

## Matthew 13:52

**And he said to them, because of this, every scribe, having been disciplined into the reign of the skies is like a person in charge of a household, who brings out of their treasury both new and old.**

To my shame..... It took me more than twenty years of preaching before I was prepared to acknowledge the apocalyptic dimension of what had hitherto seemed a balanced, civilised and delightfully quotable verse, (above) rather than part of a narrative delivered to powerless people immersed in the desperation proper to the trajectory of catastrophe.

More ***'grab anything that's useful and run with it!'***  
than ***'tastefully balance antiques with innovations.'***

This involved a desperate yet liberating 'leap' from the comfort of my previous use of that text, and perhaps I should declare at the outset that for a practitioner - *with no time to be a student* - of 'environmental' preaching, leaps, like the joyful ***leaps of the lame***, which are at once ***also the leaps of the hunted deer*** [cf Isaiah 35:5] are the order of the day. Get used to it!. And leap, yourself. The risks and resources you might have kept in reserve for that rainy day should be cashed in now it's tipping down. Forget the timetable of church decline. Now, we live! And it's far more exciting to be a Christian in the midst of crisis.

Well-fed and safe people are not revolutionary, but dwell in (the illusion of) the sabbath, and perhaps also under the misapprehension of completion. They more easily lose empathy with those experiencing injustice.

Crisis is actually the mode in which Christianity, and Christian prayer, makes sense. And we need to distance ourselves from any embarrassment about that, any snide suggestion that "we only pray because we are afraid."

Even if that were true, it is nothing to be ashamed of. Perhaps to be grateful for. The pandemic has introduced, with a vengeance, the theme and genuine experience of crisis, though at time of writing, with the disadvantage that people confidently look beyond it, rather than building and embracing a resilient spirituality for the long haul. Given the accelerating worsening of prospects for the safety of children, grandchildren, (or even the twilight of our own years,) an environmental perspective for Christianity has in the meantime decisively shifted well beyond the "nice thing to do" of the early days to

a purposeful quest to evolve our spirituality (and therefore our lives and the lives of others).

This *is* a mucky, messy preaching, where “black and white” (alongside the supposed opposites), good and bad resist distinction, where metaphor dies the death of reality, where globally contextual Biblical inspiration finds itself unable dutifully to bow the knee to the anthropocentric big beasts of written theology.

The old Calvinist convenience, that “if they don’t listen they’re damned anyway”, falls apart, because we are so much in the same boat, so much co-dependent on the ‘common home’. God’s warning to Ezekiel that if he didn’t speak up then the responsibility was his, is more like it.

This is public and missional discipleship where the craftiness of the snake comes into its own, supplanting the worn-out caution of the dove, and the Sign of Jonah is that Ninevites make the change that saves them *before* the game-changing disaster hits.

( Though what if Jonah had arrived just a few days later, when the sea-levels were already rising, the CO2 was more than any time in human history? Maybe, like us, they’d have ignored him anyway?).

This is the inconvenient observation that the promise not to overwhelm terrestrial life with flooding is made by God, but *not* by Noah or his offspring.

This is voicing the suspicion that jolly liberal talk of ‘*stewardship*’ of Creation, in effete horror at dominationalist language, might no longer be fit for purpose, and that the ‘Good Shepherd’, rather than the Hired Hand, (who buggers off when the wolf howls), might be a better role-model than just looking after someone else’s soul-less property, which you can control better than the average sheep-dog does the wayward sheep. Control is gone. The “omnipotent dictator” model of God, in crisis, loses all viability and risks destroying faith and replacing it with despair. ‘God’s in charge, everything’s all right’ needs identifying with the temptation Jesus resisted, to jump off the pinnacle of the Temple, as a demonstration of faith.

This is rejecting the unbiblical idea that our species, though we have a special role, are the be-all and end-all of Creation. [try the whole book of Job] . Or the culmination of the Creation [Let’s just forget the *Sabbath*, though

maybe that's why it was migrated to Genesis chapter 2 when they set the chapter headings?]

This is standing up to the secular nihilism that paints human beings as a virus on the planet. And even to environmentalists who come, with their despair, to the same conclusion.

This is sticking your neck out like pacifists in the Blitz, to respect and befriend an environment which might be presented as your enemy, to reveal Nature as your much-maligned friend and supporter.

This is recognising the blessing of Isaiah's 'Little Child's Leadership' [11:6] in the climate strike movement as well as the curse of child**ish** leaders [cf Isaiah 3:4]. This is seeing both that those against us are for us and those not for us are against us. Whatever *works*!

But beauty always helps. And multimedia or online preaching can help with beautiful and deeply moving images. "Bringing the mountain" to the prophetic community, that they might hear the mountain's prophecy. A congregation in love **with**, but not anaesthetised **by** the green pastures, able to be taught by the trees and birds of their own locality, and with permission to speak as roughly and lovingly to the storm as they might to a human being in need of repentance, will be making friends with Jesus, rather than just nurturing anger at the irrelevance of church inaction.

Relationship with the rest of Creation is not characterised by cotton wool, but perhaps the blunt practicality of those who live close to the soil. Can preaching bridge this gap to those socially distanced from the Earth in urban bubbles?

The bizarre egalitarianism of online worship - a reshuffling of our patterns of exclusion, where the housebound take part and the conservatively stuffy are excluded, at the most trivial level enables family pets to be present in worship. We have experienced holiness in different sorts of boxes from the usual. It's not yet clear whether this will help.

Where online eucharistic celebrations have subverted the ponderous committees, there's also been the chance to experience all food and drink as holy - a significant advance on rarified and specialised substances fondled in expensive vessels.

The deepest temptation for churches during the restrictions of 2020 has been to shelve or prohibit talk of every other crisis; as if tragedy never required multitasking.

Putting the gloom back in, when things are not just grim but very different. Pastoral gloom forbids prophetic fervour.

How to forestall the accusation that joy in the changes we saw and their possibility (*schadenbedingte Freude*) might appear as repellent as Schadenfreude?

The more resourceful amongst us have tracked down those scientific reports which clearly linked the virus crisis to the abuse of nature. The Law of Connection, so fundamental to partnership with Creation, helps wake us from the attractive torpor of an anaesthetic church.

At all times, environmentally-aware preaching involves a ride on the “within-reachness” of the kingdom: taking care to share ( and from lockdown on, affirm by clear demonstration) the genuine and tangible benefits of some of the changes we need to embrace anyway, such as cleaner air<sup>1</sup>, better physical and mental health, less stress, and more. An honest vision of a better life, and how we can begin to live it, belongs alongside awareness of the problems.

Few **treasurers** are other than completely conscientious, when it comes to the church’s treasure and the location of their heart. When do you share the feelings of Christians in southern Africa, that investments in fossil fuel companies are comparable to historic support for slavery?<sup>2</sup> If you do so, do you need to allow for a pastoral picking-up of the pieces? What sort of encouragement do you offer to a local church which bucks its denominational trend and steps out of line, for love of the Earth?

A preacher can, and should, delightfully affirm the bug-hotel in the church grounds, the bird-feeder on the notice-board, signifying hospitality to the ‘strangers’ with and without wings that might be the angels sent that we might entertain them unawares. ....And supply the corrective to the slippery slope of works-righteousness for those who have done **everything** environmental

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-matters-air-pollution/health-matters-air-pollution>

<sup>2</sup> From a letter from Rev Canon Rachel Mash, Anglican Church of Southern Africa.

‘since my youth’ [e.g. Matthew 19] that our creative environmental actions (insulation, LED lightbulbs, banning single-use plastic in the church etc) are a currency of prayer in their own right, leading us on, rather than locking us down.

It **should** be obvious - but love and encouragement move things on better than the overt rebukes of a visiting eco-preacher. Few congregations are not trying to do ‘the right thing’. Respect that!

Things which it’s right to do, are those whose effect and measurement we hand over to God. Next to reassuring denialism, the most spiritually damaging messages right now are those which promise to “fix” the world. “Solutions” rather than transformation. We have much to learn here from the Mennonite approach to conflict <sup>3</sup>. And where we do come into controversy, to learn what it means to be ‘more than conquerors’.

The distinctiveness of a church which is more into convincing than defeating those who set themselves up as opponents, should bring evangelistic dividends. And call out the exclusivism of those who prioritise “mission” over global climate justice.

Evangelism, as the proclamation of Good News ( - in the neglected verses of Mark 16:15, to “**every** creature”) can now shuffle off any liberal reservations.

Sharing stories, such as of the neighbouring church which drastically reduced their carbon footprint by feeding the hungry, clothing those in need of clothing , and generally doing what a church ought to do in its community.<sup>4</sup> All the good stuff belongs together. People need to know. The place of boasting in the Lord needs to be revisited, however un-British that might seem.

Unambiguously, and shamelessly, it is to your hearer’s good that they become fully aware of the climate emergency, that they dedicate prayer and/or action to their response, and that they feel they have permission for sustaining hope, even where a rational/logical pathway to such hope is not forthcoming.

It is unloving to omit these omnipresent concerns from preaching.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://mcc.org/learn/what/categories/conflict-transformation>

<sup>4</sup> <https://grantongoesgreener.org.uk>

To preach with environmental awareness is far more to be a ***rushing-in fool*** than a ***fearfully-treading*** cautious ***angel***. Indeed, the role of a Gospel Clown, a fool for Christ may be more sustainable than conscientious correctness, or the mantle of a more sombre prophet.

A fool holding on to the hope that the foolishness of getting on with it and acknowledging the rocking of the boat we are all in, is wiser than the settled wisdom of the status quo or its near cousin, evasive incrementalism = doing nothing by doing it a bit at a time.

I've learned that, in a service where I am completely and even brutally open that the 'end of the world is nigh', it's not a bad outcome that over handshakes at the door, comments veer towards "lovely service, minister!"

Either folks have taken no more notice than they usually do, ***or*** they have indeed been enabled to bring their fears before God, their frailty onto holy ground, less self-conscious of slipping off their shoes at the spectacle of the only bush unburned by wildfire.

To lead, through the progress of worship, from despair and disinterest to refreshment and repentance, is no longer the prerogative of would-be Spurgeons. Whatever you have to offer, and whatever your theological background, a hard look at your own prejudices and inhibitions might lead you to some unexpected places. I've come across a convinced vegan Seventh-Day Adventist, a conservative Nigerian Presbyterian, whose critique of 'stewardship' helpfully challenged my previous moderation, evangelicals who take to environmental initiatives like ducks to water, and inspiring Roman Catholics taking the lead from Pope Francis, which leads us across so many boundaries. Your church tradition should be no excuse. The only "dragon to slay" is a mindless distrust of honest science in its interpretation of the Voice of the Earth.

Looking around,(and based on things I have been sent for review) there's a theological convergence which is a function of the urgency of the crisis, which I might describe as a circumstantial pressure towards radical incarnationalism: taking seriously what it means to say that Jesus is fully human. Does it follow, for instance, that he shares our evolutionary history? You yourself will work out what avenues beckon.

I try not to get frustrated when (usually) senior church leaders fumble on about Genesis 1-3 or Revelation 22 as if the intervening thousand pages were not full of God's partnership and love for the whole of Creation. Which is

why, although the widespread discipline of the Revised Common Lectionary is decidedly pre-crisis, I am happy to work with it on my visits to congregations. That said, the systematic omission of the apocalyptic needs pointing out. I have chosen to seek the partnership of Creation in the whole of Scripture, and so far, have found this search far more justified than I expected.

In preaching, words *may* seem cheap, especially when you write a few thousand most weeks, but in this job, every word, refined by the fire of the consciousness both that it needs to be spoken and that it's open to challenge from a culture of complacency, can turn out to be cripplingly costly. And thus far, lonely. Some sort of support or spiritual direction; the prayerful backing of your community can't be over-valued.

I could wish for an instant *ecumenical order* of environmental chaplains, because being obliged to stick your neck out, in seeming defiance of attitudes taken for granted in theological training, will be less hazardous when *all* our pastoral leaders are awake to the global - and no less local - context in which all our preaching will take place for the rest of our lives.

For now, environmental preaching is dancing on a tightrope, with the rope held between the churches, and by their consent. My hope is that the creative and interpretative skills currently being inculcated wherever ministry training involves spiritual reflection and responsiveness, will result in leaders and preachers more than minimally equipped to support God's people in this particular iteration (not the first, I hope not the last) of the End of the World. Where an End is, there is also purpose.

The habit of leaps *is* historically extremely widespread, though 'a fact universally *unacknowledged*' in the worship life and practice of mainstream churches, where embedded songs and rituals develop from associative use of scripture, rather than direct and prescriptive instruction. [Cf Matthew 22:37-40]. In so many ways, reliance on grace, forgiveness, and love for the other are the most environmental of values, working through our faith.

Certainly with gratitude for Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si*,<sup>5</sup> the biggest and most irrevocable leap of all comes when we hazard anew the question 'Who is my neighbour?' -And discover our neighbour Earth, holding us, feeding us, healing us when given the chance.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://laudatosi.com/watch>

We find, richly and immersively supported by the poetry of scripture, that the crass anthropocentrism of the Enlightenment is now a garden fence blown down by severe weather: the sentience of fellow creatures can no longer be denied, or even scientifically justified, and “our neighbour”, the hungry, thirsty, the naked, the imprisoned and sick confronts us with more than just human eyes. Almost everything about humanity: intelligence, emotions, and more, is also found elsewhere. This should school us in wonder and humility, making us less easy fodder for the well-resourced corporations banking on fear and denial.

There is even a role for fear, - shared, not inflicted. Fear is not a sign of lack of faith. There is a place for the fight-and-flight emotions, to shift us, whilst working to avoid these becoming chronic conditions.

So how can we be unworriedly aware of the scary outlook of tomorrow, whilst concentrating on the *‘kakia’* we are up to our eyes in today? The choice, not to worry about tomorrow, makes possible an annoying, sustainable hope, which is a distinctive contribution of churches to public discourse.

If the Pope is content to describe the Earth as our Mother, our sister **and** our ruler, then it becomes meaningful to hear the voice of Christ saying “Whatever you do to the Earth, you do to me”.

The poetic magic of preaching, but seldom of scholarship, can draw this together with the obedience we owe, to our own advantage, to our parents, [*e.g. Ephesians 6*] and Jesus’ outrageous treatment of his family in Mark 3, where one’s **true** family **are** those who do the will of God. One’s parents in Christ are those who teach us to care and take responsibility. Honour the Earth! For whatever your immediate genetic connections, science happily confirms what ancient scripture discerned, that down to the DNA, all life is related; made of the same stardust.

Since awareness of crisis lays bare any subterfuge, we also note that forgiveness, (*including of our polluting self,*) and awareness of our slants, prejudices and agenda is now more than ever the foundation of humility on which assertive proclamation has to be built.

We **‘would say that anyway’**, yet, out of love, for the Earth, which is the only consistently honest way to love people, we find the courage to say it, notwithstanding, which transparency enables us to call out the anthropocentric bias of almost all translations and written material of the churches over the last century. In so doing we have no interest in impugning the integ-

riety of sincere and dedicated scholars of the past, but every reason to be seeking to ask what the Spirit is saying to the churches today.

Thus our functional hypocrisy is on the table. The best place for it. When hidden, it becomes a weapon against us, a trap to undermine. Though I find I have now to draw the line at domestic or European flights, I *will* burn fossil fuels in order to visit and preach, though in lockdown, I am valuing other ways. The literal urgency is such, that we lack the leisure to remove the logs from our own eyes even as we offer help with the motes of others. The preacher gains credit from the example they personally set, although the next best thing is to look to the hearer to outdo them.

I did encounter textbooks in my training, which squirmingly described Jesus himself as an “apocalyptic preacher,” though if that were a treasure, it was one my congregations were content - and perhaps relieved - for me to shove to the bottom of the treasured baggage with which I arrived at the congregations I served as “*their* minister”.

Congregations are unprepared for the possibility that a preacher might actually mean what they say, though the ‘scariness’ of the global situation means that the ‘scariness’ even of neglected or sidelined apocalyptic scriptures acquires a potentially comforting level of meaning. I’m realising “scariness” is a theological term. It includes the thought that speaking truth even to the power of your own congregation might threaten your ability to do so.

Without (for now) descending into wild-eyed gleeful literalism, a new meaningfulness should be inescapable when there are “... signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. [Luke 21.25 ]. Equally, the closeness in Jeremiah and Isaiah of injustice and environmental devastation should not leave us untouched by the suffering of Creation in solidarity with impoverished and exploited humanity, even when, corporately, it is our species that wields the knife.

Resident and incumbent preachers, rather than white-horse peripatetics like myself have an exceptional opportunity in the ‘times and seasons’ of the Christian year, as well as preaching the occasional offices of Baptism, marriage and funerals, sensitively and with integrity to open up awareness. This works best reformatively rather than additively.

No number of “special eco-Sundays” will equal the value of “seeing the green” in the defining festivals of our faith.

A heavy-handed approach might well be counter-productive, but nothing is too holy to be green. In Holy Week, Jesus is welcomed by branches, nailed to a tree; the Earth alone receives him, before he meets his friends, being (mis)taken for the Gardener. I was particularly impressed by the 'green protocol' of the Church of South India, encouraging the planting of a tree in place of the burning of an oil lamp at weddings. Amongst the 'memes' I have perpetrated, one of the most penetrating is that "there is nothing too holy to be green". It is no longer responsible to "**shelve all that treehuggery**" **because it's Lent, Advent, Easter or Pentecost.**" Instead, these traditions stand to be enriched and enlivened as we listen for the voice and place of Creation in all of them.

In Advent, liturgically minded churches may place Judgement and the Second Coming decoratively on mantleshelf of their worship, though in such a way as to affirm what is, rather than to accompany what's headed our way. So much confusion and nervousness: that mention of 'judgement' of reckoning and radical transformation, keeps company with a safely distant and thus unrealistic global destruction, that we prematurely identify one with the other and fearfully and tragically postpone our wholehearted engagement with the completely literal juggernauts of climate emergency. **'Lord, come quickly'** is the more welcome when we realise we're locked to a 'come-upperance' **anyway**, barring the most unlikely, radical and widespread change. Thus ideas of 'Second Coming' becomes an encouraging search for God's solidarity and encouragement in discovering the place and purpose of the church today. If we have to negotiate disaster, I hope we'd prefer to do so with Christ!

In my first pastorate, in Wales, folk spoke with more love than awe of the entertainingly fiery preachers, who would *'get a hwyl on'* and hammer the pulpit with their fists in the passion of their deliverance.

Locked into that pitch-pine forecastle of the chapel, which was designed not so much to be 'six feet above contradiction' but rather, to be in viscerally close eye contact and unamplified voice range of densely-packed worshippers, they offered a weekly and profoundly **sustaining** catharsis, delivered in the ***Language of Heaven/the Skies [laith y Nefoedd]***. 'Salvation' was in there somewhere, and the uprightness and decency of chapel folk was related to that, though the focus of eschatology was post-mortem. 'Hiraeth', that untranslatable, infectious and deeply longing for a "home", with permission for tears and love, demonstrably sustained spiritual, and therefore physical sur-

vival. **Salvation-as-deliverance** in the Bible stories joined hands with **salvation-as-relationship**, (justification by faith,) these twin anchors of our faith. (Additionally, an African friend has described the inclusion of Creation in tis scope as “**changing the doctrine of salvation**”.) The confused logic of Hell gave coherence as a to-be-saved-from location, and perhaps that resonated with the working conditions of the miners. Song and spirituality carried and undergirded political activism. Such things are indispensable right now, and so there’s every reason both to write and seek out new (and singable) songs to support our preaching. Hymn poems may play with images and push boundaries even more effectively than preaching. Emotions are key. Where a song cultivates longing, this can be for a healed (or recovering) Earth, rather than a distant detached heaven. And there is room for lament.

The pinnacle of Welsh tradition, and the associated and politicised ‘revivals’ seemed - **and let’s go with recollection, rather than necessarily forensic history** - to coincide with that of the grossest exploitation both of the Earth and of those who were the “human tools” of the violation of the landscape (and, though we didn’t notice, climate) that was the coal industry. Creation groaned, and with it, the workers, God’s children or not. Cardiff Castle (and the “very religious<sup>6</sup>” Marquis of Bute’s overblown palace Mount Stuart), were built well-nigh literally in the blood of the mining communities. *Pacé* Max Boyce, “I was not there”<sup>7</sup>, but arrived, instead to serve **post**-industrial communities (also in Scotland) whose cohesive raison d’être, both loved and hated, had been torn from them like a cancerous limb excised without anaesthetic. Solidarity from the churches had been patchy. Ministers who had stood, suffered, and maybe been arrested with striking miners earned deep respect. Preaching and solidarity were one. And I wonder if the ideational content of preaching mattered that much.

*(All preaching, all worship, is ultimately speaking in tongues, relying on the Spirit to be our kindly editor. It’s freedom from the responsibility to make everything happen that makes activist preaching possible.)*

Heavy industry, polluting, and invariably in the service of warfare, had come with the gift of identity. As it does to oil and gas workers unsure of how “just” the transition to a zero carbon economy might be. As it does to farmers, feeling under attack over the methane footprint of their ruminants.

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<sup>6</sup> Verbatim, from the tour guide at Mount Stuart

<sup>7</sup> <https://open.spotify.com/album/17sA91NEuH2hrTihOrvTpe>

Without the pit or the shipyard, the powerlessness whose sting had been mitigated by the solidarity of labour and the deep dark song of the chapels, was rubbed more definitively in their faces as community fragmented: pubs and chapels both became sad skeletons.

And salvation, (*from **what?***) as well as sinfulness (*who's bothered if the things I enjoy or my deepest identity upsets some bloke with a long white beard in a galaxy far away?*), drifted loose from their demonstrable anchor in experienced reality.

Metaphor acquired a "**mere**". Poetry became decorative, rather than a vehicle of truth. That **sin** might be about "*what truly harms the Earth*"<sup>8</sup>, rather than some harmless enjoyment that irritates vicars, or involves weight gain.... this comes as news to our hearers.

Further -and this will be for the reader to resolve - what are the implications of the global insignificance of personal chosen harm? How much guilt should an individual be prepared to acknowledge for the violence and abuse of their species, their culture, their race, towards the Earth, all of which will be self-destructive, and all of which, with an injustice which cannot but cry out with the blood from the Earth, [cf Genesis 4:10] is **already** hitting the poorest worst and first. Which lives matter? The racial dimension of climate disaster is also emerging on the back of a renewed awareness of imperial history and its legacy.

The New Testament in particular, having emerged redundant out of a context and expectation of powerlessness, persecution, threat and catastrophe, found profoundly uncomfortable and humiliating employment as tool of Empire and social control. National, Established, and very large churches, whilst they may lovingly dispose over considerable assets and organisation, may struggle to be free of the illusion of being 'in charge', wary of being blamed for the demise of the Gadarene swine in time of transition. It's in the debates that follow **from** environmental conscientisation of congregations and their leaders, that even the largest church **should** be able to overcome inertia.

At the other end of the scale, and with the precedent of heroic preachers of pacifism in time of war, we cannot underestimate the pressure involved when a local preacher conscientiously opposes the 'hanging fruit' of jobs and prosperity in, for instance, a new coal mine, runway, or fracking plant.

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<sup>8</sup> Wording from an Agnus Dei written for Palm Sunday in Iona Abbey 2019

These things become the more acute with the telescoping of timescale. Even if many folk in churches find motivation for eco action because of love of their grandchildren, we now have to convey the unwelcome truth that the world 'as we know it', will not 'see you out'. Nor can a ten-year scale to peak CO2 be approached incrementally. Change is best embraced yesterday, but the next best time is today.

Even for someone whose faith was found and grounded in the justice and peace commitment of the Iona Community, **salvation-as-relationship**, be it individual or corporate, has loomed disproportionately large - or worse - has seemed disconnected from/antagonistic to **salvation-as-real-world-deliverance**, which can sometimes put mere religion to shame.

The 'Rule' of the Iona Community attempts to hold these things in tension; to mix up the love-of-God people and the justice and peace people so you can't tell the difference.

To sustain by spirituality a life of loving activism. And vice-versa. And this, whilst not being ultimately dependant upon success or achievement. A sustaining faith needs to look reality eye to eye without letting procrastination or complacency take the place of wisdom.

With a more than 99% consensus of peer-reviewed science, that human corporate action has dangerously and permanently disrupted the 'laws that never shall be broken'<sup>9</sup>. The complacency that goes with "*God's in charge, so we don't need to bother about climate change*" needs to be assertively confronted, and as in so much of environmental preaching, with overtly Biblical resources. Churches offer something qualitatively different from secular environmental groups, though we sometimes lack the confidence to drag Jesus into our debates. The result is, that Satan holds on longer.

If Jesus, tempted by Satan didn't fall for the reassurance of misapplied scripture and jump off the pinnacle of the Temple, then his disciples should cultivate an analogous scepticism. And the immense catalogue of disasters that is the Old Testament cannot square with '*everything will be all right*'. It's precisely the God who *is* in charge who is screaming 'Don't do it!' whilst allowing you the freedom to go ahead and mess things up anyway, before being present to pick up the pieces.

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<sup>9</sup> [https://hymnary.org/text/praise\\_the\\_lord\\_ye\\_heavens\\_adore\\_him](https://hymnary.org/text/praise_the_lord_ye_heavens_adore_him)

Truth -that sets us free **to act** - is there for those with eyes to see and ears to hear, though the limits of our sight and knowledge - in particular, where the Crisis of Creation has not yet hit us hardest - might not yet have pushed us over the edge to the radical and incarnate repentance called for by the prophetic voices of Greta Thunberg, the IPCC<sup>10</sup> and the disregarded prophetic groaning and shouting of the prophetic Earth-self (cf Romans 8, Luke 19:40, and the Iona Community daily office) conveyed with especial poignancy by indigenous peoples. What voices, and not just human ones, do we marginalise as a matter of course?

The danger of activist burnout, and the pitfalls of indispensability, with some irony, is the incarnation of the demons at work to kill the earth with their message of indefinite 'growth' and single-use, throwaway styles-for-lives evading the embarrassment and humiliation of mortality. Even 'building back' after COVID presents this danger.

The most **lethal** half-truth of the crafty (but not evil) snake of Eden was [Genesis 3:4] "You (**probably**) won't die.

And the **kindest** response to the Fall,( if that's how you want to see it) is God's reminder that we *will die*. That, and our literal identity with dust, soil, minerals, and all the Life that we share it with. [Genesis 3:19b] **Memento mori**, almost compulsory on ancient gravestones, with their stone hour-glasses, is a keystone of Environmental Preaching, which does well to learn too, from the spiritual insights of palliative care. A good life is marked by love and justice, not by the lie of 'endless' life. Maybe having been a carer and partner in life and work to a terminally ill person has been good preparation for the palliative dimension too. We're into 'End-of-world' ministry, rather than just 'end-of-life'. Have we neglected the duty of the 'Reformed Pastor' by Richard Baxter in our preaching, 'to prepare for death'?<sup>11</sup> Do we allow for the comfort of lament, the mourning for the loss of creatures prematurely extinct, or of the world that might have been?

The lazy presentation of "the end of the age" and related phrases as "forever", or even of "**all-the-days**" as "**always**" reflects how drenched even our worship has become in the denial of death that leads to death.

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<sup>10</sup> [https://unfoundation.org/blog/post/intergovernmental-panel-climate-change-30-years-informing-global-climate-action/?gclid=EAlalQobChMI3-H0zJmN6AIVQVXTCh18dwdOEAAAYASAAEgLu-lvD\\_BwE](https://unfoundation.org/blog/post/intergovernmental-panel-climate-change-30-years-informing-global-climate-action/?gclid=EAlalQobChMI3-H0zJmN6AIVQVXTCh18dwdOEAAAYASAAEgLu-lvD_BwE)

<sup>11</sup> Pg 9: <https://www.apuritansmind.com/wp-content/uploads/PDF/RichardBaxterReformedPastorPDF.pdf>

Looking to the fulfilment of the “end of the age”, rather than into **a sterile infinity**, amounts to a deepening of faith in the goodness and solidarity of God, without being bullied by a merely philosophical faith in superlatives .

Today I may join a congregation in worship, perhaps to lead, most often to preach. Worship is the best place for climate awareness. A ‘talk’ has less safeguards, less scope to hold on to hope, than a sermon. Wherever possible, I will have examined the scripture to work from, and negotiated the ‘right to tweak’ any given version.

If ‘heaven’ can be experienced as sky, rather than an irrelevantly distant dimension; if Spirit blows in your face, if ‘world’ is not tyrannically limited to the human ‘world’ (even though, sometimes, that may be what is meant). The ‘Earth’, dust, soil, and the World have been variously and sometimes conveyed. If you’re an interpreter of Scripture, then, with integrity, be bold enough to be prepared to be part of a process here. Does the language detach itself from, or embed itself in the life of the hearer? That’s for the preacher to discern. Or maybe to follow on in preaching from a more dialogical form, like group Bible study.

I am **always** aware both of the danger of ‘making the Bible say what you want it to say’. Yet I work with that apocalyptic desperation to see what we might grab hold of, old or new, to find, build and sustain our hope, without adding to the pre-immersion in hypocrisy or dishonesty, and what is actually there under our noses, that might be opened up for our good and the good of the world. The idolatry of the ‘pew bible’, the locally-authorised version is my enemy, whereas the option to project rather than print is welcome. Undoubtedly, given our social media culture multi-sensory, competent and sensitive multimedia preaching has the best change of being memorable, rather than anaesthetic. People will handle bigger ideas with visual backing and ‘footnotes’, and it’s good to be able to share Bible references on the fly, without constantly stopping to give chapter and verse verbally.

Two years in to my post of Environmental chaplain, I can say I’ve never before felt as excited or rewarded in my struggle and relationship with the Bible. Crisis draws us more closely in to our friendship with Christ. It becomes, necessarily, less exclusive.

I’ve been inspired simply by the phrase ‘Hallelujah anyway’ as well as challenging the dominant superficially rationalist cultural withholding of permission

to hope, where such hope cannot demonstrate a rational and coherent pathway. As 'children' lead in Isaiah, so does the spirituality of the oppressed from now on. Though life can and should still be a blessing. I hope I could say that to couples who wonder if they should have children in this time. Where else should our leadership come from? The decision remains theirs, of course.

Spirituality is not a refuge (in the sense of somewhere to escape to) but a context which enables hope in the face of everything which might eviscerate it.

Hallelujah! Lord, Come Quickly!

or perhaps, more realistically "Hosanna: God help us!"