

# What is God up to in the face of climate change?

Short talk by Silvia Purdie  
at the Sustainable September event of Eco Church NZ,  
Ponsonby Baptist Church, Auckland,  
Saturday 2 September 2023

## Discussion Questions:

### Pepeha

- *Where do your people come from?*
- *Which natural places feel most like home?*
- *Who do you belong with?*

### Climate Change

- *If climate change was a thing that you could see, touch or hear, how would you describe it?*
- *What do you feel about climate change?*

### God at work

- *How do you notice God at work? (in the space of creation care/environment/climate?)*
- *What is God doing in my own life?*

Silvia's comments:

## 1. God is creating capacity

For me, it is vital to create and protect the mental, emotional, physical and spiritual space in which I can address climate and creation care. I do feel this as a call on my life, but it is always a challenging space. When I ask myself, 'what is God doing?', in my own self I am aware of the Holy Spirit being with me in this.

It reminds me of Psalm 139:4

*"You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me."*

God is ahead of me and God is behind me.

Ahead of me is the challenging edge – te wero - the spaces I could step into, the tasks that could be done, the goals I could strive towards.

Behind me is the infinite kindness of God – te mahi tohu, te aroha roa – which cares for me. As Christians we enter the field of climate action with a distinctive voice because we know deep down, through and through, that we are loved, we are not alone. This work is not ours to carry by ourselves.

I know for my own self the 'grace space' that Wairua Tapu creates in me. Sometimes this is a small space, closely held. I have been unwell for the past month and my capacity for climate action has been non-existent. Sometimes I connect with the issues emotionally and it's all a bit much. Other times my capacity grows outward and I feel I can tackle anything, no matter how huge. But always this is about joining Christ where Christ is at work, at his invitation and in his care.

## **2. God is sustaining the church**

I am a Presbyterian minister, and I see my church being caught in vicious downward spirals of institutional decline. And yet I also see that the Holy Spirit is at work in the church. Eco Church is part of that bubbling up of missional integrity. I see God building up the local church to enable local community. We here today are an important part of a dynamic global movement: the diverse ways that Christ is calling and sustaining his people to care for God's creation. This movement has the fingerprints of Jesus all over it!

... breaking down barriers in the body of Christ

... blurring the boundaries between church and community

... building genuine caring relationships between people  
and connecting people with local places

The local church will be needed in a warming world more than we have ever known in our lifetimes. In the past the church out-sourced much of its work to other organisations. Christians were at the forefront of establishing health, education, justice and services, but over the last century these have been professionalised. What I see now is the community sector increasingly being under threat, as social services struggle to meet more human need and address more inequities with less and less resources. Multiple disasters will compound this trend. The church can no longer look to other community organisations and expect them to have the capacity to look after people.

In a changing climate the church gets to be the church. We get pushed to the edge of what we can cope with and we find Jesus Christ there. We will be needed, and God is raising up people to be where we need to be.

## **3. God is inspiring radical action**

I notice the Holy Spirit forging a conviction in the hearts of all sorts of people from all sorts of contexts to take action to fight climate change.

I see the church as being too concerned for our own reputations, too committed to respectability. Climate change is both 'the' crisis of our time, and one among many. The church has a strong track record with responding to health crises, educational needs, fighting racism, slavery and oppression. It's our call in our time to forge new alliances and to apply what we know about social change to the terrible global problem of greenhouse gas emissions and other forms of environmental degradation.

If the Spirit is stirring you to act more boldly, then let this be your official endorsement.

If you are waiting for permission from the church to step into civil disobedience or push for change in your workplace or your city, may this be your encouragement. Go for it!