



19 May 2013  
The Day of Pentecost  
Choral Evensong  
Genesis 6 vv. 5–13  
Galatians 5 vv. 13–26

**The Renewal of Creation**  
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*For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as oneself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.*

*Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your people and renew the face of your creation pouring on us the gifts of your Spirit and kindling in us the fire of your love.*

In 2008, I received an unusual request: would I show 17 Melanesian bishops and their wives around St John's College. The Episcopal visitors had travelled to the UK ahead of the Lambeth Conference and were visiting Cambridge as part of their experience of England. Now the worldwide Anglican Communion is a curious and wonderful thing, but it does have some complex political dynamics – not all bishops or provinces have been completely loyal in spirit to the leadership of Canterbury. So, towards the end of the tour, I tentatively asked one of the bishops where he and his brother bishops stood in such matters. His answer was refreshingly categorical and to my pleasure a heartfelt eulogy to the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Williams followed. As we parted the Bishop of Vanuatu, as he was, passed me his business card and generously offered to host me 'if I was ever passing through' the archipelago of islands 2000 kilometres East to North East of Australia.

I have to confess I don't know a great deal about Vanuatu, other than if you tunnelled straight down through the earth you would miss it - but not by too much: So, the chances of me 'passing through' were and are pretty remote. It is a world away...

It is a world away....but of course, that is exactly what it isn't. I am of course alluding to the simple, and has been pointed out – 'inconvenient' truth that we live in an age in which human action is altering and changing the environment, and not for the better.

Just a couple of weeks ago, scientists at a research facility on top of a volcano in Hawaii reported that average daily levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere surpassed 400 parts per million for the first time; that is for the first time in human history. We are no longer passengers on this globe hurtling through space, rather we are creating a different future for our planet with consequences for all its inhabitants.

We may of course shrug or wring our hands, but resignation is not an option for the inhabitants of Vanuatu (among many, many places), as their President put it addressing the United Nations in 2008:

*'Unless the present trend of global warming is reversed through sincere and concerted international action through the UN framework, some of our Pacific colleague nations will be submerged. If such a tragedy does happen, then the UN and its members would have failed in their first and most basic duty to a member nation and its innocent people.'*

The connection between responsible sincere moral human action (let's call it righteousness) and the world as God's creation is of course central to the Biblical narrative. Most obviously in that very familiar story, reeking of Sunday School, that of Noah and the Ark: In the face of evil and violence and corruption, one just man sees the world in a very different way and as a consequence an ark of salvation is constructed with that wonderful combination of human skill and craftsmanship and the propelling moral energies which are entailed in all the most inspiring of human endeavours: our globalised, ever smaller world is not so different from that of the righteous patriarch, Noah.

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In a pair of rather shocking images, the Roman Catholic and Franciscan theologian, Leonardo Boff describes Western Europeans as the ‘hyenas of humanity’ who through their colonial projects imposed their interests on weaker peoples with extreme violence and terror and have engaged in opportunistic and rapacious plunder of their natural resources - ushering in what he describes as the ‘Tyranosauric age’ of globalization - in which minimally accountable multi-national companies suck the life-blood out of weaker economies with little regard for the massive ecological and environmental impact of their actions. Hyenas, ty-ranno- saurs - such images are of course dramatic, overstated, hyperbolic - intended to shock and are wide open to a whole range of criticisms and qualifications, yet Boff makes a powerful and uncontested basic point – our political and economic practices are not globally sustainable; not fit for practice. In Paul’s language we are currently destined to be consumed ‘one of another’ probably in a matter of decades.

We need then to undergo a process of conversion, of quite literally seeing the world differently and responding with appropriate action and commitment. The first German cosmonaut, Sigmund Jahn looking back on the earth in 1976 reflected on such a ‘seeing’ with simplicity:

*Political borders are something of the past. National borders are also something of the past. We are a sole people and each of us is responsible for the upkeep of the fragile balance of the earth. We are its guardians and we must be concerned with our common future’.*

For we all share this blue marble, this earth, this Common Home. But of course as housemates, humanity has a profound problem: We don’t seem to know how to draw up the house rules and more importantly how to make everyone stick to them.

The UN has a key part to play, but it will not solve the environmental crisis. Scientists have a key part to play, but they will not resolve the problem of global warming. Rational arguments about the ‘economics of enough’, about sustainability, about an abstract ‘global citizenship’ will not by themselves heal our wounded planet. Rather consciousness raising and a changed perspective is essential to the renewal of a creation marred by the despoiling, competitive avarice of modern humanity. But as with Noah’s Ark, expertise and hands-on know-how must be allied to righteousness, to heartfelt moral energy and action; we need to generate a much deeper sense of connection and solidarity between people and we need to cultivate virtues which bring a human face and personal accountability to globalisation.

Today is Pentecost when we as Christians celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit. That Life-giving, creative power of God which we understand as intimately involved in the Creation but which also unites people of different cultures and languages by breaking down barriers and misunderstanding, yet which also comes into the individual believer to transform, to bring about a renewal and flourishing, as St Paul puts it - a spiritual fruiting of the individual such that they are capable of a powerful, new, neighbourliness enriched by love and patience and gentleness and self-control : What an extraordinarily inspiring vision Pentecost entails – linking as it does Creation to personal renewal through a creative transformation of human communities, an image of an expansive human existence which St Paul contrasts so starkly with the self-indulgence that leads people (in his graphic language) to bite and devour one another in a frenzy of competition and envy.



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For Paul that transforming new neighbourliness meant seeing beyond the powerful identities and status distinctions that shaped his world to a more equitable and generous horizon of the good; seeing and living beyond the life-defining distinctions of Jew and Gentile or that between citizens or free-people in the Roman world and the mass of enslaved persons in the engine-room of a brutal empire; so too for us in our small, shrinking globalised world: we need to hear Paul's challenge to us for we require a re-newed and deeper vision of cross-cultural Christianity, of who our brothers and sisters and neighbours might actually be, what challenges they face in their daily lives; we need a more profound imaginative solidarity, a fresh commitment to a Cross-cultural Christianity for our day – capable of reaching across divisions of status and circumstance, between powerful economic powers and small island nations alike if we are to build an ark, the salvational vessel we all so desperately need.

Part of such a Cross-cultural Christian discipleship clearly involves that fruit of the spirit – self-control – we must exercise restraint in our use of resources as individuals and communities and institutions, must take responsibility for our own impact on the environment - knowing full well that it is a drop in the ocean, that 'it may not make any real difference' yet doing it anyway. Another part lies in building bridges and relationships between us and those in other parts of the world – learning and knowing and understanding something of the lives of others, of men and women and children (like us) yet who struggle with the impact of environmental degradation or indeed poverty or deprivation: literally 'bearing them in mind' – having them 'there' - not just in our prayers, but as part of our everyday thoughts and decisions and actions, large and small. And finally we can perhaps deepen our support for one of the many charities which seeks to transform the lives of others and our environment, be it Christian Aid or Oxfam or Medicine without Borders, or indeed pray for, and rejoice in, the many smaller inspirational projects or charitable initiatives which harness human skill and ingenuity to the fire of God's love and thirst for justice. So Come Holy Spirit, our souls inspire, today, here, now, to your glory and to the food of all. Amen