



SEASON OF CREATION

SEPTEMBER 1- OCTOBER 4

SERMON NOTES WEEK 4

In our readings, the spirit of Scripture mounts an attack on every variation of entitlement and complacency. Firstly in the satirical narrative of the success of the mission of the prophet Jonah, sent unwillingly to pagan foreigners and animals for whom he himself has no love or concern, and then in the presumption expressed by the day-long workers in the vineyard that superior opportunity equals superiority, and that 'levelling-up' is a scandalous injustice.

How far we allow this radically egalitarian direction of travel to progress will be a matter of discernment, but the 'making of **equality**' by the intervention to ensure **equity** might seem a step too far for many in our culture.

Are we indeed 'worth more than **many** sparrows'?[Matthew 10:31] - but if so, how many, given that Jesus in that phrase is addressing a crowd

of **many** people. The ‘exchange rate’ of life becomes less self-explanatory the more closely we enquire.

Exceptionally, it’s worth quoting this soundbite from Archbishop Emeritus Rowan Williams, speaking at the 2023 Congress of European Churches, who sums up meticulously some ‘public domain’ insights we all should be able to arrive at, but might not have bothered or dared.

“The environmental crisis overshadows every other issue: The story here is of an insanely unbalanced account of human entitlement and human capacity that has consistently, in the last three centuries, ignored any sense of the interdependence of human life and the life of the organic order as a whole: the life that matters has been, explicitly or implicitly, defined as human life – and human life lived in a specific mode, that of expanding consumption,”

If you’d noticed, or notice now how our speech and even your prayers imply an unspoken hierarchy of life, often with our own race/species/class at the top, then in that sense, you’re “equal” with Baron **Williams** of Oystermouth. You have permission to claim that public domain insight as your own, and not to feel as scholars are often encouraged to, that you are ‘dwarfs on the shoulders of giants’. Even if that were so, you see further. with each passing day.

The people in our congregations have a better view, and the opportunity to be better informed than many great ‘authorities’ (including theologians) of even the relatively recent past, as regards the progress of the Nature and Climate crises. Of course we need wise guidance, prayerful discernment and the ability to sift climate denials fake science from the honest projections of, for instance, the IPCC or even the UK Climate Change Committee: but what matters to the world God made, sustains and loves, is right now. In this a certain responsible recklessness, or a pious irreverence may be of use. We’d be in good company.

The whole Book of Jonah (whales, worms, and repentant animals) should be shamelessly exploited, rather than held respectfully in check. It's really worthwhile briefly summarising the rest of the Jonah story, not taking for granted that everyone even knows the outline.

The multi-faith environment of the story is also useful for us in a culture in which Christianity does not dominate, though our faith has vital things to say, as bearers of God's word of love for all. Where these things may be stern or scary, we need look to Jesus rather than Jonah: every hard truth must be offered in love. Our expectations of being heard do not determine how worthwhile it is to speak.

Whales and worms aside, by far the most 'miraculous' aspect is that, without waiting either for the impending disaster, or for the religious conversion of the Ninevites, indiscriminate life-saving change for all creatures is embraced, to the disgust of the prophet of doom. The pagans of Nineveh get on with it.

God loves those who are messing up their world. Enough to throw them a lifeline they don't understand, but grab hold of anyway.