

I wonder if St.Francis of Assisi figured largely in your life when you were a child? Probably to if you were brought up in the Church of Scotland - maybe St.Andrew or even St.Columba might have been known to you, but perhaps St.Francis of Assisi less likely.

But for me, growing up as a young Anglican in New Zealand, St.Francis was my 'first Saint' as he figured on the cover of 'My little Book of Saints' which was presented to me as a 5-year-old in Sunday school.

There was St.Francis, complete with brown robe, animals circling around him and birds perched on his outstretched arms, feeding from his hands. St.Francis, I learned, recognised God in all of Creation - in all the creatures and plants and hills and oceans, the planets, the sun and the moon - and crucially, he recognised our interdependence.

So for me, God's magnificent creation – our natural world, has been an intrinsic part of my understanding of the nature of our Creator God, ever since I was a very small child.

And there was also a responsibility as a Christian, I learned - an unavoidable responsibility - and accountability for God's creation and how we treat it.

It's true that St.Francis morphed into Gerald Durrell and then latterly Jane Goodall and David Attenborough as my awareness of the interdependence of our natural environment and our fellow creatures developed. Oh, and Rachel Carson was in there too - with her groundbreaking book, 'Silent Spring'.

I'm mentioning St.Francis as we mark his Feast Day of 4 October, and we near the end of Creation Time which runs for the Church throughout September -

and I'm mentioning St.Francis because we stand on the brink of a world-wide ecological crisis.

Now you may be tempted to ask, by whose authority are such claims being made? Indeed, President Trump and many of his followers suggest that the so-called 'climate crisis' is exaggerated - and refuse to accept that the climate is changing because of human activity. Indeed, the link between climate change, extreme weather events, the ecological crisis and the emergence of the Covid pandemic - that link has now been made by many scientists as they point to loss of natural habitat for so many animals. Deforestation has driven wild species into closer and closer proximity with high-density human conurbations facilitating the mutation of this novel corona virus which has now jumped from animals to

humans. Again, our interdependence with all of God's creation is brought into sharp relief as we watch our polar regions melt, the oceans warm, wild fires rage out of control - and recognise how we, in our lifetime, have driven thousands of species to near extinction.

In Matthew's gospel which we read the authority of Jesus being questioned by the chief priests and the elders. Jesus, in this instance, comes back with a question of his own - which confounds them into admitting they didn't know. There is a great deal of political and public discourse these days which centres on comparative authority for making claims. Which set of scientists are we to believe - and big business can peddle doubt for an ulterior motive - protecting their own profits. Some of you may have caught the radio series: **'How they made us doubt everything'** which explored the tactics used to make us doubt climate change, and before that - the link between tobacco and cancer.

So yes, of course we need to be on our guard and to evaluate information... and it may seem reasonable to question 'on what authority do you speak?' but there comes a time when evidence is so stark and reality is staring us in the face, that it is futile to keep arguing with the climate sceptics and debate whose authority we're going to follow. We need to get on and do something. Global warming is a real issue. That's the rationale of Extinction Rebellion - we **MUST** now act.

Then Matthew goes on to relate the parable of the two sons - and how things are not always what they seem at first.

In that story, we are told John the Baptist came to show the way of righteousness - and he was not believed.... except by the tax collectors and the prostitutes. And that crucial final line: **'And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.'**

I cannot help thinking that our grandchildren will be saying to us as they inherit our polluted world, ravaged by extreme weather and as they lament the loss of thousands of wild species:

'And even after you saw the evidence - you did not repent and do something about it.'

This is God's Creation we are despoiling. As we think of St. Francis Day, let's evaluate our response to the Climate Crisis and the Covid pandemic - and consider the needs of those who suffer disproportionately - typically the poor and marginalised, and ask:

'Is it not time to repent and do something about it?' AMEN.