

Who can stop climate change? We can. We have a responsibility to do so that began when God commanded the earliest human inhabitants of the Garden of Eden to 'till it and keep it'. To keep it; not to abuse it, not to destroy it.

These are the words of Desmond Tutu

Christian Aid has long encouraged the church to find sources of hope so that we might be inspired to take action on the causes and consequences of climate change, most recently in its Song of the Prophets Report.

The biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann has shown us one of the tasks of such prophets is to inspire our imagination, to offer an alternative vision in which the earth might be a different and better place, and then live that envisioned world into a reality.

Micah is one such biblical prophet, but we might wonder if someone writing millennia before the manufacture of disposable plastic and industrial pollutants has anything to contribute as a source of hope and inspiration of action on the climate crisis?

We heard a short passage from Micah in the Bible Reading. So who is this Micah guy? Micah was from a town in southern Judah. He was prophesying sometime around 700 BC, more than 2 and a half thousand years ago. Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah and Hosea. Micah's understanding of the social ills of his day are evident in his prophesy. He alternates between doom and hope and unsurprisingly, the theme of the prophecy is judgement and deliverance. Micah tells us that God hates idolatry, injustice and rebellion, but He delights in pardoning the penitent.

Much like climate scientists and eco-activists have been clamouring for the attention of the world in the past few decades, Micah begins his prophecy with a message that is intended to go global: 'Hear, you peoples, all of you; listen, O earth, and all that is in it.' (Micah 1:2)

Micah names and shames the corruption of the political leaders, the dishonesty of the merchants and greed of those who control the use of land. He denounces their exploitation and oppression of people and land, he sees these social injustices as integral to the idolatry of the people of Israel, the misplaced worship and devotion to greed that religious leaders of his day have allowed to happen on their watch.

The work of theologian Walter Wink has shown us that such naming of the systemic 'powers' of injustice, along with a deliberate engagement with their spiritual and material manifestations, is a necessary step towards their redemption and establishing a vision of shalom.

As with Micah, so too climate injustice feeds upon the prolific idolatry and fallen principalities of money, power and rapacious self-interest, fuelled by the myth of perpetual growth. These false gods continue to entice the world away from a biblical vision of peace and justice and finding our place within the well-being of creation.

If we are to imagine the better world presented to us in the Christian Aid report, 'Song of the Prophets', then we need to begin with naming and engaging the systemic powers that have led to the injustices that now mar creation and threaten its very existence.

We do this not necessarily to condemn specific people, companies or practices (that is too easy and such scapegoating is rarely pretty or helpful), but to reveal their destructive directions and engage them in an imaginative and prophetic return to their true vocations.

Micah does this memorably. Early in the prophecy his incisive metaphors and subtle innuendo play on names of the towns that perpetuate these injustices leaving the message of judgment abundantly clear. Other prophets were known to resort to creative measures to getting their point across: Jeremiah smashes jars, Ezekiel digs through walls, and Isaiah walks around naked to name a few ways they grabbed attention and emphasised their message.

Trouble is not just ahead

According to Micah (in chapter 2 verse 1), there's a lot of woe coming to those in power who plan injustice and plot 'evil deeds on their beds', and in chapter 3 he warns us that even more trouble is

on its way for those who are bribed to proclaim that everything on earth is just as God would have it and 'no disaster' will then befall us (3:11-12).

Climate change disasters are not only coming, they are already upon us, not as punishment from heaven but as a direct result of our behaviour. As ever, those harmful actions originate predominantly in the global North, but most perilously impact the poorest people on the planet. The evidence Christian Aid has gathered from places like the Philippines, Kenya, Bolivia, Bangladesh and El Salvador is indisputable.

Christian Aid have identified four different prophetic statements for us.

First, '19-year-old Glory, from the Philippines lives on a small island of Tabugon, Carles with her family. It's beautiful and peaceful, with fresh air, coral reefs, and fresh seafood. But it is changing. Living on an island is very challenging. Glory really feels the impact of climate change. Her message for the world is that we must act on the crisis of climate change. We need to be responsible. We should be concerned on protecting our surroundings because this has been created for us. We have the wisdom to know what is right and what is wrong.'

Secondly, Katalina Tahaafe Williams, a theologian writing from Australia and the Pacific islands says this: 'Only the willingly ignorant continue to deny the link between our consumerist lifestyles, climate change, and suffering in the developing world. Promoting economic growth as the answer to all our problems, and in particular global poverty, is irresponsible. We need to recognise that our current growth-oriented system is driven by powerful economic interests set on making profits, however short term.

'... And it is just plain wrong to ignore the suffering of the poorest and most vulnerable populations in the world especially when they are the least contributors to climate change.'

Third, In chapter 6, Micah says this: 'O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me! (...) Can I tolerate wicked scales and a bag of dishonest weights? Your wealthy are full of violence; your inhabitants speak lies, with tongues of deceit in their mouths.'

Finally, Christian Aid reports: Drought drives people to the brink. Storms tear families apart. Raging waters show no mercy. Our world is in crisis. We have the power to stop it. People living in poverty are on the frontline of this climate crisis. They are losing food, water, homes and family. Every day, they walk further, dig deeper and build stronger to survive. Unrelenting. Determined. They battle the worst of a climate crisis they did not create. This is unjust. But a better way is possible. A way that restores justice to our broken world today. A way that protects the future for all of us, our children and grandchildren.

The earth as judge

God calls upon the mountains and the hills, the foundations of the earth itself as witnesses for the prosecution of Israel. Back then, nature was only called to testify to the selfishness of the people and the injustices visited upon the poor. Now, today, creation might be summoned as a wounded and feverish victim too.

And while we might look to our own resources and solutions in response, God presents us with a more radical challenge in those familiar words of Micah 6:8: '... what does God require of you but to do justice, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God?'

Do justice – how can we do that?

God requires us to do justice with those who are the worst affected yet least responsible for the climate crisis. To amplify and join with their voices in the call for a new deal for climate justice go to the Christian Aid web site to sign their online petition. There is a link to this at the end of the service.

To do justice also requires justice for the earth, to acknowledge that the raging fires, flooding rivers, devastating typhoons and species extinction are a result of the grave injustice of exploitation and neglect of the natural rhythms we must now learn to live in harmony with.

Love mercy – what does that mean for us?

God requires us to embody loving mercy and kindness. While this, of course, demands that we act with compassion for the wounded creation and for its hurting people, it also begs what may be the more difficult question: how are we to engage the fallen powers in such a way that show redeeming mercy to those who continue to reject the radical changes that are needed for a climate crisis to be averted?

Is it to believe with hope that perhaps even the most ardent climate change-denying politician, or the most active carbon-emitting company has the potential to change. Well, nothing is impossible with God! And it also offers an invitation to show ourselves mercy for any guilt we may feel for our own carbon dependency. Such mercy might save us from silent shame and allow us to loudly call for the system change needed.

Walk humbly – how do we do that?

Walking humbly means turning to God in prayer, in continuous and collective prayer for the planet. This year we are invited to join the Christian Aid prayer chain where together with Christians across Britain, Ireland and the world, we will bring our prayers of lament, confession, repentance, petition, intercession, praise and thanksgiving. If this is something that interests you, there is a link to more information at the end of the service.

Joining with sisters and brothers across the world in prayer we remind ourselves that the earth is the Lord's and in setting our hearts to seek God we galvanise our courage to do justice and love mercy as we respond to the challenge and join in the mission of God in restoring the earth.

What does God require of us? - to do justice, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God. Christian Aid have provided us with some radical ideas on how to achieve that.

