

## No Separation

Isaiah 40:21–28a

Psalm 136:1–9, 25–26

Revelation 22:1–5

John 3:16–17

Welcome to the Season of Creation! It's good to be here with you all again after two weeks of being away enjoying the wonders of God's Creation. I was grateful to be north of the fires and so suffered very little from the smoke. We stayed in a little house with a veranda that looked into the forest and every morning and evening the bird feeder was visited by a tribe of steller's jays. One of the interesting things about these birds is that, a bit like pelicans, their gullets expand so they can cram themselves full of seed as quickly as possible and then go off on their own to actually eat it.

It has always given me joy to be in Creation, and I know that many of us find it easier to connect with God when we are in nature than when we are among people and buildings. But it's a little bizarre to say that it gives me joy to be in Creation, as if there were ever a time when I am not in Creation. I am a part of God's good creation and so are you. We are not somehow separate. We are not separate from the environment we live in... we are an integral part of it.

Last November I had the privilege to spend a few days on northern Yellowstone, watching wolves. The re-introduction of wolves has had a big impact on the rest of the environment there. Wolves have reduced the elk population, which in turn has reduced overgrazing, and that has led to greater diversity, less soil erosion and clearer streams and rivers. I wish I could say that the introduction of humanity into parts of the planet which were previously wild has been as helpful. Unfortunately, we have overgrazed; we have used and continue to use more resources than the planet has to give.

Like the steller's jays, we have grabbed as much as we can, and filled ourselves and our storage units with much more than we need to live abundantly. And in the process we have left little for others.

We have turned beautiful rivers into polluted and dead waterways. We have put pollution and hothouse gases into the atmosphere. We have trashed not only the land but the water too.

Because we imagined that somehow we were separate from Creation. We didn't realize that we are an integral part of God's beloved creation. We imagined that somehow we were more important than all of the rest. And we often behaved as if nothing mattered but our comfort and convenience.

Yesterday I heard some news that made me cry. It wasn't about the mosque that exploded in Bangladesh, or about the sea creatures killed and suffering from the Mauritius oil spill. No, it was this:

“The Trump administration has instructed federal agencies to end racial sensitivity trainings that address topics like white privilege and critical race theory, calling them "divisive, anti-American propaganda.”<sup>1</sup>

It made me cry because in refusing to acknowledge white privilege, in describing critical race theory which enables us to see the racist structure of our society as anti-American, the President is actively supporting the opposite. He is actively supporting ideas of inherent white supremacy. This is a small step toward declaring a new time of apartheid and it is another indication that the values of this administration are not the values of Jesus.

I mention this now because there is a parallel between our behavior towards those who are non-white and our behavior towards non-human Creation. The same sense of separation and superiority which enables one group to look down on others, also enables us to see ourselves as separate from, and better than, the rest of Creation. The same hubris which enables us to not notice the policies which lock people of color into communities where the air is the most polluted, the temperature the hottest and the opportunities the least is the same hubris which allows us to strip mine for our convenience; to kill elephants for their tusks so that we may enjoy ivory; and to set fires which burn vast areas of prime forest land in order to expand grazing land.

It is as though we stubbornly misread today’s gospel, John 3:16. Sometimes I see people with the verse reference on their bumper sticker or back window. A neighbor has it on his front door. John 3:16. And I wonder how they understand it.

“For God so loved the world that he sent his only-begotten son.” God so loved the world, the cosmos. God so loved it all not just the white bits, not just the rich bits, not just the convenient bits, not just the beautiful bits. God so loved the world, the whole of creation- yes even the black holes which astonished scientists this week with their massive collision in inter-stellar space.<sup>2</sup>

A collision that happened 7 billion years ago. And God was right there, loving them as they collided. God was right there. And God saw that it was good.

Every part of Creation from the smallest quark to the largest black hole came from God and returns to God. We are made from stardust and sunlight. 3.5 billion years ago there was no oxygen in Earth’s atmosphere. We could not have survived. But ancient microorganisms breathed in carbon dioxide and breathed out oxygen. You and I owe our very existence to the stars, the sun and a bunch of algae. And in and through it all God provides life, that mysterious animating force which means that we are more than a collection of dead cells.

And yet humanity has the cheek, the temerity, to think that we are separate from the rest and that we can use everything the earth provides without concern for the planet itself or for those who will come after.

Separation.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2020/09/05/910053496/trump-tells-agencies-to-end-trainings-on-white-privilege-and-critical-race-theor>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.extremetech.com/extreme/314548-scientists-detect-new-kind-of-black-hole-from-massive-collision>

Sin is separation from God and sin is what separates us from God. As we humans grow up we gradually separate from our parents. As humanity grew up it separated from God – our spiritual ancestors gave us the story of the fall and the expulsion from the Garden of Eden to understand that separation. But we have made separation into a god and worshiped it. Rugged individualism. Manifest destiny.

My friends, once we are grown adults, separation is sin.

And that is exactly why God sent his only begotten son – so that we might no longer be separate – so that we might be reconciled with God. We separated ourselves from God so God in Jesus crossed the barrier and chose to be reunited with humanity and through us with the rest of the cosmos. That is what God has done for us.

The root cause of our failure to care for this planet, the root cause of racism and white privilege is separation and the root cause of separation is fear and the root cause of fear is sin. Because if we truly believe that God so loved the world that she sent her only son, we do not have room for fear and we no longer need to be separate, to circle our wagons against the fearsome enemy.

In the next few months we will probably see more news like yesterday's. We will see more attempts to separate, to set us against other people, to scapegoat liberal activists, immigrants, people of color, losers and suckers in general. It will be hard not to get caught up in the cultural whirl of separation, of us against them. It will be hard not to see supporters of a different political party as separate and inferior.

As the people of God, we need to resist. We need to resist policies that discriminate, that oppress, that separate. We need to resist values that corrupt, that affirm anger, hatred and separation. And we need to resist those same tendencies in ourselves.

And we can do it because Jesus has already been there, done that. The cross proclaims that the separation between God and humanity no longer exists. In the cross, the worst that humanity could do came together to kill God but that was not the end of the story. In the resurrection, God came right back at us with incredible love for the cosmos. God refused to die. God refused to be separate.

That is what God has done.

Now, what will we do?