

The View from Grabbist

There is a simple question that always faces us, particularly poignant in times of profound change or threat. Our own times certainly qualify as such: grinding wars where the lives of children are stolen by rage-blinded leaders, profit-driven climate change, the destruction of our ecosystems, political upheavals, lack of integrity in public life, AI, fake news and technology changing at rates never seen before...

Facing these realities, the question we face is this:

How do we live well in the face of difficulty?

It may seem obvious, but just to *begin* to ask such a question is a radical act, and to ask it is to begin to answer it. In asking it, we are acknowledging that we don't want to get swept up in the atmosphere of *reaction* that is all around us: visceral, unmindful reaction.

One reaction is to be the **ostrich**: bury your head in the sand and pretend it isn't happening. We just ignore it all. But, in the face of danger, this is folly. It won't do!

Another reaction is to be the **cassowary**: viciously attack those who seem to bring us troubling news, desperately looking for evidence that they are wrong, slating them any way we can. This too won't do!

A third reaction is to be the **pheasant**: panic, flee or attempt ill-thought-through responses in an attempt to find quick solutions. Some well-intended activism falls into the trap of mindless flurrying around, going nowhere. This also won't do!

In fact, no *reaction* will do.

We have, instead, to stop.

Stopping may involve asking what our reactions *are*, naming them. Am I an ostrich, a cassowary or a pheasant? *'You will know the truth'*, Jesus said, *'and the truth shall set you free'*. Facing the truth about ourselves and our visceral reactions, fears and anxieties is the first step to freedom: *'search me'* is an ancient prayer, inviting the divine Spirit to bring us into a place of reality. It can be scary – but in the end is liberating. We do well to pray it.

There is another bird that might help us here: the *eagle*. *'Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength'* said the ancient seer *'they shall rise on wings like eagles, they shall run and not faint'*. Here, we entrust ourselves to the One who has led people and peoples through troubles throughout history – not denying the troubles but living trustfully through them. *'Look at the birds of the air'* Jesus said *'they neither sow nor reap nor store away in barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them'*.

Only when we learn to stop, breathe and be present to ourselves and to God can we begin to truly see what we are to do. If we want to bring peace, we have first to *be* peace, if we want hope, we have to *be* hope. Here, we do not react – as ostrich, cassowary or pheasant. Instead, abandoning our reactions, we soar, not away from the troubles of the world, but in and through them. Enlightened, we are light and peace, justice and hope. In Christ's name.

Kenneth

