

Sermon preached at Gisborne, 11 September 2022

May the words that are spoken and the reflections of our hearts be worthy of your grace, O God, to whom all honour and glory are given now and forever more. Amen.

Jeremiah 4:11-12, 22-28; Luke 15:1-10

Listening to the Voice of Creation

The apostle Paul once said that creation exposes the nature of God.¹ When we mistreat God's creation, it shows our unfaithfulness to our relationship with God. Presently the world is experiencing unusual natural disasters caused by climate change that Jeremiah had already prophesied theologically. The two readings - Jeremiah and Luke, will help us explore these things in *the Season of Creation*. This year, the theme is *Listening to the Voice of Creation*, which began on 1 September and will end on 4 October.

In Jeremiah, the first impression is that it is full of natural disasters: polluted land, earthquakes, drought and so forth. With these verses, Jeremiah takes Israel's troubles to a whole new level. Nature and the entire cosmos are not only aware but also affected by the nation and its failures. Jeremiah knew what many today are just beginning to understand. That is, "the world is so interconnected . . . human words and deeds . . . human sin and evil can have . . . wide-ranging effects in the world of nature."²

We also see that the warning begins much before – from chapter 3, in which God calls Israel to repent. In chapter 4, God's wrath comes in the form of fatal natural disasters if people do not repent. When Jeremiah warns Israel of the earth turning back to "waste and void," it reminds us of Genesis 1:2, in which the beginning of the world was covered with watery chaos. Through this warning, Jeremiah shows that there is a clear link between the judgment of the people and the desolation of creation. That is, our actions impact all creation as the world is interrelated. Still, there is reason to hope. For Jeremiah, the relationship with God is not ended, even now, with cities in ruins, with neither bird nor human to be found, with mountains moving and the fruitful land a desert. God still offers Israel hope through repentance that will bring

¹ Romans 1:20

² Terence E. Fretheim, *Jeremiah* (Macon: Smyth and Helwys), 100.

God's blessings to them. The same hope is found through the faithfulness of God in Luke 15:1-10.

The two parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin speak more of God's faithfulness through one crucial truth. Without restoring the lost one, God will not stop searching for it. In the case of the lost sheep, the number 99 is incomplete without the lost one. The shepherd is restless until s/he finds it and returns it to its sheepfold. What did the shepherd do in search of the sheep? S/he may have tried to check the plain and bushes that the sheep might have grazed on the grass. The shepherd may have slept under the night sky and endured the heat of the sun during the day while thinking of the lost sheep. When s/he found it, the joy was greater than s/he felt before losing it when the sheep was safely kept.

When it comes to the lost coin, there were more reasons than the complete number 10. For the woman, the coins were not just ordinary silver coins. It was a Jewish custom for a woman to possess ten Silver/Gold coins which would be presented by the Bridegroom on the day of their engagement. The ten coins symbolized the woman's relationship with the Bridegroom, so they were very important to her. Every day when the bride would go out, she would put on a veil in which she had sewn the ten coins. The veil was an indication to the public that she had been bought with a price and was waiting to be married. Each coin represented part of the covenant the man made with the woman. The veil was significant because it separated her from the world and told them she was given to someone for marriage. Now considering she had lost one of the coins. Her marriage could even stop. The Groom could simply assume that she was not responsible or interested in the Groom. From both parables, we learn how much God is faithful to God's children and loves them, big or small. God cares deeply enough to go out of God's way to save us when we are lost, light the lamp, and sweep the dirt-floored house, trying to find the lost coin. God rejoices when we return to God.

In addition, parables always teach us about ourselves. The lost sheep is helpless and vulnerable; it needs the flock and the shepherd to protect and guide it. Just so every person is created to find meaning and fulfilment in communion with God and others – thus the two great commandments of loving God and loving neighbour. The lost coin is completely without value unless its owner possesses it. Likewise, each of us has a mission in life, a purpose and a task, but its proper place is within Christ's Kingdom. In the context of the season of creation, since we - Christians are tasked or missioned to be good stewards of creation, we have a duty to protect and care for each other and creation.

Broken relationships among people and the land correlate with the contemporary human broken relationship with creation, causing the climate crisis and natural disasters. Restoring the relationship with creation is also related to the fulfilment of our salvation too. In Romans 8: 19-23, Paul urges that the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God. When they are revealed, the creation will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. That is, we are fully revealed as the children of God when we are faithfully able to listen to the voice of creation as its good stewards. May God help us become the faithful stewards of creation by which we are revealed as the heirs of Christ in God's kingdom. Amen.