

Sunday May 22, 2022

Lesson 10: The Redemption of Creation

Scripture: Joel 2: 18-26; Romans 8: 19-22

Context:

The lesson for today focuses on the redemption of creation as we discuss cultivating the disciplines to draw us closer to God. Part of creation is God drawing all things together for healing and wholeness. This involves the land as well as individual forgiveness and restoration. God works through all things to be reconciled to God.

There are two scriptures for today's lesson. From the Old Testament, there is the book of Joel. Joel is known as one of the minor prophets and while a concise book, there is ample instruction on how God will restore the people of Israel. The passage from the book today reminds us how God works through the land to supply and give the people of Israel what they need. No longer will the Israelites go hungry or be oppressed by the armies around them. Instead, the Lord will be with them as evident in the land which gives them nourishment and support. The people are to look around them and see how God has given them everything they need to live.

The second scripture comes from the New Testament in the book of Romans. This book is attributed to Paul as a letter written to the church in Rome, a church he never had the opportunity to meet. Yet Paul understands how the question of human suffering will become prominent in the Christian faith especially as the early church is a minority group in a large empire. There is the question of how God will act in their midst and what will take place in the present as well as the future.

The verses for today's lesson provide some Pauline understanding of these questions as Paul asserts how redemption is part of the whole of God's creation.¹ Paul's understanding of sin corresponds to the transgression of Adam and the effects which took place with his decision to disobey God. Paul announces the good news of how no longer will creation punish and work against human beings.² Instead there will be a transformation as creation is made whole alongside humanity.

This is where the role of the Holy Spirit comes in the text as Paul speaks of all of creation groaning to be made whole including reconciling humanity and God. The land responds to human disobedience just as was seen in the garden with the land being cut off from Adam and Eve with their transgression. Yet there is hope as since creation belongs to God, nothing can thwart God's purposes or the future God holds for the world.³ Just as humans belong to God, creation also belongs to God and will be taken care of over time. There is balance as God promises to restore both humanity and our place in creation even when we make a mess out of this world.

¹ Achtemeier, Paul J. "Romans," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2010), 142.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 146.

Application

For the past several weeks, we have examined how creation plays a role in our discipleship and ways we can respond to God. We are reminded how humans are part of creation and the limits as we think of the Creator God who is over all things. As we look at creation, we are reminded of the gifts there as well as the seasons which we see in our own walks with our Lord.

The Old Testament text today reminds us of how the land replenishes us. I have come to find creation nurtures us in several ways. Firstly, as Joel reminds us, the land gives us what we need to feed our bodies. At the right seasons of the year, we receive certain things to nourish us. There is the season for strawberries, peaches, oranges, and apples. As we look to the land, we are given what we need so we need not feel neglected or malnourished. Even during allergy season, all we must do is find local honey and soon we can breathe again. I hope especially as we enter the summer season, we can all find the places where we can feed upon fresh fruits and vegetables, being reminded of God's bounty which comes to restore our souls.

We also find how nature can give us perspective and the aesthetic effects of seeing the land around us. One of the reasons we see so many people going on holiday during the summer is not just the fact school is out as we also see the seasons change so there are clear sights and beautiful landscapes transformed to show the bright colors of the world. Life is greener and one can get out in the sun and soak it all up. Creation reminds us of how-to sing praise to God and give thanks for the beauty of life.

Yet our scripture also reminds us of how creation can teach us even how to regulate and understand ourselves a little more clearly. The book of Romans speaks of creation groaning within itself, yearning to be made whole and unified. There are birth pangs which emerge from it and as we watch, we see things be brought up to the surface of what has been churning underneath.

I have often felt creation can teach us to pay closer attention to what is going on within ourselves. For example, if you have ever seen a rain come out of nowhere, you think of how the same comes to us when we process feelings. We go through something or have something happen, and eventually we just let tears flow out which have been sitting there for a bit.

Often the times when we are at our worst is when we do not process the things going underneath the surface. We deny what we need to name or process for the sake of appearing or being a certain way. We present what we want to the world and believe there is nothing we need to do or consider.

Yet in looking in nature, we rarely see this thought process play out. The rain will come and nourish the ground even if there isn't a cloud in the sky an hour before. Ivy growing on the side of the house will continue to creep alongside and go into every crevice it can find. When the water snake sees a kayaker, they hide for cover to protect themselves.

Creation teaches us there is an order for life and we would best do well to pay attention to ourselves and where we find ourselves in creation. Even the changing of the seasons reminds us of how there are times for everything to happen. If we do not process the world and examine ourselves and what's going on within us, we often miss out on how God is working to transform or make us whole.

Our God is in the business of making things and people whole. This means in time we will need to turn ourselves over to God and allow things to just be whether it's hard feelings or emotions, processing pain and anger, or allowing ourselves to experience joy and grief all tied up together. God takes those things and uses them to mend our souls and just as creation cries out to

God, God cries out and restores us.

How do you enjoy the creation God has given to us? Why do you think God gives us things from the land to supplement and nourish our bodies? What ways will you appreciate creation in this season? How can watching creation inspire you to pay attention to yourself? What do the seasons and creation teach us about examining ourselves?

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