

Dear Friends

A striking photo appeared in my newspaper recently. A man-made utopia had turned into a dystopia, a dream into a nightmare, an eco-paradise into something resembling the set of a post-apocalyptic film. 826 flats in the Qiyi City Forest in the Chinese city of Chengdu were built in an attempt to create a vertical forest and all were sold. Every flat was designed to have a private balcony with space to grow plants. The estate was built in 2018 and is comprised of 8 tower blocks. However, it is reported by the state-run Global Times that only about 10 families have taken up residence, and the picture reveals that the vegetation has overrun the buildings and overhangs the neglected balconies, with just a few balcony gardens trimmed and tended. The consequence is that the development has become immensely popular with the mosquitoes which have infested the area and made it difficult for people to make their homes there.

My heart goes out with compassion for the families who may have put their life savings into what they had hoped would be their perfect family or retirement home. I am conscious that many planners, architects, and trades will have been disappointed that their best efforts have not achieved what they had hoped. Who knows, perhaps a solution may be found in the future to redeem the situation.

The theme of mankind trying to improve on nature with disastrous effects recurs in mythology and fiction from the story of the Tower of Babel to Frankenstein and beyond. On the face of it, the Qiyi City Forest Garden was a brave and laudable attempt to provide a more natural environment rather than a concrete jungle. The law of unintended consequences has intervened, unforeseen factors have become apparent and the difference between knowledge and wisdom has been illustrated once more. The work of Creation is a truly complex one due to the inter-relatedness of the physical world and there is much that we are still unaware of.

We owe a huge amount to developments in science and technology. Through scientific advances we live longer, healthier, more comfortable lives. Yet there is an inevitable cost to progress and issues relating to the environment and climate change are never far from our thoughts. These issues will shape the lives of our grandchildren. Nevertheless, there is cause for hope. The Eden Project is an example of how we can work with nature to heal the landscape.

Across the post-Industrial landscapes of our country old collieries have given way to country parks and disused railway cuttings have been transformed into linear parks that have become popular with walkers and essential to wildlife. Gravel pits that once scarred the countryside have become inland lakes that attract both human and avian visitors. Thirty years ago recycling seemed odd to some people, now it is obligatory for everyone.

I imagine the project manager for the Qiyi City Forest looking at what he has made and saying, "Oops!" Contrast that with God, our Creator. We read that on the sixth day, "*God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good*" (Genesis 1:31 NRSV). As we reflect on our own lives and on our legacy, I expect that there may be things that are particularly good, some things that are fairly good and some things that we ask God to redeem. By God's grace, may we work with nature to repair what has been damaged and do our best to live as stewards of God's creation.



On a practical note, I would like to thank everyone who helped the Circuit Meeting function well. We enjoyed a talk by Rev Gillaine Holland on the mission work at St. Michael's Sheerwater and the circuit agreed to support this with a grant and agreed to ask the South East Methodist District to do the same. Congratulations to Louise Steele who was elected as Circuit Meeting Secretary.

Methodist Conference has asked local churches to discuss a change to the consent process for non-Methodist churches to use our premises. Work is ongoing relating to inclusion, and there will be ongoing discussions about the shape of trusteeship in circuits and local churches. You can read about these and other issues in Conference Digest which has been emailed to Circuit Meeting members and is also on the Methodist Church website. Synod has also taken place online as we all continue to learn and grow in the new reality.

Rev Adam Payne's induction service will take place on Saturday at Godalming United Church with limited numbers and online. Please pray for him and his family as they continue to settle in and for the church as they build on their heritage to relate to current needs.

As I write regulations are being tightened in response to an unwelcome trend in the number of Covid-19 cases. I pray that you will keep safe and healthy by remaining alert and keeping up to date with Methodist and official guidance.

May God bless you,

Keith

Rev Keith Beckingham. Superintendent minister