

SERMON SEPT 5TH 2021

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May the thoughts of my heart and the meditations of my spirit be always acceptable to you, O Lord.

We're in this space and on this planet together. What we do while we are here is our own choice. God's gift of freedom is one of the most amazing and yet for me the most challenging aspect of being human. We have many choices relating to all the various facets of our lives and our relationships to God, ourselves, the environment and to each other. Today we are focusing on the choices we make in our relationship to the natural world.

I would like to begin by reframing that relationship as union rather than dominion. As Brother Nicholas of the Society of St John the Evangelist puts it, 'The natural world was and is the first holy scripture. God's first work from eternal silence. Perhaps because of their intimacy with the ongoing creation process, the simple creatures of the earth... model for us how to be as we are.'

What does it mean to 'be as we are'? Like the simple creatures of the earth, we are mortal and endowed with senses and feelings. As God's children, made in the image of the divine, we are also endowed with the capacity to imagine, conceive and project our minds into the unknown. Together, these amazing gifts of body and spirit open the way for us to bear witness to the wonders of creation and reflect on what that witness means. God has given us purpose, and it is for us to embody that purpose.

To begin, God calls us into relationship and invites us to become fully present, not to hide ourselves away from divinity walking in the midst of creation, here and now. We become present when we offer our full attention, attending to and waiting for the unfolding of creation. This attention is both collaboration and witness.

We collaborate through our stewardship of earth's many resources, tending our own gardens, volunteering to generate and maintain communal green spaces, researching and advocating for renewable energy, taking responsibility for our immediate environment and choosing equity, sustainability and justice for all creation in the routine pursuits and practices of daily life.

We bear witness by noticing the details and also the context, the patterns and progressions, within the natural cycles and the impact of our human interventions. To witness, we ask nothing and we take nothing. We become as one, fully engaged yet still, silent.

The more we open all five senses in this silent stillness, the greater the depth and dimension of our witness. We are being, neither thinking nor acting.

Framing our relationship to creation as union also opens us to a deeper connection with a vital strand of our Lord's teaching. How often he draws our attention to what he notices with all his human senses. He invites us to savour, to gaze, to

listen, to touch, to smell and learn about ourselves and our interdependent relationships from what he is noticing in God's creation.

In turn, noticing invites wonder, and this wonder encourages us to become curious, indeed filled with the curiosity most often associated with children. '[Jesus] called a child, who he put among them, and said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."'

To become truly curious requires humility. A humble quest increases our awe as we bear witness to the infinite that surpasses all understanding. In this humility, we recognise that we do not have the answers and doubt we even know the questions. In this way, we are without prejudice, fully open and trusting in the process of understanding God's creation at work within us and around us.

True curiosity is also without fear. Again, Christ's invitation draws our attention to the natural world. 'Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.' 'Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?'

As we embody this humble fearless curiosity, we behold nature's beauty and also the ugly wounds and scars, the sacred and the defiled. We are called to bear witness to our presence in both realities. Reconciling our wonder at nature's divine capacity for healing with our horror at all we do to impede and diminish that capacity threatens to overwhelm us. Faced with the current level of destruction caused by human intervention, we are called to notice - not turn away - and to engage our curiosity so that we can realign our human practices to the rhythms and cycles of the natural world.

How is this possible? Let us remember that with God, all is possible, including that hope which Paul elucidates in his letter to the Romans.

'We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves... Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.'

We become hope first and foremost through prayer. We embody hope through the action we take according to the talents with which God has gifted each of us.

As Paul instructs the Corinthians, there are 'varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.'

To Extinction Rebellion has been gifted radical activism. To the gardeners of De Beauvoir Town, tending, nurturing, pruning. To climatologists, prophecy, and environmentalists, teaching. To pilgrims, gathering companions and spreading the

good news like seeds along the way. And to artists and storytellers, new ways of listening, seeing, understanding and responding.

When Quentin Blake heard a taxi driver say, 'we live in worrying times', he responded to the call to his gift with a new Guernica, bearing witness to the interconnectedness of our global climate and humanitarian crises and thus also the interdependence of climate and humanitarian justice. I had the privilege of seeing this mural and the preparatory sketches on a recent visit to Hastings.

I'd like to conclude with storyteller Kevin Kling's invitation to listen again as if for the first time. 'Back in the days when pots and pans could talk, which indeed they still do, there lived a man. And in order to have water, every day he had to walk down the hill and fill two pots and walk them home. One day, it was discovered one of the pots had a crack, and as time went on, the crack widened. Finally, the pot turned to the man and said, "You know, every day you take me to the river, and by the time you get home, half of the water's leaked out. Please replace me with a better pot." And the man said, "You don't understand. As you spill, you water the wildflowers by the side of the path." And sure enough, on the side of the path where the cracked pot was carried, beautiful flowers grew, while the other side was barren.'

What choices could each of us make in our daily lives that might spare the rubbish tips of the world one more pot and renew the face of the earth as we walk this pilgrim land with which God has entrusted us to love and cherish as he loves and cherishes each of us and the whole of creation?