

Harvest Sunday (5th Easter)

– the resurrection and God's good intentions for the creation

Genesis 1:27-31; Romans 8:18-25; John 21:1-14

Today is the 5th Sunday in Easter and also Harvest Sunday. Harvest Sunday is the time when, traditionally, we give thanks for God's good providence towards us in the creation; when we give thanks for God's faithfulness and steadfast love as shown to us in the world about us.

...

Often when I'm out in my boat I'm amazed at the sea life which goes about its business regardless of our day to day concerns. I love those shore plovers and occasional penguins which hang around Evans Bay. It's a great experience when a pod of dolphins plays freely around the boat off Kapiti, or to realise, when you pull in a fish, that there are all these sea creatures down there doing stuff regardless of my intentions to catch them at it.

I spent most of yesterday mucking around in the church garden. What an amazingly fecund place Kelburn is. Things just grow and grow – despite, or because of, the weather. People rush to work past this place every day. So do I for that matter. How often do I ever stop and look at this ordinary garden seemingly full of weeds and straggly vines which, when you come to tidy it up, you find is full of all sorts of plants growing – again, as with the mustard seed in the parable – silently, with a kind of hidden-ness.

Last Wednesday there was this amazing deluge in Kelburn. From nowhere it blew up a storm. Just as quickly it stopped. The next day the sun was out and Friday was just amazing. These extreme episodes, or scenic holidays in the South island, seem to be the only times we notice the creation about us. Yet every day the creation continues in its path with or without us noticing or even being there.

The psalms, of course, are full of such observations. The psalmist's view is that God's grace comes to us in the creation in the form of sustenance – freely given, as Genesis also teaches, both for *our* benefit and the benefit of the *other* creatures we share the world with.

Consider just part of Psalm 104:

O LORD, how manifold are your works!
In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.

Yonder is the sea, great and wide,
creeping things innumerable are there,
living things both small and great.

There go the ships,
and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.

These all look to you
to give them their food in due season;
when you give to them, they gather it up;
when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.¹

Again, as we hear both in this psalm and in the Genesis account, the creation is “good”, in that it is made, in God's wisdom, to relate to itself just as it should; there is an interconnectedness, a “right order”, about it all and this is what makes it “good” – and we are part of this. This is no mistake or chance thing. It is part of God's intention and it will not be thwarted.

...

As I mentioned when I began, this is also the 5th Sunday in Easter – the time when we especially think about the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

As I was clearing up the garden yesterday in preparation for replanting it, I thought about the biblical mandate for us to be gardeners and guardians of the creation and how this is a holy charge we are given –

¹ Ps.104:24-28.

holy in that (as we heard in our Genesis reading), we are set aside as human beings for this purpose: to exercise God's care, protection and reign upon the *earth* – not upon the clouds or the heavens, but upon the *earth* – even that tiny ribbon of greenery just outside the door.

But I was also thinking how the physical resurrection of Jesus is also very much part of this. When Jesus turns up beside the lake, cooks a fish and invites the disciples to eat with him, he is affirming that *this* world matters. The resurrection *affirms* the *material* world, the world in which we live, not some sort higher ethereal existence.

Moreover, the resurrection points us to how the material world *will be*. The resurrected Jesus is somehow the same yet clearly different – what the scriptures call, “glorified”.² The disciples know it's him – they recognise him in the breaking of the bread and now in the catching and eating of the fish – yet he is not the same.

Jesus' “glorified” physicality contrasts with the world and our own existence as we experience it. Yes, it is a “good” world, but it is a world where this “good order” is somehow awry, it is a world that, with Paul, we sense is “*groaning*” as it awaits with “*eager longing*”, the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Our calling, then, is to be the ones who show forth the liberating, renewing life of the resurrection in our world. Our calling is to care for the creation we are part of and in so doing nurture it toward the ‘re-creation’ we share in Jesus. We do this not because we are scared senseless by an approaching global melt-down, food shortages, poisoned waterways, nuclear holocaust or any of the other green nightmares of our time.

Rather, we show forth this resurrection life because we are driven by *love* and *gratitude*: a love so strong that it transforms death into life; a gratitude that comes from our *new birth* into this life by the sheer *grace* and *goodness* of God; a grace pointed to in the creation and found completely in in the risen Jesus. We love God's creation because it

² Jn.17:24.

speaks to us of the one who loves us. We know this through the resurrection of Jesus.

How then *do* we show forth this resurrection life? How *do* we bear witness tangibly to its meaning and relevance for this world – this “good” yet broken world – God has entrusted into our care on his behalf?

To be honest, in specific terms, I’m not really sure. But I *am* sure it is somehow wrapped up in our *living* as the people of God. That is, the ones who are connected to this risen Jesus and each other in his Spirit – the same Spirit by whom Jesus was raised from the dead and whom we have received as a deposit, as it were, of both *our* future and the future of the *whole of creation*.

Let me leave you with the words of Paul:

In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth – the gospel of your salvation – and had believed in him, were marked with the *seal* of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the *pledge* of our inheritance toward redemption as God’s own people, to the praise of his glory...³

³ Eph.1:13-14.