

ECOLOGICAL SUNDAY 2018

Theme: Creation Proclaims Glory of God

Texts: Proverbs 8:22-31, Psalm 19, Revelation 21:1-8, Luke. 8:22-25

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. AMEN.

Ever since our child hood we have been listening to different kinds of stories such as Royal Stories (referring to Kings and Queens in Palaces), Jungle Stories (with animals and birds as characters), Moral Stories (aimed at imparting values) or Adventure Stories (referring to adventures of the brave). Among adventure stories, 'Maritime Stories' or 'Sea Stories' have a special place and such stories would normally include presence of boats or ships, the crossing over, the role of sailors, presence of a storm, the danger of sinking, ceasing of the storm and a miraculous escape. Bible has a number of such stories or stories related to water, some of the most familiar ones being the story of Noah and family surviving the great deluge, story of Moses and Israelites crossing the Sea, story of Jonah and sailors surviving the storm, story of Jesus calming the storm, story of Jesus walking over the sea and the story of St. Paul, crew, soldiers and prisoners escaping a ship wreck. All these stories are really amazing and breath-taking, and on this Ecological Sunday we are going to meditate upon the incident of 'Jesus calming the Storm'.

The event of Jesus calming the storm, as written in the Gospel according to St. Luke Chapter 8 Verses 22 to 25, also reported by St. Matthew in Matthew 8:23-27 and by St. Mark in Mark 4:35-41, begins with Jesus getting into a boat along with His disciples to sail across to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Not long after they sailed, Jesus fell asleep and a furious storm arose, so that the waves swept over the boat. The disciples, terrified that they would die, rushed to Jesus, woke Him up and shouted that they were perishing. Jesus woke up and commanded the storm and waves to be still and they immediately ceased. Jesus asked them, where their faith was, as they stood afraid and amazed, saying to one another who Jesus was, whom even the winds and waters obeyed. We have heard lots of sermons on this event, but today, on this Ecological Sunday, let us look at it from a different angle based on today's theme, 'Creation Proclaims Glory of God'. This sermon is divided into five points starting with each of the letters in the word G-L-O-R-Y.

1. God of Creation

Today's passage speaks about a God who continues to exercise authority over His creation. The fact that the wind and the waves ceased as Jesus 'rebuked' them recalls the Old Testament description of God in the opening chapter of the Bible where God's wind hovering over the waters brought chaos to order. The same God continues to exercise His power in controlling nature as seen in the case of deluge, parting the sea or stopping the sun. For God, to 'rebuke' is a powerful word of command, as in Psalm 104:7, where it says "*at your rebuke the waters flee.*" In Job 26:12 too we see God, who by His power stills the sea. In Psalm 29, we see a God who has authority over the sea, mountains, forests and deserts. In today's Gospel portion, we see Jesus as the God who is the Master over His creation bringing peace out of chaos. This calls us to acknowledge God alone as the Master of this universe and not to assume ourselves as God, controlling nature, which often results in chaos than peace.

Today, the trend is to 'play God' and try to control nature, rather than adapting to God's order and scheme for His creation. Unlike God who controls nature with no motive to exploit nature, we humans control nature in order to accomplish our selfish needs, resulting in various chaoses, including ecological catastrophes. By manipulating the God given natural order, whether by producing Genetically Modified Crops or by constructing huge dams to control

water or by linking rivers or by uncontrollable deforestation or by leveling of hillocks or by filling of wetlands we are trying to control nature in order to satisfy our selfish needs. Let this worship help us to realize that we are not masters, but stewards commissioned to care His creation. Following this sermon, as we affirm “God as the Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible,” we are also saying we are just one of His creations called to take care of rest of the creation. We are in a boat with the Creator who alone has the authority over His creation and who is willing to use His authority to bring peace.

2. Littering Creation

As we all know, ‘littering’ is the bad and unlawful act of throwing trash such as fast food packaging, drinking bottles, chewing gum wrappers, broken electrical equipment parts, toys, broken glass, food scraps, wrappers, papers or plastic all around. In public places like parks, beaches and markets, we often see sign-boards saying ‘Do not litter’ or ‘Plastic-Free Zone’, because it is a dangerous activity that would pollute environment, spread diseases and affect animals, birds and marine life. For example, plastic litter which is dumped and thrown everywhere is mistaken for food and consumed by animals, birds, turtles and fish. In long-term, this affects their eating habit and eventually kills them. This could be one of the reasons why the United Nations Environment Programme has chosen ‘Beat Plastic Pollution’ as the theme for this year’s World Environment Day. There are various causes for littering such as lack of awareness about the consequence of littering or lack of sufficient trash receptacles or improper environmental education. Two important attitudinal causes are our laziness to discard litter in the rightful places and carelessness to throw rubbish anywhere without even thinking about it.

In a spiritual perspective, through littering we are demeaning the glory of God’s creation and by that, we are demeaning God, the Creator. Littering of plastics and other trash is thus not only an unlawful crime, but also a sin against creation as well as the Creator. In today’s passage, as waves swept over the boat and as the boat was getting swamped, the panicked disciples cry, “We are perishing.” Today, as litters, electronic waste and nuclear waste sweep over our earth and oceans and as we get swamped by the storming wastes, trashes and litter, the whole creation cries the same cry, “We are perishing.” Here, the Church is called to continue what Jesus did, i.e., to save the ‘boat’ from being swept and swamped by the ‘waves’ and ‘storms’ of litters. Every year we use 500 billion plastic bag and at least 8 million tonnes of plastic end up in the oceans. In India itself, within the time it takes Hardik Pandya to bowl an over in a cricket match, four garbage trucks worth of plastic get dumped into the ocean. Dearly beloved, are we causing our own ‘storms’ and ‘waves’ for us to perish?

3. Obligation to Creation

As Jesus and disciples cross the lake, it is said that a furious storm arose and the waves swept over the boat. Have we ever thought why such storms arose in the Sea of Galilee? For this, we need to understand the geography of this sea. ‘Sea of Galilee’, also known as the Sea of Tiberias or the Lake of Gennesaret, was actually a small lake, 680 feet below sea level. This lake was bounded by hills which were a source of cool and dry air. In contrast, around the lake, the air was warm and moist and this used to cause large temperature and pressure changes, resulting in strong winds dropping to the sea. Since the lake was small and shallow, just 200 feet at its greatest depth, at points where the contrasting air masses met, storm arose quickly causing immediate danger to the boats. Such storms were usual in the Sea of Galilee and it is such an unexpected storm that panicked the disciples. They cried to Jesus that they were perishing and Jesus, in turn calmed the storm and the wave.

When St. Mark says it was ‘evening’ and ‘other boats’ were there, it is clear that there were many others who were engaged in fishing’. It is right to assume that the storm and waves caused danger for them too, making them too cry “We are perishing”. And it is right to assume that they too had felt relieved as Jesus calmed the storm

and waves. For the fisher folk there, the rough sea might have been a 'daily' challenge. They might have lived in the fear of a potential storm that could wreck their lives and livelihoods. But on that particular day, they all experienced a touch, a voice, a presence that gave them a new hope and courage. Ecology is not only about nature but also about people who depend upon nature for their bread. Any ecological discourse that does not address the fears of dalits who depend on soil, adivasis who depend on forest and fisher folk who depend on oceans is incomplete. On this Ecological Sunday, let us commit to bring hope and courage to those 'earth communities' who live in the 'fear of perishing'.

4. Redemption of Creation

We read that Jesus called His disciples to follow Him to go to the 'other side'. Was Jesus inviting them to go on an 'ecological tour' cruising through the lake to the 'other side', full of green and lushy meadows, fresh air and beautiful sceneries for them to enjoy and relax? No. We see, as Jesus and disciples stepped out of the boat, they were greeted by a man with unclean spirit, a demoniac in Geresene, called 'Legion' who was living among the tombs unable to be restrained by chains and shackles. Jesus heals Him and the man is found clothed in 'right mind'. Following this, Jesus returns to Galilee by crossing the same lake in the boat to heal the women who was suffering from a hemorrhage for 12 years. The religious and social laws in her time marginalized her and hence she comes from behind, touches Jesus' clothes and is healed. Consequently Jesus brings back to life a young girl who was dead, the daughter of Jairus. Jesus took her hand and said, "*Talitha cum*" which in Aramaic meant, "*Child, get up.*" Immediately she is found alive.

Today, for some of us, ecological ministry is irrelevant, while for a few others among us, ecological ministry is more important than any other ministries. But for Jesus, whether it was ministry in 'this' shore or the 'other' shore or 'in between' the shores, whether it was calming the storms and the waves or liberating the man who was living in the tomb or healing the women who was suffering from hemorrhage or raising the girl who was dead, were all important and was part of His broader divine salvific plan of redemption. The Church too should engage in ecological ministry considering it as part of God's redemptive plan for the whole creation. As St. Paul says in Romans Chapter 8, Verses 21 & 22, "*that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now.*" Losing our focus on 'Redemption' will result in our ministry, including ecological ministry, becoming futile. Remember, we are not just social activists, rather Disciples of Christ called to participate in His divine plan to redeem the whole creation.

5. Yearning for New Creation

The episode of Jesus calming the storm and waves happens in the middle of a 'maritime story' and to understand this deeper, one need to understand the Old Testament understanding of God in relation to Sea. Sea, was often portrayed in many of the then West Asian Religions as a battle ground of Baal (god of fertility and thunderstorms) and Yam (god of sea and chaos) to establish one's authority over the other. The people believed it was when their battle became violent that there were thunders, storms and huge waves in the Sea. But the Israelites believed that it is neither Baal nor Yam who have power over the waters, but YHWH. Hence, it is said in Psalm 29: 3-4, "*The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord, over mighty waters. The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty.*" In Jesus time too, when the chaos over the waters was seen in awe and fear, here the Gospel portrays Jesus with all authority transforming that chaos into peace, a 'new creation'.

Today's Epistle reading from Revelation 21, speaks about a vision of 'a new heaven and a new earth' where 'the sea was no more'. It is not about the total destruction of planet earth by intense heat or fire or thermo-nuclear

war. The Greek work used for 'New' is 'kaine' which means 'renewed'. Therefore, it is not about a 'different earth', rather a 'renewed earth', on which God will pitch His tent. This 'New Heaven and New Earth' is already inaugurated in Jesus Christ. In Him the whole creation is being transformed and renewed and the Church is called to participate in this mission of transforming the whole creation, which will no more be captive of the empire. It speaks about a state of new creation where there will not be any chaos or exploitation or domination of any empire. It is not about escaping from this world, which God loves, rather about healing and transforming and renewing this creation. We are to yearn and work not only towards becoming new creation but also towards participating in the making of this new creation.

Conclusion

Bible says, creation proclaims the glory of God. Among all the creation of God, it is human beings that have the tendency to sin and that includes 'ecological sins'. To affirm the fact that 'Creation Proclaims the Glory of God', we need to know 5 important aspects -: **G-L-O-R-Y**. They are

1. **God of creation**, exercises authority with all His splendor and glory upon His creation to bring peace. Human being is not to 'play God' and manipulate the divine natural order. If we do 'play God', that would result in chaos and catastrophes.
2. **Littering God's wonderful creation** is a sin, by which we demean not only creation, but also the God who created it. We should not bring disgrace to the creation as well as to the glory of the Creator. Let us not cause our own 'storms' and 'waves' for us to perish.
3. **Obligation to creation** not only includes saving the animals and birds and trees, but also bringing hope and courage to those 'earth communities' who live in the 'fear of perishing', who too are representations of God's glory.
4. **Redemption of Creation** is the sole agenda of God's salvific plan and we should locate Ecological commitment of our Church within this salvific plan. Losing our focus on 'Redemption' will derail the very spiritual basis of ecological ministry.
5. **Yearning for New Creation** is not a call to wait to 'escape' from this current world, but a call to fight against the current empires that exploit everything, and thus to participate in God's mission of healing, renewing and transforming this creation.

The question remains, "Do we have the faith to believe in the Creator God to participate in His ecological mission?"

May the Almighty God enable all of us to proclaim the Glory of God revealed in His creation and partner with Him in ushering in the 'New Heaven and New Earth'. We are in the boat with the Creator God who leads us to new shores of His mission to bring peace out of chaos.

Now may the glory and honour be unto the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. **AMEN.**

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