

**A sermon preached on the 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity 2019 at St Andrew's Church Soham  
by the Revd Eleanor Whalley, Vicar. Ecclesiastes 1: 1-2, 12-14; 2: 18-23; Luke 12: 13-21**

*May I speak and may we hear in the name of the living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Often, when I'm standing up here –

6 feet above contradiction, as they say –

I talk about the distance between the writers of the Bible and us.

The distance in time, and in culture;

the difference between how things were then,

and how things are now;

the difference in knowledge

about why things are as they are.

There's a very big gap between them and us,

and, as Christians,

we do well to remember that gap.

As far as interpreting the Bible is concerned,

things are rarely as simple as they seem.

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But when I listen to that reading from Ecclesiastes –

the words Diane has just read to us –

what strikes me

is that those words –

words written around two and a half thousand years ago, in a very different culture to ours –

those words belong to any place and any time.

They could have been written yesterday.

'Vanity of vanities', says the Teacher, All is vanity' –

In other words – 'What's the point? It's all a waste of time.'

The Teacher goes on: 'I hated all my toil in which I had toiled under the sun.... What do mortals get from all the toil and strain with which they toil under the sun? For all their days are full of pain, and their work is a vexation; even at night their minds do not rest. This also is vanity'.

Isn't it likely that just this last week,

the Vauxhall workers at Ellesmere Port

were saying much the same thing – albeit less prosaically?

'If there's a no deal Brexit –

'If this plant is closed – if we lose our jobs –

'what will our work – our training – our expertise have been for?

'What's the point?

'What's the point of anything?'

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Despair – real despair – can engulf any of us.

Sometimes the trigger is obvious;

sometimes it isn't.

Whatever the trigger,

there's very rarely a simple solution.

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Ecclesiastes offers food for thought,

Whilst all the time acknowledging that darkness – despair - won't go away:

'Remember your creator in the days of your youth... before the days of trouble come. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of every man. For God will bring every deed into judgement, including every secret thing, whether good or evil'.

That's how the book of Ecclesiastes ends.

'God will bring every deed into judgement – good or evil'

Good deeds and evil deeds:

even at the end, they'll be there together.

They'll be there before God,

and God will judge them

for what they are.

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With that in mind,

I thought of Greta Thunberg.

I imagine you remember her -

the sixteen-year-old climate activist from Sweden

who this year alone, I discovered when I Googled her yesterday,

has made speeches to – amongst others -

the World Economic Forum in Davos,

the European Social Committee in Brussels

and the European parliament in Strasbourg.

She's just announced – just a few days ago -  
that she'll attend this month's Climate Change talks in New York,  
followed, in December, by further talks in Chile.

Someone has lent her a yacht  
so she can get there without having to fly.

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I could spend all day talking about Greta Thunberg...

As a church, a couple of weeks ago,  
we switched energy providers to green energy suppliers.  
The week after we'd done that,  
Margaret Fisher and I met with a Green Energy consultant.  
He carried out an energy audit in church.  
The PCC will look at the results and recommendations  
arising from that at our September meeting.

Greta Thunberg was an inspiration to me:

These things need looking at, and they need looking at now.

And to the sceptical amongst us, which, to an extent, includes me,

I should say now that just by changing energy providers,  
we've already saved ourselves £4K a year pm utilities bills.

It's been worth doing on every score.

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Back to Ecclesiastes; back to 'what's the point?'

Greta Thunberg is no stranger to despair.

In a talk she gave in Stockholm –

and you can find this on Youtube if that's your thing. It makes me cry every time I watch it -

Greta Thunberg explained that the decision to do everything she is doing today

arose from a period of profound despair.

When she gave that talk

she began by explaining that at the age of 8

she realised the implications of climate change.

She realised the enormity of what was at stake.

She also realised that not enough was being done to change things.

'To me,' she said, 'that did not add up. It was too unreal. So when I was 11, I became ill. I fell into depression. I stopped talking and I stopped eating. In 2 months I lost about 10 kilograms of weight. Later on, I was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome, OCD, and selective mutism. Basically that means I only speak when I think it's necessary. Now is one of those times.' She was speaking in December of last year.

At the end of the talk, she says, 'Now we are nearly at the end of my talk, and this is where people usually start talking about hope... but I'm not going to do that. We've had 30 years of pep talking and selling positive ideas – and I'm sorry, but it doesn't work. Yes, we do need hope – of course we do – but the one thing we need more than hope is action. Instead of looking for hope, look for action. And then, only then, hope will come'

[ [https://www.ted.com/talks/greta\\_thunberg\\_the\\_disarming\\_case\\_to\\_act\\_right\\_now\\_on\\_climate?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/greta_thunberg_the_disarming_case_to_act_right_now_on_climate?language=en) ]

Now I don't know about you,

But I think there's something very true in that;

something universal in those words of a sixteen-year-old girl;

something of the timeless voice we hear in Ecclesiastes.

When someone is in despair,

words of hope may not help.

Words of hope might even hinder.

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What might help is action –

'Fear God, keep his commandments' says the Teacher.

In other words, consider what action we might take.

What are 'the commandments'?

Is there anything practical we could do,

an action, big or small, that just might make a difference?

'It's better to light one small candle, than to curse the darkness'.

What are the small candles we could light for one another;

light for ourselves;

light for the world around us?

'Instead of looking for hope, look for action. And then, only then, hope will come.'

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Greta Thunberg will hate Tesco, I'm quite sure –

I'm sure she's opposed to all superstores -

but she might just agree with Tesco on one thing...

However small the action, and even though, on their own,

our individual actions won't be enough,

'Every little helps.' Amen.