

THE PROPHETICAL VOICE

A voice cries in the wilderness,

Prepare a way for the Lord.

When I was a child. I would often awake to the sound of my Father coughing. Clearing his lungs. My Dad did not work down the pits. Not even in the dust of a factory. He was out in the open air of a building site.

The coughing and rasping sounds would often stop after he had had his first cigarette.

At that time there was only talk of what damage smoking could do to your lungs. The tobacco industry was already struggling with the medical prophets of doom, who linked cigarettes with cancer.

To counter this unfortunate message packs of 20 were advertised by sports stars. Formula one cars were emblazoned with the image and colours of particular brands.

The do gooders. The prophets kept on and on about the obvious hazards of this dangerous habit. Until the evidence of the consequences of smoking could no longer be ignored.

And still you could hear the voice of the comfortable cynic proclaim.

“My Grandad smoked 60 a day and lived until he was 82”

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How long does it take before we are prepared to listen to the prophetic voice?

A Voice which is invariably uncomfortable.

Growing slightly older, as a young student I did some summers on the building sites of my uncles. One boring job I had, was climbing scaffolding and scrapping mortar from the bricks of a new library complex in Moss Side. If there was any fun to be had, it was in swinging like a monkey from the bars. Or building the towers needed to reach the heights.

You will be familiar with the phrase health and safety gone mad. Indeed I admit that on occasion some limitations are more imposed by insurance companies. But the prophets of that age called out for helmets to be worn. For high viz jackets to be standard.

We thought as we hung from the skeleton frames our unqualified hands had put together, that this Prophetic voice was mad.

But it has saved lives

Many lives

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Now I am an old man

Perhaps in this second childhood I visit Chester zoo and read how the animal, in the enclosure I observe is endangered.

That Prophetic voice disturbing the enjoyment of my visit

I go for a walk on the Moors and the scars of a past industrial age become apparent. Nature has attempted to heal the wound by covering it in green. But the filth remains in areas too dangerous to build upon.

I love to look at the paintings of Lowry and the chimneys of his Lancashire. The smoke has gone. Most of the chimneys have gone. But those voices. The Prophetic voices tell me that the filth is now invisible, but it is just as potent.

That my sisters and brothers in the developing world experience drought and famine as a result of global warming.

And still you will hear people deny this reality

And still you will hear those who say it has nothing to do with them.

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So am I speaking about the environment?

Or am I speaking about our resistance to the prophetic voice

Who are you not prepared to listen to?

Why are you not prepared to listen.

Those who speak of your drinking

Who speak of your care of the children?

You're care of your own health

The encounters you avoid

The bank balance

The weight you carry

Your lack of sleep

Your lack of self belief

The work load

Your need to rest

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What are you avoiding?

Have faith

Take on the challenge

And be prepared to listen