



Australian Bush Fires- 2019/2020- Neil Thorogood

Over Christmas I paid a hastily planned visit to my father in Sydney. Ill health saw him in hospital and I wanted to be closer than the phone calls were allowing me to be. We spent the Christmas season in a room in the Sydney Adventist Hospital. On most of the days I was there the sky was hazy with smoke from the raging bushfires around New South Wales. The sun was often a bloody red ball glowering at us. Some days, as soon as I stepped outdoors, my eyes would sting and I could smell the burning gum trees. It was whilst I was there that two firefighters died. The news was always dominated by reports on where fires had reached and where they might go next. We had a gale at one point which fanned the flames and sent embers across highways to start blazes leaping from mile to mile. Most of the state hasn't had real rain for a couple of years so the bush is just awaiting the smallest spark. It was heartbreaking to listen as families returned to homes that were piles of darkened wood and twisted metal; everything was being lost. Australians are used to bush fires. They are part of the seasons in the way that we get used to rain and frost. But this year's are unprecedented in their scale and ferocity. There's a big debate across Australia surrounding climate change and its consequences. But no one can doubt the reality of loss being endured by people and by nature.

A prayer:

Your creation tests us sometimes, Lord of all.

We build and plant, tend and grow, harvest and mine.

We cut roads across the landscape and drill deep into the earth.

We tend to assume our dominance over your world;

until our vulnerability comes home again,

until we see the scale of forces that overwhelm us.

Be with those now facing fire.

Help communities coping with devastating loss and fear.

Give strength and endurance to the firefighters offering all they have to save life and property.

Give to those with leadership the wisdom they need to face the emergency and the much longer journey of rebuilding and recovery.

Help us, so distant, to sustain the bonds of love and care that cross the world.

Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayers.

Amen.