

The other day I was sitting talking to one of the men who sleep rough every night in Stratford. He's been here about three years now and spends every night in one of the parks by the river. All his possessions are kept neatly in a box and a bag and he keeps himself quite amazingly neat and tidy. I like to check how he's getting on from time to time, but for the present at least he has no desire to live a normal life under a roof. He writes poetry, and he likes to live on the edge of things, very close to nature in fact. Rather than seeing himself at the bottom of the heap he revels in his place in creation. He doesn't believe in God as such, but in the power of creation, with humankind as the pinnacle of the natural world, because they alone have the capacity to look at the world and give thanks for it. "I sit here" he said, "day after day and look at the world around me, see what the force of creation is doing and I think that's great, I say to it, 'Well done'." So profound, and yet most of us would just walk past him hoping he didn't catch our eye.

One thing for sure, he is one of the few people in the country who has not batted an eyelid at the economic crisis that's been convulsing the markets. It's been an incredible few weeks with house prices and stocks and shares all sliding rapidly and with major banks either falling apart or being rescued by governments stunned into radical action. To walk around Wall Street or Canary Wharf in recent years was to walk amidst incredible wealth and flaunted power. In the last 12 months alone

city financiers paid themselves an incredible £16 Billion in bonuses. How could that possibly be justified, especially as they were building there glittering palaces not on the rock of solid deposits but on the shifting sand of massive debt? The world economy was built on endlessly stoking up the flames of consumption, as the price of commodities soared and the over-heating world groaned with pain.

The danger is that we will try to get through the coming recession as best we can, with the only aim of our political leaders being to return us to those heady days of borrowing, consumption and debt as soon as possible. Is there no other way? No other paradigm or picture for how our shrinking world can thrive except everyone struggling faster and faster to consume what is left of the world's resources as quickly as possible?

I've no easy answers, but surely this is a time to take stock. I'd recommend you read Nebuchadnezzar's 'Dream of the Tree' in Daniel chapter 4 for a biblical picture. Read of the mighty king driven away from his palace and people to eat grass and live like a wild animal, for seven years his body lay each night, 'drenched with the dew of heaven' like my friend sleeping rough, until 'his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird.' But in the midst of that 'madness' came something else for King Nebuchadnezzar. "I raised my eyes towards heaven" he says, "and my sanity was restored."