

The Season of Creation 5: St Francis Sunday

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St Francis Sunday – Season of Creation 5B

For me, this Season of Creation has again been one of deep challenge. In no other season of the year are we challenged so directly to renounce our current lifestyle and *live simply so that others may simply live*. The immediate urgency of that message is amplified by the international Covid vaccine disparities. While we rich countries discuss the possible benefit of a third booster dose, millions fall ill in poor countries and their health systems collapse as their governments cry out for even a first dose. What on earth do we think we're doing?!

Live simply so that others may simply live. It's very like a call to renounce the world of materialism and enter a religious order, and by doing that, to choose to proclaim the Gospel through a decision to live simply. Franciscans and many other orders choose a life of poverty, chastity and obedience; a choice for renunciation.

I had a childhood where a type of renunciation was a very attractive proposition; it was taken up by people who were just a little bit older than me. Their way was to drop out, leave the rat-race behind and embrace peace and love. It was the reaction of young, idealistic people against the lifestyle of their parents and the Vietnam War. They sang about these things in the protest songs of their era, and they carried their message to the world in VW Kombi vans painted with iridescent flowers. It's an irony that some of them grew up to become prominent billionaire entrepreneurs.

So I've been left with an ethos inside me that's a combination

of the flower-power peacenik, the Sermon on the Mount, and Jesus' command to mission. And on St Francis' Day, it all comes to a head. It's been given a much sharper edge by the intertwined messages of this year's Season of Creation – creation care and social justice. They can't be separated. I'm also aware that this Season of Creation is being observed by people of other faiths too. The call to detach ourselves from the ties that bind us to selfish lives, and instead live in simple ways that leave enough for everyone and everything to share in life; this rings true in other world faiths too.

So what are the next steps? Overcoming fear is one of them. Rowan Williams says that when we are healed of our sin and our fear, when we find our healing, our deliverance from selfishness and greed and anxiety, it begins to make a mysterious difference to everything. We begin to see that God's purpose for the whole creation is glory for all that is made, where human beings share with all other things. As St Paul puts it, *creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.* ^{Rm 8.21} What joy!

Rowan Williams says that somehow our deliverance into joy and thanksgiving – into reconciliation with God and one another – spills over into the reconciliation and the transfiguration of the whole world we're in. Our liberation is the world's liberation. Good news for us should be good news for the whole of God's world.

So for us to be sharing good news with the whole human race and the whole world in which and from which we live, means first of all for us to be set free; set free from the myth that somehow human beings really exist somewhere else than in the world as it truly is; that somehow we're in charge; that somehow this is given to us to use as we wish, as if we were not embodied but disembodied.

Rowan Williams says we need to be delivered from all that. We

need to be delivered not only from untruth but from fear; the fear that if we take steps of courage and generosity in relation to the world and to each other, that there's anything fearful in that. We **can** *live simply so that others may simply live*. And that's a new life; life for us, life for our neighbours, life for the creation in which God has placed us. That's something for joy not fear. So let's focus on the thanksgiving and the wonder of the gift we've been given in our universe. And the gift of faith, perspective, courage, and spirit-filled vision that is ours.

It starts right now. We begin this right now with our prayers for healing. Today, they're worded in a way that calls each of us to the vocation of healing; healing for each other, healing for the sick and the poor, and healing for the Earth. Amen