

Part of God's Creation



Humans are a part of God's creation and cannot exist separate from it. In our world we need the essentials it provides for us, such as oxygen to breathe, food to eat, water to drink and shelter. This fact can sometimes restrict our lives, but often it gives us great joy, particularly when we have close relationships with animals, plants and the earth. Having talked about relationships with people last month, in this leaflet I shall focus on our relationships with nature.

The photograph above is of a patch of ground in front of our house. The earth enables grass to grow in and on it, and supports anything that treads, sits, or rests on it. Further, with the help of sunlight, and shadows cast by nearby trees, a glimpse of the glory and beauty of God is also revealed.

In the Gospels, we are assured that nature is valued by God, and played an important part in the life of Jesus. When teaching about God's care for people in Luke 12:6, Jesus spoke of God's appreciation of common sparrows; five being sold for 2 pennies, but "not one of them is forgotten in God's sight." And in Luke 13:34, Jesus likens his desire to protect the people of Jerusalem, to a hen gathering her chickens under her wings.

At the beginning of Jesus' ministry, after his baptism by John the Baptist, "the

Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.” (Mark 1:12). What does, “with the wild beasts” mean, we might ask? The wilderness here is a place of testing and fasting. Are the wild animals linked to Satan’s testing of Jesus, or the care shown by angels?

In the Gospel accounts of Jesus ministry, after times of teaching and healing crowds of people, he sometimes went off alone into a deserted place. Surely this was a time when he could rest, pray to his Father and be supported by nature. Even the night Jesus was captured, we are told in Luke 22:39 that he went out to the Mount of Olives, “as was his custom”. His disciples followed him, but gradually stopped and Jesus went on alone. Then, in distress, he threw himself down on the ground (Mark 14:35). With the earth supporting him, Jesus prayed fervently to God, knowing the suffering he could be facing but agreeing to do God’s will.

Many years ago, I spent 5 months alone in a desert place out of Alice Springs. I missed the support of people, but I increased my appreciation of nature. Most evenings I sat and watched the sunset. It was quite beautiful and I realised how seldom in my life I had stopped to watch a sunset, and gave thanks to God for the experience. Nearby was the dry Todd river bed, with its trees and hidden water underneath. An Aboriginal woman once told me that to find water in the Todd river, you must kneel down on the sandy river bed and then dig with your hands. Surely these acts showed respect for water and its life-giving gift of quenching the thirst of all who drink it.

I suggest that God can be present in the words, acts and beauty of the outer bodies of people and nature, and also is present deep in the actual bodies of people and nature, linking them together. This is shown clearly in the Last Supper eaten by Jesus with his disciples before going out to the Mount of Olives. At this meal Jesus took a loaf of bread, blessed, broke and gave it to his disciples saying, “‘Take, eat; this is my body.’ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.’” (Matthew 26:26-28.)

What is Jesus saying, and what happens for us in Holy Communion? Nature

was taken by Jesus, transformed and then eaten and drunk by his disciples. When we receive the bread and wine at Holy Communion, Christ's body and presence as well as nature enter our bodies. As part of God's creation, we come into a close relationship not only with other people, but also with nature in God's love.

This sounds like a wonderful experience, and it is, but the words said over the wine, describing Jesus' blood, "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins", indicate that it involves suffering and death as well as receiving Christ's resurrection life. It seems that out of pain and suffering can come the joy of new life. Along with experiencing God's love for us and sharing it with others, we also find that love causes us to suffer with Christ, to share the sufferings of others, and to desire to work with nature for the healing of earth and all its inhabitants.

Today, if I am stressed in some way, I try to stop and look at the branches of trees, the hills in the distance and, of course, the wild birds and our hens! By appreciating nature in my surroundings, I experience God's loving presence in it, feel better and give thanks. Even in a city, nature will be found somewhere!

Recognising that God's presence in creation unites all the parts of it together, can lead us to ask ourselves, how best can we show respect, reverence and love for God and all creation, people and nature, in our relationships with them each day?

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