



# Singing the future

Hymns of hope in a climate crisis



Richard Baker

### **Note on tunes**

These hymns have all been written to be sung to familiar tunes. If you want to hear the suggested tune, then click on the tune's name at the end of each hymn. Videos with a backing track are available at [www.youtube.com/@largeblue88/videos](http://www.youtube.com/@largeblue88/videos). Only tunes old enough to be free from copyright or performance rights restrictions have been used.



# Introduction

The most recent IPCC reports confirm that climate change has already caused “*widespread adverse impacts and related losses and damages to nature and people*” but also offer hope that there remains a “*rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a liveable and sustainable future for all*”. They also acknowledge that “*religion could play an important role in enabling collective action*”. This short hymn book aims to help equip Christians for that role. It offers them an opportunity to express their concerns for this planet and, more importantly, to build the hope that is essential to enable that collective action.

# Like a butterfly



The butterfly, which emerges resplendent from “death” as a chrysalis, has long been recognised by Christians as a symbol of resurrection. This hymn explores how this image might be developed in the context of the current ecological emergencies.

At first singing, this hymn might seem to be limited to a call to personal transformation. The final verse, however, presents personal transformation as an inspiration for the wider system change that is now required.

Like a caterpillar feeding,  
eating each and every leaf,  
our consumption reeks of madness,  
recklessness beyond belief.  
Adverts prompt another purchase,  
peer group pressure drives us on,  
using up creation's bounty,  
till our last resource is gone.



Like a chrysalis pupating,  
changing form within its tomb,  
we must look for resurrection,  
rebirth from our life of doom.  
If we live our lives more simply,  
listen to what Jesus said,  
we can live within earth's boundaries,  
sharing out our daily bread.

Like a butterfly emerging,  
fresh wings drying in the sun,  
showing all our re-creation,  
marker of new lives begun.  
Help us bring the Christian message,  
of a new hope for this earth,  
freed from living for consumption,  
freed for greening and rebirth.

Metre: 87.87D

Suggested tune: [Bethany](#), Henry Smart

# Singing our vision

This hymn is more about the wider ecological emergency than it is about the specifics of climate change but still feels at home within this collection. Few people will appreciate the differences between the songs of different birds, and this may offer an opportunity to play some recordings to introduce the hymn to the congregation and explore this aspect of biodiversity. The bird names are not involved in the rhyme schemes so could be swapped relatively easily for birds that may be more local to the congregation.



Once in God's garden, songbirds were common,  
greeting the morning, up in the trees.  
Robin and blackbird,  
chiff-chaff and chaffinch,  
chorus of difference, blessed by the breeze.

Where are the songbirds that once filled my garden?  
Where are the starlings that chirped through my youth?  
Pesticides lavished,  
habitats ravaged,  
nature has vanished, this is the truth.

What is our calling, now we have learnt this?  
Singing our vision or calling out wrong?  
How can our voices,  
save God's creation?  
What is my story? What is my song?

Metre: 55.54.D

Suggested tune [Bunessan](#) (Morning has broken), Gaelic Traditional

# The world dries up

Although this collection aims to build hope, there are times when we just need to stop and acknowledge our grief at the devastation that climate change has already brought and our fears for the future. This hymn expresses that pain but makes no attempt to resolve it. It might be used to lead into a time of contemplation with hope being built in later elements of the service.

The hymn is a paraphrase of Isaiah 24:1-6. Although written perhaps 2,700 years ago these words are chillingly appropriate for today.

Since J.S. Bach first used this tune in his St Matthew Passion, it has been associated with the anguish suffered by Jesus in the lead up to and during his crucifixion. Most congregations will recognise it as a Good Friday hymn and may make a link between Jesus' grief for the world in which he lived and our grief for the world in which we live.

The butterfly chosen for this page is the Monarch. This is a very rare vagrant to the United Kingdom which was once widespread across the United States but is now facing extinction because of climate change, indiscriminate use of weedkillers and deforestation in Mexico where it migrates to over-winter.





The world dries up and withers,  
the earth is parched and dry.  
The heavens join in languish,  
all life prepares to die.  
Tomorrow's fate unites us,  
the wealthy and the poor,  
exploiter and exploited,  
our world can take no more.

Our planet is polluted,  
the earth, the sea the sky,  
The rich have brought destruction,  
and all God's people cry.  
God's world has been diminished,  
our curse devours the earth,  
for we have lost all sense now,  
of what our home is worth.

Metre: 76.76.D

Suggested tune: [Passion Chorale](#), (O sacred head, sore wounded), Hans Leo Hassler

# God of truth and God of Justice

Very few hymns have been written specifically about climate change and those that have tend to focus on how we have damaged the environment. This hymn aims to correct this imbalance by presenting climate justice as the central issue. It acknowledges that the power imbalances are at the heart of the climate crisis and calls Christians to oppose these.

The suggested tune is a Welsh folk song originally played on the harp. In Welsh it is known as *Dowch I'r Frwydr* meaning *Come to the Battle*, a good match for these words.



God of truth and God of justice,  
we know climate change is here,  
how our wealth has wrecked this planet,  
how the poor have most to fear.  
Droughts bring famine, Storms bring flooding,  
worse and worse with each new year.

Help us speak your truth to power,  
as your prophets did of old,  
call to curb immoral profits,  
vote for change to break the mould.  
Listen out for silenced people,  
let their stories now be told.

Give us strength to fight for justice,  
taking Jesus as our lead,  
face arrest or persecution,  
when we ask the strong to cede.  
We demand the rich and powerful,  
bring about the change we need.

Metre 87.87.87

Suggested tune: [Rhuddlan](#), Welsh Traditional

# Zero Carbon Day

This hymn was inspired by a challenge from one of my lecturers to imagine a day in 2050. My immediate thoughts were dystopian, but then I decided I wanted to capture a vision of hope.

You can read a vision of what Zero Carbon Britain could look like [at this link](#).

The first two verses are essentially secular, but the final verse uses strong Christian images and language. The last four lines of the final verse are inspired by the vision of a new earth that occurs at the end of the book of Revelation (Rev 22:1-5).

The butterfly illustrating this page is the Large Blue which became extinct in the UK in the early 1980s. A conservation programme led by the Royal Entomological Society, based on an understanding of their complex lifecycle has led to successful reintroduction. This is taken as a symbol of the hope in what can be achieved when how we choose to behave is guided by a scientific understanding of how our ecosystems flourish.

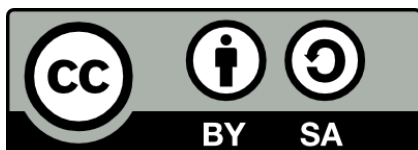


Here we are in 2050,  
Zero Carbon Day is here,  
global warming has been halted,  
children laugh and adults cheer.  
True, the oceans are still rising,  
true, we mourn for those who've died,  
but let's share the jubilation,  
we have turned the climate tide.

Fossil fuels have been abandoned,  
panels now lap up the sun,  
turbines cartwheel through the heavens,  
silenced forests sing again.  
Poverty is part of history,  
healthy food brings blooming health,  
corporate greed has been defeated,  
nations choose to share their wealth.

All it took was love of neighbour,  
rev'rence for God's fragile sphere,  
active hope for resurrection,  
vision of God's kingdom here.  
Through the city runs a river,  
crystal clear, infused with grace,  
lined with trees whose leaves bring healing,  
everyone can see God's face.

Metre: 87.87D  
Suggested tune: [Ode to Joy](#), Ludwig van Beethoven



These words are published under a Creative Commons [Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/) licence which means you can use it wherever you like as long as you attribute authorship and that you can adapt it anyway you wish as long as any publication of such an adaptation is under the same terms.

PowerPoint versions of the words (alongside a variety of other related resources) are available at [www.largeblue.co.uk](http://www.largeblue.co.uk).



All images have been created by the author based on photographs available on the [Butterfly Conservation](https://www.butterflyconservation.org/) website.