

St Columba Grey Lynn
1st Sunday in Lent: 1st March 2009-02-26

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Genesis 9: 8-17

Mark1: 9-15

Theme: God's Promise: a covenant with the earth

Are you one of the people who say "I don't do Lent!" 'I am not into all this penitence and self denial stuff" "I'm not into giving up things!"

And so we begin the season of Lent: the 40 days when traditionally we reflect on our lives as a human community and the degree to which we are carrying out our part of the covenant God made with the people and creatures of the earth. It is the liturgical season when we reconsider if we are still on the 'right path' or if we have succumbed to the temptations of personal greed: power, wealth, licentiousness. It is not about self denial but it is about mindfulness: paying close attention to our lives and our world.

This year is the 200th anniversary of the Charles Darwin's birth. And 150 years since his mind-expanding book Origin of Species was published. Darwin was very mindful of the world in which we live with all its variety, especially all living things - including humans. His scientific exploration into the differences between creatures, and their similarities, and their development, led to his theory of evolution. For scientists today, research continues to affirm his theory. Evolution highlights for us the interconnectedness over time of all living things, and the significance of the physical world that keeps creatures like us alive and able to develop.

The First Testament story of the rainbow covenant with Noah also stresses the interconnectedness of all creatures. As well, this covenant identifies our human responsibility as part of the whole creation. One of God's promises through Noah is that God will work with us in caring for the earth and all that grows on it, and all living things. In our time of dramatic change and rapid climate change, this is a critical promise for us to hold onto and work with. It is not God alone who will sort out our mess, but human actions responding to God's covenant with us and all creation. This all fits in with what Darwin was on about! We are part of creation - linked with the other creatures of the earth, and part of this inter-connected and interdependent earth.

So, when we come to think about how we are doing with our part of the covenant, (whether we are on the right path), - we first have to

acknowledge that interdependence, and to wonder whether we have so elevated our place in the scheme of things that we have upset the balance of a healthy world and upset the capacity for other creatures to live healthy lives. We may even have acted to block the ability of human communities different from ours to live healthy and full lives. This is the seasonal consideration I believe we are invited to contemplate this year!

Have we been tempted to put ourselves first all the time, have the temptations of human pride and power, and our personal desire for more and more things taken over our ability to be satisfied with enough and live justly and gently in the earth? That's a relevant Lenten reflection! That's a positive focus for mindfulness.

The Gospel story set for this morning tells of Jesus' baptism by John - that radical prophet who called the people of his time to repentance. John, the Baptizer as Mark calls him, challenged people to turn from their passive and unquestioning ways, and to live again as responsible people of faith. John called them to faith in the capacity of Israel to create just ways living and fair use of resources. He called for a restructuring of Israelite social systems. John wanted a more self-conscious alignment of the people with God's covenant, extending to all of life on this earth.

As we know only too well, Jesus goes off into 'the wilderness' after his baptism (we can talk about that on another occasion.) Jesus then contemplates his life in the face of the various temptations that are put before him... but the recording of the story by Mark is restrained on the details of that wilderness experience and the climax of the story is reached with Jesus emerging from the 'wilderness' and gathering his own following and proclaiming the 'good-news'. Jesus proclaims 'the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near!' He declares that we are no longer waiting for God! That in this earthly time, we are called to live out hospitable relationships with each other, and a use of power that brings opportunities for everyone and sustainability. That is our part of the covenant. God's 'kingdom' is not about monarchs/kings but it is about social structures, relationships and covenant-living.

The different strands that I am pulling together today - Darwin's theory and interest in our interconnectedness, God's rainbow covenant, and Jesus' proclamation - require us, I think, to set different types of 'truth' alongside each other, and acknowledge that each tells us something we know to be important. Whether it be science as we understand that word with its

verifiable data, or story and myth with their persuasive power to explain and motivate - we know the truth that our human wellbeing depends on us acknowledging our interconnectedness with the earth and all earth creatures – that includes us. It depends on us engaging our capacity to imagine a world organised to support human life and wellbeing across differences of race and culture, so that we will together have the capacity for long term sustainability.

These are the issues that are before us this Lent.

I invite you into 'mindfulness' about our world and what we value most.

I invite you to pay attention to how these things are represented by our leaders and in our newspapers.

I invite you to respond to Jesus' proclamation,

to remember Darwin,

and to live out the rainbow covenant of God with all creatures.

When we acknowledge our interconnectedness, the health of planet earth, and all that live within it can be fully restored.