“Don’t Look Up” – Or perhaps we should: A film review

Over Christmas and New Year I had time to enjoy watching a film or three (or four …). The one that remains with me bears the title that appears at the top of this article, “Don’t Look Up”, and can be viewed on Netflix, should you have access to that. At first glance, it appears to be a standard disaster movie: two scientists discover a comet that is on a direct collision course with earth and yet their warnings are ignored, despite the fact that the comet is so large that impact would constitute an ‘Extinction level event’.

I didn’t realise as I started viewing that the film had been deliberately produced as a satire on why it is that we are being so slow to respond to the existential threats of climate change and the ecological emergency. It is, without doubt, a very funny film in places. (Hang on in there for a bit of poetic justice meted out to the American President as the credits roll.) And yet it also conveys a message: we ignore the climate science at our peril, and we do that because we find the facts to be inconvenient, uncomfortable, even threatening, so we would rather not ‘look up’ and see what is coming.

Here is a little glimpse for you of some of the reasons the characters in the film don’t take the scientists seriously:

- The American President is firstly distracted by a sex scandal, then decides to take time to assess matters since the likelihood of impact is ‘only’ 99.78%. She then moves on to worry about the impact (no pun intended) that releasing the news might have on mid-term election results.

- When the scientists decide to take the story to the media, it just isn’t given the airtime it merits as there are other stories that people would prefer to hear, like celebrity gossip.

- Then the economy comes into play! The world’s 3rd richest man – an IT developer – realises that there will be precious metals on the comet that he can utilise and profit from. So the film moves on to a ‘technology will save us and we can make money out of this’ trajectory (again, no pun intended), with plans to blast the comet into smaller pieces and bring them safely to earth.

- The people of the world are divided. Some want the comet totally destroyed, others accuse the powers that be of alarmism, and yet others say the whole thing is a hoax.

Does any of this sound familiar? I won’t spoil the film by telling you how it ends, but it is worth watching. I came away from it with a fresh realisation of just how important it is that we try to get the ‘messaging’ right about the realities of climate change. It may be that it is a message that some would still rather not hear, but the reluctance of some to hear does not free us from the responsibility to speak and – more importantly – to act. One big difference between the plot of the film and the reality of climate change is this: whilst there is little that any individual can do about a comet hurtling towards the earth, there is a great deal that individuals, communities and governments can do in the face of climate change. We still have the chance to mitigate disaster.

“They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of God, as the waters cover the sea.” *Isaiah 11:9*

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