

Dear Friends,

Back in 1983, when I attended the Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Vancouver as one of the Church of England's representatives, it was still very much the era of the Cold War. People in the West still felt that the great threat to the world was that of nuclear warfare between the superpowers. But environmental issues were also beginning to make themselves felt as matters of concern.

One of the speakers said something I shall never forget. It was along these lines: "You, in the developed countries, are afraid of an apocalyptic event which would spell the 'end of the world'. Just don't forget that for many people in the poor countries, the end of their world is coming every day." I found that very challenging.

Now, as we have just gone through months and months in which the weather just seems to be "wrong", (pleasantly mild, but "wrong"), and as I write, a bumble-bee is buzzing outside my window, concern about the issue of climate-change is getting a much wider grip in the West - together with speculation about what it might mean for us. But don't forget - as we fear disasters which might or might not come in the future, for many people, experienced disaster - the "end of their world" - is coming every day.

Challenges such as the one I heard in Vancouver are becoming more and more valid. The curiosity of bees buzzing in our gardens even in January is a sign not just of things to come, but of a state of affairs which is already causing death and suffering. The World Development Movement suggests that about 80,000 people already die annually from malnutrition due to climate-change, and that soon water supply will become more difficult still in a world where already many have very inadequate access to it. For example, like one sixth of the world's population, the citizens of Lima, the capital of Peru, rely on glacier water, which may disappear in the next 20 years.

Such organisations ask us to be much more serious, now, about our own carbon emissions, and to campaign politically for our government to be much more serious, too - particularly over such issues as aviation, which is largely not counted in measures of our nation's emissions! It is an issue of justice, to "come clean". And for Christians, it is a matter of "family", too. We are privileged to be closely bound to people all over the world as those who share a common faith and calling. It is natural for people to be most deeply moved by things which affect their own families. If we deepen our sense of the global reach of Christian faith, this may put us in the way of hearing voices which witness in very personal and graphic ways to what is happening. We don't necessarily have to get on a 'plane to see it for ourselves. Just picking up a Christian Aid magazine at the back of a church may bring other people and their daily struggles alive to us, along with their names and faces.

Of course, it would not help for any of us to be continually burdened and depressed; more, we need to be disciplined, imaginative and in the best sense hopeful, in the way we look at the world. There is a call for people of faith, alongside all others of good will, to keep giving voice to the concerns of the most immediately vulnerable, both now and into the future. In the future, for example - if climate-change does fundamentally affect the global grain supply, someone will have to shout very loudly

on behalf of the poor countries in a much more difficult market. It would be a natural consequence if each nation just looked out for its own in what would be experienced as a world-crisis. Might we be among those who continually asked the question, "what about those at the back of the queue?" It wouldn't always be a popular question, and might not feel as though it were having much effect. But sea-changes of attitude and policy do start with persistent minorities who keep on asking the sharp questions.

Persistence, faithfulness, perseverance - these are all names for a virtue the New Testament prizes very highly and sees as a sign of the Spirit, when harnessed to love. We are coming towards the beginning of Lent. Perhaps any discipline we take up should be more than a programme of self-improvement, and address issues such as these, which involve justice and love on the largest possible scale.

Your friend and vicar,

Maggie Guite