

Heartbreak

[Deuteronomy 30:15-20](#)

[Psalm 1](#)

Isaac the Syrian

[Luke 14:25-33](#)

Welcome to the first Sunday in the Season of Creation which we celebrate during September. This is a bitter-sweet time because we get to thank and praise God for the never-ending wonders of God's creation at the same time that we grieve humanity's failure to adequately care for it. It is the same drama of God's faithfulness, our failure and the call to repentance and newness of life that we see throughout the Biblical narrative. Just as in the Old Testament stories, this is both an individual and a corporate call. When the prophets spoke, they spoke to the people of Israel as a whole and to the king in particular, but repentance and metanoia had to happen at individual as well as corporate levels.

In the first reading today, Moses was speaking to the people as a whole but individuals had to make up their own minds within the tribe. That is even more true today. If we are to prevent further global warming it requires individual action and corporate action on every level. We do not need to save the planet – if all humans went to Mars, the planet would heal and balance itself. It would be different than when we were here but the planet is ok. What is not ok is the behavior of the millions of people living on the planet. It is humanity which needs healing. Moses' words, "I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him," are as relevant today as they were thousands of years ago.

In today's gospel reading, Jesus was speaking to the large crowd that was following him. He lets them know that this is not a spectator sport, this is not an easy path – the way of discipleship may be unpopular and

difficult and he suggests that they should really think about it before they commit. It may be that as disciples they will need to behave in ways that separate them from their families. As their values become those of Christ, they will no longer be walking in sync with their people and may need to find others to associate with. Just like when you stop smoking or drinking you need to be around people who don't smoke or drink to help you stay away from your addiction, so when you get serious about following Jesus you need to be around people who are travelling the same way.

And that is the Way of Love.

The way of love is also the way of life that Moses talked about – it is the choice for life, all life. Jesus summed it up as two great commandments, love God with every last bit of you and love your neighbor as yourself. Our dedication to God, our commitment to the path of discipleship, means that we take love seriously. And so we look at the implications of our way of life and ask how loving is it?

I am constantly astonished by how blessed we are to live in this place where food is abundant, beauty is all around us and we have peace and security. The way of love calls us to count the cost of our living such a prosperous lifestyle. The cost to others and the cost to the planet.

I didn't watch you all arrive this morning but I have done enough times to know that most of us drove here in our own cars, alone. I certainly did. We have the privilege of personal transport. We can have a church out of town that is difficult to get to without a car. But each car comes at a cost to the planet – a cost in direct emissions and in the costs of mining for metal and oil and all the complex components – and the cost of disposing of all that when the car is no longer useful. We could reduce some of that by carpooling. Yet few of us do.

That is just one example of how our way of life impacts creation but is hard for us to change even when it is the loving thing to do. We can

think about every aspect of our life – where our clothing comes from, how it is manufactured and made; the people who cut and stitch for long hours in crowded factories so that we can have cheap clothes, the oil and other chemicals used to make synthetic fabrics, the people whose air and water supply are affected by the industrial plants that produce them. We can think about our food – the people who work in the fields often for low pay in poor working conditions, the people who work with chemical pesticides and fertilizers, the gas that is used transporting food. We can think about the trash we throw away, the trees that make the paper plates and napkins... I can go on and on.

We put our organic waste in the green bin not because it is now the law, but because it is the loving thing for the planet and also for humanity. Loving our neighbor means making an effort, doing things differently from other people, perhaps even irritating our families as we live more and more conscious of the presence of the Christ in all life and the effects of our actions.

There is a cost to making changes, but there is also a cost to the way we ‘normally’ live, a cost to the planet and a cost to other people. In the past couple of years we have become much more aware of the cost to indigenous and Black people. White folk have developed a lifestyle that seems effortless by always taking the best for ourselves. We live on land that was once inhabited and loved by the Chumash people. Not only did we just take it, but for fifty years, Americans sought to kill every Indian in California. Here in Los Osos, we live in homes that were for a long time only available to whites. Black people were not welcome here.

So the ones who survived had to live in less beautiful, less abundant places. And then we put heavy industry in those places so that the people living there have to deal with the poor air and water quality, the higher rates of cancer, all the side effects of unmitigated industrial production. It is systemic racism and as a result of our behavior, Blacks and American Indians are suffering the effects of a warming planet more than

we are. Environmental justice means that we do more than plant trees, that we take a hard loving look at where there are no trees, where the environment and humanity are suffering together and then we take action.

Our second reading this morning was from Isaac the Syrian writing in the 7th century. He describes so well the heartbreak that we feel when we let ourselves look with loving clear eyes on the state of Creation. “What is a charitable heart? It is a heart burning with love for the whole of creation, for humans, for the birds, for the beasts, for the demons—for all creatures. One who has such a heart... will even pray for the reptiles, moved by the infinite pity which reigns in the hearts of those who are becoming united with God.”

As you look at Creation, where is your heartache? Is it with the factory-farmed animals? With the workers in sweatshops? With the people of Jackson, Mississippi who have no clean water?

Wherever your heart aches, that is the place for you to focus - the place where it is most important that your love for your neighbor be manifest. It is not easy my friends to allow our hearts to break. It is much easier to look the other way, to walk by on the other side. But that is not the path of Jesus. Jesus calls us to take up our cross and follow him. As followers of Jesus today, our cross is to see the cost of our comfort and to set out in small and large ways to clean up our act in love for all beings, even reptiles.