

Season of Creation Week 4 Year A: 30 September / 1 October 2017

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How does our relationship with creation mirror Jesus's relationship with God?

The role of a prophet is not a job one voluntarily signs up for. As job descriptions go the one for a prophet is vague at best, work conditions are often hazardous, and people rarely clamor to see you, much less listen to what you have to say since you are most likely going to be critical of their life-style or behavior. Besides, the recruiter is also going to be your boss who happens to be indescribable and does not always reply promptly when called upon. Though some prophets were once respected citizens with some notoriety, others were more rascally. Either way, most of them eventually end up as solitary wanderers, living on the fringes of society where they are revered by some and scorned by others. In the end, it is a lonely job without much financial or emotional reward. However, where we would be without them?

A prophet's main function, it seems, is to bring awareness to people that their attitude or behavior does not align with God's plans or purpose. In the Hebraic sense, prophets held people accountable to their side of the covenant which was established between them and God. The prophet Joel operates in such a manner.

Though we don't know much about his history, Joel's message to the people of Judah is stark. He is reminding them that when you desert God, when you abandon God's promise, the forces of death reign; and this force of death is not limited to the people, it encompasses the whole land, vegetation and creatures alike, are subjected to this dire judgement. The act of human apostasy is borne by all creation.

St. Paul carries on this theme in today's epistle when he writes in Romans: "*for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it.*" The people of Judah had forgotten that the land is a gift from God, that God is the Lord of nature and all creation. Rather than be stewards of this gift, they have set about exploiting its resources. Recall, for a moment, that God promised to give the land to the Israelites after the exodus from Egypt. It was given to them to tend and care for; to cultivate and nurture. That is what the first creation narrative in Genesis means by "dominion" (Gen. 1.28). It was never meant to be bartered or exchanged for money or goods. Such actions, in God's judgment, was sinful. In today's world, we continue to subject the land and the creatures that live upon it to domination in a futile effort to subdue creation in order to meet our own desires and wants. The Prophet Joel reminds us today, just as he

did in his time to the good people of Judah, that nature itself has been corrupted by this human sin: this apostasy to God's covenant.

Lament, mourn, be dismayed, groan. These are not words of comfort from the prophet, but testament to the reality of the situation brought about by humankind's persisting in its evil ways. We deny our sinfulness and all creation bears the cost. On this, the final Sunday of the Season of Creation, we are once again reminded that God is the Lord of nature, the Fountain of Life, the source of all blessings, and we are expected to be faithful stewards of the land and its gifts while also worshiping and obeying God. We are meant to be in communion with God, in a covenant relationship born out of the cleansing waters of our Baptism.

To be in communion with God is to live Eucharistically. It is to offer thanksgiving and praise to God for the gift of nature and the creatures who live within it. Over the course of the past four weeks we have been invited to meditate upon our role in the degradation and destruction of our natural world; in the abuse and misuse of all of all creatures great and small. It has been a time to reflect upon our denial of our sinfulness and the continuation of our evil ways. It has been a time of personal and corporate repentance. That is the message prophets throughout time have been witnessing to: humanity's need for repentance, for turning away from behavior that ushers in a reign of death to reliance upon God, the Lord of life and the Source of abundance. However, repentance requires help.

St. Paul says as much in today's epistle when he writes that "*the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray...but the Spirit intercedes for all the saints according to the will of God.*" (Romans 8.26-7) We do not, on our own accord, know how to reconcile ourselves to God and all creation. That is Christ's work through the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, for it is through the Spirit of God that we are adopted by grace and redeemed by Christ. The redemptive work of Christ, however, is not limited to humanity.

Theologian Norman Wirzba writes, "The *logos* [Word] of God is not at work solely within human lives; it is present and effective throughout all creation [such] that the work of Christ extends to and links up with the whole of creation...[where] the history of God's action in Jesus exemplifies the nature of the Creator/creation relationship" (*Living the Sabbath*, p.45). When we align Wirzba's prophetic language with that of the prophet Joel's words from today's reading: "*even the wild animals cry to you*" (Joel 1.20), we hear that creation itself understands redemption is only possible through the grace of God which is made manifest in Jesus, the Christ. It is the role of the prophetic voice to remind us of our sinfulness, which broke the original relationship we had with

God that can now only be restored through God's redeeming Spirit. It is Jesus's obedience to Love's demand that redemption and restoration is possible.

In our denial of God, our apostasy, death reigns, and all creation "*groans in labor pains*" (Romans 8.22). It is only when we say 'yes' to God, when we admit our sinfulness, that the Word is made flesh and dwells among us. Through our repentance, we say 'yes' to God and in doing so Christ dwells within us. Our 'yes' allows the Spirit to enter our lives and draws us into Christ's redeeming grace by which right-relatedness is restored and all creation celebrates. This is Jesus's relationship with God that we are invited to emulate; thus, leading us on this last Sunday in the Season of Creation to a final question: How does our relationship with creation –forest, wilderness, desert, river, and all creaturely life – mirror Jesus's relationship with God?