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by Alwyn Marriage

TELLING STORIES: *Cassandra, Jonah and Jim'll fix it*

IN GREEK mythology, the god Apollo, who had fallen in love with the beautiful Cassandra, gave her the precious gift of prophesy as a token of his affection. However, when Cassandra did not return his love, he was sufficiently peeved to punish her by bestowing a further gift, which had the painful effect that although her predictions were true, no one would believe her. She was therefore doomed to see clearly what was going to happen, and would know what people should do to avert catastrophes; but she would be unable to convince anyone to take what she was saying seriously.

Those of us who have been in the environmental movement for years know only too well what Cassandra felt like. Twenty years or more ago the evidence of long-term damage to the equilibrium of the world's climate seemed to be stacking up convincingly, and yet so often our warnings were greeted by disbelief and even scorn.

Now, however, all that has changed. Only a few years ago one had to pay notional respect to the sceptical scientists, mainly in the United States, who insisted that all was well, or, if it wasn't, that there was nothing we could do about it as we were just living through a long-term natural climatic cycle. Despite evidence now coming to light that interested parties such as certain oil companies have been offering bribes to scientists to get them to deny the reality of human-induced climate change, there are now very few who would deny that we are in a terrible mess, and that it is human beings who have caused and are causing that mess. We no longer need to feel that we are voices crying in the wilderness. Open a newspaper any day, or turn on the radio, and the subject of climate change is being addressed almost *ad nauseam*. Let us hope that this increased awareness is the first step in a process of change which will be in time to save the planet. And in the meantime, we have at least escaped the predicament of Cassandra.

Moving to another culture, we read the old story of Jonah, one of the most human and best-known characters in the Old Testament. In that tale, God tells Jonah to warn the people of the city of Nineveh of the impending doom that will befall

them if they do not change their ways. But telling people that they are heading for catastrophe is never very easy, and is likely to bring opprobrium and ridicule. Attempting to avoid this daunting mission, therefore, Jonah had the bright idea of taking a boat in the opposite direction; and, of course, he ended up in the belly of a whale, courtesy of divine tinkering. Thanks, perhaps, to the whale's sensitive digestive system he survived that ordeal and decided, somewhat reluctantly, to do as he had been told. To his astonishment, and no little chagrin, he then found that when he finally made it to Nineveh and prophesied as God had instructed him, the people accepted his message and repented,



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so escaping the terrible consequences that Jonah had predicted would come upon them if they did not.

So poor old Jonah sat under a tree and sulked.

Well, unlike Jonah, anyone, everyone who has been banging on

about climate change all these years will be over the moon if the people of planet earth change their behaviour and avert the catastrophe that is threatened if we all go on acting as we have in the past. Although the situation is critical, there is still time to reduce the impact of the damage our past has inflicted on the future. We cannot now escape some of the effects, indeed parts of the world are already suffering them; but we could still take actions that would, in time, reverse some of the damage. If people, industry, governments, transport systems all take this on board and make the necessary changes, there will certainly be no one from the environmental movement sitting sulking under the trees. They will all be out celebrating with relief and delight and looking forward to a brighter future.

A third, more modern icon with relevance to our