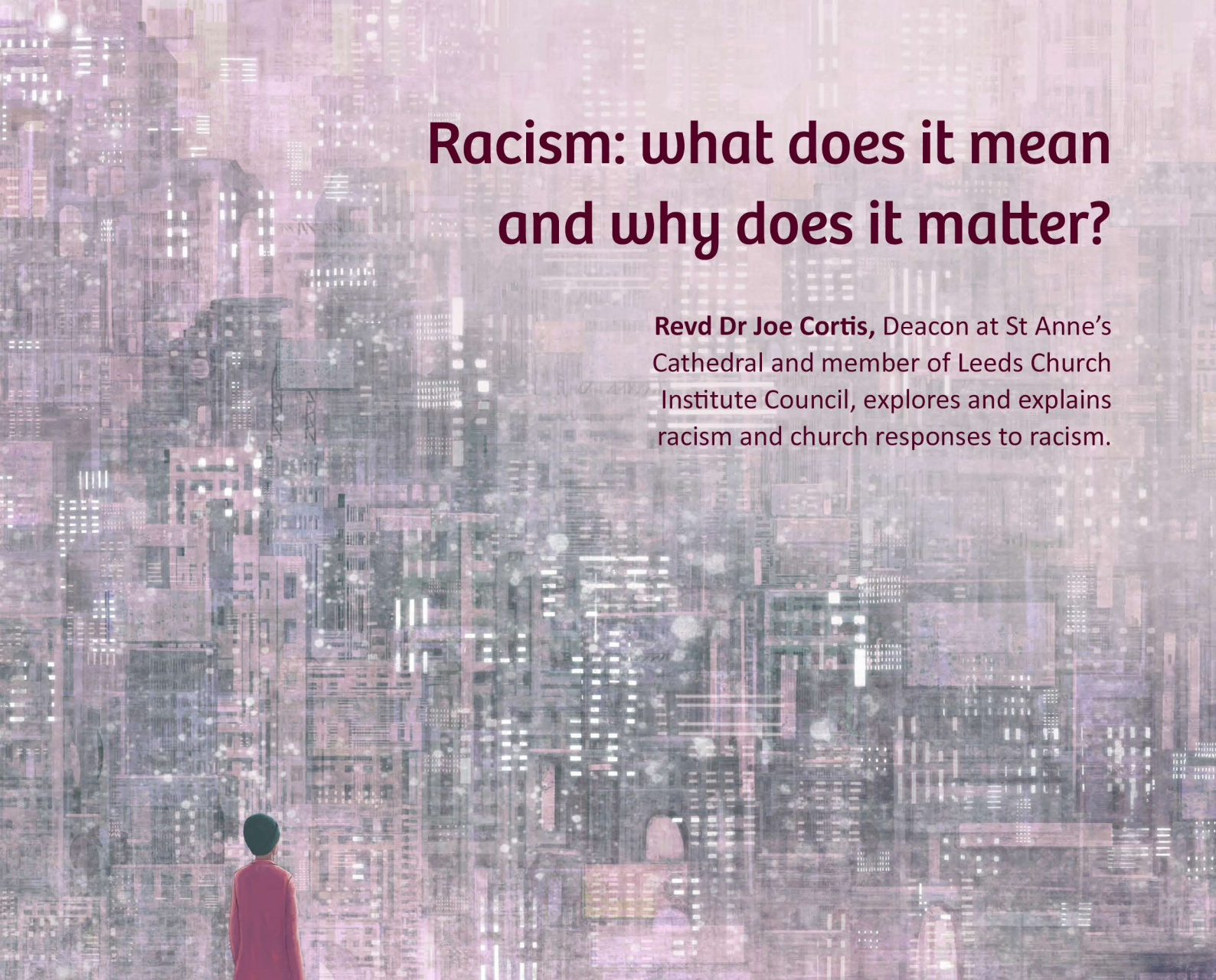


## A Good Friday?

By Daniel Ingram-Brown

She looked proud and sad,  
With grandmotherly beauty,  
As you walked away,  
Along the garden path.  
You smiled for the photo,  
Bright with unformed feelings  
No six-year-old should have to bear.  
In the car, we played the Laughing Policeman.  
But this was a sad day.  
Hopeful.  
A good Friday.  
We were taking charge of the story of life,  
A light for our path.  
And as you sat in the backseat,  
Such fragile treasure,  
I gripped the steering wheel, tight.





# Racism: what does it mean and why does it matter?

**Revd Dr Joe Cortis**, Deacon at St Anne's Cathedral and member of Leeds Church Institute Council, explores and explains racism and church responses to racism.

**Over the decades the issue of racism has been recognised in most societies but there has been little in way of change.** In our own city, the death of David Oluwale, who was "hounded to his death" by police is a formative story about post war Leeds. Recent events linked to 'Brexit' issues, the Government's inquiry into the relevance of the concept of 'institutional racism', and the role that soldiers from former colonies played during WWI are a few current examples highlighting that the concept of 'race' is still relevant today.

A belief in the existence of naturally occurring 'races' is reflected in popular and political opinion. Although people tend to now talk more about ethnicity and culture rather than 'race', it is often the case that the assumptions that were previously related to the concept of 'race' continue to proliferate. Recognising that 'race' is a social construction and not a biological phenomenon does not deal with the problem of the continued use of racialised terminology and its use as a real basis for social differentiation.

Racism is manifested in complex and changing ways over time, space and place. It can be seen across the broad spectrum of human activity, organisations and interactions.

**A key term here is 'everyday racism' which counters the view that racism is an individual problem. 'Everyday racism' refers to forms of discrimination that manifest themselves in systematic, recurrent and familiar practices.**

This means it involves socialised attitudes and behaviours, and continually adapts to the ever-changing social, political and economic social conditions.

Alongside an understanding of everyday racism is the role of institutional racism. This was first identified by the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry which



explained that the power of institutional racism resides in the taken for granted nature of routine operations of an institution and its ideologies.

**Even non-racist individuals can help to perpetuate racist practices by their uncritical participation in racist institutional structures.**

For this reason, racism needs to be studied and understood as not simply prejudiced beliefs and actions but also as a powerful part of the social structure. Skills need to be learnt to challenge racism in a 'elegant' way which is tactful, timely, not punitive and in a genuine spirit of compassion and commitment to social justice. Training has to be effective, useful and constructive if participants are to incorporate the messages and principles into their practice. One can argue against training for training's sake or training to appease the institution that it is doing something in fact does more harm than good. Moreover, teaching 'white' people how to understand 'black' people posits 'white' as central and 'normal' and hence positions black and minority ethnic people as 'others' and peripheral. White ethnicities also need to be explored and understood. Placing the issues in terms of black/white dualism only serves to simplify a complex set of social relations.

In addition to this, training also needs to be monitored and evaluated in terms of outcomes. Training requires targeting appropriate needs, identified through data collection and monitoring. It also needs to be part of the process of mainstreaming 'race' equality and anti-racism into institutional practices as a long term strategy. Such training needs to be incorporated across institutional policies and practices so that all are aware of how racism can, overtly or covertly, structure their own practice. Alongside this, our institutions need to have robust and transparent processes and procedures for investigating incidents of racism and to be seen to be taking action when necessary. Such procedures will also need to be periodically reviewed.

Last summer, faith leaders in Leeds expressed their horror at the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis in 2020 and their shock at the incendiary language, poor judgement and violence against peaceful protest that followed. In an open letter written by church leaders, it was recognised that racism is embedded in many institutions and cultures, including the Church and local congregations. The letter said:

“We recognise that we have allowed ourselves to become estranged from God’s heart and from the people he loves. We need to reflect, repent and act differently across our city to forge together a better future where all have a voice, are able to contribute and live free from fear and oppression.

We wish to build relationships in our city so we are not just helping people different from us address problems, but finding common cause with partners and friends to forge a better future together. We hope that through our listening we can shape the policies, practices and priorities of the institutions, churches, business and services of our city.”

Together we affirm that humans were created in the image and likeness of God. Regardless of any factors or reasons we can think of, individuals have an inherent and immeasurable worth and dignity. Building on this, we acknowledge that human beings exist in relation to one another. We are called to live with others, aware of others, communicating, sharing, enjoying moments of joy and being there together in times of sadness. All of us are called to participate, to join in, and to work alongside

others for the common good of all. Part of our calling today is to challenge everyday racism and institutional racism.

If you would like to take part in an antiracism initiative with Leeds Citizens and others, please contact Helen Reid on [director@leedschurchinstitute.org](mailto:director@leedschurchinstitute.org)



# Should We Declare a Climate Emergency?



**Revd Mark Powley**, Director of St Hild College, writes about why Christians should be 'Telling the Truth about the Climate'

Nearly two years ago, in heady pre-Covid days, I spent a lazy day by the River Ure near Ripon with friends from Leeds. As we sat by the river, discussion turned to the climate crisis. 'What are we supposed to do now?', someone asked. 'Do we place the blame on governments, or does it all come down to individual responsibility? And, anyway, is there any hope of averting catastrophe?' Unsurprisingly, we made very little progress on these questions. But then we started to talk about the church. What should we be doing as Christian communities, and can it really make a difference? Though we had no idea that day where our conversations would lead us, the last 24 months have provided a surprising and powerful response to that question.

My friend Howard and I were involved in those conversations that day, but that wasn't the last of it. The subject wouldn't let us go. Eventually we decided to meet up a few times and thrash out some possible ways forward. We accepted that international action was crucial; and we knew that every individual had a part to play. But we couldn't escape the conviction that churches have a unique role to play. We've seen that councils, universities, NHS Trusts and dioceses have declared a climate emergency. So why not churches? Yet, when I phoned the co-ordinator of the UK climate emergency website ([climateemergency.uk](http://climateemergency.uk)) and asked how many churches had contacted him to declare an emergency, he said that not a single church had been in touch. So, armed with this and inspired by a blog piece at Green Christian, a plan began to take shape.

**What if, starting in Leeds, we could help churches declare a climate emergency – not just here in Yorkshire but across the UK?**

Now, two years after those initial discussions, we're delighted to say that Tearfund, Christian Aid and a host of other agencies have lent this idea their backing to create a truly national coalition.

**The Climate Emergency Toolkit ([climateemergencytoolkit.com](http://climateemergencytoolkit.com)) is now available to help any church or Christian organisation to meaningfully declare a climate emergency.**

It provides resources to help 'prepare' people to engage with the issue, to 'declare' or recognise the emergency, and to 'impact' the wider community.

Since its launch in January over 2,000 copies of the toolkit have been downloaded, and recent national webinars introducing it attracted over 450 delegates. My own college, St Hild, has now formally recognised the emergency, as have a growing number of churches in Leeds and round the country. And all this from a conversation by the river that quite simply took on a life of its own.



In the course of this journey we've seen the importance of the church going beyond general ecological plans, valuable though they may be.

## **We need sound a clear call to action that cuts through the static and confusion on climate change.**

Only this can bring about a step change in our response to this truly urgent crisis. Still, we might still have questions about the virtue of declaring an emergency: could a declaration be a token gesture? Can churches make the kind of changes declaring an emergency would involve? Is there any risk this could detract from other important Christian work? In response to these questions, I'd like to offer the following points in support of declaring a climate emergency.

### **TRUTH**

Christians are called to be people of truth. Paul instructs us, 'speak truthfully to your neighbour' (Ephesians 4:25).

The Biblical prophets frequently spoke out about impending disaster; their role was to call out a warning in advance and to prescribe a response which may just avert catastrophe. For example, Joel predicts a disaster – an army 'like a crackling fire' – but calls people to return to God, saying, 'Who knows? He may turn and relent' (Joel 2). Frequently in Scripture false prophets declare 'peace, peace', but true prophets insist on facing up to a tragic situation. Jesus himself prophesied the fall of Jerusalem and expected his disciples to prepare for it. Among the early Christians, Agabus later warns of a famine, and the church then responded practically ahead of time (Acts 11:27-30).

The climate crisis is already happening: loss of biodiversity; extreme weather patterns; rising sea levels; dramatic habitat change; increased atmospheric carbon. We may well be in a crucial window of opportunity to safeguard the ecological conditions many millions of humans and our co-creatures depend on. Our responsibility as Christians is to speak the truth in love about the climate emergency. Many people, especially young people, expect the church to speak out meaningfully on this issue. In fact, in a recent survey nine out of ten Christian young people said that the church wasn't speaking up enough about the climate. Making a formal declaration is a powerful and clear way of naming what needs to be named: we are in an emergency.

### **COMPASSION**

Christians, of course, have a mandate for compassion. 'Love does no harm to a neighbour' (Rom 13:10). Facing a flood, God's people built an ark; in storms they look to protect life, as both Jesus and Paul did (Luke 8:22-25, Acts 27:13-26); and in the plagues that struck the Roman Empire, they provided healthcare to the astonishment of the authorities.

To declare an emergency is to recognise the suffering people are already enduring around the world through harvest failures, forest fires and other extreme weather events. This is what we do when there is a flood in our local area, or when we see any overwhelming human need

It's a modern equivalent of what the good Samaritan did. He acted with urgency, with a total and generous commitment. Likewise, in response to the famine predicted by Agabus, Paul urged the Corinthians to action: to make a careful plan so they could alleviate the need of others (1 Corinthians 16:1-4). In the same way, churches now can take action. We can put in place practical and urgent plans to address climate change.

Christ has set us free to be radically generous, to make the sufferings of others – even the sufferings of creation – our own. Ultimately, discipleship is shown and proved by this love. This is how the world knows we follow Jesus.

### **HOPE**

Finally, we are people of hope – and this may be our greatest gift of all. To declare a climate emergency is an act of hope. If there is nothing we can do, why declare anything? But the church has hope. We speak as ambassadors of the God of abundant resources and unimaginable grace.

We are called to be signs of this hope, to be salt and light. The church, of course, is not its buildings or even its acts of gathered worship, it is a living network of kingdom influencers, each one a beacon in their household, workplace or neighbourhood. These are the places God has put us in order to witness to the kingdom. These are therefore the places we can ask questions, bring change and find new ways forward.

Done well, declaring an emergency is not an empty gesture. It's the beginning of imagining a new future. This, too, is the task of the prophet. This is why Jeremiah, when the city of Jerusalem was about to be overrun by invaders, went out and bought a field (Jeremiah 32:6-15). It was a sign of hope for a future no one could yet see. Right now, we face a challenge of imagination. Who can imagine a sustainable, low carbon economy? But once it was hard to imagine a culture where children were not exposed to the elements simply for being female, where healthcare and schooling were provided, and all people were seen as dignified under law. These were things that Christians imagined, and then helped bring to pass. Now it is time to imagine again.

The church is called imagine a new future, without casting stones at others; or placing unmanageable burdens on those who can afford it least. We're called to show how an emergency can be named with courage and faced with hope. There is an opportunity here for the church to lead, to take initiative on climate change and make its unique contribution alongside others. We should ask God for the courage to play our part.

My hope and prayer is that every church and Christian organisation in Leeds would formally recognise the climate emergency, make urgent plans to reduce emissions and mobilise its members as beacons for change wherever they find themselves. We hope that the climate emergency toolkit will play its part in helping us all to do this.



# House of Questions Exhibition: July 21st – 28th 2021

## at the Church of the Epiphany, Gipton

This unique exhibition, postponed from 2020, includes an installation by visual artist **Phill Hopkins** and supported reflection by community theologian **Dr Charlotte Naylor Davis**. Their work developed last year supported by a bursary from Leeds Church Institute. At the heart of the installation is the question, 'If you could ask one question of God or about religion, what would it be?' It is an immersive and engaging experience which encourages you to find your way to respond to the question. **Come to see and hear what they created and produced.** It will inspire and challenge you.

You can view this exhibition at the launch event, as part of a pilgrimage walk from Leeds Minister or during selected opening times by emailing [events@leedschurchinstitute.org](mailto:events@leedschurchinstitute.org).



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Design: Daniel Ingram-Brown

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Phill Hopkins: Back Page - 'Yellow House with Lion' 2018. Photo Tim Balls