

Last week, some of stayed a while after worship for an Earthcare conversation, I'm not going to lie, inspiration from that conversation has been running in the background for me this week, and has played something of a role in my thinking about this week's Gospel text.

... fair warning!

All life happens somewhere, every living thing on earth is in some kind relationship with its environment. By and large, life adapts to best fit the place where it's happening. And the ways life becomes sustainable in any particular environment, these traits or adaptations tend to get passed on to the next generation.

So, animals living in harsh, hostile or dangerous conditions, develop defenses to survive, they might be aggressive, their bodies might actually become armor against predators, they might have a bite or a sting, or rely on brute strength to fend off attack and survive.

Soft-bodied creatures wouldn't last a second in those same conditions, so you'll only find them in gentler, more benign environments, where they can flourish because the threat to life, the danger level is low..

Humans also adapt to the places where they live.

But humans are a bit peculiar, in the grand scheme of things, because, not only do we need to survive the natural world - we need food, water, protection from the elements - but we also need to survive and adapt to the world that's been created by us, we need to survive in society, in culture.

So we learn, and inherit from those who came before us what matters, what we need to pay attention to, what to value, what it looks like to succeed, what and who to distrust and what and who to fear, and how to defend ourselves, how to fight back to survive. We adapt to best “fit” with our ‘environment,’ fit in society. And, when it’s our turn, we pass these ways of surviving society on to the next generation. It’s a pretty stable system.

But adapting to the culture that’s in place isn’t necessary for human life, not in the way that needing air, water, and food are a non-negotiable. The dominant culture we live within is one of many. Culture, the way we organize society, it’s a choice.

Jesus came to proclaim that the Kingdom of God is near. God’s Kingdom, a very different environment, a very different ‘ecosystem’ for humanity, very different to the one so much of the world has been forced to adapt to to survive, for so long.

God’s Kingdom is life and living re-ordered, renewed; an environment where the danger level is pretty low, where life might flourish cooperatively and in communion .. but it’s not an actual place we can just arrive at, I think of it more as a way of being, a kind of culture even, that we’re called to co-create.

In today’s Gospel reading, Jesus is preparing his friends for life in this world as it is, once he’s gone. With him, they’ve known something of that Kingdom reality, and they’ve been adapting themselves and their lives to the truth of that. Without him they’re going to have to resist the forces and the pressures of the world that’ll be pulling them right back into life as it was before, right back into the way of being in the world that Jesus, by his life, set them free from.

The adaptive pressure to 'fit' with the world as it is immense.

And Jesus knows his disciples have gotta be nervous about that. Without him leading the way, it'll be hard, maybe even too hard.

Keeping Jesus' commandments, living from love and for love, is not an optimal survival strategy for this world. The disciples must've worried they'd be eaten alive!

They know all too well that this human-created environment is harsh and hostile, the danger-level and threat to life is high, there is an insatiable thirst for control and power over the world we share, and the hunger for wealth to make that possible, makes division and violence inevitable; how can a loving, soft-bodied human ever possibly survive?

Jesus has his friends focus on the world, the environment *in here*.

How could the ones who love Jesus, and live following his commandments *not* thrive given God's abiding presence *within*. God, the Source of All, Creator of the Universe, we carry that power within! That connection, that relationship, that's our internal environment, that's the abiding presence that'll absolutely shape us, change us, have us adapt to an entirely different reality. God's mighty presence within is the power to re-create us all, renew us, regardless of the kind of hostile environment we face out here.

But, unlike the forces that bear down on us from out in the world, from culture or in society, this force for transformation has to be chosen. It will not dominate or control us, there is no violence in it. This ultimate power is a longing, it's a whole new world waiting to re-shape us for life in it and for it, waiting to adapt us to a way of being that is a response to God's love. All we need to do is choose it.

Jesus is saying, *if* we love the one who longs to draw the whole world into communion, *then* we will know the mighty power that's within, then we will live the life we're called to live, despite that being really hard in the world as it is today ... then, that love chosen, us changed, we'll change the environment we all share; us changed, we'll make our common life more gentle, less threatening, more livable for the soft-bodied creatures that we are.

As Church, as living members of Christ's body, we all can be decisive, irrefutable evidence, proof even, that a very different way of being human is absolutely possible if we choose it. Jesus is a choice.

For sure, can't get avoid the world we live in, we know its pressures, we feel its dangers and threats, but we do get to choose, choose whether we'll be part of the reason things stay the same ... or, drawing from what we know of the world within, choose to live in the world that could be.

Our call isn't to survive for as long as we can, do whatever we need to do to make that happen, whatever hurts or violences we do to others or ourselves along the way.

Our call is to thrive, at least for today, by embodying the way of love, at least for today.

We are in Christ, and Christ is in us, so we can put down our weapons, we can set down the defenses we think keep us safe from the forces of the world, because, actually, far from keeping us safe, the very many ways we fight back, the ways we protect and defend ourselves, the violences we use to do that, it all plays a role in keeping this world just as it is, unsafe, threatening, for ourselves and for others.

God's kingdom is our ideal habitat, it's what we were created for, it's our ultimate life-giving environment; and we can choose to live in a way that fits well with that, choosing not to adapt our lives to this.

Jesus lived and died for us so we might know we have that choice.

All life happens somewhere.

And we can be that somewhere, a better place for life to happen: we can be a loving, life-giving environment, where the danger level is really low, and in which all have the right to thrive. ... if we truly love Jesus, and follow his commandments, that radically renewed, life-giving environment can be, will be, us.