

I am a third generation vegetarian. My grandparents were completely vegetarian; my mother ate meat once in her life and didn't like it. But my father loved meat and so we were all brought up as omnivores; roast meat on Sunday which reappeared in different forms for as long as my mother could eke it out and fish on Wednesday (because that was the day the fishmonger came to our street. )

My first inkling that this might not be my own path came when I was about eight. We were walking home from church and I was chatting away as eight year olds tend to do. I declared that "All things bright and beautiful" was my favorite hymn. My mother, who was often disturbed by exuberance or enthusiasm, replied, "So why do you eat animals?"

This was an entirely new thought for me. The first time my theology and my life experience collided. There was no easy answer; part of me dismissed it as "Mom being Mom" while another part stored it away as a difficult question to be revisited.

As a young adult I discovered that meat is a very inefficient way to get protein since the animal has to eat pounds of grain and beans to produce one pound of meat and we could just eat the grain and beans ourselves. In fact, at that time, it was calculated that if people in the rich countries ate just 10% less meat and the resulting savings in grain and beans were redistributed there would be no hungry people. I hate to be hungry and I hate for anyone else to be hungry so it was an easy decision to eat less meat.

In the last decade I have come to understand that the way we raise animals for food is a huge contributor to global warming; I have realized that the way we grow most vegetables and transport them is also harmful to the health of the planet, sometimes to the health of the fieldworkers, and sometimes to our own health; and I have discovered that the way we raise and kill livestock is rarely without suffering; even more recently I learned that cheese production is not much better than beef production in its effects on global warming.

I have also found that a vegan diet is in many ways the most healthy for our bodies. Besides which, there are many, many delicious vegan recipes these days – it's no longer just a load of old lentils.

So as you know, as an act of stewardship of creation and of my own body, I chose to eat a predominately organic, locally-sourced vegan diet. However, I'm not very good at keeping rules so I make exceptions and I never chose to go hungry in the presence of food, whatever it is! But eating vegan has become an important part of my spiritual practice; it promotes the gospel values of non-violence because I cease to contribute to the suffering and violence caused by our systems of animal husbandry and reduces the amount that my daily life oppresses the planet and other people.

On Wednesday of this last week, the church remembered Anselm who was Archbishop of Canterbury in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Anselm was a brilliant theologian who is usually remembered for three things; the first is his definition of theology as "faith seeking understanding". He saw clearly that the understanding of our faith cannot be divorced from the living of it. The second is

his philosophical proof of the existence of God based on the idea that God is that of which nothing higher can be thought. And the third is his explanation of atonement – the mechanics of how Christ’s death on the cross serves to reconcile us with God.

England in the eleventh century was a feudal society and it was within that framework that Anselm re-interpreted the satisfaction theory of atonement that was current at the time. In the feudal system, serfs worked on an estate for an overlord, usually a knight, who protected the estate from attack. The serfs owed the knight a debt of honor for their protection and livelihood. Anselm pictured God as the overlord of the world to whom is owed a debt of honor. But we humans cannot pay the debt because of our sinful natures. Yet God, the overlord, cannot overlook such an offence and demands satisfaction. While it is humanity who owes the debt, the only person actually capable of paying the debt is God himself. God therefore became man so that he himself could satisfy God's offended character. Christ's death accrued a superabundance of merit which then became available for distribution to those who believe.<sup>1</sup>

That theory has been foundational for later theologians. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Protestant reformers shifted its focus to concentrate not merely on divine offense but on divine justice. In this view, God's righteousness demands punishment for human sin. God in his grace both exacts punishment and supplies the one to bear it.

The reason they made this shift was because that was the way the world worked in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. This was the time of the Tudors. Kings and queens, princes and lords demanded allegiance from their subjects and administered sharp justice for those whose loyalty came into question. Theology, faith seeking understanding, found a way to understand based on the economic and social structures of the day.

Five hundred years later, we do the same thing. As we seek to understand our faith and reinterpret it in a way that makes sense to us today, we look at it through our own perceptual screens. In thinking about theology we use insights from science, we relate it to our social and economic systems, we take that which has come to us in the tradition of the church and in the scriptures and use our reason to reframe the ancient truths. This is the three legged stool of Anglican theology – scripture, tradition and reason.

Just as my understanding of food and diet as an issue of stewardship has come a long way since I was eight, and I have brought my behavior more and more into line with my faith, so theology has developed over the centuries and our understanding of our faith continues to develop as humanity learns more and experiences new challenges.

We are facing a major challenge now. Never before has there been so much global awareness. Never before have we as humanity, together faced such a global disaster. Never before have 175 nations agreed to work together on anything; but yesterday delegates from 175 nations signed the Paris climate agreement.

These times call for new theology. A theology which not only talks about the nature of God as present within Creation and re-interprets the atonement in the light of that new understanding,

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.theopedia.com/satisfaction-theory-of-the-atonement>

but which also re-examines the place of humanity in this ever-expanding universe. And I think that the second lesson this morning from Paul's final letter, his letter to the Romans provides the basis for this new theology. "Creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God." Our finding and claiming our inheritance as the daughters and sons of God is what creation is waiting for. This is what is going to make the difference in this global crisis. The Paris Agreement may be signed but there is a long way to go – not only has it to be ratified by the nations, not least our own, but it also has to be put into effect.

That will require us realizing that we are truly connected with one another. Scientific advances have helped us come to understand in entirely new way that the whole of creation is interlinked. The melting of the Arctic cap is causing drought in Los Osos; a new virus in one country quickly spreads to another; in experiments with tiny particles our thoughts can change the nature of reality. The little things we do and think really have an impact. Just like the mustard seed. Mustard makes thousands of seeds which can remain dormant and then spread whenever conditions are right – forcing out other vegetation.

This, Jesus tells us, is like the kingdom of God. Someone scatters seeds and they mysteriously grow. Mustard seeds are scattered over a wide area by birds and animals. The effect we have by the simplest of actions is mysteriously broadcast and multiplied.

As the daughters and sons of God, what we do through our thoughts and actions has a big impact. We can have a huge impact by simply changing what we eat. You'll be glad to know I don't expect you to become vegan!

But just as we can bring about social justice by being informed and active citizens, so we can effect farming and husbandry by the way we spend our food dollars. Buying locally and buying vegetables and fruits that are in season reduces greenhouse gases as well as supporting the local economy.

We learned from the Sustainable Seafood talk on Monday that the Morro Bay fisheries use mainly sustainable practices so buy your fish locally – from our own Jo Oliver, direct from Mark Tognazzini at Dockside or from Wild Bay who sell at Farmers Market. Never buy farmed fish and just give up on shrimp – there is no sustainable way to harvest it - for every pound of shrimp caught, four pounds of other fish die for no purpose, and shrimp farms are an environmental disaster. Poultry contributes much less to climate change than other meats but please think about the suffering caused by chicken farming and buy cage free chickens whenever you can.

Believe me, I know it's not easy. What do you do when your recipe calls for avocado but the only avocados at Ralphs come from Mexico and though you can get local ones at Native Café they close at 3 and it's already 3:10? Do you spend the time and the gas to drive into Morro Bay to get local ones? And when money is short do you really pay an extra 50cents for organic celery?

These are questions that only you can answer in cooperation with the Holy Spirit. But I hope your take home from this Earth Day service is that what we do, think and say matters, and

spread and multiply like the mustard seeds in the kingdom of God. And changing our habits actually does change the world. So it's time to roll up our sleeves and do it.