

*You and Me, and I and You
And It and They and Us*
The Interconnectedness of All Things

God of all people

you sent your Son
into the shrouded world
into the borderlands;
may his dawning light
give hope to the broken,
the persecuted,
the alien and the excluded,
that we might feel the kingdom drawing near
and turn to follow him;
through Jesus Christ, the morning star.
Amen.

It has taken me all my life to understand that everything is interconnected and that nothing that is done or said or thought is without consequence and without deep connections with the rest of life. That for this reason, if not this reason alone, the distinction between sacred and secular can be demonstrated to be a false one, as all things are sacred, because all things are threaded together.

Yet all of my life I've continually had to relearn that very principle.

Because somehow, like all of us, to a greater or lesser degree, I am influenced by my church and societal culture and their fierce defence of individualism and the primacy of personal faith over against the notion of the 'world' and the larger community in which I live and work and have my being. We have convinced ourselves somehow, that what I decide, or think or do is my business and my business alone.

And also there is this tendency in me and in others to compartmentalise life. To (and often conveniently) cordon off one area of my life from another.

Jesus comes into this self-absorbed world, and breaks down the walls of separation and difference, and is continually attempting to open our eyes to a quite a different reality, a reality that brings all things together as one, as a unity.

In fact, in a certain moment of time as short as the twinkling of an eye, the scales will be removed from our eyes, and all things in heaven and on earth which have always been inter-linked, will not only obviously become one, but will *be* physically one. The way it always was, it's just that we couldn't or wouldn't, always see it that way.

Certainly the disciples were affected by that same ego-centricity, and that introversion. They thought that all that God was doing was *confined* to their world, hence their attitude:

Teacher we saw someone casting out demons in your name and we tried to stop him because he was not following us.

Jesus had to remind them that the 'deeds of power' enacted under the authority of his name, were not confined to them alone, and to their little world, but were open to *anyone* who availed themselves of the principles upon which that power was based. Who were *they* to stop him?

His compassion and his power weren't commodities that could be owned or monopolised or franchised by anyone. Perhaps there was also a little bit of professional jealousy on their part (remember the failure with which Jesus was greeted coming down from the Mount of Transfiguration, when an anguished parent complained that the disciples couldn't heal his son of demon possession – maybe that failure wasn't an isolated one). And here was someone who wasn't even part of the in-crowd, being more successful.

Rob Bell in one of his short films in the Nooma series, called 'Rhythm' says that for many people their concept of the Divine is built around a God who is outside of everything, a God who is essentially somewhere else, a God who made the world but then stands back and watches it from his vantage point, a God who is there, and then from time to time comes here. And I would add there are those in the Church, conversely, who think that God is basically here, and only from time to time do we find him 'out there'.

Bell says there is a song playing all around us all the time, and that song is playing everywhere – that it is written in our hearts, and everybody, yes including those *who aren't following us*, are playing the song. The question, he says, is not whether we are

playing the song, but rather, am I in tune? He then he comes up with this remarkable and provocative insight, much the same as Jesus' point that if someone isn't against us, and is in sympathy with our cause then he and she is with us. Bell says:

There are people who talk as if they know everything about being a Christian and yet they can seem way out of tune. And then there are others who would say they don't know much at all about the Christian faith, and yet they can seem very in tune with the song.

It is a song that plays truth, love, grace, mercy, justice, compassion. It is a song that Jesus both sang and lived. It is a song for which he died, and a song that rose again and was sung at the resurrection. In Him I can see those abstract truths coming to life, I can understand them, I can relate to them, I can as Rob Bell says, *play that song*.

To my mind we are wired up precisely for such a song – a truth that evolutionary theory, which we often categorise as hostile to our cause, is discovering in a way that is quite astonishing.

Michael E. McCullough in *Beyond Revenge: The Evolution of The Forgiveness Instinct* (2008: 2) draws on evolutionary biology, to make the point that our choice between forgiveness and revenge is a real one, and that we are *not* programmed for revenge:

“In *Good Natured* primatologist Frans de Waal uses case studies and decades of his own research to argue that humans have inherited not only greed, deceit, and the love of power ... but also the capacity for a variety of moral behaviours: setting and enforcing rules that benefit the group, sharing with the needy, sympathising with those that suffer, offering consolation to the vanquished, and returning favours to the generous.”

Thus, the choice between being “fundamentally brutish” and “fundamentally noble”, is one that is deeply imbedded in our DNA and our evolutionary past. Our human nature, is not straitjacketed by a moral code imposed from above, which we call civilisation.

He concludes that

“The claim that **revenge** is an authentic, standard issue, bred-in-the-bone feature of human nature **doesn't imply that forgiveness is a thin veneer of civility that we slap on top of an unwilling,**

brutish, fundamentally vengeful core. Nothing could be further from the truth ... the capacity for forgiveness, like the human capacity for revenge, isn't even a uniquely human characteristic. Many animals ... primates, dolphins, hyenas, goats, and even fish – do some very forgiving-esque things."

In God's world there is no place for a 'them' and 'us' mentality.

Whoever gives a cup of water to drink ... will by no means lose the reward ... whoever they are.

Indeed, *everyone is salted with fire*, everyone is wired up to be at peace with the other. But there rages within us a selfishness that tries to impose itself on me.

Decisions can't (without serious after-effects) made for others. We can only make them for ourselves.

Just worry about yourself, and spend less time judging others, would be sound advice.

Esther's appeal to the Persian King, despite their cultural and religious differences, is based on humanitarian and not ethnic grounds, based furthermore on a confidence, that it was offensive - from anyone's frame of reference, that human beings should choose to destroy and annihilate others, on someone's prejudice or whim.

And to this day the feast of Purim is celebrated to acknowledge God's goodness in sparing the Jews.

And here there is a great irony in as far as modern day Israel despite all of its suffering is blind and deaf to the human needs of the Palestinians, walling so many of them into what can only be described as ghettos, where human rights and dignities have either been ignored, or consciously and deliberately stripped away.

There is the rather humorous story told by the nephew of Edward Said, Saree Makdisi, about the Centre for Tolerance that the Israelis are thinking of building over a Palestinian grave. It's frightening, yet bemusing that the authorities cannot see the offence that this might cause, thinking that somehow such expression of tolerance would override, neutralise such petty concerns.

At Synod there was no better example of compartmentalisation than in a protracted debate over climate change and the question of how 'it', relates to 'us'.

I was very concerned to see some of the simplistic thinking here such as: our main concern should be that people are 'born again', and that we should disregard all this 'alarmist twaddle'. I'm all for being 'born again', I'm one of them, and can recommend the experience to others ... however ...

As if the spiritual life and the physical life around us could be separated from one another!

The Bishop's communique for this Creation Sunday underlines the truth, that the reality of nature and the reality of God, and spirituality are one and the same thing:

"... the health or the distortion of the human relationship with God can be imaged in the health or distortion of the human relationship with Creation".

Hence the dismissiveness of a remark which pours scorn on the current climate change agenda, as I have mentioned above, from the Synod floor, is of great concern.

What is at issue here is a question of ethical choice, a question of being salt, and here again it seems, we have evidence that those 'outside' the faith, 'not following us', are in fact more exemplary of salt than we in the church, and here we should be mindful of Jesus' warning that we must guard against losing that 'saltiness', that capacity to preserve and conserve the world around us.

John Holdren, appointed by Obama has these serious points to make

- Global warming is a misnomer: global climatic disruption - not benign almost entirely harmful
- Already producing significant harm, growing more rapidly than expected
- Mainly caused by humans
- Without doubt this problem is real
- Rapid non-uniform change, affects everything to do with climate

- It concerns us now, not just our children
- With climate change, patterns change i.e. and *everything is affected*
- An important analogy – the health of the body :
- Change in our own temperature signifies sickness of the whole body when we have a temperature we need to worry why should it be less so with climate?
i.e. small changes in degree signal major changes in the body just an index modest change

In an article just received from Andrew Glikson from ANU, 'Collapse or Survive': The stark choice facing our species By Johann Hari September 23, 2009 *'The Independent'*, the lunacy and the irresponsibility of a viewpoint that discounts climate change, is exposed:

We are – at the same time – thrillingly close and sickeningly far from solving our planetary fever. The world's leaders huddled in New York City yesterday to discuss man-made global warming, in a United Nations building that will soon be underwater if they fail.

They all know what has to happen: their scientists have told them, plainly and urgently.

As man-made warming rises by up to 2.4C, all sorts of awful things happen – whole island-states in the South Pacific will drown, for example – but we can stop it.

If we turn off the warming gases, the temperature will stabilise.

But if we go beyond 2.4C, global warming will run away from us, and we will have lost the "Stop" button.

The Amazon rainforest will dry out and burn down, releasing all the carbon stored in the trees; the vast amounts of warming gases stored in the Arctic will be belched into the atmosphere; and so 3C will turn ineluctably to 4C, which will turn to 5C, and the planet will rapidly become a place we do not recognise.

To stay the right side of this climatic Point of No Return, global emissions need to start falling by 2015 – just six years from now – and drop by 85 per cent by 2050. Our leaders need to agree this at the climate talks in Copenhagen in December. The scientific debate is over. The answer is in sight.

Indeed, each one of the leaders could feel the solution on their skin and in their hair yesterday: it lies in the awesome power of the sun.

Every continent has the same option. The entire energy needs of the US could be met by covering 200 square kilometres of its empty deserts with solar plants: it would cost about 10 years' worth of oil purchases, with none of the wars, tyrannies, or blowback Islamism. China and India have similar options. It is achievable, with the kind of great effort we made to defeat the Nazis. We too could be a great generation – one that came close to the brink, but then came together in a great collective effort to change course. We would leave a lean, green civilisation that will run for millennia.

But instead, our leaders are fiddling with the old dirty technologies, too addicted and too addled to move us on and up. In Britain, we are actually turning back to coal, mining 15 per cent more this year than last. Professor Jim Hansen, the head of Nasa and the world's leading climatologist, calls coal power stations "death factories" that condemn millions to drown, or starve, or burn.

Across Europe, solar power is being allowed to wither: Germany's biggest solar company, Q-Cells, has seen its stock fall from €100 to €10 in a year. The other market-leader, Spain, has seen a similarly disastrous fallback.

The World Bank, which receives £400m of your taxes every year, is promoting this soot-streaked vision across the planet. They have just spent \$5bn helping poor countries to build power plants that will destroy them. Indeed, it just bankrolled the single biggest source of greenhouse gas emissions in earth – a coal plant in Gujarat, Western India.

A lot to think about here, and many challenges: gives Jesus words about 'the cup of water' we offer, a new urgency and poignancy of meaning.

With society stressed to the max, we need as a church to realise the strong stabilising and reassuring impact we can have on it.

We have a tremendous sense of community, and we offer faith, hope and love from that community.

In a front page spread in the Canberra Times yesterday, entitled *Fiery Father*, Father Bob Maguire says he believes all 250 Catholic parishes should be tailored to their communities needs. He said:

*"I thought the idea was to be the salt of the earth ...
If I was younger and had some dedicated helpers
We could leave the place open 24 hours, seven days."*

I encourage you to take a look at the latest plans that we have for achieving just that by this time next year – there are copies at the back.

On Wednesday night of this week, 11 of us with 7-8 apologies sat with this very thought and on the double-sided page you will see the outcome – what Holy Covenant does so well already – building a community of faith hope and love.

Jesus says we are salt, that we have salt within us and it is this that will not only bring peace to one another, but also to the world.

Out of Quantum comes an expression that I think is so apt to the human condition, and this Creation Sunday: it is the term ‘entanglement’ and is defined as a phenomenon in which two or more particles remain inextricably linked no matter how far apart they are. And in a sense that is what characterises the whole universe.

If the Sacred Text, the Bible, is correct,

the world as we know it is in for a shaking, such a shaking as we have never seen in the history of humanity.

And when the shaking has stopped little will be left standing except *faith hope and love.*

And embracing all these three wonderful qualities, the praying community, *the community and the solidarity of the shaken.*

My experience of driving to the coast:

And the recent dust storms. Both have served to greatly heighten my awareness of how the creation and us all groan together.

Henri Nouwen in his *Book of Hours* writes:

There is great pain and suffering in the world. But the hardest pain to bear is your own. Once you have taken up that cross, you will be able to see clearly the crosses that others have to bear, and you will be able to reveal to them their own ways to joy and peace and freedom.

Read: Love God's Wild Card

Let us pray:

Lord of rising sun and gentle rain,
whose gifts are uncounted
whose care is uncaged:
free us from measured love
which keeps a record of wrong
and fails before our violence;
take us outside the limits
where we speak only with those
who reflect ourselves;
recall us to your image
shining and alive
in many-coloured eyes;
through Jesus Christ, the peacemaker. Amen.