

## **Song of Songs 2.8–13**

Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.

The voice of my beloved! Look, he comes,

leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or young stag.

Look, there he stands behind our wall,

gazing in at the windows, looking through the lattice. My beloved speaks and says to me: 'Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The

flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtle dove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance.

Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.'

## **GOSPEL Matthew 11.16–19, 25–30**

At that time Jesus said, 'To what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market-places and calling to one another,

"We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn."

For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon"; the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!"

Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.

I thank you, Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'

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Christian Scripture is a puffin's beak: a multi-spectral rainbow - but also like those bird **colonies** of Orkney, a cacophony - of voices, and cultures. That's even before we begin interpretation for our day and global circumstances.

That serious, seductive calling: of courting and flirting with the environmental economic and spiritual wisdom for which children and grandchildren *may* thank us.

If we **can** reasonably **hope** for such continuity.  
For hope, you need faith, and for faith, you must also needs attend to love. The sort of love which we grow into after childhood with its games, some annoyingly foolish, some so deeply valuable and beautiful.

That so noble aspiration of mature people, which is such a valuable motivation to our movement: *to bequeath to future generations a beautiful just and safe home*; .... this has telescoped with the deadlines now coming thick and fast; the realisation that the inseparable crises of Nature and Climate are a clear and present reality. Now!

The sea that we see from this church, **will** continue to rise. And it's beyond reasonable doubt that the **cause** of unjust human activity led to the **effect** of eradicating - so far - half the Earth's wildlife since 1970. Remember 1970, anyone? I do.

We will not 'see things **out**'. This is not one of those temporary problems we fix, or which just goes away if we ignore it. So how to see things **through**? That's what faith is for. Hallelujah Anyway! Who would have thought?!

**All** current generations are involved, are threatened, are responsible. To change what they can change; adapt to what they can't .

Some of us may **be** to blame, though whatever the fault, the fate, and the need to respond is shared.

Shared with the diversity of fellow creatures too.

**To** whom as much as to us, God gives the Earth as habitat.

**On** whom, in ways we're only just beginning to realise, we vitally depend.

We need everyone on board. The sick, not the healthy, need the doctor.

"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

Last Summer's brutal heatwave in the UK, turning green hills brown overnight spoke inescapably of the disruption of seasons, migrations and cycles on which our cultures and religions have relied since the ice age. Those cycles sights sounds and smells which delight and sustain the lovers of the Song of Songs.

For now **those** laws ( in the Psalms) that never should be broken - by knowing human choice - are transgressed left right and centre. It's the wanton shaking of the foundations of the **real** Earth we're made of, and of the **real** sky above us we've dressed up as an abstract science fiction "heaven"; those foundations which Bible poets so insightfully drew together with justice and righteousness as the pillars of God's throne. When we pray for God's will to be done **on Earth**, don't take it **for granted** that's the way it is in the **skies**, in **heaven**.

When God is the maker of the unified Creation of heaven and earth, sky and soil, **all Creation** needs your prayer and its working out in the concrete decisions of your daily lives.

What will help, what will harm? And what might make things better? Never let those questions slip from your agenda.

We've reached the stage at which the despised hyperbole of the prophets and poets; their causal link between injustice and

environmental catastrophe, has blossomed into observable reality. And those embarrassing apocalyptic outbursts even of that sensible man Jesus in the Gospels, begin to sound like news reports.

So today as a set reading.... hmm ... we read *the Song of Songs*. A song of love, set amidst the love of wildlife. It's happy, delightful, sensual, and therefore deadly serious. Like the environmental commitment of many churches.

The lovers are encouraged and strengthened in relationship, aspiring to define their whole lives, by immersion in the beauty, fruitfulness, and dependability of the seasons and migrations. They find fulfilment by connection. And I hope, whether you're visiting Orkney or live here, you make friends with the nature you find here.

The lovers take note of this: Creation does not exist solely for them. Yet in their openness to *know* Creation without aspiring to rule or control; and to find their place and purpose amongst the undespised wildlife... **therein** their lives are enriched.

It's taken far too long for the poets and scientists to find common ground. But **of** that we see more and more each day. As science confirms the languages of trees, the intelligence, emotions and societies of animals. More and more, that we depend on nature and their diversity far more than ever they depend on us. That childish human game of "king of the castle of Creation" falls apart.

And it's now above all the dispossessed and despised voices: voices dismissed as 'infants' who give the lead and bear the burden of wisdom - in the child climate strikers on the

streets of the global north - and those indigenous peoples from pole to pole who were targets of cultural genocide.... together with those who share their voice with a nature not just beautiful, but indispensable to our own survival; those who voice the wisdom given to Solomon, described explicitly **only** in these terms: that when God gave him wisdom, he spoke of trees, animals, birds, insects, reptiles and fish. Not of profit.

In our lifetimes, and until now in our churches, the voices of women, of other races and identities, but also fellow creatures and indeed, that **most prominent** character of Scripture, Earth-self, have been conscientiously ignored and sidelined. And with them, Jesus, for whom the last **really will be** first.

It's worth enquiring who has seized control of the Biblical narrative, to the extent that every other approach seems inferior.

To our peril, and like those children in Jesus' pointed marketplace, we've peevishly - and even pathetically confused dominance with definitiveness.

As if there's no other way but our way. But God is green notwithstanding.

We've let the narrow-minded childish selfishness of colonialism strangle our spiritualities. So we play the pipes of profit and dance the deadly dance of throwaway consumerism and wonder why grown-up Creation - *who has better things to do* - doesn't join in, who after a century of friendly toleration now shows increasing signs of boiling over in irritation as we approach 1.5 degrees of warming. This year, next year, who knows?

The Bible is a treasure-house of spiritual responses to threat, injustice and crisis, neither single-use, nor throwaway. With our maturing awareness and acceptance **of** crisis comes the realisation of the coherence and value of faith liberated from captivity as a tool of empire.

Jesus himself was already inspired to be recycling repurposing and weaving together the poetry of his people with their very real life experiences and skills for life on Earth.

If I'm reckless enough to summarise the body of Jesus' teaching in Matthew, which includes that wonderfully contemporary story of builders on rock and sand, neither of whom could fix their climate, but one of whom took notice and - by the skin of their teeth -survived, .... that summary would also be that of the earliest Christian hymns: "**Wake up, take notice.**" "**Read the signs of the times.**"

With the barbed addition that it's stupid to ignore the warnings and even **ultimatums** we're given in the honesty of science and the love of God. And that God is no safeguard against the folly you knowingly choose, especially at the scale we're perpetuating in the global north. Still sending out ships and seismographs to explore for **additional** oil and gas

Today some read the signs ... and regret it. All the more cause to seek God's help. By standards current in my lifetime, we've already passed tipping-points of "too late". Scientists and Statesmen, traditionally obliged to speak moderately have described us as being on a "highway to hell", swept along by our addiction to casual flying and the despairing fear that there's life other than by the addictive combustion of hydrocarbons, building greenhouse gases without precedent since before the dawn of human history.

When the nature we need for our happiness is so undervalued, then young couples getting serious - like the one frolicking through the love-and-nature-poetry of the Song of Songs - today are losing hope and pondering whether it's right to bring more children into a world with such terrifying prospects.

That's why for the church, and for anyone who even for a moment or as a visitor dips into what we're about, it's simply stupid to miss out on this God-given opportunity. Of partnership and love for fellow creatures. Not stewardship of property.

This gift, from the treasure-house of faith to discern the urgently needed wisdom and spiritual resilience to brutal changes afflicting the life of the Earth. To "Wake up, take notice." and "Read the signs of the times." The truth, in love. What else are we here for? AMEN.