

Read Archbishop Justin's speech at Virginia Theological Seminary on climate change and reconciliation

Thank you for such a warm and typical VTS welcome. It's very kind of you to stand and applaud. I always think it's wiser to wait until the end to see if it's worth doing. It's a huge honor to give this address.

There is someone from the Mulligan Family here. One of Professor Mulligan's great impacts was to draw people and clergy into engagement in the public square. That is indispensable and wonderful that it is celebrated here. Last November, Professor Emeritus David Ford from Cambridge published a remarkable commentary on St. John's Gospel, a "Sell your shirt to buy it" kind of thing. About John's Chapter 17, he says, "For disciples to be sent as Jesus was sent is for them to have a vocation of life-giving love for the world." A vocation of life-giving love for the world. In many ways that underlines why I speak as I do on public affairs, not as adequately as Professor Mulligan, but seeking to say something about the life that Jesus Christ brings.

As the church, we must acknowledge when we do not bring life, but rather inhumanity, cruelty, death, exclusion, a soulless institutional approach to our vocation. We are disciples of Jesus Christ. Our Calling is to bring life to the world. Tomorrow I shall be flying to Canada, to Saskatchewan where I will meet with First Nations leaders. And I will hear their stories of residential schools, the shame of Anglican churches that colluded with government stealing of land, of cruelty to the indigenous rightful peoples of Canada. I will hear of the abuse physical, sexual, spiritual, cultural in which our church participated. And I will show my sorrow and grief at that history.

We are called to bring life-giving love to the world. So, what world? In 1914, 108 years ago, war was unexpected by most economists and political scientists, thanks in part to the gold standard and peace between the great powers which lasted since the Congress of Vienna in 1815.

It was felt that a cosmopolitan elite, the connectivity of economies and rising literacy and education would make large scale wars impossible. The conflict that erupted in 1914, which the United States joined in 1917, lasted by some counts until 1991. Only 30 years later, once again, we face the possibility of war, of a global conflict between major powers, with all the terrible apparatus and science that we have developed.

In those 30 years, for good or ill, the world developed far faster than scientists thought possible. The forecast now is that the developments in science and technology over the next 30 to 40 years will be the most rapid in human history. Some of those changes, the development of the COVID-19 vaccine, for example, has saved many lives and taken possibly 10% of the time that it would have taken 30 years ago. And it is now imperative that it is made available to communities globally and affordably.

Medical and biological technology, artificial intelligence, GPS technology all have the chance to revolutionize the way we live, for better or for worse. And they will be for better, if and only if they are rooted in our values and love for one another, and that we seek not to possess, but to give.

Therein is the challenge to the church. What example will we give? To possess or to give? Within our world, there is a similar quasi-unconscious optimism to that of 1914. An optimism based on a false theological anthropology, a false understanding of the corruptive desire for power, of the search for our identities in negatives based on having an enemy, in which that malevolent political jurisprudential philosopher Karl Schmidt of the 30s and 40s appears to have found his voice again. Of sin as a force of great power, of evil as something we must meet, not discipline, and direct.

This unconscious optimism has paradoxically led to record outbreaks of mental illness at the individual level. And at the collective level to frustration and fragility of relationships. And at the international level to war. Lest we forget, the United Nations before the invasion of Ukraine identified 49 serious wars going on in the world. Now there are 50. We forget most of them. War prevents solutions. War leads to the greatest danger of all for humans, a spiral of climate change that will lead to greater conflict that will prevent action on climate change and generate yet more conflict until large parts of the tropics become uninhabitable.Â

Research suggests that global warming is worse than we thought, and we have less time to act than hoped. We've already begun to suffer the consequences in communities around the world. We face a dual justice and injustice, the consequences of our actions are exploitation of our natural resources, but the burden is falling on those who do not bear the blame. Indigenous peoples, minority communities, the young, often those very people most alert to the importance of living in harmony with God's creation spoke of it before we had ever heard of climate change.

God's response is one of the most frequently used commands in the Bible, "Do not be afraid" because out of fear comes war, violence, and possession rather than generosity. God is not saying there is nothing to be afraid of. God is inviting us to move beyond fear into faith, hope and action. We are rightly fearful of climate change. It's the biggest threat we face. If we ignore it, it will become our fate. Governments may be tempted to use those initials I saw when I worked, I confess, in the oil industry. It was a long time ago. I was much younger. I can make loads of excuses. I was on the finance side. As a group treasurer of a big company, I noticed that the accountants had marked one of the deals I had done, which was a tad complex, T-D-I. I asked the audit partner, "What's TDI mean?" he said, "Too difficult, ignore". Governments now in Europe, and I suspect in the States have run out of bandwidth for dealing with climate change and they are marking TDI.

We must deal with Ukraine, Russia, and many other things. Individuals and organisations feel paralysed, too small, and hopeless to make a difference. This fear can only be dispersed knowing that there is a new way forward, one for which each of us is indispensable.

Last year I took a sabbatical, during which I was helped by VTS and particularly by Professor Robert Heaney, and I wrote a book about reconciliation. God calls through Jesus Christ crucified, risen, and returning for all things to find reconciliation. It is the calling of every Christian and every church because it is God's purpose. Reconciliation with peace and justice, because without them, nothing is reconciliation. It cannot be imposed; it can only be embraced. When we think of reconciliation, we naturally think of human conflict.Â

In theological terms, reconciliation begins with how we relate to God through the work of Jesus, the revelation of God testified to in Scripture and in whose beauty we will rejoice throughout eternity. The implications are enormous. Go to Colossians 1 verses 15 to 22. "They applied to the whole of the created cosmos." The idea of reconciliation applies more widely than between moral agents only. Reconciliation includes a global conflict of increasing severity and urgency. The conflict above all is the conflict of humans with the natural world. Reconciliation demands sacrifice and courage for the body of Christ, the church, the individual and the relationship of all creation with the renewing power of God. Reconciliation is the gift of God enabled in the world through the Holy Spirit who transforms every aspect of creation, and in reconciling life directs us to Jesus, setting our hearts on fire with the flame of the spirit's love.

As I was writing the book, it became clear that conflict happens on a horseshoe-shaped scale. At one end, we see the internal conflict within ourselves. In the middle, we might see conflict within families or between nations. And finally, conflict points us back to ourselves. The biggest global-scale climate change and, now nuclear warfare, is a conflict where the only enemy and the only victims are ourselves.

In the 1940s, there was a remarkable left-wing Labour Party politician called Nye Bevan, a senior member of the Labour government in the Post-War United Kingdom. Ernie Bevin was the foreign secretary - Secretary of State in US stance- a former Trade Union Leader, and Nye Bevan's bitter rival. Someone said to Ernie Bevin that the problem with Nye was that he was his own worst enemy. Ernie replied without hesitation, "Not while I'm alive, he ain't".

Today we are our own worst enemy. On the existential conflict of climate change, we have unthinkingly, unintentionally created a circular firing squad. Climate change needs examination through the lens of reconciliation and conflict, a conflict that has already caused great damage and left deep wounds. A very different conflict to anything that humans have ever experienced before. It's easy to divide it into two sides, the creation, and humans, but that is wrong. Those facing the worst costs of climate change, as I've said, are the least responsible for causing it.

To quote Thucydides, "The rich do what they will, and the poor suffer what they must". It is the antithesis of the Kingdom of God.

I suggest dividing this conflict into three interrelated inseparable categories. First, the damage inflicted by humans on the natural world. From the coral reefs of Australia to the fragile biodiversity in the world's forests and seas, we have irreparably damaged our planet and are beginning to feel the consequences. This matters because it is not our world. It is God's world to cherish and care. Psalm 24 reads, "The Earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world and all who live in it for He founded it on the sea, established it on the waters".

Yes, God gave dominion to Adam and Eve and to humanity. In both the demands on the Kings of Israel and in the radical recalibration of those demands in the New Testament, especially in John Chapter 13, God makes it clear that dominion means service in gracious love and service always means sacrifice.

Scripture reveals a picture of God's people deeply connected with their environment. The Bible doesn't uplift the people who rule over the land but who are interdependent with it. Now is the time for deep repentance and restoration of God's creation, the healing of the collateral damage.

The second part of the conflict is between those who do and those who are done to, for it is not just the creation we must reconcile with when it comes to climate change, but badly impacted indigenous people, minority communities, women and the young.

Take the example of Sub-Saharan Africa, a billion people, the fastest growing population on Earth. In telephony, they jumped a generation, from prototype telephones to sophisticated wireless telephones without going through cables everywhere. They can do the same if we support the greatest jump of technology in history to clean energy in nations that produce almost no energy. That's our responsibility. We can export that responsibility or take it seriously. We have that choice. In the Global South, there are countries like Mozambique where 60% of people have no energy at all. That won't shift unless the sacrificial financial contribution from the Global North is immense.

In the top graph of the papers that were handed to you, green is good, red various and brown bad. We needn't examine the picture very closely to see the result of climate change will be further conflict. Between 2009-2019, roughly 250 million people were displaced by an onset of disasters in more than 140 countries. In 2019 alone, 25 million people or so were forced from their homes. And at a meeting of faith leaders in Rome last year, the head of the IPCC warned that at the current rate by 2050, unless we keep to under 1.5 degrees of warming over the pre-industrial average, somewhere between 800 million and 1.2 billion people will be permanently displaced. Today it is 80 million. In 1945 at the end of the greatest war in history, it was 25 million. When food and water run out, people move. There's more competition for what's left, and when large groups of people move and competition increases, we see conflict. The fallout from climate change will be significantly more multifaceted when it comes to global conflict and peacekeeping. It will result in political instability, threats to critical resources and infrastructure, and significant unpredictability in food and water supplies. We're seeing that already

In Bangladesh climate-driven changes are almost certainly contributing to insecurity and conflict, not through a direct causal path, but through erratic weather patterns converging with existing risks in ways that have heightened the likelihood of violent conflict. Natural disasters displace 700,000 Bangladeshis each year already. 400,000 every year arrive in Dhaka, most displaced by environmental shocks. 81% of slum inhabitants in Dhaka moved there for climate-related reasons. Ironically, Dhaka is one of the most vulnerable cities to climate change. 90% of the population in the slums have been affected by violent criminality arising from overcrowding and lack of resources. Add to that losses in rice production in Bangladesh. In 2007, a single cyclone destroyed a million tonnes of rice.

Annually, climate variability reduces crop production across the world by more than 7%. \$26 billion a year that is experienced by local farmers on marginal farms. In Mali, places where you could once graze cattle are disappearing into desert. The cattle are being driven across the areas of pastoralists. The old story of Cain and Abel acquires a new reality.

Solutions. We could start by putting into practice the agreements made at Glasgow at COP 26 on deforestation, methane and nationally determined contributions strongly resisted in the UK Parliament, US Congress, and ignored by many other countries. Investment in renewable energy. Strategic planning for training people in green jobs. New homes with high energy efficiency. That's the biggest single step we can take. Yet when crises come, as we've seen with COVID-19, we turn in on ourselves. The vision of a world remade is possible, but to translate that to reality requires grassroots organisations, the churches, and the faith of communities.

Our approach to changing the climate needs to be top-down, middle out and bottom-up. The only way forward is partnership. We can't do it by changing governments, but we can't do it without changing government ideas. We can't do it without businesses and the middle classes, but we can't do it with them alone. We can't do it without the poor. And we won't.

Last year Pope Francis, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and I issued a joint statement for the first time in history urging people to come together, taking the words of Deuteronomy 30: Choose life.

At a meeting in Rome, we convened prior to COP 26, the President of COP 26, a UK Cabinet minister, called Alok Sharma said to me, "I've just realised I'm talking to those who lead the faith communities of 70% of the world population". The faith communities are indispensable. They can make or break our future, but they can only do that with repentance, generosity, and sacrifice. That will only happen if it starts with the rich. That's you and us and those who have the resources.

The Lambeth Conference in a few months aims to move the Anglican Communion to be the first global church committed to an education in scientific and technological change, embedded in theological reflection on the nature of our world, our humanity and God so that they can be used for the common good, not for the good of the powerful. The healing of the nations or a dystopia in this time of crisis which will we choose?

Church supported mediation and reconciliation are essential. There's much that individuals can do but it will only happen if we're united. A fractured church can only argue. In 2010 the church in Sri Lanka developed a strategic plan to help build capacity in Disaster Risk Reduction by training clergy and laypeople to prepare for disasters and minimise their impact. They built a tool kit. A few years later, the success of the Anglican programme was such that the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka asked the Diocese of Colombo to build regional ecumenical disaster committees. There are now eight of them covering six high-risk provinces in Sri Lanka.

Jesus tells the story of the rich man whose harvest is so big that he has nowhere to put his crops. He says to himself, "You have many goods laid up for many years. Take your ease. Eat, drink and be merry". For many years we have done that greedily, while others went hungry. We've drunk heavily and left the well dry. We've been merry and ignored the misery of others. And God says to the rich man and to us, "You foolish one. Tonight, your soul is demanded of you. The things you have prepared, whose will they be then?"

Church Commissioners for England have been enormously successful in their investments in the last 30 years, more than doubling them to a published figure of £10 billion, about \$12 billion. In that time, the number of people in England going to church has halved. "You foolish one. Tonight, your soul will be demanded of you".

This is our hour of reckoning. All our wealth, power and status, beautiful chapels, wonderful music will be as nothing in the face of global warming. The riches we've stored as we ignored the cries of those in poverty, the groans of the land, the command of God to be good trustees of God's creation. Whose will they be when our harvest is laid waste?

The barns are burned, the land cannot yield. Jesus's story is a call to collaboration towards generosity and justice, away from short term material gain. We must choose to be a society that believes in community and supporting one another because the problem might be too big for me, but it is not too big for us. In collaboration, we find that our fears more easily faced.

It is the Church of God that must set the example, and that example requires sacrifice in unity that enables our voice to be heard. John's Gospel says very clearly there are only three problems with disunity: it stops our prayers being effective, it loses our assurance of salvation, and it stops our mission. Apart from that, there's no problem with disunity. But unity is sacrificial because it means sharing God's church with those who are wrong.

We will and must bear our share of the burden and build a future where everyone can flourish and enjoy the fruits of God's abundant world. The dangers are immeasurable, but the hopes and possibilities that come from decisive action in the power of the spirit are immeasurably more than the fears of what we could face. I am with the words I began with from David Ford. For disciples to be sent as Jesus was sent is for them to have a vocation of life-giving love for the world. Amen.

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