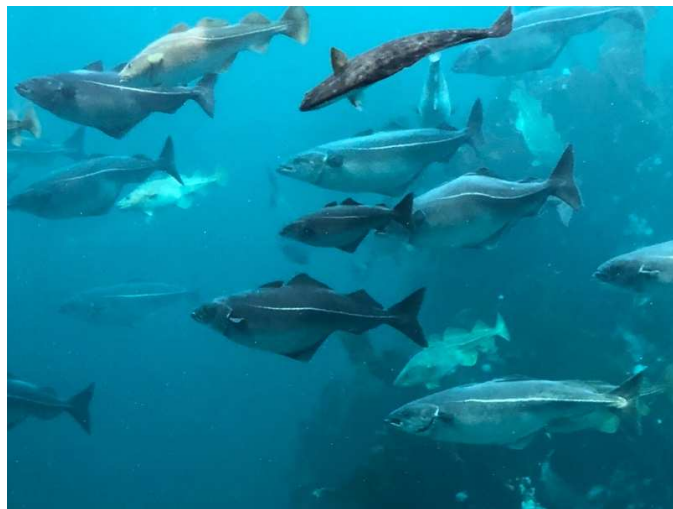


## 6. Hope or despair in the minds of today's young people.

In the last session we discussed how mankind's inhumanity to fellow people was the cause of suffering over the centuries. If Jesus's exhortation to love one another had been taken seriously by humanity there would have been far less suffering over the centuries.

But what about the existential threat now posed by climate change? In Jesus's time no-one would have thought that human activity could change the climate. Genesis 1:26, 28 make it clear that humans were to fill the earth and subdue it and be in charge of all living creatures, and vv. 29 and 30 make it clear that plants and fruit-bearing trees were a gift to us and to animal life for food. This promise from God has been dramatically undermined by human activity.



Let them rule over the fish of the sea . . .



and the birds of the air . . .



and over all the creatures that move along the ground . . .



I give every green plant for food.



This view from our Holy Land pilgrimage, looking northwards up the Jordan valley from Masada shows what many areas of North America, Africa and Australia already look like; a foretaste of climate change affecting us all.



Our beautiful planet, photographed as it is for the first time in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century seems uniquely adapted for supporting life as we know it.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rees, *Numbers*, 158-161





We need little reminder of the 18th Century changes that began in Britain, but the Keeling saw-tooth curve recorded for CO<sub>2</sub> levels in Hawaii show the rise from 1960 that is contributed to by all industrial countries.<sup>2</sup>

The recent COP27 climate change discussions held in Sharm el-Sheik in Egypt have revealed the deep divisions in responses to the crisis now disrupting many regions of the world. The underlying problem is not too different from that underlying the problem of violence in the world that we discussed in the last session. Self-interest, unwillingness to give up personal life-styles, and failure to act in love toward others are frustrating efforts that would help to ameliorate climate change – too little, too late.

Greta Thunberg<sup>3</sup> has spoken boldly and effectively at the highest levels of governments around the world, representing the younger generations and adding yet one more reason for despair to the list including violence, pandemics, poverty and political instability – little wonder many young people are without hope for their futures!

### **Hope for human efforts?**

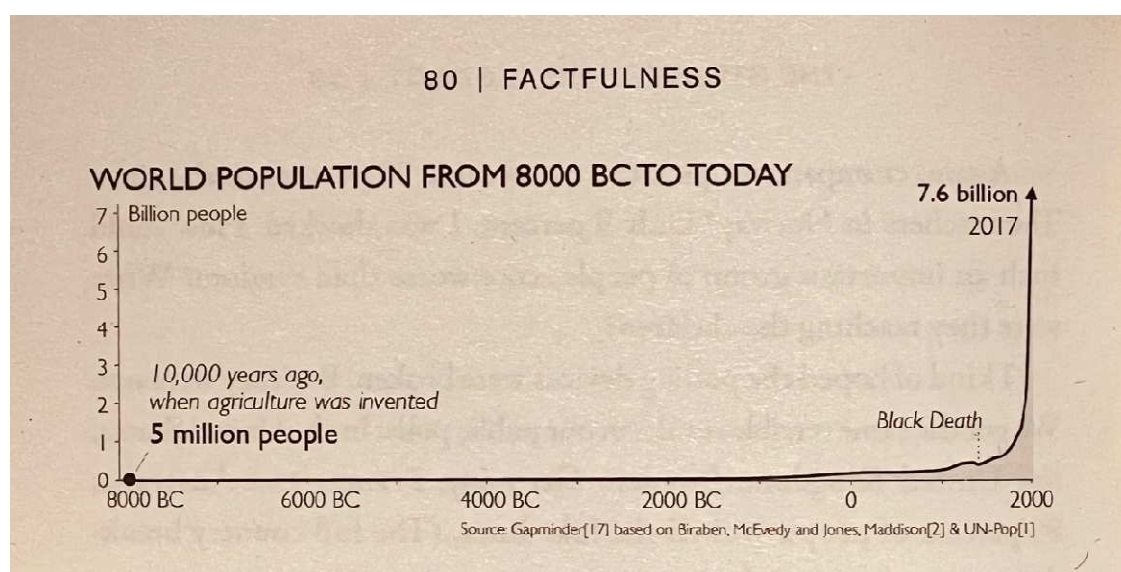
Hans Rosling, Professor of International Health, public educator, adviser to WHO and UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund) has produced an authoritative book (entitled *FACTFULNESS*, published

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<sup>2</sup> Henson, *Climate*, 29-30

<sup>3</sup> Thunberg, *No one*,

posthumously in 2018) that gives objective evidence of how humans have done in relation to their well-being. One of the most striking graphs (shown below, shows estimated world population since 8000 BC. Agriculture was developed about 8000 BC when estimated world population was about 5 *million*. There is little evidence of the biblical injunction to Noah after the flood to be fruitful and increase in number (Genesis 9:1), though the ominous message of vv. 2 and 3 have been only too apparent and devastating for animals, birds and fish. But what is most striking, and worrying, in view of the world's finite resources and widespread famine, is that during the past 100 years over 5 *billion* people have been added.<sup>4</sup>



As living standards generally have improved, so has the birth-rate fallen. Predictions are that population (about 7.6 billion in 2017) will stabilise at about 11 billion by 2100.<sup>5</sup>

Roslin provides evidence of many things that have improved. For example, from 1800 to 2017 average life expectancy increased from 31 years to 72 years. From 1970 to 2010 the proportion of the population who were undernourished fell from 28% to 11%. In that same period harvest yields have tripled. The share of the earth's land surface protected by national parks has increased from virtually zero to 14.7% in 2016.<sup>6</sup>

But the percentage of fossil fuels as a source of energy in 2016 was 87% - worrying for climate change. It is little wonder that Greta Thunberg is not short of ammunition!<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Roslin, *Factfulness*, 80

<sup>5</sup> Roslin, *Factfulness*, 87

<sup>6</sup> Roslin, *Factfulness*, 60-3

<sup>7</sup> Roslin, *Factfulness*, 135

Perhaps Roslin's most devastating statement is that the world's largest man-made famine occurred in China in 1960, killing between 15 and 40 million people.<sup>8</sup>

So much for human efforts!

### **Jesus's inflammatory teaching**

So far we have considered Jesus's revolutionary political view that was at so at odds with prevailing expectations of an anticipated Messiah. But he made a series of even more inflammatory statements that set the religious authorities against him. In Matthew 5:21-22 Jesus refers to 'what was said to the people long ago' about murder. But Jesus followed with "But I tell you" before equating anger and murder. Similarly in the case of adultery (5:27-28) he equates adultery with looking at a woman lustfully. Divorce (v. 31-32), oaths (v. 33-34) and reciprocal justice – measure for measure (v. 38-39) come in for the same treatment implying that the mere thought of actions that manifest as sins is as bad as the sin itself – *a salutary lesson for us all*. But of course, what made these statements so inflammatory was that he was assuming the authority of God. The reaction of Caiaphas, the high priest, in Matthew 26:63-66 documents the outcome of that claim - it sealed Jesus's fate.

### **The Christian viewpoint**

The early followers of Jesus were not slow to realise that he was indeed fully able to assume the authority of God. Christians also believe that God's intentions for our world are reliable and will take place. And Christians know that their own fate is secure and assured.

So we can only have faith in God for the future, knowing that the intention for humanity is unimaginably good and exceeding our hopes. All that Jesus taught tells us this. But his teaching also tells us what is required of us in this life, and this surely must mean that we need to do all we can to ameliorate or avoid the effects of climate change, just as we need to work on ameliorating or avoiding all the other ills of humankind. God does answer prayer and also acts through secular agencies. So support for NGO's working to relieve famine, spread education and have a favourable impact on climate change is important and should be supported by all. On an individual basis, changing life-styles to reduce carbon footprint and waste, and acting toward others in love is also important. If there are enough

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<sup>8</sup> Roslin, *Factfulness*, 55

people praying for this world, and if their prayer is accompanied by personal action, there is indeed hope for the young people of today, whose future is at stake.

**But it's nearly Christmas, so let's return to our pilgrimage visit to Bethlehem**



### Bethlehem – The Church of the Nativity

The Church of the Nativity was identified as the site of Jesus's birth for Helena (whom we encountered in relation to the site of Jesus's crucifixion and burial in a previous presentation), resulting in Constantine commissioning a church on the site in AD 326 – the present building dating back to 530 contains the Grotto of the Nativity with the silver star marking the exact spot! The original church incorporated the entrance to a cave where the birth was traditionally thought to have taken place.





The Grotto of the Nativity – The place of the Birth of Jesus.



In the nearby Shepherds' Fields there are caves, shown above, that may well have resembled the traditional cave. Animals were enclosed deepest in the cave, with the occupants sleeping and guarding the cave near the entrance. The shepherds were told that the child would be found lying in a manger - a feeding trough for animals - (Luke 2:12). As is the case with Jesus's death, locality is disputed; the best we can achieve is a plausible likeness to the true locality and this cave served the purpose in adding a further dimension to our understanding of Jesus's birth. Luke refers to what the shepherds would find as being a 'sign' to them in v 12.





The Shepherd's Sanctuary on the Shepherds' Fields



One of the large murals inside depicting the event recorded in Luke 2:8-11:

And there were shepherds living out in the fields near by keeping watch over their flocks by night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, **“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you, he is Christ the Lord.”**

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