Good morning.

East Lancashire doesn’t really do drought and here in Burnley the grass is emerald green and the trees are verdant. However I have just spent a fortnight at the Lambeth Conference in the south east of England and experienced its terrible aridity in this year of drought. Scorched grass. Distressed foliage. An enervating and inescapable heat.

I was surprised at the strength of my own reaction to this dryness which felt suffocating. It seemed to me a foretaste of a dystopian world in which the climate had broken down irreversibly because of human activity. The scientists tell us that we are going to have to get used to summers like this, maybe even in drizzly Lancashire. So even the innocent joy of a summer day is now laden with a sense of doom.

The Bible is full of the terror of drought and has vivid descriptions of its impact. The prophet Jeremiah could be describing Summer 2022 as he writes, ‘The ground is cracked because there is no rain. The farmers are dismayed and cover their heads. Even the doe in the field deserts her newborn fawn because there is no grass.’ Drought in the Hebrew scriptures is an image of divine displeasure. The baked and thirsty ground is a sign of a human race that is failing to live in right relationship with God and his creation.

But the Bible also contains rich and watery images of what happens when the human race learns to live in harmony with creation. Isaiah has God saying, “I am making streams in the wasteland. The wild animals honour me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the desert.” This is a beautiful and remade world, a creation healed and filled with wonderful and thriving life.

We have seen chilling evidence of the impact of climate breakdown in recent months. There is plenty to make us afraid of what the future might hold. The trouble is, as the prophets knew, fear is insufficient to change human behaviour. It leaves us feeling powerless and guilt-stricken.

If we are to encourage the lifestyle changes necessary to make a difference, surely we also need a positive vision of what the world has the potential to be if we get it right. Imagine Isaiah’s vision rewritten for today. Drought stricken lands flowing with water. Fresh and unpolluted air. Forests and oceans recovering their diverse life. Hungry people fed. A human race that has relearnt the art of living in harmony with the planet. If I need to change my life to build a world like that, then bring it on.