

Thought for the Day 18th November 2020

Good Morning

There's a connection and a disconnection this week between the new Covid Vaccines and the upcoming speech by the Prime Minister ahead of chairing the next UN climate conference.

The virus and the climate both threaten our existence.

But whereas the virus is beginning to meet its match, the changing climate is still rampant.

The difference?

We feel and fear the nearness of the virus; as to the climate, in spite of sporadic flooding and occasional droughts, it's not yet touched our nerve.

The global pandemic shows that that where there's a fear there's a way. With the climate there seems insufficient fear to find a way.

That's why we need prophets as much as they did in the Old Testament. But as many of them find they're often without honour in their own country.

Some years ago I spent time listening to young people's dreams and dreads about the future. It made me re-think my own attitude to the environment. What did Jesus have to say about the earth? What were the Jewish and Muslim ethics of Creation?

I went to see the late Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks. When I ventured that Jews might begin with Genesis he stopped me.

'No, James. That's a very Christian way of reading the Bible on this subject!'

‘No’, he repeated, ‘we start in Deuteronomy with God’s instruction to Moses that as they entered the Promised Land they were never to destroy a fruit bearing tree.’ Long before anyone knew the science of climate change there was a religious intuition that trees were central to our ecology.

Just as I was leaving this ‘masterclass’ he posed a question. ‘Do you know what the three most extraordinary words of Jesus were?’ Here was the Chief Rabbi putting a Christian bishop on the spot about Jesus, and I didn’t know the answer.

He raised his eyebrows, ‘But I say’. Apparently there’s no evidence from that period of a rabbi saying as Jesus did, ‘You’ve heard it said, but I say ...’.

Those three syllables are the words of a prophet in any generation – prepared to face the wind and walk against the storm of public opinion.

And to persuade with hope rather than with fear.

For the problem with fear is that it usually grips the soul once what is feared has already claimed the lives of many people.

The Right Reverend James Jones KBE