

Rector's Reflections on Lent 2008

This is the earliest date I ever remember for Ash Wednesday and the beginning of the season of Lent. Lent is traditionally thought of as a special period of time, once again forty days, set aside for introspection, self-denial, prayer, and study as the events of Passion week and Easter Sunday approach (sound enjoyable). We should find ourselves journeying towards the cross, drawing closer and closer week by week. Coming to know the power of the cross is not only a human journey, but a journey for all of creation. Plants, animals, the entire earth itself in our hemisphere, join after these days of introspection with humanity on this spiritual homecoming, through the covenants established between God and creation long ago.

Of all our many sins and shortcomings worthy of prayer and contemplation this Lent, probably the sin of species pride, is the one most rarely considered. If anything, Lent probably has elevated the human-centeredness of the Christian faith, focusing on the impending extraordinary acts of love and sacrifice, and on the wondrous salvific nature of Christ's death and resurrection for all humanity. But this season's Biblical texts should redirect our ego centric ideals, and allow us to acknowledge the special relationship that exists between God and all of creation. The reality of that relationship points up the arrogance of the human perspective - a perspective that declares other orders of creation as "*lower forms of life*," that is based on a misguided interpretation, and fails to recognize the interdependence of all created life. By abandoning such pride we just might be able to perceive the scope and depth of God's sacrificial love, not just for humanity, but for the vast complex of all the cosmos.

So, let us start this year's Lenten journey by recognizing God's remarkable commitment to all creation, and redefine our relationship to the good earth and its inhabitants. Regardless of what expectant parents utter, we don't come into the world. We come out of it, as both creation stories in Genesis make clear. Nature is not our resource, our tool, our commodity, our machinery, our stage. It does not speak our language. It is our brother, our sister, our ancestor, with a voice different from ours. We need to move away from an attitude specieism and discover that Scripture teaches (in Genesis 1) that God had a separate and distinct relationship with birds of the air and fish of the sea and even plants before God had a relationship with them.

The creation story in Genesis 1 portrays God weaving together the various fabrics of God's creative imagination into a complex network of living, breathing, and moving planet. Each and every phase of this activity bears the personal fingerprint and signature of God. We the ancestors of those human beings whom God creates on the sixth day reside in the same relationship to God as does that which came before us. There is no hint that the relationship between God and non-human creation is diminished in any way because of our arrival on the scene.

If all the earth suffers from humanity in the deluge of punishment meted out in the flood, then, scripture teaches us that it is with all created things that God re-establishes an enduring personal relationship, despite the sins and shortcomings this life brings with it. If Christ's death was a saving event, then salvation is for the entire order of created beings. All those who faced punishment are now redeemed. All life is now able to achieve its fullest expression of being through the grace of God's sacrificial love. The gospel is not simply news of our redemption from the world. The gospel promises redemption of the world.

It is no coincidence that this reflective, somber period of Lent occurs, for those of us in northern climates at least, during the late Winter/early Spring - a time still cold, still barren, still swaddled in silence. As Easter and Spring approach, the cycle of life begins again: Silence breaks for with singing, wind brings warmth again, branches begin to bud, snow-drops appear, grass begins to green, hibernating animals awaken as the entire earth rouses to its rebirth. All creation not only illustrates for us the redemption of life through Christ's death and resurrection; it also participates as a full partner in the event with humble us, all humanity with the covenanted love of God the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.

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