

Exodus 6:2-13, Romans 5:1-11

Installation of Elly Sheard as Canon for Creation Care

Truro Cathedral : 14 March 2021

Then the Lord spoke to Moses, “Go and tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the Israelites go out of his land.” Go on Moses, speak up!

And Speak up is the third of our new priorities for Creation Care. *Cherish creation, cut carbon and speak up*. Elly's installation is one way in which the Cathedral and Diocese are speaking up. Creation care matters and Elly is called, as the new Canon to speak up, and to help us speak up.

But when we speak up, what shall we say?

Perhaps, like Moses we feel like we're poor speakers, who haven't got the words to say. Or that we don't have a right to speak up, given that as Western mass consumers, we're all part of the problem. Or perhaps we're not sure where to even start - it's all too much, and anyway, isn't it governments and big business who have to make the real decisions; maybe we think our voice is too quiet and small to make a difference.

Or maybe we've tried speaking about the climate and biodiversity emergencies before, but it's as if, like the Israelites, people aren't listening.

And there's truth in that. Our actions suggest that we - individually, nationally and internationally - aren't really listening. Imagine if two years ago we'd been told, clearly and unequivocally, that there would be a terrible global pandemic which would lead to 3 million deaths around the world. Imagine what we would have done to prevent and prepare for what was to come.

We know the facts about climate change and about the loss of biodiversity. There can be no doubt that we are facing a future which will make lockdown look like a holiday. And yet the evidence is that we're carrying on, largely unchanged. We're tweaking a few things around the edges, sure, but that's nowhere near enough to prevent the future David Attenborough spoke of recently, when he warned that *'If we don't take action, the collapse of our civilization and the extinction of much of the natural world is on the horizon.'*

This recent tweet sums it up; *It feels like we'll only start to take climate action seriously after we've exhausted every possible alternative avenue, pursued all available distractions, and engaged in every procrastination tactic on offer.*

It's as if, like the Israelites, we have been enslaved and that, as a result, we hear the words of warning but cannot take them in. Like them, we're promised a just and fruitful future, but we're held captive by our need to buy more, to grow more and to have more, even as the warnings pile up, the earth heats up and the sea levels rise up.

And it's in that context, that we're called to speak up.

So what shall we say?

First of all, because words without action are empty and hypocritical, we need to say that we are committed to putting our own house in order; to cutting our carbon emissions to net zero and beyond, and to cherishing the parts of creation that are given into our care.

And then we've got a story to tell. It's a beautiful story of a Universe that isn't random, blind or meaningless, but which has a purpose and a calling. And this good and beautiful creation was created by God out of his utter, abundant overflowing love. A love that expresses itself in the joyful creating of light,

land, sea, plants, fish, birds and animals. And this glorious abundance is created with a purpose, - a calling, we might say - to reflect back the joyful, abundant creativity of the creator. Scripture even suggests that creation has its own voice - a voice that's heard in the clapping of trees and the singing of the mountains, in the proclamation of the skies and the praise of the ocean depths.

When we speak up, we will talk of the createdness of all things, and of the way life and joy and abundance all point to the Creator.

We will speak up and tell of the goodness of God.

And we will speak up and tell of the call given to humanity - to every human alive - each of us called into being as part of creation, an animal amongst animals, and yet with a particular task. To steward, to cherish, to care for the abundance that has been provided for the benefit of all.

And that call is an expression of a clear pattern of divine behaviour - calling a part to bless the whole. Like Abraham is called to be Father to a nation, like Israel is called to be a light to the world, like Jesus Christ is called to redeem all things. Similarly, out of the whole of creation, one part - these strange primates, with the gift of speech and complex thought - is called to bless the rest. And we live up to that call whenever we steward creation for its original purpose; which is to sing of God's abundant, joyful creativity. Whenever creation reflects the love and joy of its creator.

We will speak up, as part of creation, created and called to steward the whole.

But right now, much of creation is not singing. Today the words of Hosea seem horribly prescient - *the land mourns, and all who live in it languish; together with the wild animals and the birds of the air, even the fish of the sea are perishing*.

Rather than the part blessing the whole, we are destroying it. We have turned away from the call made to us and chosen to walk a different road. And the consequences are clear. We see them in raised temperatures and bizarre weather; in the terrifying loss of habitats and species; in the suffering of those made most vulnerable by poverty and deprivation.

And like Hosea and the great prophets, we will speak up, giving voice to creation's lament and speaking on behalf of those already suffering from the effects of climate change. We will speak up within the church and beyond - and we will do so with the humility of our creatureliness and with the confidence of our calling.

We will speak up to call humanity back to its core task - to steward creation that it might reveal the glory of God.

And we will do all of this with hope and with joy. Not with a blindly optimistic '*It'll all be alright because it always is*' kind of hope, but with the hope that is rooted in the faithfulness of the creator, in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ and in the love poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

Some say that disaster is inevitable. Some tell us that it's all part of an unchangeable cycle of mass extinctions. Some suggest that humanity is getting what it deserves.

That is not what the gospel says. That is not what we will say.

We will speak up and we will tell of a good creation, of a just and fruitful future, of the call of Christ and of the unbreakable power of love.

We will speak up.

