



## Creation Two

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Habk 1:1- 4, 2:1-4; Luke 17: 1-10

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Season of Creation, I began this season inviting you to join with me on a journey, to bring yourself. I shared with you the insight of unexamined grief I gained from Adrian te Patu and its relevance for the climate crisis we're in. That we find ourselves where we'd rather not be, we participate in the way things are and want to make amends. Of the value of pausing to consider how we got ourselves here, of our ways of thinking and acting that contribute to the state of our planet's depletion. I suggested we might name the swirl of emotions we experience in the face of all that is before us as grief. Enquired about having the collective courage to acknowledge this, not to fix it but, in paying attention allowing that it may change how it comes to express itself in our lives. That it might release us to embrace acting differently than we have.

Today we have this delightfully challenging gospel. When we observe the Season of Creation in our liturgical year it's not uncommon to change the readings to fit the context. I spent quite a bit of time looking at readings that we might use during this time. Before remembering there's a discipline demanded of you when you preach to the prescribed texts, maybe I could pay heed to that. Having said that, I did alter today's gospel by extending it to include the verses about it being better to be thrown into the sea and drown than to lead someone astray and the call to rebuke, invite repentance and forgive over and over again without limit. Why extend to include these? Well, commentators suggest it's because of these

verses the disciples plead for more faith. “Jesus has just told them discipleship is more demanding than they imagined. They are accountable to one another. They are not sure they are up to this.”<sup>1</sup> These verses give context to what follows. They tell us of our responsibility to one another for the life and health of our community.

In recent conversation with someone who dwells on the edge of faith, they reflected upon our human habit of talking about creation as if it’s over there, somehow separate from us. Even though, physiologically, we know we’re comprised of the exact same elements as the world around us. Even though we know we’ve no life in us without the living systems of the natural world. It’s as if our capacity to self-reflect has caused us to stand ourselves over against the rest of creation and forget our utter dependency upon it.

When we listen to today’s gospel, what community, do we think, is its message intended for? When we hear of the need for confession, repentance and forgiveness, of not causing another to stumble, who do we think of as its intended community? Disciples and apostles are named in Jesus’ audience. We hear it as part of a faith community. Do we think, therefore it’s intended for those who are of a faith community, those for who we hold responsibility and challenge for care? We may extend that sense of community responsibility to the wider human community around us, those we love who aren’t part of a faith community, those we chance to meet, interact with and influence.

This Season of Creation might we look more widely and deeply at how we understand, what we mean by, community. At what or who we think we can include in community? How wide are we willing to extend our inclusion?

Given we’re close by the feast of St Francis, we might reflect on Francis’ relationship with nature. Recall his words of familial

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<sup>1</sup> Feasting on the Word Bartlett – Westminster Knox Press – 2015, 142

intimacy of Brothers Sun, wind, air and fire, Sisters moon, stars, water and sister earth our Mother. If we included in our community all that sustains and supports its life, our life and the life of every part of the world, how might we hear today's gospel?

We hear admonishment against any member causing the downfall of another in the community. The call to notice when there's a falling short of flourishing. To notice, to name and to insist that which is cause of the falling short of another is turned from, repented and realigned. As this is done to forgive. Time and again we agree to be restored in relationship. Our life and health, the life and health of every part of our community depend on it.

Sigh, does this not seem all a bit too impossible!? Being accountable to one another for the consequence of our actions. Confessing we diminish flourishing, turning from our habits to do differently and forgiving one another over and over again.

To forgive like this for Luke requires faith, for this is what the disciples plea for. Kimberly Long suggests "Jesus changes the question from "How much faith is enough?" to "What is faith for?" [Jesus] tells them, "You already have the faith you need. Now fulfil its purpose: live it.""<sup>2</sup>

Jesus uses the relationship expectations between master and slave to illustrate, relationships that were part of the landscape in Jesus' time. Such relationships, Long proposes, were "marked by mutual accountability and expectation. The master expects the servants to perform their duties, and the servants, in turn, expect that when their work is done, they will receive nourishment and rest and protection."<sup>3</sup>

Curiously such master-slave relational expectation rather mirrors ours with creation. But here's the thing, implicit in a relationship of mutual accountability and expectation is respect for the stature,

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<sup>2</sup> ibid

<sup>3</sup> ibid

worth and dignity of each in the relationship. I fear we've failed to respect, much less recognize the stature, worth and dignity of our natural world in ways that suggest a mutuality of relationship.

In Luke Jesus tells this story to illustrate the faith needed for us to be able to live as a community. A robust community that mucks up yet can change and forgive and restore relationships. Faith is not a possession you can gain more of, it's a way of life and is worked out in relationship. "In this divine economy, faith is less about personal fortitude and more about mutual forbearance, as we keep on learning that we are all in this together. A community that lives out this sort of faith is not afraid to ask questions or express doubts or show weakness; nor is it afraid to value mercy over fairness, or to forgive one another's failings even when patience wears thin."<sup>4</sup>

We live and move and have our being because of the community of life we are embedded. We're in this together, how seriously have we taken our living world partner in relationship? Mother Nature has been enormously forgiving to the point where giving is costing her her very life. We have imperiled our own existence, for we are fundamentally interconnected.

Forgiveness requires faith, Luke would have us know. To forgive in the sense used today isn't to forget the misdeed but that we no longer bear the guilt associated with it. How are we going with that?

Last time I spoke I invited you to reflect on the idea of unexamined grief, to be gentle with yourself. This week, how about forgiveness with the implication of guilt it bears? Guilt can be a familiar discomfort, binding us and our energy to stay as we are. Forgiveness requires faith, it may free all of our community from bondage.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 144