29 September 2019: Choral Eucharist
Michael and All Angels


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‘Creation as Sacrament: Restoring a Broken Image’

Opening Prayer

‘Sing to the LORD a new song’. May the words I speak this day reflect something of the mystery of your Word, O Lord our Strength and Redeemer. Amen.

Creation: A Shattered Image

We can’t really avoid the tide of media images about the current state of the ecological demise as yet one more iceberg melts without trace into the surrounding oceans.

Slowly, but silently, the sea levels are rising, and in that relentless progression small island communities such as the Marshall Islands, or the tiny fragile pacific island of Kirbati, are slowly, but equally surely, sinking down, disappearing. With that process comes the shattering of lives lived simply and in communion with surrounding ecology.

The Amazon, with its immense biodiversity and capacity to absorb carbon dioxide is dwindling at an accelerating rate. With that comes a poisonous process of extinction of myriad creaturely lives and indigenous communities that are irreversibly lost.

Somehow, we have lost our first innocence of connection: any strong sense that ecological stability was possible and that God’s providence prevailed not only in human life and politics, but within the wider created order as well.

That belief in a creation, namely, that God created the world and that God’s presence actively dwells in the created world around us eludes us.

Proverbs 8:22-31 speaks of the work of wisdom in the creation of the world, one who is, in some translations, in 8.31, like a little child, ever at play in creation.
How can we learn to perceive God’s wisdom once again in creation, and restore that shattered image?

Transformation

The clue to that re-learning how to sing the new song of creation comes from the Epistle to the Colossians, which speaks of the mystery of Christ in language that mirrors that used in the Hebrew understanding of the wisdom of God. It is a wisdom poem about Christ.

Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him.

This is a statement of faith, that the whole of the created order is created through the power of Christ and for Christ. A truly astonishing claim.

He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Before all things. That means before all the incredible diversity that ever existed and that we can still see around us came to exist, Christ was there, and, once creation comes into existence, it is Christ who joins all things together.

He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.

The church is not separated from the life of creation, its life, including its sacramental life and that of creation are intricately bound together.

We cannot avoid that mystery of entanglement, it is written into the Biblical text.

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

And here lies the most important clue, the main message I want to leave us with today, that reconciliation of a broken image is possible through the power of God in Christ and in the work of the cross, reconciling and healing, ‘whether on earth or in heaven’. And that work of reconciliation is continued in the Church today.

So, how do we go about working towards that restoration?
The first step is perhaps counter intuitive. Instead of turning to creation in its brokenness, we need to take time to deliberate, to enter into a deeper reflection on Christ and the capacity for transfiguration in Him.

Mark’s Gospel tells a story of a journey where the first disciplines – the nascent Church-had the privilege of witnessing the transfiguration of Christ. The first part of that journey is climbing up a mountain side: getting in touch with the earth.

It is not easy, and we are likely to become weary, but we must venture on that pilgrimage in the company of Jesus. What that journey looks like for each of us may be different.

But we are all called to pay prayerful attention and ask the Lord, where are you leading me with you in this journey of hope? What fragment of this multisided and complex puzzle is the special work I am being called to undertake?

Hearing that call applies to all of us, whatever stage in our life’s journey, for Christ and Creation are, as Colossians reminds us, intimately bound together in a deep incarnation. We can’t make the excuse that we are too young, too old, too busy, too worried.

Peter became afraid when he witnessed the white garments and the transfigured body of Christ. He was shown a mystery that he did not fully understand.

Our fears are likely to be different from those of Peter, but the message from the Lord is the same to each one of us, ‘Listen to Him’.

Christ will indeed restore and transfigure all things, but it was a restoration that did not avoid suffering.

In the light of Christ we can learn to see again, to see the world around us as still reflecting something of the image of God, even as it shares, with us, in Christ’s suffering, pain and death.

The transfiguration is a prelude on earth to what we can anticipate in the power of Christ’s resurrection.

As Orthodox theologian John Chryssagvis has pointed out, the liturgical tradition also mirrors this passage from death to life. So, he puts beautifully in his most recent book *Creation as Sacrament*, ‘In the Resurrection of Christ, in that joyful abyss of the empty tomb and the mystical encounters between the risen Lord and his disciples, the inner secret of all creation is revealed’ (John Chryssagvis, *Creation as Sacrament: Reflections on Ecology and Spirituality* (London: T& T Clark, 2019), p. 105).
The resurrection shows God’s ultimate intention for the whole of creation, Jesus is revealed as the meaning of the whole cosmos and its destiny.

The creation, of which we are part, is being called to a cosmic transfiguration.

And a Christian leader who has paved the way for such an approach in our time is Pope Francis. I will therefore end with the second half of a prayer for Christians drawn from his encyclical Laudato Si’, which has inspired so many in this journey of transfiguration.

Triune Lord, wondrous community of infinite love,
teach us to contemplate you
in the beauty of the universe,
for all things speak of you.
Awaken our praise and thankfulness
for every being that you have made.
Give us the grace to feel profoundly joined
to everything that is.
God of love, show us our place in this world
as channels of your love
for all the creatures of this earth,
for not one of them is forgotten in your sight.
Enlighten those who possess power and money
that they may avoid the sin of indifference,
that they may love the common good, advance the weak,
and care for this world in which we live.
The poor and the earth are crying out.
O Lord, seize us with your power and light,
help us to protect all life,
to prepare for a better future,
for the coming of your Kingdom
of justice, peace, love and beauty.
Praise be to you!
Amen.