

1. We begin with a provocative claim by a Christian leader: 'Christianity is not a religion or a set of creeds; it is a lifestyle.' I am not saying that the right belief is not important, but our readings today tell us that it really matters what you do: do the right things, do as you say, be a consistent disciple of Jesus. It is our lifestyle that matters and our lifestyle is what people see. Our discipleship (or lack of it) will be seen.
2. James is not the only person in the Bible to think like this. In many places the right action is emphasised. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, help is needed: a man has been robbed; he might die. The priest and the Levite no doubt have the right confession of faith, but they don't act on it. They ignore the robbed man for fear of being polluted. It is the Samaritan who helps. When Zacchaeus gets to know Jesus, he repents and it shows practically: he gives away the money which did not belong to him. Zacchaeus does not so much find a religion; he finds a new lifestyle.
The early Christians stood out in society at their time. They loved each other and their neighbours with concrete actions. The pagans around them were surprised and said: 'See how they love each other!' Baptists and Anabaptists also used to have a good track record in this respect. We were known as practical Christians, people with a distinct lifestyle. I wonder how much of that remains. Our (lack of) discipleship will be seen.
3. In Matthew 21:28-31 Jesus tells a fascinating little story: only one of two sons is obedient. It is your obedience that counts, not what you say.
If we consciously keep doing the wrong things, if we consistently ignore God's good rules, we should ask ourselves if we have the wrong image of God. Who is the God we serve? Whose disciples are we?
4. Our topic is very broad, so for today we focus specifically on creation care. We all know the issues, I suppose: pollution – exhausting natural resources – climate change. Why this particular topic today?
 - Because of the new King, who is passionate about the environment
 - Because our Baptist Union has called September a 'climate season'; see https://www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/349554/Baptist_Union_Environment.aspx
 - Creation is good and beautiful; and we know it is vulnerable
 - We had the climate conference not so long ago, remember?
 - We all admire Greta Thunberg
 - We all love David Attenborough's TV series
 - We all love 'the great outdoors'
5. Many things have already been achieved: we abolished plastic carrier bags; we have more electric cars. Yet not enough has been achieved. The government needs to do more. We need to do more. Many of us said that after Covid things would be different, but they are not. We are flying again and we are forgetting the environment. More action is urgently needed. Discipleship is needed.
A sermon is not the place for specifics or rules; see the quiz. Yet because we confess God as creator, we have to be good stewards, good disciples.

Craft Activity

1. Reflect

- Hearing and doing
- God's beautiful creation
- How are we treating the created world?

2. Write a short prayer on a post-it note, either

- 'Thank you, God, for ...' (something in creation, our food or access to nature)
- 'Sorry God' for not looking after the world very well; or
- 'Please God' for something we would like to do differently

3. Stick your post-its to the tree and look at them:

- What prayers are on it?
- Say a group prayer