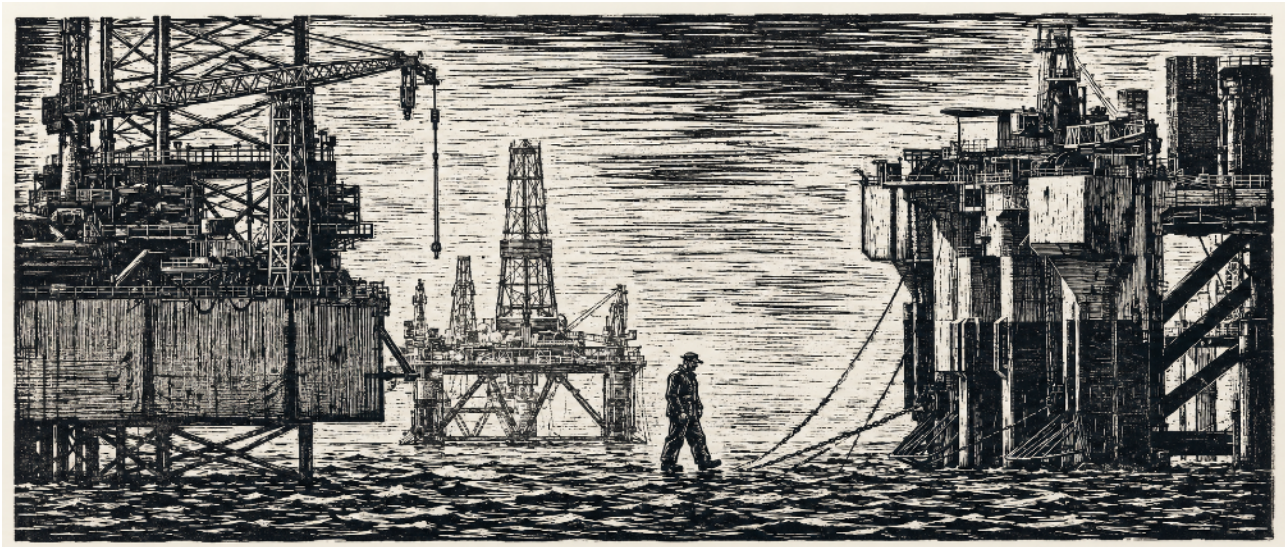


TAKING SCRIPTURE SERIOUSLY

As a sermon for yr A proper 14, 1 Kgs 19 and Matthew 14, Roslin Chapel.



(digital woodcut from a photoshopped original photo. DJMC)

Dear friends, it's good to be here once more, with the opportunity of these very stimulating readings today; stories of life-changing drama, Elijah and Jesus. Nudging us, towards how vital it is to reassess our relationship with the rest of God's Creation, which we also are. To learn, as a priority, to *live with the created* world rather than explain it away in advance.

After a night sheltering in a cave in the Cairngorms a couple of weeks ago, it's with interest that I re-read that question to Elijah in the scariness of the mountain. “**What are you doing here?**”

And I wondered...

What did God say to Jesus in *his* mountain prayer *before* he took that stroll across the sea?). **What did** God say to Jesus before his disappointment when his friend Peter lost his nerve and got soaked.

What is God saying to us before we sneer and dismiss this *Biblical* truth of Jesus walking on the water - or worse, get sucked into explaining things away and concoct some half-baked nonsense about concealed stepping stones, as I did once read in an unjustifiably famous commentary. Oh yes, ponder, oh yes, discern, and learn perhaps from Sherlock Holmes that When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth. *However* improbable.

So let's take the story as read. Of Jesus modelling respectful and assertive harmony with the Earth. Supported by those wind and the waves, to whom - and in order to save human lives- Jesus elsewhere speaks directly, forcefully and above all personally. And Peter - just for a moment - shows

this calling, this fellowship with Creation, is for us, not just for Jesus. Through faith. It's absurd to deny the spiritual experiences of ordinary people.... but since the earliest days of the church, community discernment is vital.

~And what else is the message of *this* building in particular, in which we're gathered to worship amidst so many personalities of the communion of Creation, than that *this* is the community on whom we depend~

Those Green Men, Women, and Children in the carvings here, the interwoven plants and the stars in the heaven above us, reminding us how everything with breath is called to delight in God.

A friend writing a book on St Columba asked me to think about what it was like to be part of the community around him. And I remembered what I'd read and grasped, when I studied that saint: a life in which the signs God sends are there, by default, *to be read*, rather than disregarded. Signs in the sky and the sea and the soil.

No true miracle is in conflict with *God's* laws of the universe....

And yes, if you wondered, the principle of non-contradiction: God not working against God, goes back a long way. God is not divided.

Yes, we have dreams, but dreams and visions are subject to discernment. We bring our stories into the church, into this house of stories to ponder what the Spirit of Creation is saying to us today. In the realities of the life we're immersed in.

And even that idea, which is from the hymnbook Jesus grew up with - *that idea from the Psalms* - taken broadly, and even scientifically celebrates the interwovenness of life on this, God's good Earth. Worship comes about when we breathe in what the trees breathe out and vice-versa. And in a time of such widespread wildfires, what is it that the trees are breathing out today?

Faith needs the confidence to make those connections between different dimensions of *reality*, both as we measure it and as we experience it. The things we engage with, using creativity and imagination are not merely imaginary. Not unreal. And that persistently unhelpful idea of a miracle - something which transgresses the laws of Creation- that doesn't fit with a mature and Biblical appreciation of God as Creator who chooses collaboration with Creation as the means of creating and sustaining.

For Elijah, for Jesus, we don't just observe: creation talks back, and we miss out if we pretend that's not the case. God is praised by a beautiful balance of receiving and living and receiving.

Just as accurately, a poet or prophet could say, that's the essence of the carbon cycle. A beautiful noise; a voice of praise, like your voices and the music we're hearing and making today in this place.

Loud enough to be heard, and change lives, soft enough to do no harm. Or when disrupted, the most appalling cacophony.

On that model, think of the climate crisis this way, that into *this* lovely and intimate space, (C15 historic chapel) has been brought the sound system of a mega stadium and the volume turned up to an ear-splitting, earth-shattering maximum. Earthquake, wind and wildfire, perhaps. Way beyond what used to be natural.

Not nice, even to imagine, let alone to experience: but that's what it means for fellow people, fellow creatures, and will mean to the extent that we carry on so mindlessly with 'drill baby drill'. Which means, somewhere on Earth, kill babies, kill! That's what it's very clear indeed happens when we evade or delay a just transition, a repentance to a way of life which does less harm. Scary - and without such faith in Christ, it's not surprising if we lose our nerve and land in the drink with Peter.

More oil is more harm to the Earth; more sin, as prominent leaders of the world church have bluntly put it. But trust in Jesus - *the trust he grumbled at Peter for lacking* - trust in Jesus is trust in the one of whom that Angel spoke in Joseph's dream. About Mary's pregnancy. A dream of which he decided, *on reflection*, to take notice of. Call him Jesus - "God-rescues" -because he will show *the way out of* our sins.