

Time is Short and the Water Rises: the title of a book, I think, about the building of the Aswan Dam and the threat it posed to many wild creatures. It was an account of the rescue operation to save the elephants and rhinos and so on, that lived in this part of Africa: a man-made flood with man-made consequences and responsibilities. This was the stuff of my childhood reading. I don't remember worrying about any of the human beings whose lives and livelihoods were threatened: it was the animals that mattered. And God didn't feature at all. Now, a little later in life, *time is short and the water rises* has a much greater resonance and relevance, not only to the animal life of the Aswan valley, but to all life everywhere, not least my own, and the question of God is now paramount, or should be, if we as Christians could only get our act together. For the role we've inherited, or perhaps, better, been allowed to share, is that of Israel, as a prophetic sign of God's presence and will for all creation, or, better again, as a voice speaking to all nations on behalf of all creation. There is a rescue operation going on which we've largely interpreted in a religious language which remains largely unheard by the rest of creation because it hasn't been interpreted into a language which the rest of the world will readily understand. This is the language of love made visible in word and deed.

Now, you may be asking what this has to do with today's readings, and especially John the Baptist crying in the wilderness. Well, don't worry, I've been asking that, too, and the connection seems to be that the voice needs to be heard by us, as much as anyone, if God's care for us all is to become clear, to become evident, to become real. Advent is a chance to re-discover our primary call as hearers of the Word, of the God who has, in Christ, already saved us. This realisation should give us great joy: death has, indeed, lost its sting and sin is done away with. This is where Christ's first coming and second coming coincide and somehow inform one another. We look towards Christmas as a reminder of what has already taken place but somehow get stuck in that first childhood remembrance of rescue; of the magic of Christmas as a time of gift and time-out and not as a radical re-making of our world and ourselves as the place where God's presence, God's love, is made manifest. All this prompted by a recent request to write a review of a book entitled *Laudate Si and the Environment*: a series of essays reflecting on the impact and importance of Pope Francis' encyclical which addresses our environmental crisis – and he does so in many admirable and challenging ways. And yet it's a voice, a document, that is already being forgotten; a religious voice which is failing to have an impact on the world and, as one commentator says, this is because the Church itself is not practising what it preaches.

So the call is akin, perhaps, to my re-imagining or re-imagining, the rescue of the animals from the threat of the Aswan Dam by remembering, also its people, the indigenous people of the land, whose fate is our fate, also. In other words, it's time to grow up and realise that no one's fate is exclusive of our own and Christ came for all. Not, then, just as a gift to be unwrapped and indulged in for ourselves only, but to be en-fleshed in that language of love and service which all people can understand. This is why Pope Francis' call to save the planet is so closely linked to his call to save the poor.

Br John Mayhead
Monastery of Christ Our Saviour