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Isolation Radio Talk

Sunday 11 October

Creationtide 06

Genesis 9.8-17

Healing our Broken Covenant with Creation

Good Morning

If we tip-toe very, very quietly, then hopefully we will not be noticed ... by God.

If we keep looking forward and not over our shoulder then maybe we will not see ... God.

Plain for all to see is our broken Covenant with Creation and our Home, the Earth.

The Christian Judaeo tradition has long been held responsible for the desire of humankind to claim domination of nature; the lust of humankind for power: 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth' (Genesis 1.28), says Scripture.

Humankind has multiplied and has done all in its power not only to subdue. It is also raping the Earth - our Home. The wind has sown and the whirlwind is reaped in our generation and without doubt by generations to come.

To catalogue our destruction of the natural world is to write a long list. I don't have to, Sir David Attenborough over the past 80 plus years has done that for you. And now, in the face of extreme weather, forest fires and the global pandemic, he asks you, what is it that we can all do to help our planet?

(And I urge each one of you to watch his latest film *A Life On Our Planet*, in which he shares his thoughts on what we can all do to make a difference. So concerned about the issue of climate change, which threatens humanity's very survival unless urgent action is taken to halt the damage it has already caused, he makes a desperate appeal for help in securing its future. Remember this is all about the Earth - our only Home.)

What is eye-wateringly true, is that the legacy humanity has taken from one year to another, to another, to another, continues to gravely upset the balance in the equilibrium of our Home - the Earth.

Twenty years ago, at the beginning of this Millennium we did not - well the wider public did not know - whether the die had already been cast too far and too deep: had we set in motion the incurable destruction of our the Earth, our Home? It is true however, that the weaker living things perish first. Plants and creatures that have become extinct cannot be brought back. 'First the forests die and then the children.' It is not yet the strong, it is the weak, but soon it may be the strong. The poor countries of the world have no defence against the plunder by the rich. Toxic waste is dumped; forests are cut down; subsistence economies give place to cash crops sold for the

benefit of the rich so that you can have fruit in season and out of season. Profits are spent on arms, armaments and palaces. People are held in thrall: Ghandi was correct to say that 'the worst pollution is poverty.' And the worst is not just poverty but the corruption that causes poverty. It is a cycle that leads to death. Poverty leads to overpopulation because children are the only security left.

Overpopulation consumes not only food but also the foundation from which food comes by over-grazing or too much fertiliser. It is no accident that it is in the poorest countries the deserts grow fastest. They must sell not only the apples but cut down the apple tree for fuel. We say they must use our disease free seed but they cannot save seed for next year because we have rendered it infertile. Such cycles tend towards destruction. Where there is massive social injustice ruthlessness dominates. It breeds a culture of violence. Violence against weaker people becomes violence against weaker creatures and such injustice becomes a grave injustice visited by humankind upon the Earth herself.

If this is the moral crisis facing the world and especially the affluent 'West' or 'First world', it is more, much more. It is a *religious* crisis. We - humanity - are confronted with the shaking of the foundations of that in which you put your trust. Your relationship to the natural world is determined by human techniques by which you sustain life, and by which you recycle what you have taken. You now throw things away and still you assume they have gone. Not so! Something never becomes nothing. It may be changed. Nothing you discard has gone.

And that is true of God for the post-modern world. Made in God's image women and men were bound, I suppose, to see themselves as gods, and so inevitably, to render God un-necessary. You can understand how you come to say the world is passive, an object for you to conquer, dominate, subdue; that you are lord and owner to do with it what you will. You come to look like a god, not through goodness and truth, not through love and patience, not through long suffering and kindness but through sovereignty and in power.

Francis Bacon coined the phrase *Knowledge is power*, applauding the science of his time. 'You are masters and possessors of nature' says Descartes. Compare that with the words of Chief Seattle recorded in 1854:

“Every part of this soil is sacred in the estimation of my people.
Every hillside, every valley, every plain and grove,
has been hallowed by some sad or happy event in days long vanished.
Even the rocks, which seem to be dumb and dead
as they swelter in the sun along the silent shore,
thrill with memories of stirring events connected with the lives of my people,
and the very dust upon which you now stand
responds more lovingly to their footsteps than yours,
because it is rich with the blood of our ancestors,
and our bare feet are conscious of the sympathetic touch.
Our departed braves, fond mothers, glad, happy hearted maidens,
and even the little children who lived here and rejoiced here for a brief season,
will love these somber solitudes
and at eventide they greet shadowy returning spirits.
And when the last Red Man shall have perished,

and the memory of my tribe shall have become a myth among the White Men,
these shores will swarm with the invisible dead of my tribe,
and when your children's children think themselves alone in the field,
the store, the shop, upon the highway,
or in the silence of the pathless woods,
they will not be alone.

In all the earth there is no place dedicated to solitude.
At night when the streets of your cities and villages are silent
and you think them deserted,
they will throng with the returning hosts that once filled them
and still love this beautiful land.

The White Man will never be alone.
Let him be just and deal kindly with my people,
for the dead are not powerless.
Dead, did I say?
There is no death,
only a change of worlds.”

*[Chief Seattle, Treaty Oration, 1854; published The Seattle Sunday Star
on Oct. 29, 1887, in a column by Dr. Henry A. Smith.]*

If you consider *nature* is nothing more than your property, to do with as you will, the consequences are already upon you, and you must hope that the same technology bringing the disaster, will also save you from it. Might it not also be true, that the way you use the Earth - your Home - and destroy it, comes directly from the dis-ordered and dis-eased relationship, you have to your true nature, and to God?

It is precisely here that you are called to conversion. The way you think about God will be the way you think about yourself. 'Tell me what you believe in' writes the theologian, Moltmann, 'and I will tell you who you are.'

By what images will you describe God?

Do you think of God as a One-alone god, existing as a single entity; perhaps existing in your mind, and in your own pain; a God, who has no answer for you. If God has ever been alone, there would be neither a basis in the Universe for love nor a framework for relationship: simply put, love would not exist because if there was no “other” in the beginning, and God was alone, then God cannot be Love. Merciful, perhaps, but not Love.

Or, do you think of God as a living community; a fellowship of three - a Trinity - yet with room for another. Where the origin of Love is other-centred, self-giving and unconditional; where God is, in One God; and God *is* the relationship of the Father (or Mother, if you like, but I would never hold hard and fast to ‘labels’), the Son and the Holy Spirit; and each is One among the Others; *all* self-giving, and *all* mutually indwelling with each other.

[The Trinity, Moltmann, p308]

Think dance, and think of the Trinity, as three, forever in the great dance of face-to-face-to-face: the divine dance, full of life and light and music and laughter and joy and wonder and acceptance and goodness. And this, is the grand celebration of relationship in which all Creation is created. This is a God who is Love - a God who cannot be anything that is not Love.

Is this an image of God you have? If not I would encourage you to have.

God cannot be a God of domination and subjugation; it is contrary to a God of Creation. God is of community and relationship; of affirmation and support of life. And the whole of Creation cries glory to and for a Creator.

Our need, yes, humanities need, is to rediscover the immanence, the abiding, brooding and mysterious presence of God, in the whole of Creation - our only Home.

Christians have long recognised that the person of Jesus is not just about personal salvation. It is, about Christ being in all and through all. In Christ himself, is the mystery of the Creator. You can discover and read about this in a letter written to new Christians in Colossia, found in the Bible.

Jesus said, "Split wood, I am there. Lift up a rock, you will find me there", says the Gospel of Thomas (saying 77b). What can this mean, other than that what you do to the Earth, you do to Christ. It is for this reason that you know God loves what has been created. It is for this reason humanity can know, God wants to bring life to its full flowering. All things are within the Covenant (God's promise), as God says in Scripture "I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature" (Genesis 9.9-10). From this Covenant it follows that future generations have rights and responsibilities; from this Covenant all the Earth has rights and responsibilities. Before God the Creator, all living things are partners in God's Creation and within God's covenant.

So let us not tip-toe but step boldly and hopefully we will be noticed by God.

Let us keep looking all around - north, east, south and west - and then we will see God.

Then it will be plain for all to see is that we are healing our broken Covenant with Creation and our Home, the Earth.

Thank you for listening

Prayer

It is not a time for me to pray for us all. It is a time for all of us to pray.

What then is your prayer about our Earth - our Home.

Pray it now, in the silence that follows.

And end it with 'Amen', which is a Hebrew word meaning 'So be it'; for in the intention of your prayer, is the conviction you have, that together, God and you, will heal our Home, for we have a part to play to.

Silence is kept

Amen.