

Year A Creation 2 Proper 23 10th September 2023

Ezekiel 33: 7-11

Romans 13: 8-14

Matthew 18: 15-20

Well, what a set of humdinger readings we have today! Not exactly a theological term, but I hope you understand why I say that.

The readings all talk of taking action, action motivated by love. Paul puts it most succinctly in v 10, 'Love does no harm to a neighbour. Therefore, love is the fulfilment of the law'. He talks of 'understanding the present time', he gets the urgency of his times.

The prophet Ezekiel uses more imperative and earthy language; laying a charge against people of faith that they have not warned or dissuaded others from their ways that offend God. He also makes clear that there is no pleasure in seeing anyone suffer and die, God's desire is to see all turn from their ways and live.

The gospel reading is about love and accountability, especially in community.

So, without me having to be too much of a contortionist, how do these readings apply to the season of creation?

What came to me in my preparation phase, and it did help to meditate on these scriptures whilst walking Misty on a beautiful sunny day, was the urgency in our times is undoubtedly humankind's abuse of God's creation and the continued behaviours leading to further desecration and sin as climate change may reach a tipping point; those actions which move us further from God's presence.

The consequential thought was to consider that religious communities often fear getting involved in social movements, including about the climate emergency. There is a fear linking faith with current events and politics. Instead, we tend to call on individual behavioural change, shying away from

calling for larger societal changes as Ezekiel and the other prophets frequently did. Is that because it feels too big, too hard, or a fear we will be thought of as party political rather than political? For there is a great difference between the two.

We get our word politics from the Greek *politikos* which means affairs of the city and *polites* which means a citizen. In the Greek world, people would come together to discuss and debate and reach decisions about how to govern their community. So, every time we comment on, discuss or debate a matter of social relevance, we are involved in 'politics'.

Most of Jesus' teachings, seeking to change the society of Israel and Judea through peaceable means, to bring God's kingdom down to earth, are by the Greek definition, political statements. He may have chosen to heal individuals or teach small groups most of the time – but his most memorable teachings were to 5000 men and their families.

In our gospel reading the theme is about confrontation and how hard it can be, even when the cause is right and just. In this climate crisis, who requires to be confronted? I would argue it is those who profit the most from the status quo and the many who actively work to thwart change. They act in their own self-interests, not in the interests of all of humankind and God's creation.

So, should we be so nervous to speak out from our religious perspective in principled opposition to the destruction to God's most beautiful creation. Is engaging in social discourse about the climate emergency really off limits for us? I truly hope not. I believe these passages encourage if not demand us to throw off our hesitancy, and to speak out. I believe we have a moral duty to not remain silent, but to draw on our faith to gain the courage and integrity to equip us to have a voice, and call for change. In our faith language we may call it repentance – to change our minds to follow a way of living that does no harm to our neighbour, wherever they are in the world.

Our faith gives us the strength to speak out, and possibly take us out of our comfort zone. The songs of praise and lament, our confession of faith, our sharing together in communion in thanksgiving for the example of Jesus who we ask God to give us strength to follow, the commandment to love our

neighbour, and our reading from so many prophets are all the sources of inspiration we need – the spiritual wells from which we drink.

You will know that I truly believe and feel inspired to preach about the climate emergency. I can see no way of saying it isn't a matter of faith. I can't avoid reading scripture and seeing that it calls us to repent because of how we have damaged God's creation. Jesus' new commandment was to love our neighbour. How can we say we love our neighbour while we ignore the catastrophe facing our global neighbours? How can we ignore their cries of distress following fires, floods, drought, hurricanes and tornadoes? Paul demands people wake up and 'put on the armour of light' to face the challenges of their day, waking up to see things in a new and different way, and then to act accordingly.

My membership of the Iona Community enables me to join with others who also share a passion for God's world. Part of our rule states:

- ✚ That God has given us partnership as stewards of creation and that we have a responsibility to live in right relationship with the whole of God's creation;
- ✚ That, handled with integrity, creation can provide for the needs of all, but not for the greed which leads to injustice and inequality, and endangers life on earth;
- ✚ That social and political action leading to justice for all people and encouraged by prayer and discussion is a vital work of the Church at all levels.
- ✚ Engage in forms of political witness and action, prayerfully and thoughtfully, to promote just and peaceful social, political and economic structures.

In the face of the climate crisis, what does love look like? Is it limited to making personal changes to reduce our carbon footprint? Or does Christ's call to love our neighbour take us out into the streets, to proclaim his Word, and join with others in seeking changes at regional, national and international levels? Being

awake as Paul challenges us to do, may well invite us to live at a deeper level of God's love for all humankind and for God's world.

Our neighbour is not just those who are geographically close to us, but all humans across the world, who whether they acknowledge it or not, are made in God's image. And I come back to where I started, with a quote from the epistle, v 10, 'Love does no harm to a neighbour. Therefore, love is the fulfilment of the law'.

Wearing your armour of light, clothed with our Lord Jesus Christ, how do you wish to respond to the climate crisis? Where does our love lead us?