



Living on planet earth

Yesterday, Theresa May declared war on one-use plastic. Viewers of Blue Planet II will surely be right behind her. How to steward the earth in a way that our ancestors will be able to live well in it is surely one of our core responsibilities. We want our seas free from plastic. For Christians, it's a matter of honouring what God asked of us, but you needn't be a Christian to be bothered about the state of the earth.

I do, though, have one particular concern; it's that our collective thought bubble is so limited that it can mean that our focus is too narrow.

Today, the focus is on plastics. By comparison, twelve years ago, the focus was on carbon emissions, and a notable offender was flights. The "Plane Stupid" pressure group was formed out of people who noted that the emissions caused by flying were massively significant, especially for CO₂, but also for other pollutants. People were encouraged not to fly or to limit it severely.

For about three months, everyone was talking about it. The Guardian holiday supplement stated it would put the carbon footprint of every holiday it recommended at the foot of the relevant article. People holidayed in the UK for a year; the word "Staycation" was born; it was all very mainstream.

And then, well, people's minds moved on. Holiday supplements could work for a month or two recommending Norfolk, Cornwall and Brittany, but after

that they went back to talking up Antigua, Cape Verde and Tenerife.

Taking holidays is just such fun, and cheap flights is one of the perks of living in the modern era... Flight companies started to argue that to argue against flying was to argue against people's demographic right to take a holiday once or twice a year. It was immoral!

Except the science hadn't changed; the emissions of flying on planes hasn't got any less; it just became inconvenient, boring and even puritanical to talk about it. What was briefly (and sensibly) mainstream became associated once more with 'Save the gay whale' hippies. People, especially people wealthy enough to afford foreign holidays, just don't want to know.

But, to repeat, the emissions are no less; the environmental damage is no less today than it was twelve years ago.

I just wonder if something similar will happen with plastics. We are currently in the 'hot spot'. Blue Planet II is fresh in our minds; we want to move to reusable coffee cups etc.

That's all well and good. But, if ever there was a case where the only difference come through long term change, it's the environment. I just fear our brains are too small, and our souls too fickle for us to do it.

January 2018. for the Train is a short column written by the Reverend Robert Stanier, the vicar of St Andrew and St Mark, Surbiton, for people to read on the train, or elsewhere. You can also read "Thought for the Train" at