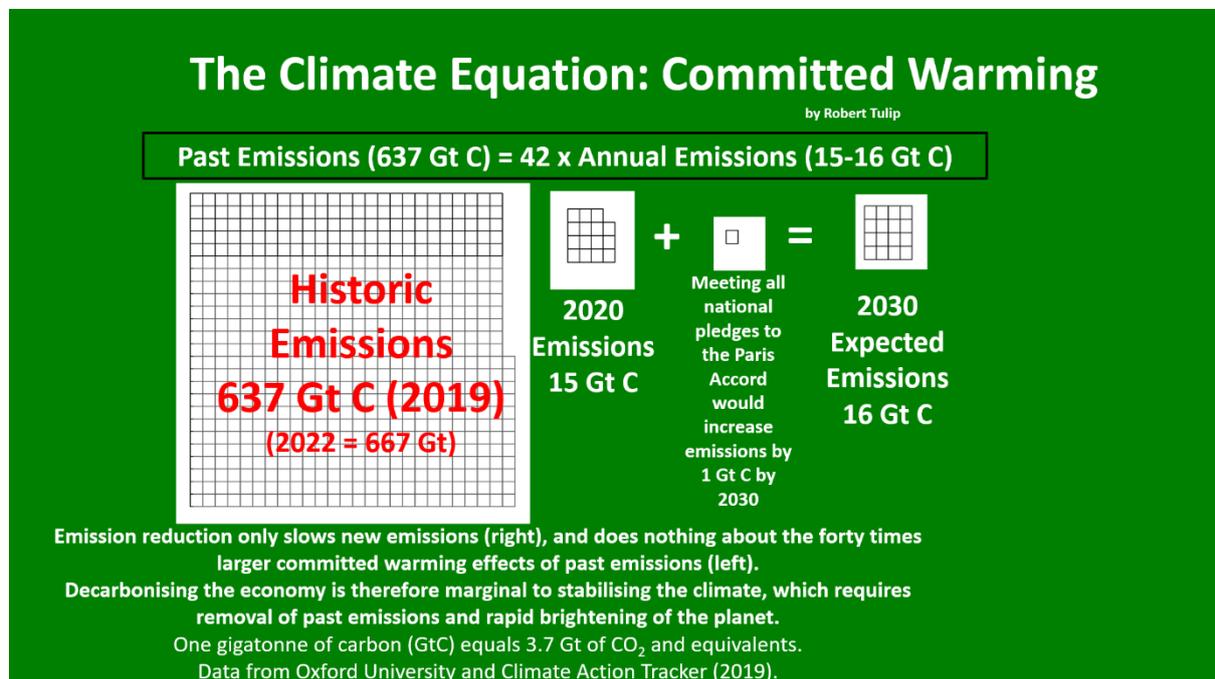


Life Is Stronger Than Death
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Readings: [Psalm 118:14-29](#) [Revelation 1:4-8](#), [John 20:19-31](#)



The great message of the resurrection of Jesus Christ at Easter is that life is stronger than death. After the despair of the cross, a situation of a bleak loss of all hope for the friends of Jesus, in the face of the brutal power of empire, the new life of Easter Sunday symbolised the healing power of faith that God is a God of the living, that the forces of hell and death and sin will not prevail against the Kingdom of Heaven.

This is an astonishing message. Many people tend to reject it as making no sense. And yet the resurrection vindicates the faith of the Psalmist that the stone that the builders rejected would become the chief cornerstone. The cross symbolised the rejection of Christ by the builders of his society, while his return to life symbolises that Christ remains central to human life. Without a keystone an arch cannot stand. Builders who reject the cornerstone are like the authorities and institutions of the world who cannot see the essential nature of reality, and are therefore destined for destruction. But saying that they cannot see to people in power is quite difficult. The instinctive reaction of powerful people who are challenged in this way is to automatically reject such criticism. Emotions of pride and arrogance are central to worldly power, and simply cannot allow such direct challenge to their legitimacy and mandate.

Jesus was condemned to death on the cross, showing how the kingdoms of the world emphatically rejected his spiritual vision of liberation. And yet the power and truth and

vitality of his message of divine love lived on through the story of the resurrection, setting the path for the eventual coming victory of God in the world, a victory that remains the cornerstone of Christian hope. Our text from Revelation 1 expresses this great hope that love will rule the world, that we will see a glorious transforming liberation of our planet from the power of sin and death, a new heaven and a new earth, a new creation making all things new. The alpha and omega, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, symbolise that Jesus Christ represents the turning point of a New Age. As we prepare the way for the eventual rule of Christ on Earth, we are called to prepare the way, to live as though we are in the Kingdom of God already, to imagine how our life together can be transformed.

Saint Thomas was not alone in being unable to believe in the resurrection. His demand for evidence, to see and touch the wounds of the nails driven into the hands and feet of Christ, in the story recounted by John, was a perfectly natural response to an extraordinary claim. Christians today have a range of views about the meaning of the story. In the modern world evidence has become a cornerstone of our public values. Much evidence is ignored due to corruption and ignorance and exhaustion, but a growing movement demands that we base our opinions upon facts, that our society should be accountable and transparent in our values. Whatever our opinions about what actually happened to produce the resurrection story, Christians all share the Easter faith that Christ symbolises the victory of life over death, of love over hate, of goodness over evil, of light over darkness, as Archbishop Tutu proclaims in his wonderful [hymn](#) that victory is ours through the love of God. In the northern hemisphere, Easter comes when the days become longer than the nights in spring, representing the victory of light over darkness and of life over death as the Sun returns with the summer months. The presence of God in the incarnation of Christ reflects the observation that in our fallen world we are lost, and that the resurrected Christ is able to show us the way of life in truth.

Watching the bloody attack Russia has mounted against Ukraine must shake our faith in humanity, if not our faith in God. The ability of Vladimir Putin to lie and kill and destroy with total disdain for any moral sense is a throwback to earlier times when tyrants faced no scrutiny or accountability. And yet the horror we all feel about this evil shows our shared moral principles around the world, demanding that Russia must be accountable for its actions. We can only live together as a global community when we recognise that such tyranny is obsolete, that the moral values of peace and justice and love and truth will be victorious over the power of evil.

The questions of evidence in Ukraine are quite clear. But I would now like to turn to climate change, a topic where the science about the causes of warming is also absolutely simple and clear, but the questions of what we should do about it need far more careful discussion. Dozens of Australian church leaders, including many whose communities have been directly affected by flooding and bushfires, have signed an [open letter](#) calling for government leaders to take effective action to protect our climate. I am sure we can all endorse this call, given that a stable climate is essential for life to flourish. We already see how extreme weather is wreaking havoc. This is caused by the extra heat our emissions have added to the air and sea. Scientists also point to the imminent dangers of sea level rise destroying all the coastlines of the world, the ongoing loss of our priceless planetary heritage of complex biodiversity, and the risks of sudden shifts into an unliveable climate. Our world is far more fragile and sensitive to shock than is generally assumed. The need for climate security shows why we must first make war a thing of the past, so that we can

cooperate as a global community to address the growing security threat posed by unchecked warming. The scale of the peril must make us wonder if life will indeed triumph over death as the Gospels assure us, or if we will see apocalyptic collapse of our civilization into broader conflict.

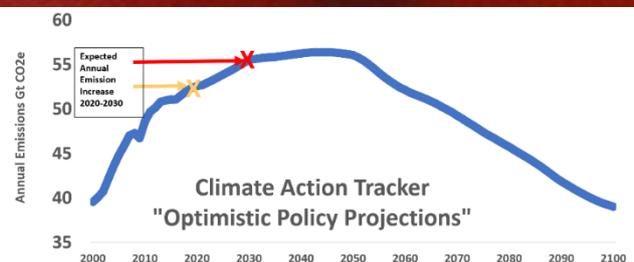
In their letter, the church leaders said “We need our government leaders to heed the advice of climate experts to reduce carbon emissions to ensure a safe and sustainable future.” A problem with this statement of the climate problem is that many experts contend that cutting emissions is not enough to ensure our future. Decarbonising the economy by shifting to renewable energy is essential for the environment and economy, but the unfortunate reality is that emission reduction alone is far too small, slow and contested to be the main strategy to address climate change. I want to take this opportunity to explain some of the evidence that backs up this difficult observation.

Climate change is caused by all the greenhouse gases that humanity has added to the atmosphere. By the end of this century, this will total about a trillion tonnes of carbon, nearly four trillion tonnes of carbon dioxide and equivalents. Geologists tell us that the last time Earth had such conditions, the seas were tens of metres higher and the temperature was so hot as to be unthinkable for human survival. Each year’s emissions worsen the problem of total climate forcing by about 6%. The elephant in the room, the remaining 94% of warming, is the committed warming from past emissions. If we were to magically end all combustion today, the earth system would continue to heat up until it reaches a natural equilibrium.

As well, the likelihood of drastic emission cuts is low. Expert projections indicate that emissions will continue to grow for the next decade and will then only gradually fall. All that means cutting our new emissions can do almost nothing to slow the crisis. Even achieving net zero by 2050 would produce a highly unstable climate, no more stable than the circus trick of balancing plates on sticks.

It is essential to work out how to convert all the extra carbon we have added to the air into non-warming forms, such as soil, biomass and construction material.

But even that is not enough. If we think of our planet as like a person, we are already in a fever that will only get worse unless we find a cure. Shifting to renewables is a good thing



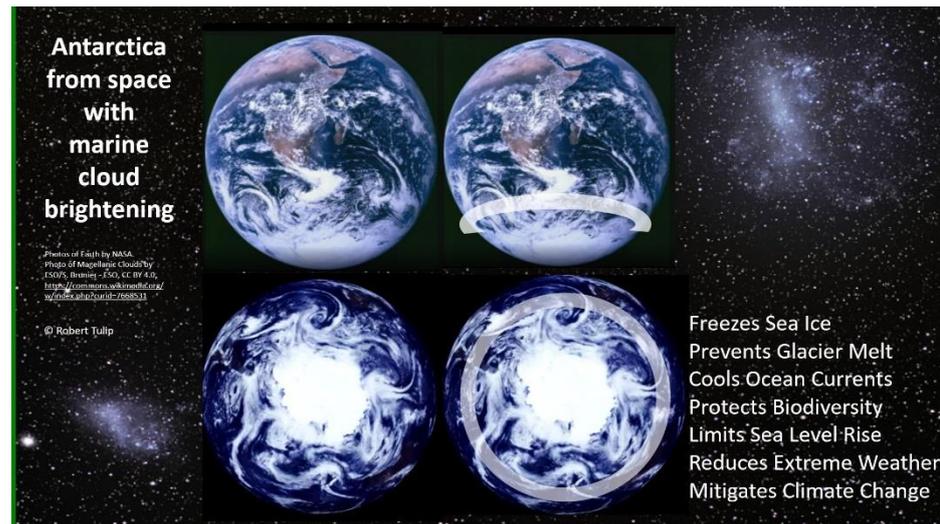
Projected global emissions this century (2019 estimates) if Paris Accord pledges are exceeded. Chart by Robert Tulip, data used with permission from <https://climateactiontracker.org/data-portal/>



but it will not cure our planetary fever. Cutting emissions can do nothing to mitigate extreme weather or biodiversity loss in this decade.

Even removing carbon dioxide is too slow. Our situation is like a person who has had an accident and needs a tourniquet while they are rushed to hospital for surgery. The only tourniquet that could prevent dangerous climate change in this decade is united global action to reflect more sunlight back to space, brightening the planet. I know this topic of geoengineering is regarded with extreme scepticism by many people, but the problem is that if we do not take such action, we can kiss goodbye to our existing ancient ecosystems with all their complexity, in a world without beaches. We can also expect that extreme weather will worsen, further destabilising our world systems. Taking action on climate now means brightening the planet while we work out the slower sustainable strategies that will allow humanity to flourish in the future.

My reading is that there are safe and simple methods we could deploy, such as creating mist from ocean water to brighten clouds with sea salt. Brightening clouds in the Southern Ocean would help stop ice from melting, which would



reduce the risks of sea level rise and ecosystem collapse. It would cool the ocean currents flowing north, which would reduce the disruptions that are causing our extreme weather. Such a project would enable governments to cooperate for peace and security. Unfortunately, this whole conversation has been completely excluded from the UN climate discussions because people fear it would reduce the focus on cutting emissions. But as I have explained, cutting emissions is nowhere near enough to have any effect on the climate, so we really need to open up the discussion of other methods.

The resurrection story of the victory of life over death can provide hope even for the extreme despair that many people feel about climate change. As we look into how Christianity offers hope, one key message I want to leave with you is the need for mutual respect and dialogue. The Christian ethic of love can overcome the partisan tribal psychology that causes people to refuse to enter conversation with those who disagree. The story of Jesus Christ has enabled reconciliation between widely different cultures, overcoming our tribal instincts in a spirit of love. Reconciliation is a main theme of the ideas of salvation in the Gospel, such as the Beatitudes and the Last Judgment. Our faith that love will rule the world offers the only real prospect for overcoming the many blockages we now face. Christian faith in the victory of life over death offers a profound story of salvation for our world.