



PROTECTING THE COMMONS – LAND SUNDAY

Seasons of Creation - 2

September 13, 2020
Anglican Parish of Raymond Terrace
www.stjohnsraymondterrace.org

SEASONS OF CREATION 2

Pray:

May I speak to you in the name of GOD – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen



^In the previous chapter of Exodus – at chapter 13: 17 When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was nearer; for God thought, ‘If the people face war, they may change their minds and return to Egypt.’ 18So God led the people by the roundabout way of the wilderness towards the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of the land of Egypt prepared for battle. GOD was leading His people to the promised land. But the army of Egypt was pursuing them. There seemed to be no apparent way of escape, but the LORD opened up a dry path through the sea. Sometimes we can find ourselves caught up in a problem and see no way out. ^In the immortal words of Lance Corporal Jones – DON’T PANIC! GOD can and will, open up a way.

^Some scholars believe that the Israelites did not cross the main body of the Red Sea but one of the shallow lakes or marshes north of it that dry up at certain times of year – or perhaps a smaller branch of the Red Sea where the water could have been shallow enough to wade across. HOWEVER, the Bible clearly states in our passage today: ²¹ Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night; and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided. ²²The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. Also, the water was deep enough to cover the Egyptian chariots. The GOD who created the earth and water performed a mighty miracle at exactly the right time to demonstrate His great power and love for His people.

No evidence of this great exodus has been discovered in Egyptian historical records. This was because it was a common practice for Egyptian Pharaohs not to record

their defeats. They even went so far as to take existing records and delete names of traitors and political adversaries. Pharaoh would have been especially anxious not to record that his great army was destroyed chasing a band of runaway slaves. Since either the Egyptians failed to record the exodus or the record has not yet been found, it is impossible to place a precise date on this event.

Psalm 114 tells us that the mighty GOD delivered Israel from Egypt and that we can celebrate GOD's great work in our lives.

In the passage from his letter to the Romans, Paul talks about the weak and the strong. Who is weak in the faith and who is strong? We are all weak in some areas and strong in others. Our faith is strong in an area if we can survive contact with sinners without falling into their patterns. It is weak if we must avoid certain activities, people, or places in order to protect our spiritual life. It is important to take a self-inventory in order to determine

our strengths and weaknesses. When in doubt we could ask ourselves “Can I influence others for good rather than being influenced by them?” We always need to find a balance between our strengths and weaknesses and our boldness or inability to do CHRIST’s work in the world.

There will always be differences of opinion within the Church; but Paul tells us not to argue about these but to hand these situations with love. We always need to accept, listen to and respect others – and differences of opinion are an opportunity for us to learn something new and enrich our relationships.

Weak faith is immature faith that has not yet developed the muscle it needs to stand against external pressure.

^Our principle should be:

1. In the essentials of our faith – UNITY
2. In the non-essentials of our faith – LIBERTY
3. In everything – LOVE

The ancient system of sacrifice was at the centre of the religious, social, and domestic life of the Roman world.

After a sacrifice was presented to a pagan god, only part of it was burned. The remainder was often sent to the market to be sold. Thus, a Christian might easily – even unknowingly – buy such meat in the marketplace or eat it at the home of a friend. Should a Christian, then, question the source of his meat? Some thought there was nothing wrong with eating meat that had been offered to idols because idols were worthless, phony, and empty. Others carefully checked the source of the meat or gave it up all together, in order to avoid a guilty conscience.

Each of us is accountable to CHRIST – not to others. While the Church must be uncompromising in its stand against activities that are expressly forbidden by Scripture, it should NOT create additional rules and regulations and give them equal standing with GOD's law. Many times, we are guilty of basing our moral judgements on opinion, personal dislikes, or cultural bias rather than on the Word of GOD – showing a weakness in their own faith that GOD is not powerful enough to

guide His children. When it is our turn to stand before GOD, we are not going to be worried about what our Christian neighbour has done.

Our Gospel passage for today talks about GOD's mercy to us. The rabbis taught that people should forgive those who offend them – but only three times. Peter, trying to be especially generous, asked JESUS if seven – the so-called perfect number – was enough times to forgive someone. By JESUS answered: “77 times” – meaning that we shouldn't even keep track of how many times we forgive someone. We should always forgive those who are truly repentant, no matter how many times they ask. In Bible times, serious consequences awaited those who could not pay their debts. A person lending money could seize the borrower who couldn't pay and force him or his family to work until the debt was paid. The debtor could be thrown into prison, or his family could be sold into slavery to help pay off the debt. It was hoped that the debtor, while in prison, would sell off his landholdings or

that relatives would pay his debt. If not, the debtor could remain in prison for life.

Because GOD has forgiven all our sins, we should not withhold forgiveness from others. Realising how completely CHRIST has forgiven us should produce a free and generous attitude of forgiveness towards others. When we don't forgive others, we are setting ourselves outside and above CHRIST's law of love.



In 1964 Garrett Hardin wrote his famous paper entitled “Tragedy of the Commons”. In it he tells the story of 2 adjacent properties – one privately owned and one common property. Hardin observed that the state of the private farm was much better than that of the common. He explained that the owner of the private property understood that grazing his cattle on a certain patch until the patch was fully grazed and then moving the cattle along to another patch in order allow the grazed patch to recover. This was important because the owner had a personal interest in the longevity of his property. At the

same time, the common was overgrazed because the herders had no personal interest in protecting what was held in common.

This story of the tragedy of the commons has become an important story in understanding how we are to care for the environment. Hardin's story tells us that unless we begin to care for common property as shared property for the benefit of all, we will all suffer the consequences of systems breaking down. Already we are beginning to see the impact that our use of fossil fuels has on the climate. For the past two decades the leaders of the world have been meeting to discuss how best they might respond to the impending climate crisis. The basis of all these talks been that every country is focussed on what they need; and talks have often stalled because one country waits for another to make the first move. All this while carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere increases, storms become greater in number and severity and record high and low temperatures are set on an almost annual basis. The same can be seen in other systems

such as the oceans, which are becoming more acidic, forest that are being felled, water resources drying up and arable land becoming deserts. This was the thinking in 1964 and, it seems, not much has changed. When I was commissioned as Rector of St John's, I was privileged to have a smoking ceremony of welcome as part of the service. Country is particularly important to our Aboriginal brothers and sisters. The land and they are one and they know how to look after it. May we learn from them how we can improve our stewardship of this land.

Non-Indigenous people and land owners might consider land as something they own, a commodity to be bought and sold, an asset to make profit from, but also a means to make a living off it or simply 'home' [1]. They 'develop' land, as if it was unfinished or raw.

For Aboriginal people the relationship is much deeper. Palyku woman Ambelin Kwaymullina explains:

"For Aboriginal peoples, country is much more than a place. Rock, tree, river, hill, animal, human – all were

formed of the same substance by the Ancestors who continue to live in land, water, sky. Country is filled with relations speaking language and following Law, no matter whether the shape of that relation is human, rock, crow, wattle. Country is loved, needed, and cared for, and country loves, needs, and cares for her peoples in turn. Country is family, culture, identity. Country is self." [2]

They have a profound spiritual connection to land. Aboriginal law and spirituality are intertwined with the land, the people and creation, and this forms their culture and sovereignty.

The health of land and water is central to their culture. Land is their mother, is steeped in their culture, but also gives them the responsibility to care for it. They "feel the pain of the shapes of life in country as pain to the self". [2] Aboriginal languages described intimately the land and the culture of the people who spoke them. That is why the removal of Aboriginal people from their ancestral

lands has been so disastrous because the loss of country leads to loss of that language and culture.



May we pray:

Gracious Lord – we thank you for giving us this earth on which to live. Help us to care for it in order to live sustainably and to reduce and eliminate non-essential usage and damage. This we pray in the name of JESUS.

Amen



Life Application Study Bible

<http://sustainable-preaching.org/2020/09/13/15th-sunday-after-pentecost-season-of-creation-2/> Date accessed 12/09/2020

<https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/land/meaning-of-land-to-aboriginal-people#:~:text=Aboriginal%20law%20and%20spirituality%20are%20intertwined%20with%20the,gives%20them%20the%20responsibility%20to%20care%20for%20it.> Date accessed 12/09/2020

Source: Meaning of land to Aboriginal people - Creative Spirits, retrieved from <https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/land/meaning-of-land-to-aboriginal-people> Date accessed 12/09/2020