

In an address at the Vatican, in 2019, the last Pope, Pope Francis, proposed that “sins against ecology” be added to the official teachings of the Catholic Church; he also said that ecocide should be considered a crime, a crime against international peace,¹ because of the suffering and displacement caused by our ever accelerating abuse of the natural world, and the harms this inflicts not only on the planet but on so many communities around the world – especially indigenous communities and communities of the global south.

This is Rogation Sunday, a Sunday during our liturgical year when we’re particularly mindful of our dependence on all that grows, of crops, of the weather conditions needed for those crops to grow. It’s a day on which, traditionally, prayers have been offered to God for a good harvest. And in 2025, perhaps we should also be particularly mindful today of the fact that our God is not only the God of our liberation and salvation, but also is Creator of all, and so our abuse of the natural world is a terrible sin.

Being mindful of God as Creator of all really is crucial for a full understanding of Jesus the Christ. In the midst of a culture that likes to compartmentalize all things, separate and sort things, that sees the human person as autonomous, individual, self-sufficient, and essentially separate from nature, ‘above nature,’ we can entirely lose sight of the fact that each of us is, in fact, inseparable from the larger whole, inseparable from this natural world we’re a part of.

¹ <https://www.stopecocide.earth/press-releases-summary/pope-francis-destroying-the-earth-is-a-sin-and-should-be-a-crime>

And when we forget this, we can so easily miss or disregard the expansive, cosmic truth of Jesus the Christ, and limit our understanding of salvation to the self, our ideas of fullness of life and liberation to humanity alone. Make it all much smaller than it is. Our 'small' and personal ideas about Jesus can have us forget all about the natural world, or peripheralize it, with us focusing only on ourselves, or on human actions or behaviors.

Ideas around power and wealth, rank and strength have been really well absorbed by the church through its history; these big ideas, much beloved by the world's most dominant cultures, have weevilled their way into our churches and theologies as assumptions about human life, givens. Without, perhaps, even realizing it, Christianities have arisen that focus exclusively on the individual, on private and personal spiritual strivings to climb the ladder of holiness and righteousness, to make progress, our own efforts entirely separate from the lives of others and the world around us ... and what's been lost in all this is the centrality of the call into wholeness, unity, catholicity, the call into the enormity of God's whole Creation and the unimaginable depths and vastness of eternity. Ideas of embarking on a Way toward restoration of *all* things, a Way into freedom and fullness of life for *all of Creation*, of which we are just a part, this has never really been mainstream.

That we should love one another as Jesus loved us, that we should love our neighbor, and value the life and right to thrive of our neighbor, just as we value our own, is deep within the Christian tradition, and the Jewish tradition from which the Christian Way arose – yet, through history, particularly the Imperial history of the Western World, that mandate has been shrunk down, limited, really, to our relationship with other people, and usually only those closest to us.

The rest of this big world, and especially the rest of the non-human world is rarely, seriously and equally, considered part of this promise to love. We rarely appreciate the degree of mutually, or reciprocity between us and the non-human world, despite our health and survival being entirely dependent on it. We should absolutely see 'our neighbor' in the non-human world. Christianity, as a Way of being and living, is a Way of relationship, and when our relationship with the rest of Creation is set off to the side, all life is impacted. Ecocide should absolutely be 'a thing.'

The role and impact of nature on human life has long been central for, and valued by indigenous cultures and wisdom traditions across the planet. But in the Western World, especially, the natural world has long been seen primarily as a resource for our use, and exploitation, something we can own to generate wealth, and from which we can extract profit. Science is finally beginning to study these ancient knowings and is showing just how intricately we're connected to the world around us, how we need the natural world, not just as a resource, but to be healthy, and not just in mind and spirit, but also in body. The planet we so mercilessly destroy and exploit is our life-support support system in ways not previously understood.

This week I learned that²:

Kids who spend time in nature have a lower risk of depression in adulthood.³

² Please see this book for all the references that follow: Lucy Jones, *Losing Eden: Our Fundamental Need for the Natural World and Its Ability to Heal Body and Soul*, (Pantheon Books, New York: 2021)

³ Ibid., 50

That spending time in nature has been linked to a reduction in cytokines, a nasty substance in the body, associated with disease, depression, and ill health.⁴

Looking at fractals, those geometric shapes so abundant in nature, and in the human body, changes our brain waves, reducing chronic stress and the negative impact that has on the body.⁵

Negative ions, abundant around water, moving water, like at the beach or by rivers, have been linked to biochemical changes in the body that release serotonin, and have an anti-depressant effect.⁶

“Forest bathing” increases the number of anti-cancer proteins in the blood, possibly as a result of our absorbing phytoncides, chemicals that are emitted by trees and plants.⁷

The effect of nature on the human person is being scientifically shown to have a wide variety life-sustaining, life-supporting effects, from the immune system to the brain, and from the nervous system to the gut; and this area of study is still fairly new. It’s truly amazing. We are irrefutably in an indissoluble and indispensable relationship with the world we live in. The world we insist on burning and bombing, stripping, exploiting and depleting. And, as is always the case, it’s those with the least power, those with the least wealth and privilege, who’re the ones who’ll suffer the most.

Jesus said, Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.

⁴ Ibid., 65

⁵ Ibid., 74

⁶ Ibid., 80

⁷ Ibid., 82

I think it would be a terrible mistake to hear these words purely as a source of surface comfort, limited to our own personal state of heart and mind. The peace of Christ, I believe, is offered on a cosmic scale – entering into the peace of Christ is to choose the Way of universal flourishing, bound as we are in this life to all that is.

When we exchange the peace each Sunday morning we offer one another a sign of this cosmic unity, we acknowledge the role our love and relationships, as part of the universal Christian community, play in the ongoing restoration of all Creation – and we do this before Communion, which is our embodied participation in the great one-ness, as living members of the body of the Christ.

In our liturgy, then, we acknowledge the need for all of Creation to share in the peace of Christ, and so we share it freely, we exchange this peace between us to make it real in the world, by speaking it aloud, it is the peace we need if we are ever to know true unity. The peace of Christ is for us, and it is for all Creation, it is a gift of the incarnation that reconnects us to a most ancient knowing, that beyond and through the brokenness of the world there is an unbreakable relationship. If we could only learn to be fully aware of this relationship, stay fully aware of this relationship, of our interconnectivity with it all, how might we come to see the world around us with new eyes, trust that the restoration of all things in God, through Christ, is possible, and that we can be a part of bringing it into being, our love and relationships, with one another and with the world we live in, can absolutely be a part of making all things new - and the Holy Spirit is with us to teach us and guide us on the way.