

Let Glasgow Flourish

Dominating our news headlines for the next two weeks will be COP26. Which stands for the 26th 'Conference of the Parties'. Climate change has gone from being a fringe issue to a global priority. For nearly three decades the UN has been bringing together almost every country on earth for global climate summits.

The UK, together with our partners Italy, is the host for this year's event which many believe to be the world's best last chance to get runaway climate change under control.

If that is the case, and we are in an emergency, the question must be for us as Christians, where does God fit into this?

We are rightly proud of our ancient motto here in Glasgow.

"Let Glasgow flourish through the preaching of thy word and the praising of thy name."

When St Mungo arrived in Glasgow in 540 AD, he certainly believed all those years ago that our city will flourish, if we put God first and foremost.

Psalm 146 is our lectionary psalm today and it speaks perfectly to COP26.

It is a psalm that reminds us that God is our Creator.

V6, "He is the maker of Heaven and Earth and the sea and everything in them. he remains faithful forever"

Caring for Creation is an imperative and priority for us because the one we worship created all that there is, and more than that He is faithful. He will not let us down. He holds the universe in his hands. He spoke and all things came into being. He remains faithful forever. Even if the heavens and Earth pass away our God will remain. Everything is ultimately in His hands and so we are called to have faith in this Creator God.

We bring God

The psalm begins with the words, "Praise, the Lord my soul" and ends with the words "Praise the Lord".

When the psalmist speaks about his soul – he is speaking about his whole being. Jesus said, *"And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength."*

What is your soul?

George MacDonald, famous Scottish minister of the 19th century, who was a great influence on some of the most notable authors in English literature: Tolkien, J.M Barrie and C.S. Lewis, who said, he was the master.

MacDonald wrote, "You don't have a soul. You are a Soul."

The soul is our whole existence, it is that part of us that will not die. It is the eternal part of us, and that is what the psalmist calls his people to do, "Praise, the Lord my soul...." In other words, with everything that you have.

So, as we engage with COP26, let us come as God's people, who are worshipful and who have God as their soul focus. Without the God focus, we are good people who care for the planet, but when we bring God into it, then we are become his faithful stewards, entrusted to serve him because it's His world.

But there is a warning in the psalm.

V3, Do not put your trust in Princes, in human beings, who cannot save.

Why can they not save, because they are powerless to save. All their clever idea will pass. He tells us that they are mortal and one day they will return to the ground and that their plans will ultimately come to nothing.

The psalmist wants his people to capture the idea that human beings, with their own wisdom, cannot save us!

That is a message for COP26 because let's be honest, what's brought us to this conference is our own human mess. We don't need our modern-day prophet Greta Thunberg to point this out to us, we only need to look around us.

Human beings have got us in to this mess, and now our leaders are trying to scramble together and emergency plan, at the 11th hour, to deliver us from this chaos.

"They cannot save", the psalmist wrote. I wonder how many folks, over the next few weeks, will say sorry to God, for the mess of the planet? How many over the next few weeks will take time to turn around and in the biblical word repent?

This is not a new situation, the Bible tells us that it has happened before, it tells us that there was a flood that destroyed the earth and wiped out humanity, an environmental disaster, but God saved humanity! He saved us through one obedient man and his family.

This is just not an environmental issue that we are facing it is also a spiritual issue!

How many people listened to Noah when he urged them to repent.

We bring hope

The current situation may seem bleak and all around us there is despair. But the psalmist informs us that there are blessings for them whose hope is in the God of Jacob.

V5, “Blessed are those whose help is in the God of Jacob”. Why Jacob?

Jacob, you will remember was the deceiver; Jacob was the one who wrestled with God. Remember the story of how he struggled all night long, and it was at daybreak that he overcame and received God's blessing and he left with a limp, to remind him of his struggles in life and with God.

So, in the midst of our struggles and challenges in life, the psalmist encourages his people to trust in the God of Jacob, the God of the strugglers!

Our hope is not found in our own strength, it is found in the strength of the one who will not let us go – who is in all our challenges of life and who seeks to bless us.

When our hope is in the Lord our God, the God of Jacob, then blessings will come our way. We bring hope to COP26, because we believe in a God who is on our struggles.

We bring Christ

The psalmist moves from the Creator God to the compassionate God.

V7-9, speak about the nature of God that we have come to see in Jesus Christ.

“He upholds the cause of the oppressed.

He gives food to the hungry.

He sets the prisoner free.

He gives sight to the blind.

He lifts up those who are bowed low.

He watches over the foreigner.

He sustains the fatherless and the widow.

He loves those who do these things.”

This is our God; we believe in a God whose heart is with those who are going through troubled times.

We engage with COP 26 and all the issues that will arise because God's love is with all those around our world who are crying out to him.

some of them are struggling,

some are in pain,

some are oppressed,

some are blind,

some are on their knees,

some are refugees

some are Fatherless,

Some are widows

And our God cares for them.

Notice what the psalmist tells us that God does,

He upholds,

He gives,

He lifts up,

He loves,

He watches,

He sustains.

It is fascinating to see that the picture that the psalmist paints in the minds of his hearers is a picture of Christ who came 700 years after this psalm

was written and we can look back and say thank you God for sending Christ into the world.

So, COP 26 is here and people of influence from all around the world are descending on us. They are here to discuss, to plan and to plot the future of the planet and our future.

And we are part of it.

We as God's children have a unique role to play.

What can we do?

We can first and foremost make this a matter of urgent prayer. This will be the most important task for us. We may feel somewhat overwhelmed by all the issues, but we can take this to God in prayer.

Make it our prayer each day and trust that God is in this with us and pray that he will direct the minds of the princes, the dignitaries, the decision makers. Pray that they will seek God's will. That God will give them a heart for the poor and needy and collectively they will all see a way forward.

We can support all the Christian parachurch charities, projects and initiatives, from Christian Aid, Tear Fund, Eco Congregation Scotland, all who have influence at this conference, with much practical information available on their websites

We can pray that this will be a conference of change but also a conference of peace. Pray for our city and its witness to the world over the next few weeks.

May indeed we hold up high St Mungo's banner, "May Glasgow flourish through the preaching of His word and the praising of His name."

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

Amen