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Dear friends and colleagues across the Cathedral Community,

SHARING THE WATER

A few years ago my friend Nigel booked a holiday at the Red Sea resort of Sharm El-Sheikh. It wasn't an obvious choice but it was at short notice and was just within budget. Nigel isn't a great one for sitting around on beaches so he took every excursion on offer. One of them was to the ancient monastery of St Katharine on Mount Sinai. And being Nigel he brought me back a picture.

The picture was of what the monks claim is the direct ancestor of the burning bush through which God spoke to Moses. It was fascinating. But Nigel told me to look harder at the picture. I couldn't work out what he wanted me to see. And then he pointed: in the corner there was a fire extinguisher. Clearly the monks thought that maybe the bush might start burning all over again and they needed the equipment to put it out.

I've asked the question before about whether the bush was always burning, and whether this was simply the one time that Moses noticed. That's certainly important – God is always broadcasting, speaking, calling but we are not always tuned in to listen. The noise in our heads, the distraction, and at present what still feels like gnawing exhaustion makes it difficult to pay attention.

And at the same time we don't rally want to the bush to start burning. That might demand things of us that we are not ready to give.

The American writer and preacher Barbara Brown Taylor recently asked the question "does religion get in the way of God?" She went on to comment:

"Religion is the deep well that connects me to the wisdom of the ages. Spirituality is the daily experience of hauling up living water, and carrying it into a dry world"

And she continues

"In my view, religion gets in the way of God when the well becomes more interesting than the water - protecting the well, funding the well, analysing the history of the well, restricting access to the well, selling picture postcards of the well - all the things that we do instead of celebrating and sharing the water."

These are words we need to hear, especially as the present continues to be challenging and turbulent. Several people I've talked to in the last few weeks about going back to work in the office have spoken about how depleted they feel; how they can only deliver a maximum of 80%. That sense of depletion seems to be universal at the moment wherever I go and whoever I talk with. And of course I see it in myself. I was really moved a few weeks ago when a fellow Dean rang me up and said "are you OK because the last time we talked, you weren't". There's a real invitation at the moment to do some work on ourselves.

That is why I am delighted that our new Bishop is beginning to speak of Lent 2022 as a kind of "sabbatical" for the Diocese as a whole – a time when we all seek refreshment, rest and renewal; a time maybe when we deliberately plan not to have too many meetings; when we exercise restraint in how many emails we send (and at what time of night!)

Maybe this coming Lent (or maybe Advent given that we haven't even got as far as Christmas yet!) can be a time when we start drinking from that deep well which Barbara Brown Taylor speaks about. And learn to share that living water "carrying it into a dry world".

With my best wishes to you all.

Nicholas

