

Dear All,

Living off the rest of the world...

I was interested to see that Easter Day, as well as being a day of supreme significance in the Christian calendar, was this year the day when the UK started, ecologically speaking, to live off the rest of the world – in the sense that we are no longer self-sufficient as a country. According to the New Economics Foundation, we are now as a country in “ecological debt”. If our patterns of consumption in the UK were reproduced around the world, the world would have to have over 3 times its resources to meet our needs and expectations. This is not quite as bad as the USA - it would take 5.3 worlds to supply the necessary resources if the 6 billion people on the planet had the same appetite as the 300 million Americans – but it’s pretty bad.

Several thoughts occur. As Christians we must be humble enough to recognise that we came late to the ecological party – and humble enough to recognise truth where we see it, and participate in it. And, if at this Easter season we want to talk, from our own traditions, about “all things being made new” and “God reconciling the world to Godself”, it’s about time we saw that the planet matters to God, that we are stewards of it, and had better be doing something now about cherishing it.

It’s a sight we would not have seen in previous decades: that of politicians of all persuasions desperately keen to espouse the Green cause. Putting aside a cynical smile at this, we should be glad, I think, that public debate is waking up to the issue. Clearly, the macro issues are too big for us to deal with as local communities or as individuals, except by the way we exercise our vote. But what can we do as citizens?

Well, there’s the gas and electricity supplies we use. We’ve moved over to Ecotricity recently, which guarantees to match the charges of our previous supplier and sources electricity from green sources. Go to www.uswitch.com and you’ll find a comparison web site where you can check prices and look for green suppliers – Ecotricity is not the only one.

Buy a wormery! It’ll consume much of your food waste and provide you with great compost. Look out for cheap council offers on compost bins and use them. Perhaps we should start sharing compost among church people, so that those who produce more than they need can share it about a bit.

Until a few weeks ago, I had a plastic mountain in my house, as I collected recyclables and tried to find somewhere to take them. I’ve now discovered (thanks, Gill Glasspool!) that Asda at Burgh Heath has a plastic recycling facility. Why not use it, and nag Epsom and Ewell Borough Council to provide the same within our borough?

There are all sorts of other ideas we can get into: a wind turbine on the side of your house? Solar panels? Using the car less (don’t get me on the subject of my wonderful new electric bike!). Fly less, if you can, though air travel is so incredibly cheap.

Of course, in the end, we as a country are just going to have to consume less. That’s really hard to do, and it would be terribly unpopular almost everywhere. But that’s where we will have to go in the end. What resources do we have as Christians, I wonder, to support and argue for a simpler lifestyle? More of this next time, I think...

Best wishes,

Andrew