

The future is not set

None of us can have escaped the realisation this summer that things are looking pretty dicey. Wildfires have decimated large swathes of natural habitats; our farmers have watched the weather anxiously, fearful of crops going up in flames; and we have all scoured various sources for information on how to 'beat the heat' – particularly for those who are most vulnerable.

It's hard, in these unpredictable and difficult times, not to feel anxious. Particularly when our fears and anxieties are stoked by bad actors looking to sow seeds of division and unrest.

But, alongside the bad news stories, I have noticed a different movement emerging, a very different one from those who, often for their own, selfish, reasons want to keep peddling a 'broken Britain', 'divided societies' narrative. This movement is shaking up the kaleidoscope and saying, 'hey, let's look at things differently'. Rather than focusing on what – allegedly – divides us, increasing numbers of people are wanting to take a closer look at what unites us: the values we share, such as friendship, kindness, compassion, laughter, fun, love of the land and of nature. There is, in fact, so much that we all share, whatever our colour, creed, politics, identity or ethnicity.

For too long we have accepted the doom stories that advocate a harsh response: get rid of the stranger, hang on tightly to what is ours, build ever higher walls. But the thing is, not only is that deeply depressing, but there is no guarantee those actions will result in something better. It's a terrible risk to take: sacrificing what makes us human in the hope of creating a better, safer society.

George Monbiot, climate activist and journalist, is someone I admire, but lately I have given up reading his articles. He may be correct in his portrayal of critical climate breakdown, but there's only so much bad news a person can take. But, today, George wrote something far truer than any pessimistic prediction, which was, in a nutshell, 'the future is not set'¹. However gloomy things might appear on the surface, so much is unpredictable. We simply do not know the future, and something that appears to be unchangeable, inevitable, or heading for catastrophe, can, sometimes inexplicably be turned on its head. He cites the examples of 'the collapse of state communism, and the end of just about every empire and monarchy that once looked unassailable'. He also, as you would expect, refers to the fossil fuel industry, something that seemed impossible to remove from our most basic infrastructures, and yet, it seems that renewables are far cheaper than fossil fuels and 'green technologies...are generating vast employment and income'.

Change is possible. The world offers so much potential for joy, companionship and creativity, and there is no lack of people prepared to fight for that.

As a Christian priest, my life revolves around a history-making event of renewed hope from a place of loss and desolation. Christ crucified was supposed to be the end of the story, the end of a future for a persecuted people. But Christ resurrected (however you might understand that) reminds me that however hard life might be at times, however anxiety-making, the future is not set. And believing in something better is where we begin to make a different, brighter future – one where we are united in our commitment to hope, compassion and mercy, to the care of the natural world, and to each other.

The future is not set. The Savernake Churches are working together to ensure, as far as we are able, that no one is discarded, overlooked or despised. If that's your hope as well, do come and join us. There are so many ways to get involved: soup lunches, nature walks, praying and meditating together, and our latest venture, a community garden in Burbage.

With love, Revd Sue Hart

¹ Spot the pop culture reference!