

## EARTH MATTERS, FAITH MATTERS

On 1<sup>st</sup> November around fifty people from diverse faith and belief traditions (and none) arrived at Exeter's Old Deanery to participate in a day of exploration and inspiration around issues of ecology and spirituality. In the run up to the Paris Climate Summit in a few weeks' time, the voices of faith communities are being increasingly seen as vital in reassessing human values as our industrial consumer society undermines the very Earth which sustains life.

*'Climate Change is everything change'* is a sober reminder of the pressures on the earth's natural support systems as we continue to pollute and contaminate the air, water and soil, endangering the carrying capacity of the planet to hold abundant life. As the Pope has reminded us in his recent encyclical, the Earth is our 'common home', yet we treat her as a trash tip.

So this event encouraged us to recall that the world is special, wonder-full, precious, miraculous – and for many of us sacred and holy. It is essential re-affirm deep reverence for the Earth, respecting the interconnectedness and harmony of all life and to move to more sustainable lifestyles at a time of challenge and transition.

Richard Dealler led a reflective exercise on Pilgrimage in which participants were invited to tread lightly – to walk in the Old Deanery garden, reflect on their rootedness with the ground and to be sensitive to all living things around them. He invited all to focus on the quality of our attention, to slow down in a culture of rapid busy-ness and to quieten our bodies in a time of shared silence. *"Silence is the soul's break for freedom"*, he quoted.

The impact of this walking and meditating was later expressed in verse when everyone was invited to put pen to paper and write a poem on their experience in the outside garden.

Different speakers distinguished between superficial wants or aspirations, and a deeper sense of seeking and longing, and of re-connecting in an age of disassociation and disaffection.

Young Exeter Muslim Hamzah Saied spoke movingly about his local upbringing in a global faith tradition, and of his frustration in sharing his environmental concerns with others within his community. Whereas Richard recalled the importance of reconnecting with place, Hamzah reminded us how the prayer rhythms of Islam help with our integration with time and the cycles of life.

Sandhya Dave shared some stories from her Hindu background and again encouraged us to see links between the inward aspects of our beliefs and the outward impacts of our behaviour. Planting trees is both a statement of protest in the face of oppression, and also a statement of hope for future generations she reminded us.

Finally, author and thinker Satish Kumar (a former Jain monk) passionately engaged us in his personal journey of appreciating Nature as that which gives us birth and nurtures us in life. *"We are Nature"*. Whilst our modern society separates us humans from the processes of ecology, we need to see that we are of the Earth. When we know we are interdependent and part of the whole, we will not use the planet as if it were a slave through 'human imperialism'. It is time for a re-union – to find ourselves re-united with that which births us – our 'common home'.

*"When God created time, God created plenty of it"*, Satish recalled. Let us see time as the great divine gift, especially in an age of transition.

The day concluded, as it had begun, with a shared period of silence, and it was suggested a small group of people from different faiths would continue to grow and meet, and perhaps plan a future event in North Devon and to develop an e-group...

Those travelling to Paris hope to stay in touch and the poems (and Richard's quotes) will be collected and posted on websites as a resource and reminder of the day. It shouldn't be too much to ask for 1 minute of courage and prayer for international leaders during the Summit.

#### **Resources:**

- Arbolivia – tree planting in Bolivia <http://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/arbolyvia>
- 14 minute video short: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qq3evpr1dkc>
- Our Voices Network – bringing faith to the climate talks - <http://ourvoices.net/>
- Green Pilgrimages – <http://greenpilgrimage.net/>
- Pilgrimages to Paris - <http://pilgrimage2paris.org.uk/>
- Walking Pilgrimage project - [www.marymichaelpilgrims.org](http://www.marymichaelpilgrims.org)
- Devon Faith and Belief Forum - <http://devonfaiths.org.uk/>
- Devon Churches Green Action – [www.dcgga.org.uk](http://www.dcgga.org.uk)