

Season of Creation 2

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Jrm 4 11-12 22-28, Ps 14

During the past week, I've been pondering the meaning of Jeremiah's terrifying words for this second Sunday in the Season of Creation. I didn't really know what to say to you until I came across a passage in 1st Kings. It's a word from God to Solomon just after Solomon dedicated the new Temple he'd had built in Jerusalem. God told Solomon that he and his descendants would thrive if they kept the faith. But then God warned that if Solomon or his descendants ever served other gods or prostrated themselves before them, God would cut them off from the Land. And the Land would become a ruin – an object lesson to all nations. 1 Kgs 9.1-9

We've just heard Jeremiah paint a picture of that calamity – a picture of de-creation – of Earth regressing to the primordial state of Genesis 1, becoming waste and void again. And instead of the Spirit wind that brought light and life at the beginning, Jeremiah foretells a burning, destructive wind. The wrong that God's people do has terrible consequences for the Land itself. Can that be?

In the Season of Creation, we focus on the spiritual connection between the way we live, and our relationships with God and the Earth community. We were created to honour God by serving and protecting the Earth community. But where people fail to do that – turn from that purpose, and instead sacrifice the Earth community on the altar of a desire for power and wealth – they betray Earth, God and each other.

That's where the other central element of our responsibility to the Earth community comes in – and we see it most plainly in the Psalm. That element is justice. In today's Psalm, evildoers are characterised as those who eat up God's people

as they eat bread, and do not pray to the Lord – who frustrate the poor in their hopes.’ Watching the Pacific Islands Forum play out this past week – small, poor nations entreating big rich ones to make concessions to help them literally keep their noses above water, yet being constantly played like hooked fish and disappointed yet again – the Psalmist cries out with them, longing for justice. It must change!

The message for us today is that people’s loyalty to God and our just care of the Earth community are deeply connected: fidelity and justice are two sides of the one coin. We’re warned that physical consequences result from spiritual betrayal. The betrayal we are warned against is that we worship what we treasure – what we desire – instead of being freely generous like the Creator. The consequence of greed for wealth and power is the physical decay of the Earth we were created to serve and protect; the decay of the creation that reveals God’s nature to us.

This spiritual–physical nexus comes home to us vividly on this Holy Cross day. We are reminded that it took Christ’s voluntary, physical sacrifice to heal the spiritual dislocation between us and God. Jesus’s self-offering on the Cross was given for our salvation from ourselves. And that is Christ’s model and his call to us. We will only solve the de-creation that Jeremiah pictures – the de-creation that we see happening in the world around us – we will only heal that if we recognise the power of what Jesus modelled, and respond by making physical sacrifices of our own.

Can we give up ways of being that alienate us from God; ways of being whose consequence is the destruction of the Earth community? We thought about such sacrifices last week. Can we choose to be sparing with our use of energy, with travel, with how much meat and seafood we consume, and with our use of plastics? In this Season of Creation, can we sacrifice our destructive habits?

We had a very interesting conversation about this in our

Tuesday study group. One of our number reminded us that most people on Earth are not engaging in the industrial-scale consumption and pollution that our country is. People in what we choose to call the 'developing world' are struggling to simply survive; to feed their families and keep a roof over their heads. If they destroy a bit of forest, it's because they have no other access to land in which to grow their food, or timber to build their shanty. There's no way they impose the same destructive ecological footprint on Earth that we do. We have to ask why so many of this bountiful world's people suffer such need. What must be done to end the terrible grief this is to God is much bigger than the individual level I've been speaking about.

My African colleague Rev Chesnay Frantz writes We cannot preach 'peace with creation' while ignoring the wounds carved into the land by systems of oppression. Jeremiah's lament is not just about personal sin, it is also about the violent structures that devastate land and people alike. Reconciliation with creation must mean dismantling the economic engines that keep exploiting both earth and labour. What I've tried to draw is a picture of the way our spiritual and physical life are integrated; that each affects the other. And more, that the spiritual life of humanity has consequences for the Earth and vice versa. I've called us to consider making personal changes in our physical lives that can make changes in our spiritual lives, so that maybe once convinced, we might consider joining in something much bigger – to help our part of humanity to make peace with creation; to participate in God's passion for justice. Amen