

# That you act justly . . .

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## To cultivate the earth and to care for it

Over the recent history of mankind the cultivation and usage of the earth has accelerated to the point where we are now asking how we can possibly sustain what is going on at the moment. The answer that comes back from those with the most knowledge is that we will be unable to do so. Which might bring us to the conclusion that we have neglected the second part of the injunction in Genesis, 'to care for the earth'. Rather belatedly we are trying to organise to manage the current situation and engineer a stable future. Conferences such as the one that recently finished in Bali are steps in the right direction but, as anyone who followed the process would have noticed, it is with great difficulty that even modest agreement is reached. There is a great deal of work to be done to convince certain governments as well as the generality of people that action is urgent.

If we live in the UK it takes rather more of an effort to look at what is going on and conclude that this is unsustainable. In other parts of the world the evidence is more obvious. One writer comments: "In the Asia-Pacific region people are devouring resources at 1.7 times the rate that the region can support." And that includes such essentials as fresh water. "But," he adds, "the average impact of an Asian is still seven times smaller than that of a North American and a third that of a European." So despite the fact that we are not visibly confronted with irrefutable evidence, we are near the peak of the consumption pyramid and, for everyone's sake, need to become engaged in the process of change.

An even more powerful motivation than caring for the planet is that of caring for the poor. Production of consumer goods (and exploitation of the workers) may be booming but the effect of this on more natural trades can be devastating. One Indonesian fisherman recounts that 5 years ago he could earn about \$100 per week catching shrimp. Now the effects of extensive logging in

his area mean that by shrimping he might only earn \$5 per month.

## What would Jesus drive?

In the US, a campaign against high-consumption vehicles used this slogan as a conscience-pricker. I don't know how effective it was but it is a justifiable question. The answer can be found clearly enough in the principles that Jesus laid down in his teachings. And so, I think, can what Jesus would have thought about climate change. Clearly he didn't talk about 'carbon footprints' but he did refer to natural things in many of his stories and sayings. He talked about reading the signs: "Let the fig tree teach you a lesson. When its branches become green and tender and it starts



putting out leaves, you know that summer is near." "Early in the morning you say, 'It is going to rain, because the sky is red and dark.' You can predict the weather by looking at the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs concerning these times!" There are plenty of signs for us to read and the consequences of ignoring them are comparable to the folly of building a house on sand.

## Whose Justice?

Pope Benedict's latest encyclical 'Spe Salvi', states that the norms of human justice have been established by God and it is up to mankind to seek to understand and implement these rather than to create our own standards independently. He says that "a world which has to create its own justice is a world without hope." He is presumably referring to the chaos and argument that would occur if the matter were left for the smart and the powerful to hammer out between them. So the life and the teaching of Jesus are highlighted as the touchstone for whatever we wish to implement in the name of justice.

During this season of the Church's year we are reminded that Jesus was poor, threatened and a refugee, sharing the lot of so many in our own time.