

Creation Care Series – Isn't It Ironic

In our conversation on creation care I have made it clear that all of creation speaks of the magnificent work of our Creator God. In essence what I and others in which I have quoted passionately share that all of creation echo's the hand of God the Psalmist says it so poetic in Psalm 104

Praise the Lord, O my Soul

O Lord my God, you are great; you are clothed with splendor and majesty

God wraps himself in light as with a garment he stretches out the heavens like a tent and lays the beams of his upper chambers on their water.

God makes the clouds his chariot and rises on the wings of the wind.

God makes winds his messengers, flames of fire his servants.....

How many are your works, O Lord? In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.....

May the glory of the Lord endure forever; may the Lord rejoice in all his works.

Psalm 104 follows the wonderful account of Genesis and says wow! At the end of Psalm however we also read how our God rejoices in all of Creation...God gets a kick out what has been created by him...all of creation, the trees, the ocean waves, the clouds, the snow caps, ice bergs, the sand on the beach...and yes God rejoices of each us that he creation on purpose! Another way to put our hands around this is understand that all of creation reflection our creator– I am not talking Disney “circle of life” stuff! Rather that in creation we can find the Character of God – life, joy, serenity, shalom, but there's more. IN creation we also see the very nature found in of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – which is available to every believer

– That death/that dying is part and parcel of ushering in new life. In other words in the economy of God out of death very often comes life – both new life and eternal life. That life, all life, is a natural consequence of death it is natural. And one may say somewhat IRONIC.

Back in the mid-nineties – a popular song hit the airwaves entitled “Isn't it Ironic” by Alanis Morissette. Musically, the song was the standard grunge music format, with delicate, sparsely instrumented verses alternating with loud, aggressive chorus sections – boy she could shriek with the best of them! However it was the biting lyrics that got the attention of the masses. Lyrically the song was comprised of a series of vignettes describing situations or circumstances that was deemed to be “ironic”. In each of these vignettes, she ended them with the question "Isn't it ironic?" For example:

"A traffic jam when you're already late

A no-smoking sign on your cigarette break

It's like ten thousand spoons when all you need is a knife

It's meeting the man of my dreams

And then meeting his beautiful wife

And isn't it ironic... don't you think?"

The song's usage of the word "ironic" caused quite a stir because many felt that the song was an improper application of the word “ironic” which of course made it “ironic.” **“Irony” is defined as - the disparity between what you expect will happen and what does happen....** Admittedly some situations that Morissette describes in the song are arguably examples of simply “being in

the wrong place at the wrong time – a form of fate” or merely unfortunate circumstances or mere coincidences.

Nevertheless the popularity of the song caused many people to ponder on the ironies of this life

- Take the person whose lived an unhealthy lifestyle, cheese burgers/big Macs with beer morning noon and night has an epiphany and becomes a vegetarian and lives a healthy lifestyle [i.e. exercise, yearly physicals, the whole nine] and then one day drops dead of a heart attack while jogging...the exact thing that kept him alive is the very thing that killed him...
- Take my wife who cares for her teeth, flosses, brushes religiously after meals and goes to the dentist like clock work yet struggles with cavities, caps, gums.....as for me, I do brush but that’s about it – cavity free!
- Young people - you stay up all night studying for a test. When you go to class, you discover the test is not until the next day.

Irony is doing or saying the opposite of what is expected. Irony is all around us in all of creation.

- Venus flytrap – a carnivorous plant....
- **Rhododendron**¹
- **Chrysanthemum**²
- Also known as mums, orange and yellow varieties of these showy flowers often turn up in foil-wrapped pots on people's front steps around Halloween and Thanksgiving.
- **Lily-of-the-valley**³
- These are entirely poisonous, from the tips of their tiny bell-shaped white flowers that coyly fall off like parted hair to the very water in which they might be placed.

Can’t you hear the refrain.....Isn’t it Ironic? Other parts of God’s creation we irony as well...The other day my daughter Marcela and I went to the zoo where we have a family membership and she was proudly telling me all the interesting facts about her favorite animals, most of which I didn’t know – some of the facts where somewhat ironic when compared to our own human nature.....

- The male peacock who we saw strutting itself, is by far the most beautifully decorated compared to the female species (mummer parade through the Zoo) – Marcela told me God did this because that the lady peacock needed to be impressed by the male.
- We then went to the so-called “King of Jungle” the lion is absent from home and it is the mother who cares for the cubs – protects them from their own father. Marcela said I don’t even get that grumpy
- Lastly as we went to see one of her favorite animals the elephant but when we arrive it was empty and we read that the elder elephant had died after being in captivity at the zoo for over 50 years – Marcela said it is “Kinda weird that in order for humans to keep animals safe from becoming extinct we have to keep them caged til they die.....Isn’t it ironic?

Indeed “Ironic” is the best description of our scripture text this morning. Rd Jn:12:24-26

¹ http://www.livescience.com/strangenews/top10_poisonous_plants

² http://www.livescience.com/strangenews/top10_poisonous_plants

³ http://www.livescience.com/strangenews/top10_poisonous_plants

I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.

The person who loves his life will lose it, while the one who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be.

My Father will honor the one who serves me. (vv24-26)

Central theme – here we find the irony of Jesus and the irony of God’s creation coming together – that death/dying is part and parcel of ushering in new life. In the economy of God out of death comes life – new life and eternal life. It is natural.

In our study of Creation Care over the last few weeks we have spent time seeing how Creator God can be seen, heard, in all of creation. That sense the beginning of time our God has called humankind to care, to be stewards of creation – not to abuse it, rule over it, but care for it, nurturing it, allowing creation to rest. Yet the reality is that we have abused God’s creation in name of profit, gluttony, over zealous work ethic and political power. In fact in our text last week we saw how all of God’s creation (including you and I) are called to rest, to Sabbath. In other words all creation has a rhythm to it – Ecclesiastes. Says

Ecclesiastes 3:1 There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: 2 a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot,

The things of this world do not happened haphazardly rather, all creation have a season, a time, birth, life, and yes even – death. Isn’t it Ironic my brother and sister that in death according to our scriptures we find LIFE....The world would call us quite foolish to proclaim such foolishness. This is why the words of Jesus this morning are quite IRONIC when we consider that most of us do everything in our power to keep from death... Yet the words of Jesus to us this morning are clear.....

The person who loves his life will lose it, while the one who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

Jesus words push each of us to the brink of irony and to the point of being uncomfortable. Jesus carefully and powerfully interjects how creation, a “kernel of wheat” to illustrate that death is a natural step in order to produce life. Let’s be clear, Jesus could have utilized other images such as fire as it utilize to burn or kill vegetation so that a clearing is produced - this is used as a fuel control technique to reduce the risk of fires in fire-prone shrublands as way kill in order to preserve life (ironic). A modern day example would be organ donation in my death others may live..... Jesus utilizes a simple and common kernel of wheat noting that when it falls from its stalk and dies it will produce many other seeds, more life. Jesus implies clearly that in creation death isn’t the end. Amen.

- That we like the kernel of wheat can produce many more seeds.....

The famous observation of Tertullian of the 1st & 2nd century was that, **“the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.”** echo’s the words of Jesus. If your like me you have no trouble thinking of persecution and martyrdom as a great obstacle to the spread of the gospel, yet if the blood of the martyrs truly is the seed of the Church, then without it, the Church does not grow....we do not grow. There is a direct correlation between persuecuation/martydom and

discipleship – began in Rome with Stephen in Acts and lasted up for the next 300 years up to Constantine, our Mennonite tradition comes out of persecution – by both Catholic and Protestant...today in places like India and Indonesia, Sudan...Tanzania Mennonite Church grew beyond measure – underground! It is noteworthy that the seed dies on its own accord. The seed can choose to remain as a single seed. It can also choose to die. In John 10:17, 18 Jesus said,

“The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life-only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again.”

Jesus died on the cross not because he was powerless. Jesus died so that we may be made alive. Because of our sins, we were as good as dead. However, because Jesus died in our place, by faith in Jesus, we have new life from God.

“The one who loves his life will lose it, while the one who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where

- That we like the kernel of wheat we are daily being called to die to ourselves –

10But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. 11And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. Romans 8

Paul wants each of us to know that not only can physical death produce life as it did with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ or with the life of martyrs provide stimulus for the generations to come alter them...but each us are called to die, die to sin, die to this world and if we are open to the transformation power of the Holy Spirit this death process like that of the resurrection of Jesus on third day will produce a new life, a newness in our heart, mind and soul. This transformation is moving from simply believing that God is God, Jesus is the Son and the Holy Spirit to a sense of belonging relationally to the one who created you. But the fact remains that in order for this new life to begin the transformation process we must die to self and this world....Earlier in John’s gospel this understanding is being presented to Nicodemus a great thinker and religious leader. Jesus said up til this point in your relationship with God you have worked at “doing” the right things failing to remember that you belong because I have invited you first – grace. This act of grace is free, though it wasn’t free, as Jesus died on the cross. Jesus tells Nicodemus what so many of us need to hear for the first time or perhaps for the 50th time

1Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. 2He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him."

3In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.^[a]" IRONIC)

4"How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"

5Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. 6Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit^[b] gives birth to spirit. 7You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You^[c] must be born again.' 8The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

9"How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.

Jesus wants Nicodemus to know that in order for the Spirit to enter in this life one must die to this world – hatred has to die, lusts has to die, jealousy has to die, fear has to die, idols/that which you value more than your relationship with God has to die.....it has to die.....The Rich Man asked Jesus What must I do to be saved? Jesus words were quite Ironic and cutting – give up your identify which is wealth.....the rich could have walked with the Lord, talk with the Lord, touched him, seen the living Savior but he like most of us said you know what I'll stay where I am at – even if where I am isn't sufficient. Jesus wanted the Rich Man to Die to that which defined him – die to your will, because the Bible is clear our will.. We see a different result upon dying to yourself – let's be honest sometimes it takes hitting rock bottom before we are ready to look into the mirror of life and say Lord "I give up" (hands up)....and you die to your addiction, you die to the lies of low self-esteem, of a life of loneliness and separation from a church community, you die to isolationism.....and say like the youngest Prodigal Son and say 'in my fathers house there is Shalom...I will return home, failing to realize that our heavenly Father has always been waiting for our return – the son finally remembered that he already belonged to the family...(isn't it ironic)

17" When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! 18I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. 19I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' 20So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

21" The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'^[b]

22" But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. 24For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

As we die to ourselves, our text tells us that the natural occurrence will mirror creation in that we will produce fruits found in our Lord – we belong

2But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. 25Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

Communion Service transition

As we transition into our communion service let us remember the words of Jesus – he said do this drink this juice, eat the bread in remembrance of him....in remembrance of his death, his willingness to place himself in equality with all the rest of creation, yet because of

1If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. 3Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

5Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: **6**Who, being in very nature^[a] God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, **7**but made himself nothing, taking the very nature^[b] of a servant, being made in human likeness. **8**And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!

9Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, **10**that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, **11**and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:1-11

The irony of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is available to each of us, in a real sense we have been created to worship, love and adore our God...*we belong.* Therefore – we too can position ourselves this day like a kernel of wheat to die to this world, die to those things that take away the joy of my salvation – simply by confessing to our Lord of your desire to be pure, holy, righteous, true, thankful, a sanctuary for you Lord – for your Spirit