

Season of Creation – SJN Prayer Service – September 8, 2018

When I was a little girl in Catholic elementary school, sometimes the teacher would talk about the end of the world. That happened a lot in November when death, judgment, heaven and hell seemed to be important topics. Sometimes we would hear something from that biblical book we called the Apocalypse back then and which we now call the book of Revelation. As I understood it at the end of time we would have the Second Coming of Jesus who would judge everybody and those of us who passed that test would be admitted to heaven and the world would end. Ideas about heaven were a bit vague – we would have glorified bodies but really they sounded kind of flimsy.

I was very sure I did not want to be around when the world ended – not because it was scary but because it was sad. I loved the world. I loved the crick (Raccoon Creek) where we played, and the woods, and the blue spruce next to my window and the red birds that lived in the spruce. I loved the purple irises in my mother's garden and the old apple trees and the applesauce my mother made from their fruit – so much better than the applesauce from the supermarket. And I loved the world even more when we took those long family car trips that people took in the 1950's and I first saw the mountains and the desert and the Grand Canyon and the ocean! And at the same time I was learning about the end of the world we said a prayer every day in class and at home that seemed to say just the opposite: "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end."

Which was it? End of the world or world without end?!

Over the years with the help of my scripture teachers and theology professors I was able to figure out the answer: our Creator Father who loved every bit of the cosmos into existence and saw that it was good did not fashion a creation that would simply be tossed out and discarded in a millisecond at the end of time!

When St. Paul wrote his letter to the Romans he had never heard of global warming. He wouldn't have recognized a fossil fuel if he tripped over a lump of coal. But in a luminous moment of theological insight Paul recognizes that the fate of humanity and the fate of the created cosmos are a shared fate. As Paul points out in the text we just read, the created world did not sin – humanity sinned. And yet, as a consequence of our sin, creation – like humanity -- became subject to corruption and death. And God's choice to become part of that creation, part of our humanity in our savior Jesus Christ, means that **all** of creation is, as Paul puts it, awaiting “with eager expectation” its future redemption.

We know that by our Baptism we are called to be part of the redemptive work of Christ, making God's unconditional love a reality for our brothers and sisters. But as Paul makes so clear, that redemptive mission extends as well to all of creation. Faced with its groaning labor pains, we are called to midwife it into birth as the “new creation” made possible by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

And when we listen carefully to the groaning of creation we ineluctably hear the cry of the poor. We are commissioned by our Father Creator to keep and till the garden of our common home, to be stewards of the great gift of our planet. And we know that when we fail at that task, either by our sins of omission – choosing to ignore the needs of the earth – or our sins of commission, willfully abusing its gifts and resources to feed our insatiable appetite for “stuff” – it is the poor who suffer.

The monsoons, hurricanes, floods, wildfires, earthquakes and other climate-related disasters do not fall equally on rich and poor. It is the poor who are still without permanent homes a year after Hurricanes Harvey and Irma. It is not the wealthy who died in a Florida nursing home that lacked a back-up generator. It is the poor – not mere scores as we were first told, but thousands – who died for lack of proper medical care in Puerto Rico as a consequence of Hurricane Maria. It is the poor who cannot get paying work as kitchen and housekeeping staff at resorts on the Gulf coast of Florida because the red algae bloom has killed the fish and driven the tourists away.

But St. Paul reminds us that “where sin abounds, grace abounds even more” or in the words of Laudato Sí “our individual failings must not blind us to our grace-infused power to do better.” Ecological conversion begins with the little daily actions and as Pope Francis urges “We must not think that these efforts are not going to change the world.”

Laudato Sí explicitly recognizes **that world is the world without end**. In the words of Pope Francis: *“At the end we will find ourselves face to face with the infinite beauty of God, and be able to read with admiration and happiness the mystery of the universe, which with us will share in unending plenitude. . . . In the meantime, we come together to take charge of this home which has been entrusted to us, knowing that all the good which exists here will be taken up into the heavenly feast.”*

- Mickey Edwards

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