



Creation Three

Rev Cate Thorn

Jer. 29: 1, 4 - 7; Luke 17: 11-19

9 October 2022

Today is the third and last of this year's Season of Creation Sundays. As I've said each week I invited us on a journey, bringing simply ourselves. Along the way I invited us to take time to reflect more deeply about our relationship with creation given the crisis creation and we find ourselves in. Posited the notion that our unexamined inner workings may contribute to the way things are. Further, these may cause us to react defensively, making necessary change a confrontation rather than a choice. I invited us to extend what we mean by community to include the natural world. In a relationship of mutual accountability and expectation, for without the natural world we have no life. I used words of grief and guilt, touched upon their potentially paralyzing impact. The familiar discomfort binds us and the natural world to our destructive habits of living.

Thus far, it's fair to say, the journey may seem largely self-reflective, acting differently, while we catch up with ourselves has been part of the deal. Reflecting, as I was, on where this Creation journey may next lead us, the words of Jeremiah and Luke suggested to me to thanksgiving and gratitude.

The text of Jeremiah tells us God's people are in exile. Jeremiah's urging them to pivot - to use a word from our Covid lexicon. OK, so you thought God was with you because you were given the Promised Land, you had great kings and temples and all the things you thought showed you were God blessed. And now you've been

overrun by more powerful forces and find yourself in chains of exile. Let's pivot this understanding.

Does being in exile mean you're God abandoned? No, rather God sent you to be exiles. You're to understand how you're God blessed, God presence people in a new way. The means for flourishing life are still with you. Rather than mire yourself in a funk of despair, decide to look differently at your situation. See the potential for flourishing that is there, align yourself with the society in which you find yourselves. Not to be absorbed but in order to multiply. Seek the welfare of the city in which you now dwell, where you've been sent for in its welfare you'll find your welfare.

Then to the gospel - it makes me laugh, statistically only 10% noticed they were healed, turned and gave thanks. The other 90% were healed as well but we've no idea if they noticed for they were intent upon following instructions. I wonder how that stacks up in the real life of our community. First of all there's the whole issue of healing in such a context - do we accept that healing in this type of way is a thing? If so, what would that sort of healing **actually** look like, especially if it's not as we thought or expected? If we can get over that potential stumbling block, how many of us upon noticing healing, would turn in praise and give thanks to God? We hear the words often enough the gospels but how can faith make you well?

Faith, that verb, last week Luke had it as necessary for forgiveness and for robust community life. This week faith restores wellness. Faith, the Greek word *pistis*, has nuances of meaning. Broadly speaking it can be understood this way: *pistis* (faith) is always received from God and never generated, it enables the believer to know God's preferred will. The root of *Pistis* is *Peitha* - to be persuaded. Language used to describe divine attribute is often and unhelpfully anthropomorphic. For those of us who flinch that this imagines a Daddy God imposing divine will or doling our favours from heaven, this could be a struggle. But it's interesting to note

faith's there to be discerned and received, not imposed against the will of the individual and it can't be self-generated.

The capacity to receive, to notice, to respond with thankfulness, and gratitude can turn our experience of life and living on its head. Turn us from the favourite topic of ourselves, toward the world around us. Thankfulness and gratitude widen our gaze. They open us to be more aware, alert and appreciative of what we receive and, as importantly, of what we have to give.

We might understand Jeremiah telling those languishing in exile to turn their gaze from themselves to the world around them. To see the place they now find themselves as source and resource for blessing. To pivot to discern how they were blessed and were in turn a source of blessing for the welfare of this new place.

I receive, as many of you may also, the monthly newsletter from the Centre for Action and Contemplation. Richard Rohr is one of the founders of the Centre. In a recent newsletter Cynthia Bourgeault describes parables as "a wisdom genre" that Jesus "transforms proverbs into parables." A parable, she comments "is not the same thing as an aphorism or moral lesson," it's closest to "the Buddhist *koan*, a deliberately subversive paradox aimed at turning our usual mind upside down ... their job is not to confirm but to uproot."¹

She then quotes theologian Harvey Cox, he notes the parables that take up 35% of the first three gospels are, surprisingly, "*not about God*. They are about weddings and banquets, family tensions, muggings, farmers sowing and reaping, and shrewd business dealings. God is mentioned in only one or two." Because Cox suggests "Rabbi Jesus ... wanted us to look closely at *this* world ... here and now - all around us in the most ordinary things - we find the divine presence."²

¹ <https://cac.org/daily-meditations/wisdom-teachings-2022-08-29/>

² *ibid*

Though of similar genre there's an important difference between koans and parables. "Zen stories aim at changing one's *perception* of the world" but with parables "Jesus wanted people to see that *the world itself was changing*, ... therefore... they had better change the way they looked at it ... *pay attention* to what was going on around them and to discern a reality that was just under their noses. ... Something was happening, in the consciousness of the listener, and in the world itself. Something new and unprecedented ... and they could be a part of it."³

Forces greater than us, forces of a planet in peril, have exiled us from our accustomed lifestyles. Do we cast ourselves as exiles in a funk of despair or will we pivot? See instead we've an intended place and role in this new territory. The world, this place of divine presence is changing. Can we also change? Change how we look at the world. That we can see this new and unprecedented state of our planet, before its demise, is a gift. Gifting us the, albeit small window, of chance to change. Participate as the 10% who see this, turn and give thanks for we discern healing is possible. And act. In the words of Jeremiah let us seek the welfare of the city where we've been sent in exile and pray to God on its behalf, for in its welfare we will find our welfare.

³ ibid