

I remember as a teenager doing some simple experiments with solar panels and being very impressed that water warmed up so quickly in the sun against a dark background and even more impressed that some tiny solar panels I had bought could actually generate electricity! That must have been at least 45 years ago. It was part of a realization that burning fossil fuels was unsustainable. The miners strike and oil crisis of the early 1970s forced this onto the public agenda. This year, for the first time in the UK, renewable sources and nuclear power overtook fossil fuel as the main source for power generation power for two consecutive months in August and September.

I'm sure that it wasn't planned for the United Nations Climate Change conference known as COP25 (Conference of the Parties) to coincide with the first two weeks of Advent. But it is appropriate timing for us because for Christians climate change is a spiritual issue because it reflects on our stewardship of the world. We believe that God has entrusted us with the care of our earthly home. Pope Francis has blamed human selfishness for climate change and I can see where he is coming from. His encyclical 'Laudato si – on care for our common home' is a broad and deep reflection on these matters. What could be more selfish than trashing the world and squandering its resources and leaving it to the next generation to try and sort it out? I can well understand the rage of extinction rebellion and the stern warnings of Greta Thunberg.

In truth we have known for many decades that things will have to change. But we all like our comforts, we like our way of life, and Governments really don't like upsetting voters by forcing change on them. Yes, we have all known for a long time that change is needed but in the last couple of years the temperature of debate as well as of the planet has continued to rise. The evidence of climate change has become indisputable, even though there will always be some who will dispute its causes.

I used to imagine that it would be our grandchildren who might be seriously affected by climate change but now evidence seems to be everywhere and staring us in the face. CO2 levels in the atmosphere have risen again this year. And a quick glance at the weekend news feed shows a massive fire in Australia which is too large to be put out, alarmingly close to the city of Sidney and in Africa the news that the Victoria Falls has dried to a trickle after the worst drought in a century. I saw a heart rending piece recently about a South African farmer, who had previously prospered, in despair that his region had not had significant rain for five years. Extreme weather events and patterns are already putting many people's lives in peril.

We may feel in England, and in most of Europe, that we are relatively sheltered from the immediate effects of climate change. Most of us don't mind it being a bit warmer and having champagne (or similar!) made in Kent.

But looking ahead it is not hard to see that widespread drought and famine could cause huge movements of people which will put extreme pressure on more temperate parts of the world. Increased conflict seems almost inevitable - which is perhaps the most terrifying part of the story.

Huge change is going to be required of us because so many of our fundamental activities contribute to climate change; our food, our means of transport, our forms of heating, the clothes we wear, to name but a few. And change has been happening. Just ten years ago 80% of our electricity was generated by burning coal and gas. Now it is less than half that and only 1% comes from coal which is the most polluting source. And there is surely great potential in exploiting the wave and tidal energy which surrounds our island nation. But we know that much more needs to be done and that some large nations are far from committed to radical change.

So we each have our part to play as individuals, churches and communities in cutting our carbon footprint and living less wastefully. But we shouldn't be fundamentalist about this any more than in other matters! People who have family living on the other side of the world still want to be able to visit them. And Devon farmers keeping grass fed cattle and stewarding their land well for nature are not the enemy!

I was very struck by a phrase from last week's epistle "Now is the time to wake from sleep." St Paul was talking about the nearness of our salvation but I couldn't help thinking about the slumber which often takes over when difficult decisions about sustainable solutions are required by national and world leaders.

The Prophet Isaiah had a vision of a world transformed, made beautiful and peaceful by God. The poor and meek are treated fairly, and even those creatures who are usually at each other's throats are pictured lying down peacefully together. The earth is filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

Our Christian response to climate change should certainly include practical changes and political awareness. But it must also include prayer for concerted action and perhaps, above all, a keeping alive of that vision of a world transformed. There are many solutions and actions that can be taken to mitigate and slow the effects of climate change. The big question is whether the will exists to put them into effect! Many nations are already working together but can vested interests and old enmities be put aside to tackle this global crisis? John the Baptist was stark in his warnings to those who cared nothing for those around them. It seems that a sort of judgement of our way of life may be just around the corner for us. We can help by facing it with joy and hope and by praying for a world renewed and restored, as envisioned by Isaiah.