

On Thursday we started a \*six week class<sup>1</sup> focusing on Thomas Merton who was a Trappist monk and priest. Merton wrote over 70 books, mostly on spirituality, social justice and pacifism. This year is the fiftieth anniversary of his death and so it seems appropriate in this Season of Creation to look at his ideas about creation.

In 1964, Merton wrote,\* *“We live on a planet which has reached the point of extreme hazard at which it may plunge to its own ruin, unless there is some renewal of life, some new direction, some providential reorganization of its forces for survival . . . or . . . The coming upheaval will soon sweep everything away.”*

It may be that such a \*renewal of life is underway in our midst but you don't need me to tell you that it's difficult to see. It seems that our efforts are too little, and too late. In fact, last month the New York Times Magazine published an article entitled,\* “Losing Earth; the Decade We Almost Stopped Climate Change” which argues that in the 1980s we could have done something that would have made a big difference but now it is impossible.

Merton was deeply aware of his own historical reality. He said, \**“That I should be born in 1915, that I should be a contemporary of Auschwitz, Hiroshima, Vietnam and the Watts riots, are things about which I was not first consulted. Yet they are also events in which, whether I like it or not, I am deeply and personally involved”*<sup>2</sup>

We are people who are deeply and personally involved in many events and realities which we would prefer not to be happening. \*The biggest of these is surely that our world is falling apart and yet we cannot find the political will nor the vision to create a more sustainable future for all beings.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nowyouknowmedia.com/prophet-and-mystic-of-creation-on-retreat-with-thomas-merton.html>

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Merton, Contemplation in a World of Action, 164.

There is a small book in the Old Testament called Esther. \*Esther was a young woman in the Jewish diaspora in Persia. As a result of winning a beauty contest she became Queen. When the Jews were threatened with an ethnic cleansing campaign, she was encouraged by her uncle Mordecai to go to the King and intervene on their behalf. He said to her, “For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” Esther 4:14

Unlike Mordecai, we don’t know if relief and deliverance will arise from another place, but \*we are the ones who are here at this time in history and who knows whether we have not come to the earth for such a time as this? We are the ones who are here at this time in history and we are the ones who get to co-create the next steps with each other and with God.

Kathleen Deignan, the academic and nun who is teaching the DVD series we are watching about Merton says

the violation of the sacred earth is a spiritual crisis, a crisis for the Creator God for whom creation is a glorious experiment of kenosis—of divine outpouring. God is enmeshed in the flesh of our Earth. \*Likewise, creation is an experiment for the human who is created to receive and become this gift of divine enmeshment in radical freedom. \*Such a profoundly religious crisis therefore requires an unparalleled radical spiritual transformation that will fund us not simply to survive but thrive as beings bearing the divine image, missioned to be the gardeners and governors of paradise.

I’ll read that again...

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\*God is enmeshed in the flesh of our Earth, and humans are created to receive and become this gift of enmeshment in radical freedom. That's a pretty amazing statement.

God is not out there or up there somewhere, but is embedded in the very stuff of which our world is made and \*has incarnated as a human so we are the ones who get to receive God's gift and live it out.

For me, this changes the whole thing. \*It's like one of those pictures where from one perspective you see a vase while from another you see two faces. It's difficult for me to see the vase because I keep seeing the faces but let me try to describe the vase I think I'm seeing.

The ecological crisis is not something that we will sort out in a technical or logistical way, though it is that – the urgent need for us to reduce our carbon footprint thirty years ago already is still there- that's the faces. The vase is that God is as invested in this as we are and that there is a profound spiritual change that is perhaps already happening and that will provide the energy for the necessary action to be taken.

\*God has given God's self to us in an unprecedented gift which we remember and participate in in a focused and condensed way every time we celebrate the Eucharist together. We receive and participate in God's gift in many other ways but in the Eucharist it is particularly concentrated and powerful as it is symbolized in the bread and wine and in the gathered Body of Christ.

It is up to us as the generation who are realizing the disaster that humanity has created, \*it is up to us to understand and receive God's gift in a new way, one where we are conscious co-creators with God of the New Creation.

I feel very inarticulate about this. If your take-away from this sermon is that the planetary crisis is a spiritual crisis then I have only partially succeeded in communicating the vision.

Throughout the Biblical narrative, God was enabled to act \*when the people cried out to him. Think of the Exodus for example – God told Moses that he had heard his people's cry. God's creative and powerful intervention was made possible by the prayers and the desire of the people. God co-created with them. God did not just get rid of Pharaoh in some divinely imposed regime change but empowered and supported Moses and the Hebrew people.

When the longing of our hearts and minds is for \*renewal of life, when we come together in the Eucharist representing the whole of Creation and our longing is for the life of Christ to be renewed and demonstrated in us, then, then we are acting in our own freedom and we enable God to act in hers and something new will break forth as the prophets have declared these many millennia.

I confess to you, my brothers and sisters, that although I have been committed to simple living ever since I first read \*Small is Beautiful forty years ago, it has not always been the deepest longing of my heart for there to be a renewal of life on this planet. I have longed for love, I have longed for security, I have longed for success. Only rarely have I longed for planetary healing.

And this is partly because I am self-absorbed, and partly because I don't want to believe that the planet is dying. \*I look at the world around us here and I am profoundly grateful. We live in remarkable peace and prosperity. Yes, we worry about water and try to conserve it; the

ongoing drought is part of our experience of climate change. But on our planet, 1.1 *billion* people lack access to safe drinking water. 2.6 billion people lack adequate sanitation. 1.8 million people die every year as a result, many of them small children.<sup>3</sup> I don't actually want to know that just as I don't want to know about the \*animals who are dying in the sixth great extinction.

If I refuse to know then I cannot long. If I imagine that becoming as carbon neutral as possible will engage the greater forces human and divine then I can imagine I am doing all I can. \*But God responds to the longing of our hearts. Because we are radically free, God will only act in power when she hears the longing of his people, when she hears our cry.

And this gives me hope. Without God this planet is doomed. But if we co-create with God, if we call out in our hearts to God, \*if we come to the eucharist together not just for personal solace but also as a way to engage in the healing, as a way to engage and participate in the life of God with a vision and a hope of new life, then I think there is a possibility that we may yet turn and find \*a new way of life for all beings.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.worldwatercouncil.org/en/water-supply-sanitation>