

HARVEST ALL-AGE TALK 2022

By Sarah Tahvanainen

I'd like to start by asking who has heard of a Bible figure called Enoch? How about Josiah? Mordecai? *(a few hands go up)*

What if I said Moses? *(lots of hands go up!)*

You probably know that this famous Biblical hero went to rescue the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt, that God sent the 10 plagues upon the people of Egypt until finally Pharaoh relented and that Moses was able to lead the Hebrews through the red sea to the land the God promised them... picking up the ten commandments on route. But Moses would never have become this famed rescuer, overturning the injustices against the Hebrews, if he had not stopped at a certain burning bush and listened to God calling him. It must have been an awesome and terrifying sight to see a bush on fire yet not consumed by the fire, and Moses' first instinct might have been to run a mile, but instead he took off his sandals as God instructed him and he listened. And in case you are wondering Josiah, Mordecai and Enoch were also people who listened carefully to God!

The worldwide church is currently in the midst of the season of creation, a dedicated time in the year when we think about the world that God created. This year we are joining other Christians around the globe in *listening* to the voice of creation. God wants us to listen and act, like Moses did, to the cries the earth and of God's people. If we were to take off our sandals like Moses and truly listen to creation, then what would we hear?

We would hear the warnings that our world is getting dangerously warmer, how ice caps are melting and sea levels are rising. This Global warming is also linked to more frequent and extreme weather events such as drought, floods, wild-fires and hurricanes. We are in a climate emergency but are we truly listening and are we acting. Let's add these cries from our earth to make our own burning bush over *(children add flames to the bush)*.

To give some examples of these burning issues, we saw an unprecedented heatwave in many parts of Europe this summer, with wildfires raging across Portugal, Spain and France. As recently as this week hurricane Ian hit Cuba and caused a power outage over the entire island, it went on to wreak havoc in Puerto Rico and Florida causing mass devastation and loss of life. Earlier in September Super Typhoon Nora resulted in deadly flooding in the Philippines, and Hurricane Fiona was one of the strongest storms on record to impact Canada .. having also unleashed its fury in the Caribbean. In the same month record monsoon rains and glacial melt caused the most severe flooding in Pakistan's recent history, impacting nearly 33 million people and leaving nearly one third of Pakistan under water.

And sadly the increase of these extreme climate events creates secondary fires, or emergencies. Let's see what they are:

Kids read out the words on more flames and add them to the bush (loss of life, lack of clean and safe drinking water, lack of basic necessities, malnutrition, sickness, conflict over resources, lack of income and jobs, rising food prices, homelessness, more refugees, deeper poverty...)

In the north we do not tend to experience the impact of climate change on such a devastating scale. Here in Finland we have noticed summers getting warmer, the land getting drier, and less snow and ice in winter. A white Christmas is becoming rarer! But for us it is rarely an issue of life and death. Climate change affects everyone but it disproportionately affects people living in the global south, in countries like Bangladesh, who are having to deal with extreme climate events on a terrifying scale.

So our bush over there is burning and it is burning with injustice –it is deeply unfair that developing countries who contribute the least to climate problems, are being affected the most. In the global south, the world's poorest people rely on the climate and natural resources for their food and income –they end up paying the highest price of our recklessness, for them climate change is a literally a matter of life and death.

'Many times in the bible God tells us true religion is acting justly and kindly to the widow, the orphan and foreigner, to those most in need.' * In today's Gospel reading Jesus says 'Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life' that is work for Jesus, who is the bread of life. By putting our trust in Jesus we find a different joy and purpose to our lives – a joy that comes from loving our neighbours, from sharing what we have, of serving others, ...and this how we can put out the fires of injustice, and restore the beautiful picture that God painted.

Moses was told to remove his sandals when he approached the burning bush, for he was standing on holy ground in God's presence. May this symbol of the burning bush remind us to remove the "sandals" of our unsustainable lifestyles, to contemplate our connection to the holy ground where we live, and to listen for the voice of creation.**

So I end with some words from Exodus chapter 3, where God says to Moses **"I have heard their cry...I know their sufferings...Come, now! I will send you...I will be with you"** (Ex 3: 1-12)

Thank you for *listening*

*Sources: *Revd Jenny Gray **Season of Creation 2022 resource booklet*