**Rainbows and Resurrection; Acorns and Arks**

Helen Burnett, October 2020

Almost a year ago to the day, on Oct 7th at 2 o’ clock in the afternoon I sat down on the north end of Lambeth Bridge and began to pray, next to me was a section of Noah’s Ark!

Earlier that day on the **south** side of Lambeth Bridge, directly opposite Lambeth Palace (the London home of the ABC), sections of that same Ark stood stranded on a traffic island while speakers from Christian Aid, CAFOD and Tearfund addressed a large group of Christians gathered there to protest the lack of governmental action on climate change and raise awareness of the sixth mass extinction. Together we sang and prayed, laughed and cried.

One of the speakers that morning was Ruth Valerio, the author of this book launched in spring this year and nominated by the Archbishop as his Lent Book 2020.

Everyone present was there because they had read and understood the science. They had looked into the abyss and were convinced, that as Christians we needed to act on behalf of all those human and non-humans already suffering the ravages of climate change.

So, what had frightened us so much that we were prepared to turn out on a cold early morning in Lambeth ?

In 2015, the historic [Paris Agreement](https://unfccc.int/files/meetings/paris_nov_2015/application/pdf/paris_agreement_english_.pdf) was signed which committed world governments to keeping a global temperature rise **well below** 2°C above pre-industrial levels, and to **pursue efforts** to limit the temperature increase **even further** to 1.5°C.

In 2018 the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change gave us just 12 years for global warming to be kept to a maximum of 1.5C, beyond this, **even half a degree** will significantly worsen the risks of drought, floods, extreme heat, and poverty for hundreds of millions of people.

Alarmingly, we are not even on track to limit temperature increases to 2°C.

According to the UN, current policies will  lead to [around 3°C of warming](https://www.unenvironment.org/resources/emissions-gap-report-2019) by the end of the century - but it could easily be [4°C or more](https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2018/02/AR5_SYR_FINAL_SPM.pdf).

These levels of global heating would make inevitable [unacceptable risks](https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-03595-0),  including the loss of the [Amazon rainforest](https://advances.sciencemag.org/content/4/2/eaat2340), [simultaneous failures](https://www.pnas.org/content/115/26/6644) of staple crops and a multimeter [sea level rise](https://www.pnas.org/content/116/23/11195).

[Many scientists](https://archive.org/stream/fs_cc_Climate_Change_Going_Beyond_Dangerous-Brutal_Numbers_and_Tenuous_Hope/Climate_Change_Going_Beyond_Dangerous-Brutal_Numbers_and_Tenuous_Hope_djvu.txt) believe 4°C would be:

**‘incompatible with any reasonable characterisation of an organised, equitable and civilised global community’.**

There **may still be time** to prevent these catastrophic levels of heating, but **only** if we are prepared to take unprecedented action now.

Whilst this is the global perspective, the [State of Nature report, 2019](https://nbn.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/State-of-Nature-2019-UK-27-09-19.pdf) on the **UK’s** biodiversity revealed the following terrible facts:

* 41% of all UK’s species have declined since the 1970s (hedgehogs have declined by 95%)
* 26% of the UK's mammals are at a very real risk of becoming extinct
* A **third** of the wild bees and hoverfly species have sustained losses, likely due to pesticides, habitat loss and climate change
* 97% of the UK’s wildflower meadows have been lost in the last century

The picture isn’t pretty.

BUT, if we are the problem then we can be the solution too. Alongside this dark and gloomy picture are [many signs of hope](https://spckpublishing.co.uk/saying-yes-to-life) –

You have two symbols of hope in your hands today – an acorn and a rainbow and this service itself is a symbol of hope. Climate Sunday grew out of an initiative by Churches Together Britain and Ireland along with the main Christian NGO’s Christian Aid, Tearfund and CAFOD and is being adopted by churches nationwide.

Last week we celebrated our own Harvest and gave thanks for our farming community and our own food security. But unless we want to be like the rich man ignoring Lazarus and his children sitting hungry at our gate we must remember those whose food security is already jeopardised **and** the **stark** truth that the vast majority of those already affected by climate change are our unseen neighbours, people of colour living in areas of the globe where crucial habitats are disappearing, crops failing and sea levels rising .

It is impossible to turn away from Creationtide without heeding the call to consider our commitment to the earth…

A commitment first expressed in Genesis, in the Garden of Eden and re-affirmed in our reading today by the **Rainbow Covenant** between God and Noah and his Ark, teeming with the all the species of the world. *A commitment celebrated (whenever we celebrate) here shortly in the Eucharist when we reaffirm ourselves as a resurrection people, a people of renewed hope*.

And that is why on October 7th 2019 we carried the stranded ark along the south bank and over Westminster bridge to berth, landlocked on Millbank; a powerful symbol of Christian witness to the heed the very clear warnings, just like our ancestor Noah, and to take action even when all around were deriding us.

When I eventually appear in court charged with obstructing the highway as I sat in prayer, my defense will refer to my faith and my commitment to uphold the 5 marks of mission of the worldwide Anglican Communion.

The 5th mark of mission is *‘to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.*’

Unfortunately, the ark remains in police custody, but they can never imprison the rainbow – the rainbow will continue to occur wherever there is hope, wherever Christians turn to their God and say *yes to life*, yes to hope, yes to resurrection.

From Noah’s despair at his neighbour’s dismissal of the impending flood, to the women’s despair at the empty tomb we **know** the truth, that out of apparent despair and disaster can arise hope –

land and a rainbow for Noah,

the risen Christ for the disciples.

The truth is that the Christ light cannot be extinguished, that it shines **in us** and t**hrough us** as we gather together here, a newly registered Eco Church, always ready to listen, to learn, to pray and yes to act.

It cannot be extinguished because Jesus showed us the way; and take note, Jesus did not turn to the secular leaders , not even to the spiritual hierarchy for followers  - the people he turned to were ordinary people like you and me – at no point does Jesus say ‘let’s wait for Herod to change his mind about things…’

As Christians we are committed to see and experience Christ as the new creation – Christ is the restoration in all things and so we are commissioned by the rainbow and by the risen Lord to be Christs eyes Christ’s ears Christ’s hands, feet and heart here on this beautiful earth.

While I returned, eventually, from my police cell to Whyteleafe, Ruth Valerio, Director of Tearfund, returned from **her** stint on Lambeth Bridge to write the final chapter of her book that chapter is called ‘Resurrection Churches’

*Helen reads excerpt*

Resurrection churches, resurrection lives. This is the calling to us as we look at all that God has made and say Yes to Life.