

It has been said:

You give but little when you give of your possessions.

It is when you give of yourself that you truly give.

The atmosphere in Simon's house that night must have been electric: a Pharisee, a prophet and a prostitute in the same room at the same time. How the woman came to be in the room we do not know. I imagine that Simon, a Pharisee, zealous in living out his faith, ready to teach others its orthodoxy and moral code, was eager to meet with Jesus. Simon will have been eager to be in the presence of another whom he knew to be a person of faith. There is a great comfort to be felt when talking and sharing one's faith with others of a like-mind. I do not mock Simon. I do not mock his passion for his faith, his love of Scripture or his desire to meet and share with other people of faith. And, he invites Jesus into his home. There is a challenge for us. Simon is an example to us. I do not mock him.

How the woman came to be in the room we do not know. She heard Jesus was to be there certainly, but how did she get in and how was it possible that she was able to stay? I imagine that however she got in, it is likely that it was Jesus who insisted that she be allowed to remain. Simon seems to permit her to stay. Again, Simon deserves our credit. His reputation is in serious danger the longer she remains in his home. Before she says or does anything, it is sufficient that he is a Pharisee and she a prostitute. What would you think of me if you heard that I had hosted a private dinner in the manse at 26 Seton Place and a prostitute was invited? What if I told you that there was another minister present also? Before the unnamed woman does anything, Simon's reputation as a Pharisee, respectable and of good moral character, is already in trouble. And what would you think if you heard that the prostitute at the manse washed my feet with her

hair, kissed them and poured perfume over them – all in the manse of this church, last Thursday? I do not mock Simon. He is a man whose faith is strong and his faith matters more to him than the idle tongues of others. I should perhaps say for those who have just woken up that there has not been a prostitute in the manse, at least not in my time!

The atmosphere in Simon's home that night must have been electric: squeaky clean respectability and sex in the same room! Jesus says to the woman, 'Your sins have been forgiven. Your faith has saved you; go in peace.' Did you hear her confess her sins and promise a new start? You did not. What we see is a woman broken by life, by her life choices, by the choices that were forced upon her. What you see is a woman desperately in need of a better life, while being so aware of the mistakes she has made over the course of her life. Driven by an overwhelming sense of emptiness, she seeks her soul's fulfilment from a man of God. Simon permits her to be in the room. Jesus lets her wash his feet with her hair, kiss them and pour perfume over them. He has received from her. He has allowed her to bless him. A prophet has allowed himself to be blessed by a prostitute. Taking theology to its logical conclusion, God is blessed by a sinner. He allows Himself to be ministered to by a sinner. It is true that Jesus forgives her and grants her God's peace, but he also has received. It is true that Jesus demonstrates the value of every human person by bringing into the home of a respectable Pharisee a prostitute, in all her uncleanness. Jesus, God, shows her value. More than that, however, the woman's value is truly revealed because she ministers to Jesus. A prostitute blesses a prophet: that is how valuable she is as a child of God.

The Gospel lesson today is then, in part at least, about God in Jesus revealing the true value of all of His children. We are all broken people. All who come to Jesus will be

received, welcomed and made whole. The theological thrust of the Gospel passage, as with Amos and Ephesians, is that all people are valued equally by God, equally. And this brings me to the work of Christian Aid and climate change.

Last year Christian Aid broke new ground for a development agency. In its report *The Climate of Poverty*, Christian Aid described in detail the grave dangers posed to poor people by climate change. It is vulnerable people in poor countries that are affected first and most seriously. That is why Christian Aid said then – and repeats now – that climate change is the most significant single threat to development; it could undo decades of progress in fighting poverty. Where *The Climate of Poverty* reported from the frontline of climate change across the developing world, this year's report, *Coming Clean*, focuses squarely on our own back yard, and on how the UK has a major influence over global action to preserve the climate. Christian Aid believes that the best way to fulfil its remit to tackle the scandal of poverty throughout the world is twofold: to find ways of stopping the greenhouse gases that are causing the climate to change; and to help poor people in dealing with the ravages of climate change on their doorstep.

Christian Aid criticises the rich world. Why? Because it is indisputably the rich, industrialised, northern countries that caused this problem in the first place. It is their emissions of carbon dioxide and other noxious greenhouse gases that are currently polluting the atmosphere and trapping too much of the radioactive force of the sun inside our planet's atmosphere. There is widespread awareness that the USA is the biggest polluter; it is known that Europe, India, Australia, China and Russia are all major emitters.

In the UK, the general figure of 2.13 per cent is accepted as the UK's share of global

emissions – ‘only’ 2 per cent, according to the government. Christian Aid, using data provided by the environmental research agency Trucost, states that because of its extensive and global economic reach the UK should bear a far greater responsibility for reducing the world’s CO2 emissions than government rhetoric suggests. At the heart of this wider responsibility lies the City of London, whose trading might allows the UK to punch above its weight economically. The Stock Exchange is a powerful global institution that deals with some of the world’s largest and most influential companies. Many of their factories and offices may be overseas but they come to London to trade. Christian Aid argues that if they have the right to trade here and enjoy the benefits of being able to move their capital around the world freely, then they also ought to have the responsibilities that a place at the world’s top trading table demands. These include responsibilities relating to climate change.

Most matters relating to companies’ costs and benefits are obliged to be reported in annual statements to owners and shareholders. Profits, losses, acquisitions, investments, stock – all are rightly on show. However, despite climate change being such an overwhelmingly important issue for business as well as for humanity and the planet, it is not yet compulsory to show the extent to which a company emits CO2. Christian Aid, on behalf of the world’s most vulnerable people who are encountering disease, sea level rises, floods, famines and conflicts as a result of climate change, Christian Aid demands that the UK government takes the first step and makes carbon reporting mandatory. It is obviously true that many of the poorest countries of the world have serious problems besides that of climate change, but climate change is a threat of such proportion that it threatens the future growth, stability and development of many countries and peoples. Climate change is too important to be left to the whims of voluntarism. If we accept Christian Aid’s calculation of Britain’s global emissions, then

far from being an insignificant polluter, we rank seventh in the world. Our emissions are more than the 112 smallest emitting countries put together.

Christian Aid also point to the hidden dimension of UK emissions. The government only counts emissions from the domestic economy, but the process of globalisation means that the CO₂ emitted on our behalf in other countries is not counted against us. UK companies in China, India, Africa and elsewhere, together with companies working for the UK market, emit CO₂ but those emissions are somehow not seen as our responsibility. The UK's apparently light carbon footprint rapidly begins to assume a much greater profile when the worldwide investments made with its money, through the City of London, are taken into account. The companies trading on the UK stock exchange serve British consumers through the proliferation of cheap goods made around the world. But they do so at the cost of proliferating quantities of CO₂. This CO₂ is to some extent hidden from view, as it happens beyond the domestic realm, and yet – since it is the beneficiary – the UK should accept some of the cost too. This is a significant problem. While the actual size of our footprint as a nation is not known, one estimate suggests that emissions associated with the worldwide consumption of FTSE 100 company products amounts to 12 to 15 per cent of the global total. In this case, the UK's influence, if not its direct impact, is revealed as not only statistically significant, but also critical to the future of the planet and its people. What happens on the UK stock market is of direct and compelling relevance to millions of the poorest people around the globe.

Take the example of the Kenyan green bean. If beans grown in Kenya, exclusively for the UK market, are flown to the UK at considerable 'carbon cost', should the poor people of Kenya be forced to spend their CO₂ budget on the air freight? Kenya and its

poor population benefit to some extent from the production of luxury vegetables for rich countries' markets, and so it is only fair that some of the carbon cost is absorbed by Kenya. But it is also only fair that the UK, the companies involved and their consumers also bear some of this cost.

One could say so much more on this subject but a sermon is no place to present the complexities of a scientific, economic or political argument. The main reason for this ignorance of the UK's real carbon footprint is that the majority of the largest companies listed in the FTSE are reluctant even to respond to voluntary carbon disclosure – and of those that do, only ten per cent declare to an acceptable standard. Christian Aid's report states:

The inconvenient truth lurking in the shadows of globalisation is that the UK and its multinational businesses are responsible for a much greater share of the world's CO₂ emissions than two per cent.

Without the transparency that mandatory disclosure would bring, the big money will remain in carbon-intensive programmes. Christian Aid is under no circumstances suggesting that all this could or even should happen immediately. It will take time to shift business away from carbon-intensive activities and towards clean development. But given the scale and urgency of the climate crisis, no time should be wasted in beginning this very significant and important programme of work.

Climate change matters to Christians and to the Church because climate change is about people, it is about caring for people, it is about justice and it is means that we are enacting our faith. Jesus showed Simon the Pharisee that a woman, a prostitute mattered, that as a child of God a Pharisee ranked as high as a prostitute. The gospel applied today means that a Kenyan woman and child are as valuable to God as any woman and child living in the Grange. We need to take responsibility for our carbon footprint.

Amen.