

5TH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Revd. Cara Heafey, Associate Minister, Summertown URC



Photograph by Carolyn Wheeler

READ: ISAIAH 40:21-31

"Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth."

REFLECT:

The photograph above was taken in Yosemite, California, during a wonderful holiday in 2011. Yosemite is a place that evokes the word 'grandeur.' From the giant Sequoias (the mighty 'redwood forests' of the Woody Guthrie song) to the towering sheer granite faces of mountains *El Capitan* and *Half Dome* (which you can make out in the distance of this picture), the scenery is breathtaking, and on a scale that makes you feel very small.

The dizzying scale is not just about size, either. Some of those soaring vertical trees are thought to be more than 3000 years old. The iconic rock formations of Yosemite are 10 million years old. How brief and inconsequential our own lifespan seems in comparison. Like those of the rulers in

verse 24 of this passage from Isaiah: blown away with a breath.

The prophet's words here are to a people in exile. A defeated people, who have been cut off from their usual places and patterns of worship. They are feeling vulnerable, weakened, weary. Hope is scarce, meaning hard to find. Some emotions we can, perhaps, translate into our own situation.

It has recently been brought to my attention that huge swathes of the Scriptures came into being in response to massive, existential disaster. The exile to Babylon in 597 BCE and the destruction of the temple in 586 called forth a period of collating old texts and oral traditions and of new prophecy and writing, leading to the formation of the Hebrew Bible. Similarly, the destruction (again) of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE seems to have been the catalyst for committing the teachings and stories of Jesus to the page. The Bible was born out of crisis, the kind of collective crisis that threatens our way of life and sense of identity, and it's in times like these that its words seem fresh and close. I wonder what new theology and creativity will be born out of the times we are living through now?

I encourage you to draw deeply on the resources of our faith and scriptures during these long lockdown days. They were written in, and for, times like these. These words from Isaiah give a scale that provides perspective, drawing attention to the majesty of the natural world, the power of its creator, and reminding us of this same God's faithfulness and care.

Read again, and meditate on, the beautiful words of promise in verses 28-31. In these days where Covid survivors speak of the fatigue and exhaustion that linger; where NHS workers are overwhelmed by the workload, emotional toll and moral injury of caring for the sick and dying; where all of us are weary in our souls of this virus and all it has taken from us... in *these* days, they are vital, shining words. Breathe them in, deeply.

PRAY:

- For all who are weary, in body or in spirit.

CONNECT:

Give attention to nature in whatever ways you safely can: whether that's walking among trees, watching the birds that visit your garden, or looking out of your window at the clouds and the changing light. Feel your perspective shift (See verse 26).

RESOURCES:

Our friends at Wheatley URC have a huge archive of online sermons you can listen to, and are regularly posting new resources on their website:
www.wheatleyurc.org.uk

SUPPORT:

Pauline and myself, and your elders, are here for you if you need someone to talk to, have a prayer request, or just fancy a chat! Ping us an email or give us a ring.