

Climate Action Sunday

Earlier this week I was very thankful for the offer of someone to come and fit a water butt at the Rectory. Collecting water after a summer like the one we just had is not just essential but I feel it is imperative. I watched Gardners World last week and I was drawn into watching how grey water could be used to water some plants. Reflecting on these two actions helped me to reflect that changing my habits and behaviour is as important to the planet as what I believe.

The theme of this year's Climate Sunday is, "Living Water", explores Ezekiel 47:9 and 12 as a powerful biblical vision of hope and ecological healing. Set amid exile and loss, the image of living water flowing from God's sanctuary reveals divine healing that renews land, water, biodiversity, and human responsibility towards the whole creation. The symbol depicts water flowing from the Temple of God - at first a tiny stream that grows deeper, and deeper and as it does so, it brings life to dead areas and restores fertility to damaged or barren ecosystems. Through living water comes healing; but in order to receive new life, we too can step into the water and also become part of God's river of life, taking part in the healing of creation.

The historical context of this text is one of political, social, theological and national catastrophe. Jerusalem has been destroyed by the armies of Babylon. The Temple of Solomon has been raised to the ground. Many of the people of Israel have been taken into exile in Babylon, carried far from their homeland. By the rivers of Babylon, they weep and lament (cf. Ps 137).

Book of Ezekiel is set during the Babylonian exile (Ezekiel 1:1), after the fall of Jerusalem at the beginning of the sixth century BCE. Ezekiel, a priest, is among those exiled and is commissioned by God as a prophet (Ezek 3; 33:1-9).

His message initially centres on God's judgment against Israel's idolatry and injustice, interpreting the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple as divine judgment carried out through the Babylonian armies (Ezek 7-10; 21). Yet Ezekiel's message does not end in judgment: God has not abandoned his people. Ezekiel proclaims that God's sovereignty is not confined to the Temple, God remains present with the exiles, and restoration is promised. Significantly, the Temple is at the centre of Ezekiel's vision of renewal (Ezek 40-47). Although it had been profaned and destroyed, it is now transformed into a symbol of blessing, healing, and God's presence through the whole of creation. The wondrous river described in Ezekiel 47 embodies this future renewal: when the Lord dwells again among his people, the land itself will be restored.

Furthermore Ezekiel has been describing the building of a new temple in the desert from chapter 40 through chapter 46. This new temple is impressive but empty and lifeless. It is only in chapter 47 that life finally appears. In this passage, the prophet is brought in a vision to the entrance of a future, idealized temple. From beneath its

threshold flows water that begins as a trickle and becomes an ever-deepening river - too deep to cross. This river courses through lands once barren, transforming deserts into fertile deltas, restoring fish, vegetation, and even healing the salt-laden waters of the Dead Sea.

Ezekiel's vision reframes water — the most basic element of life — as a divine agent of renewal, justice, and hope, a life-giving force flowing from God's sanctuary. In Ezekiel's time, water was a symbol of divine presence and blessing. Great civilizations depended on mighty rivers such as the Nile, as well as the Euphrates and the Tigris which were two of the rivers that watered the Garden of Eden (cf. Gen 2:10). The water of the oceans too is teeming with life! The vision begins with a small trickle — droplets of water flowing from the place of prayer and sacrifice. From a tiny stream it grows to an unstoppable river — the first marvel. The river grows as it flows from the Temple, nourished by the worship and prayers of God's people. But the second marvel is greater still. The river does not merely sustain life, it restores entire ecosystems. The prophet saw "on the bank of the river a great many trees on one side and on the other.... This water flows towards the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, and when it enters the sea, the sea of stagnant waters, the water will become fresh. " (Ezek 47:7,8) While describing how the river flows into the "sea of stagnant waters" the prophet is referring to the Dead Sea, one of the most lifeless places in his region. So powerful is this river's water that the salt waters will become fresh and teem with life.

An Ecological Reading of Ezekiel 47:9,12 Ezekiel's claim that fresh water will make salt water become fresh (Ezek 47:8–9) is deliberately shocking — it names something ecologically impossible in order to proclaim something theologically decisive. The prophet is not describing a natural process; he is announcing a divine reversal. The Dead Sea symbolised death: no fish, no plants, no outflow — a place where life goes in and dies. Salt water represented sterility and judgment. By declaring that the fresh water heals the salt sea, Ezekiel echoes Genesis imagery, where God brings order and life out of chaotic waters. This is a new creation. Ezekiel could have said the river bypasses the Dead Sea. Instead, it enters it. The point is theological: divine life flows into the most dead and hopeless of places. Life is renewed not through human management but through divine action interacting with the created world. Salt water becomes fresh not by human management but by divine healing. God does not bypass the place of death — God enters it. The trees which bear fruit every month represent a form of life that has moved beyond scarcity and seasons of lack. Like the freshening of the Dead Sea, this image is intentionally non-ordinary — it signals restored creation, not improved agriculture.

John the Apostle in our second reading today later echoes Ezekiel, presenting the river and the Tree of Life as the final vision of cosmic, ecological, and even political healing (cf. Revelation 22:2)

So what does Ezekiel and John have to say or have a bearing on our 21st century water crisis. Ezekiel's vision stands in sharp contrast to the reality of the water crisis we face. According to the United Nations UN News, 1.7 billion people lack basic hygiene services at home, and 2.1 billion people still lack access to safe drinking water - that is 1 in 4 people on the globe! As climate change intensifies, and groundwater extraction increases, several countries are now reaching a so-called "point of water bankruptcy" (UNU), that is a condition marked by irreversible losses of natural water capital. Although access to drinking water is a human right for all, the multifaceted water crisis disproportionately affects vulnerable communities, future generations, and non-human life that has no voice in political or economic systems. These are some of the many challenges:

Water becomes unaffordable for the poor.

Impact on health of water borne diseases.

Impact of industrial discharge of chemicals and other pollutants into rivers. Increasing water consumption fueled by the datacentres and energy production required by our digital activities, including for use of artificial intelligence.

Poor governance and corruption by companies and governments.

Impact on food security of droughts, floods, storms and desertification. Salination of the soil due to sea level rise or overexploitation of aquifers.

Violence over competition over scarce water supplies.

These many issues are leading to migration, pushing people into exile, with loss of homes and culture. The impact on ecosystems and biodiversity is devastating: according to the World Wide Fund for Nature, we are facing catastrophic declines in aquatic wildlife, with freshwater populations dropping by a staggering 85 % and marine populations by 56 % in the last 50 years (WWF). From a theological perspective, this crisis reflects broken relationships — between humankind and God, within the human family itself, and between human beings and other living beings. Furthermore, it is of paramount importance to stress that water pollution has implications related to social justice and equity.

However, drawing on our beliefs as Christians as well as being informed we can see that Hope comes from Faith and Action is part of Ezekiel's vision As co-workers with the Creator, Christians' relationship with non-human creation should be grounded in the biblical vision of creation as an interconnected community of life. This relationship is one of sacred partnership and mutual custodianship rather than domination. Pope Francis describes it as "a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature" rejecting excessive or tyrannical anthropocentrism (Laudato si' 67, 68, 116).

Christians are called to confront the aforementioned injustices and to reject a worldview that treats water as a disposable resource. Adapting a mandate for the preservation, responsible management and equitable distribution of water for all, based on the understanding that water is a gift from God, and access to drinking water as a fundamental human right. On every continent, inspired by our faith, Christians are acting: rivers are being restored, water sources are being protected from pollution and extractive industries - and arid lands are becoming green again. Wells are being dug and water provided for parishes, villages, and health care centres.

Being awarded a Bronze Award from Arocha is a step forward for St Brandon's to be part of this work as is the work of the climate action group – more about which we will hear later.

Let us overcome our fear and step into the water of God's love and be part of the River of Transformation for the world, to see the literal healing and renewal of creation and the blessing of the Earth.

Amen