



Auckland Unitarian Church
Love beyond belief

Global warming: an ambulance at the bottom of the cliff

David Hines © 6th November 2022

The image of an ambulance at the bottom of the cliff is a common one in politics. Left-wing and right wing politicians both use it for different policies. Left wing politicians use it to say: let's not be tough on criminals, let's spend money on fixing the social background that made them that way. Right wing politicians use it to say: let's not throw money at unemployed people; let's spend it on getting people back into their jobs. The national party raised this in a speech last week.

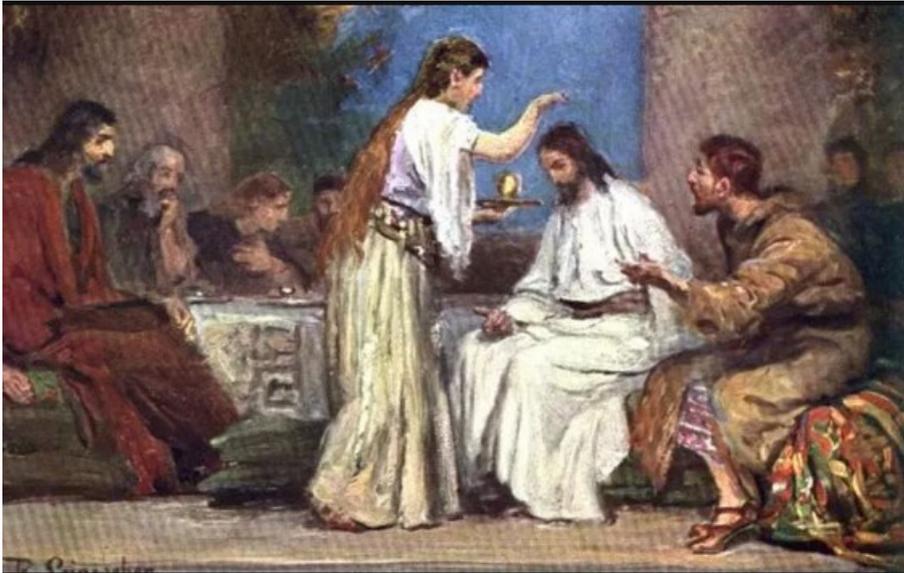
I think, there is a place for both. Sometimes we need to look to the long term, and we call it a fence at the top of the cliff. Sometimes we need compassion now and we want an ambulance at the bottom of the cliff.

Global warming is strong example. There are short term and long term things that need to be done.

Another example is a disaster that happened 2000 years ago. The Bible records it, **and they had the same argument about which was more important**

Jesus was heading for Jerusalem for the last time in his life. He had enemies who wanted to kill him and he knew it. He looked at Jerusalem from across a valley and wept... because he could see disaster brewing for all Jerusalem. Jews of his time were deeply divided, even among his friends. Some of his friends were Zealots, planning a rebellion against the Roman occupation.

Others were tax collectors and **worked** for the Romans.



This picture shows Jesus with a group of friends and a woman came in crying, and she had brought a jar of extremely expensive perfume, and began anointing his head.

One of the friends was embarrassed, and said what a waste. This perfume could have been sold.(It was worth about a year's income) The money could be used to feed the poor. **He was a man with a long term view.**

The woman had a short term view, showing her overwhelming feelings about what was about to happen.

But Jesus said, leave her alone. You can feed the poor any time you like (That's a long term task).

But (right now) she has done a beautiful thing for me, preparing my body for burial.

Was he being shortsighted? Not at all ... he was looking at the short term disaster for himself and the long term disaster for Jerusalem. And she was being very supportive.

The details of this may be fiction, but the impact was true. Jesus was killed, and Jerusalem was destroyed, about 30 years later. **And the people who wrote this down were writing it about 30 years later...** so they were possibly eye-witnesses, and putting words into his mouth things that they had seen.

In this version Jesus says when you see Jerusalem surrounded with armies, head for the hills. And they did.

The Jews were following a different dream. They stayed and defended the temple, and accused the Christians of disloyalty....

But they both had a point. It was a turning point for both religions. The Jews still celebrate it with the Wailing wall in Jerusalem ...

I was struck by this parallel four weeks ago, when I read a report prepared by the United Nations and the Red Cross... They were writing about a disaster of global warming, and how it would affect the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, southern Asia, south east Asia and Latin America.

Our world has mainly been taking a **long term** approach to global warming, and saying how icebergs are melting, and islands disappearing under the sea. But this report from the Red Cross and United Nations says **those five regions are already unlivable now**. In Africa alone, they said 36 million people were on the brink of death and might not survive this year. Other areas might last five years. But Humans cannot not survive in the conditions they face right now.

A news item on **Three news** last week developed the theme. They showed the painful videos of this disaster, from Kenya, just one of the affected countries. **I took shots of them on-line from Reuters and it is basically the same story**. Each of these photos poses a dilemma.



The main cause of the disaster is drought. This picture shows a cow in a dried-out water pan.



This scene is goat herders who came here looking for a water bank, but it has almost dried up; leaving just a pond for their herd. And one of them is having a swim.



It's hard to recognise, but this is the carcass of an elephant.

Another shows a huge plain of elephant bodies. Kenya for years has been fighting poachers, killing the elephants for their tusks, but now there are 20 times as many elephants dying of starvation. There just is no grass for them. One subspecies is on the way to being extinct.

Many mother elephants are now unable to produce milk to feed their children.

Some human mothers are also unable to produce milk.

(Some children die from heat before they are born.)



Another photographer noticed the grim fact that the death of grazing animals meant an easy time for predators. The prey were losing energy. The lions and vultures are having a feast.

But I was more shocked at another aspect of this story.

Seems to me that **these vultures are doomed as well**. When their food supply runs out.

This process has started now. Some reports suggest it could take five years to run its course.

The Bible writers described the horror Jerusalem was surrounded by Roman soldiers. No one could bring in food or water, and people were starving. The gospel writer quotes Jesus as saying: *it will be dreadful for pregnant women and women who are breast feeding their babies..* And when someone asked when this would happen he said where the bodies are, there the vultures will gather. All that is happening in Kenya.

But the Kenyan people are fighting back, helped by aid from the United Nations and the Red Cross, who wrote this report.

Church organisations are also sending money and staff in, for causes such as schooling.



This is another strange picture. These cows are dying, but they are not being buried. They are being taken to market on a truck. Meat from these animals is not your usual source of food but it is high in nutrients, and is being processed to serve to people suffering malnutrition.

Kenyan people are also building a fence at the top of the cliff. Meat has been a highly valued food, especially for wealthy people, but they are now turning from being meat eaters to vegetarian. And some are taking the next step; becoming vegans. **They will make less demand on the environment than we do. We could follow their example.**

And at the bottom of the cliff, people are being rescued.



This baby is suffering malnourishment, but is in a clinic receiving professional help.



This baby is also malnourished, and is being fed from a special diet supplement.



This elephant and her baby are in clover. Literally. I didn't read the story behind this picture, but they appear to be not in a desert area, and doing well.



And **these** baby elephants are orphans, but they appear to be thriving, and unlike human babies they have learned to hold their own bottles, and their keepers seem to be enjoying their work. The reports behind this photo say that baby elephants adapt to humans very well, and vice versa. It is compassion in the middle of disaster.

And other positive stories did not make it into the main news photos, but they include:-

- Children at makeshift outdoor schools
- A teenager who set up his own disaster warning system: the government was issuing bulletins in English, but people in his region don't speak English, so he translated them ... it doesn't say how, but I suspect he was broadcasting on radio. And saving lives.



- And the child in this picture is dragging a jerry can full of water for his family.

My conclusion

All these people at the bottom of the cliff, helping those in desperate situations. We could be supporting this work.

That's the guts of this report from the United Nations and Red Cross.

And, breaking it down the United Nations Red Cross report has a series of five recommendations.

I was a bit disappointed with this story at the very end, because it didn't say what the five recommendations were. But by comparing about four media reports found:-

- Better early warning systems
- Better funding for local relief workers, rather than shipping aid around the world
- More training for local relief workers
- More thermal heat shelters
- Changing school calendars, so they are not having to walk to school on the worst days.
- Lowering the goal for temperature rises. At present the goal from the United Nations is for global temperatures to rise no more than 2 degrees from the baseline set a few years ago, down to 1.5 degrees. That would be huge, and save millions of lives, but is it politically achievable. This too is a fence at the top of the cliff, not disaster.
- And the report says the United Nations and Red Cross budgets cannot cope.

Lastly

And who is this report going to be sent to is this report going to be considered by? The COP27, a UN forum that has met about once a year.

New Zealand will be represented by our climate minister James Shaw.

So what do you think?

It seems to me that the key thing they want is money, rather than shipping stuff to the five regions.

And that we should be watching what James Shaw suggests, and get in quick with our priorities.

And that low carbon emissions should be back on our agenda.

Meditation / Discussion Questions:-

- Which local relief actions are most important? Warning systems, heat shelters?
- How much money can NZ send?
- Rethinking the target of 1.5 degrees temperature rise?