

## **Planet Earth Sunday - Rev'd Hans Christiansen - 6<sup>th</sup> September 2009**

### **Readings: Genesis 1.1-25 the Creation Story by theologian Matthew Fox, John 1. 1-14**

Today we begin the four-week Season of Creation. In this season we celebrate God the Creator and God's creation. For so much of the year like Lent, Easter, Advent and Christmas we focus almost entirely on Christ, which is good and right, but until this new initiative we didn't have any season when we focus entirely on God the Creator and the creation.

But now we do. And how important it is! We as Christians need to talk more and celebrate more the wonders of God's creation and our part in it.

As the late Creation-theologian Thomas Berry always insisted:

*"Planet Earth and the stars are the primary vehicle of human experience of the divine."*

With other words: It is in nature that we primarily experience and are inspired by a sense of God's presence.

And yet in modern times we have not been very good at treating the earth well. In fact much of the destruction of earth has philosophical and theological roots largely in an anthropocentric misinterpretation of Christianity, where nature since the 16<sup>th</sup> century largely has been viewed not as a place of divine encounter but as something to be used, measured, controlled and ultimately owned.

*"We have de-sacralised the world and made the earth into real estate"*, as an aboriginal singer starkly sings.

This mechanic view of creation has had tragic consequences for Planet earth and it is only now with the threat of dangerous global warming that people on a large scale are beginning to wake up to our interconnection with the earth and the universe.

But our Christian faith should not be used to legitimise any exploitation of nature.

In fact there are plenty of texts which point to God's presence in the earth and therefore its sacredness.

In the reading from Genesis today we heard poetically described how God creates the universe, and brings forth the earth from the deep, and how through God's creative power the earth co-creates to bring forth vegetation and life. All the while the Word of God is present, dancing with God as it is described in Proverbs 8.

And then we heard the beautiful prologue to John's Gospel where the Word, which was present at Creation, is identified as Logos, which in Greek means Creative Wisdom.

When time is right the Creative Logos is fully developed in a human being whom we call Jesus. God is present in all places: from the uttermost Super galaxies to Earth with all its variety of creatures and humans.

Creation is not devoid of God. Creation is full of God. From the very beginning of time throughout all the explosions, expansions, and mutations, God is there co-creating with the universe while the Cosmic Christ, the Logos, is dancing.

The Creative energy is one with the world. Everything we see and touch and feel is totally one with

God the father. Every single leaf, tree, grass, flower, drop of water, human being, and animal is infused with the Holy Spirit and Logos.

God is present in it. Everything created is good and beautiful and to be celebrated and everything, as we heard in the second reading, is gift. The whole of Creation is a gift so we can celebrate, wonder and experience God's presence.

And yet we turned creation into a non-sacred entity we could use. It has had terrible consequences. Look at the amount of animals that have become extinct and will never come back because of us? And yet deep down we know the wisdom that the earth is sacred and full of God's presence.

Our primary sacred scripture is the book of nature.

As Meister Eckhart wrote back in the 15<sup>th</sup> century: *“every creature is a word of God and is a book about God”*.

Or as Hildegard Bingen wrote in the 11<sup>th</sup> century: *“The Word is living, being, spirit, all verdant greening, all creativity. The Word manifests itself in every creature.”*

Think of standing under the canopy of the stars at the back beaches on a clear night, - what wonder and awe and joy it can bring!

Think about standing bathed in sunlight on a beach at the bay, - what warmth and comfort!

Think of the forest enveloping you and a deep sense of unity and peace fills your soul.

Think of the times when you have been deeply touched by the earth and all her beauty.

The Celtic Christians, which for many Anglo-Australians is ancestral heritage, never lost touch with the earth, which they had revered as sacred before the coming of Christianity. Instead, at best, they infused their Christianity with a deep sense of the sacred in the earth, much like some Aboriginal Christians have done.

Or as the psalmist in Psalm 104 sings: *“You have made all your works in wisdom.”*

Nature can live without us but we can't live without nature. Plants and forests and trees were here way before us and if it wasn't because of them we couldn't live.

We are totally interconnected with nature. Let us listen again to the beautiful words of the Native American Chief Seattle when the white settlers tried to buy his land:

*“This we know. The Earth belongs not to us; we belong to the earth.  
This we know. All things are connected like the blood, which unites one family.  
All things are connected.”*

*“Whatsoever befalls the earth befalls the sons and daughters of the earth.  
We did not weave the web of life; we are merely a strand in it.  
Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves.”*

What beautiful words – even though we believe in a transcendent God, God is still immanent, God is

the creator of the world but God is also in the world. All things are interconnected and what we do to the creation we do to ourselves.

All native peoples know this; The Aboriginal people of this land know it.  
Have we forgotten?

Let us become mystics once again. Let us begin to revere nature again like Middle Age Christian people did when they, for example, adopted ancient nature symbols such as the Green Man, the labyrinth, and the Mandala and depicted the cathedrals with these signs.

The Earth is our mother as Hildegard of Bingen wrote.

In one way Earth is just a bit of stardust, but it is formed and fitted so beautifully that we almost faint of awe and beauty when we see the images of the earth from space. There are so many planets in our galaxy alone and not one that we have found yet have got life on it.

Earth is a planet of grace; a planet of beauty; a planet that inspires dreams and vision of a divine presence.

Today and throughout the month, let us join our chorus with the ancient Biblical psalm writers who sang that the mountains, rivers, oceans, trees, animals, rain, hail and sunshine all praise God.

Let us indeed today and always give praise for the earth who carries us, feeds us, and inspires us. Let us celebrate the divine presence we see in the earth and in Christ.

The Lord be with you...

Hans Christiansen