

Journey Together to Hope and Act with Creation

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Pentecost + 18 – SoC 3 – Prov 31 10-31 Ps 1 Jas 3 Mk 9

The theme of this year's Ecumenical Season of Creation is *Journey Together to Hope and Act with Creation*. '*Journey **together***' has put our focus on relationships; our relationships with each other, with God, and with God's creation. It's helped us understand our ecological spirituality as *the relationship between our actions, our spiritual health, and the health of Earth, our common home*. The present state of the Earth shows us how pivotal a healthy ecological spirituality is.

Any close contemplation of the natural world astounds us with the intricate balance of life; the delicate relationships all living things have with each other and with their geographical and climatic environments. To contemplate creation – any part of it – is a magnificent lesson in symbiosis; in the wonder of its interwoven balance. And it's obvious that our role as the beings who have the greatest impact on nature, for good or ill, is to live in harmony with the natural order; to *Journey Together to Hope and Act with Creation*. Anything less violates who we are, and life on Earth.

In the Season of Creation, it's always a bit of a puzzle how our set Sunday scripture readings might help us with this central call of our spirituality: to live in harmony with the natural order. And it looks like today's first reading provides a particular challenge. 'A capable wife who can find?' The first commentator I read warned that *preaching on this passage in the midst of the pitched gender politics of our age is like stomping through a minefield*. Harmony with the

natural order? At first glance, this reading only sounds comfortable for the old patriarchal order, and apparently has little to do with the good of God's created order. But let's see.

Who is this *capable wife*? There's a hint in vv. 23 and 31. Like her husband, she's known and praised in the city gates. That's odd. The city gates were where *men* publicly negotiated legal and social contracts; where *men* managed the well-being of the community. But *she's* there! Last week we heard that Wisdom's voice speaks at the entrance of the city gates. ^{Prov 1.21} So this *capable wife* is being portrayed as the embodiment of the Divine Wisdom that the book of Proverbs celebrates.

If we expect Proverbs will only list traditional women's roles for her to fulfil, this *capable wife* proves us wrong. The traditional roles *are* there, but this woman also negotiates contracts and conducts trade in the way only a man was expected to. This surprising description for a woman living in a traditional patriarchal society shows her as living an honest, thoughtful life, in harmony with her community and with the realities of her time and place, and making a wonderful contribution; a provider.

This *capable wife* embodies the Divine Wisdom that New Testament language calls the Word of God –Jesus.^{1 Cor 1.24} All the honour, kindness, trustworthiness, strength, generosity, and dignity this woman embodies as Divine Wisdom, Christians see revealed in the selfless life and ministry of Jesus. In the wisdom of this capable woman, in the wisdom of Jesus, the balance of life is in the best possible hands.

That sounds easy to say. But the truth of it becomes very clear when you see what damage can come of its antithesis. The letter of James speaks of the dangers of an unbridled tongue and even credits the tongue with the power *to set on fire the cycle of nature*. ^{Jas 3.6} Until recent decades, that would have

seemed quite a stretch. But we do see clearly now how unbridled tongues – the misinformation machines that were once used to protect the tobacco industry – are now used to subvert the best intentions of governments and organisations seeking to avert ecological catastrophe. Even repeated calls for change by the UN are mocked and ignored with apparent impunity.

The struggling Earth community in so many places today bears witness to these crimes against simple truth. We see everywhere the avoidable consequences of greedy, reckless unaccountable abuse of wealth and power. Deforestation and habitat destruction; poisoning and over-use of water – oceans, seas, lakes, rivers and aquifers; species extinction; ecosystem collapse; soil degradation; micro-plastic pollution; greenhouse-gas emissions continuing to rise; destruction and violation of minority populations and first-nations peoples; corruption; prejudice; false history – the list goes on. We can point the finger sometimes, but we need to be reminded how easily we can be complicit. Our Gospel today helps us there.

In our Gospel story, Jesus quietly tells his disciples for a second time that he will be betrayed and killed and rise again. They didn't hear him before, and this time, they're deafened to what he says by the sound of their own voices arguing with each other about who's the greatest. Somehow, despite having chosen to go *on the way* with Jesus, their teacher, they could drown out this most significant teaching with the chatter of their petty ambition. And we can do that too. How many voices call out to us to follow empty, materialistic dreams? Who do we listen to?

The world is a different place now from the world of the *capable wife* – the world of Jesus and his disciples on the way together. But the way of wisdom and of selfless, kind, generous hearts remains the same. And so does our call to *Journey Together to Hope and Act with Creation*. May God fill us with the wisdom of the *capable wife*, and the self-emptying

love of Christ our Lord. May we take a little child on our knee and like Jesus, proclaim and live the Gospel by putting ourselves last in order to serve this child's hope of a future! Amen