

Homily Trinity 13: 6 September 2020 - Ezekiel 33.7-11 & Matthew 18.15-20

Today has been designated as Climate Sunday and it begins a short period which, in recent years, has been called Creationtide: it fits in with the usual time for Harvest Festivals and culminates on the 4th of October with the feast of that lover of the created order, St Francis of Assisi. For some years now, there have been many voices trying to call humanity back to its origins in and with the earth and often they have been voices beyond the Church. I remember Greenpeace from my childhood and whether it is that charity or a political movement like the Green Party, for a while they were seen by many as rather wacky and fringe and perhaps we as the Church also kept their message at arm's length. Are we a little late to the rally and what might our voice be in relation to the Climate Emergency?

Did you know, brothers and sisters, that we have one voice here in (or I should say on) this very place. During lockdown, we received a little bit of theological graffiti. It is still there on the back door of the office in the church garden and it says:

"God is judging the nations with a pandemic!"

Intake of breath? If you don't believe me, go and look afterwards. Now, I don't know what precisely the author had in mind. Nor would I want this message to be emblazoned on our noticeboard at the front nor would you want such a sentiment to be my message week, in week out or maybe at all. But can we hear it today as if it were from a latter-day Ezekiel, a sentinel not just to Israel, but to all of humanity and to us personally: 'O wicked ones, you shall surely die'?

Might not God be judging the nations with a pandemic for humanity's horrendous abuse of His precious creation, the earth? The earth has been sick a long time, is very sick; did we really think we could go on blindly, without being affected? Is not everything intricately and intimately connected because we are all family, the earth is our common home? And should not the judgement fall heaviest on those who were meant to be in charge, but have ruled selfishly, greedily, uncaringly?

The original Ezekiel (or God through Ezekiel) also said:

'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?'

Judgement is only the beginning. If we are to be judged without mercy, maybe let's keep on with our sinful ways. But with mercy, there is hope and after hearing honestly our failures as humanity and as the Church, we can be voices of and live lives of hope. God is the God of life, of creation, of new creation. There is always hope and we must joyfully be part of this.

Yet another potentially paralysing refrain is that the task is so great and we as communities, as individuals are so small. Another reason not to bother because what difference would it make anyway? But what do we hear in the Gospel:

'if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.'

The Creator God Himself is with us in our task of renewing the earth and all its creatures. He is with us for the long haul. He judges and calls back those still persisting in destructive ways. He is with us in the smallest and humblest of deeds which you or I will do to preserve and cherish the earth's resources; these deeds which are an integral part of the mission of the Church, part of our faith, part of our love for God and for every kind of neighbour – human, animal, vegetable and mineral! Amen.