

Psalm 104 – various

*Laudato si* – paragraphs 10, 11 & 12

Mark 10. 13-16

When the reformations in Europe began to take place in the late 1400s and into the 1500s the new sects and churches which sprang up threw a whole lot of stuff out. It was as though the windows were flung open and everything was turfed out the windows with little consideration about what was being jettisoned. One of those things that was jettisoned by the reformers was people who had been named as saints and whose lives themselves, the pattern of their lives and their teachings, had been discerned to be lived in the pattern of Jesus, lives which had mirrored in their own particular way, the reflection of Jesus and so ultimately of God.

Today we mark the life of Francis of Assisi. But because of the outrage of the reformers – and maybe we can excuse their outrage, such was the distortion of Christian faith in some of the ways saints had come to be regarded – the influence of the lives and teachings of these saints were lost. The baby was thrown out with the bathwater; and the protestant churches in the main tried to sustain themselves on a thin diet – without any recipe books of what a saintly life looked like.

Pope Francis, quoting St Bonaventure, an early Franciscan, writes: *St Francis would call creatures, no matter how small, by the name of ‘brother’ or ‘sister’*”.[20] *Such a conviction cannot be written off as naive romanticism, for it affects the choices which determine our behaviour.* For the contemporary cynics and corporate mindsets in our midst, Francis would be called a tree-hugging-hippy. An idealist. A communist. Impractical. An anti-progress advocate. But how are we going with all that progress? How are our children turning out? How about the poor of the earth? And what of the earth itself?

Francis writes in *Laudato si*: *If we approach nature and the environment without an openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs.* Is this not where we are? Unable, unwilling to set limits on immediate needs?

He goes on: *By contrast, if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously. The poverty and austerity of Saint Francis were no mere veneer of asceticism, but something much more radical: a refusal to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled.*

Last week Rod read an exquisite Wendell Berry poem for us, one of the poems Berry writes as a sabbath discipline, after walking his land and contemplating it, apprehending the land, it's aliveness, the cycles of its life across the year. He seems to walk his land, experiencing it as a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise. Maybe I had heard what Rod said as he introduced the poem at some time in the past, how Wendell Berry each Sunday walks his land, without a job in mind, a task to perform, without the intention to attend to some agricultural task, but goes with open eyes and ears and heart and contemplates, allows the earth to speak to him, his thoughts and feelings to ebb and flow and for joy to emerge in him, and grant him rest,

sabbath rest. I know quite a number of you have been touched by Wendell Berry's words. There are more today.

Yesterday I went to a birthday lunch for my cousin who is turning 90. There were quite a lot of cousins there and we talked about our parents' lives and the world that had shaped them, and so us. And we talked about what has been lost of a simpler, more-connected time, and the busyness and insistent demands which have created the fast-paced world we now occupy. Many of us who knew that slower, more-connected world now feel bewildered much of the time. The capitalism which has propelled our prosperity over the course of our working lives, has also uprooted us from connection to place and stability; and connection to what Pope Francis calls the magnificent book of nature, through which God speaks. Capitalism has turned the natural world into an object simply to be used and controlled. Even the natural world has been harnessed in the capitalist project, Disneyfied to titillate us for a moment and then send us back to the grind of getting ahead.

At the heart of what it means to be Christian is an attention to the world of the spirit: spirit and truth, Jesus says to the Samaritan woman at the well. We might ask ourselves: are we signs of the divine presence in the world or are we, in our priorities and in the way we live, at odds with the divine order at the heart of the creation? These are hard questions for us to face, because the demands and the seductions of the world we have been formed by and have also formed ourselves, are difficult to give honest consideration to; because it might mean making very different choices to the ones we have. Pope Francis writes: *the poverty and austerity of Saint Francis were no mere veneer of asceticism, ...* And we might ask in this time of climate crisis if our endeavours to be more green are simply a veneer, or something much deeper; a true repentance?

Jesus says to the disciples as he brings children close to him: *for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.* At some level we have interpreted this call of Jesus as a need to remain infantile, and that blind faith is an expression of that kind of infantile stance. *Whoever does not receive ...* Pope Francis writes: *Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise.* Certainly the learn-ed heads will give us some technical tools to reverse what is taking place around the globe but is a rediscovery and embrace of spirit which we so desperately needs. May God give us, and our children and our grandchildren eyes to see and hearts open to the divine mystery present in all that is.

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