

Evensong Sunday 2nd April 2017 St Pauls Cathedral London

“Like as a hart desireth the water brook so longeth my soul for Thee”. The physical thirst for water is a beautiful and sensational metaphor of our need for spiritual fulfilment, of our need to find God.

Imagine for a moment a hot summer’s day after a long, long walk in the heat of the sun and someone offers you a glass of iced water to slake your thirst. You are parched. As you gulp it down you feel the cold coursing through your body quenching every part of you. And just as we need God to satisfy the soul so the body and the earth need water. That’s how God has ordered the nature of things.

From the beginning to the end of the Bible water flows through its pages as both the source and the symbol of life. It is a double metaphor for our flourishing both physically and spiritually.

Some years ago, I spent a week on the Amazon River. It was a symposium of religious and scientific leaders looking at the future of water and trees. On the last day, we gathered around our host, the Ecumenical Patriarch, on a pontoon in the middle of the tributary where the Rio Negro meets the Rio Branco to bless the waters of the Amazon. Accompanying the religious leaders was a band of Amazonian Indians dancing and playing their pipes to a great crescendo and climax as they circled a flaming and smoking fire on the pontoon. I whispered in a friend’s ear that the swell of the river was making me feel a little sea-sick. “Oh no”, he said, “it’s not the river. See that fire – they’re burning cocaine leaves!”.

Well, whatever the effect of the smoke the sight of such an expanse of water under a vast sky and bordered by such a dense and fertile forest brought home the vital vitality of water and trees to the whole created order. The water and the trees. The blood and the lungs of the earth.

In the opening chapter of Genesis God planted a garden with trees and a river. The first Gardener showing that it is in the symbiotic relationship between water and trees lies the secret of sustaining his creation.

One of the other religious leaders was a Muslim scholar from Azerbaijan. Nariman Gasimoglu. We have since become dear friends and worked together to show that both the Koran and the Bible teach us to care for God's creation. Nariman has since written a paper showing how not only the Bible and the Koran but also the Hindu Vedas teach us about the pre-existence of water to Creation and how God created everything out of water

But from that time on and to this very day there are forces in God's world determined to destabilise the finely balanced equilibrium of the Planet.

Slashing down forests, poisoning rivers with toxins and polluting the oceans with plastic humanity seems hell-bent on self-harming and turning the world into a gigantic rubbish tip. It's no accident that the municipal rubbish dump outside Jerusalem known as Gahanna was exactly the picture Jesus used for Hell. The road to Hell on earth is paved with the wasting of the seas and the trees, the skies, and the soil.

The tragedy is that it is the poor who withstand the worst of the damage.

I have walked through the rice fields on the eastern sea-board of India where children drowned after the super cyclones swamped and devastated their villages.

But the rich and the powerful find ways of protecting ourselves from the consequences of our choices.

So, for example, while poorer parts of the world are flooded through the changing climate we here in London are kept safe by Thames Barrier. Significantly it was raised four times in the 1980s, 35 times in the 1990s and since the year 2000 has been raised 139 times. I cannot help thinking that if the City of London and the Palace of Westminster had been flooded as many times as the Barrier has been raised there might have been more action on climate change.

But despite our manic desecration God refuses to give up on his masterpiece. After all, he made it good and at the outset declared it to be 'very good'.

So, through the prophet Ezekiel God gave us a vision of how he will renew and restore his creation. The secret weapon? Water! Flowing from the Temple. Sacred water. The source of it? God himself. Pure and life-giving water. How? By renewing the stagnant seas and making the water fresh again.

When Jesus came, he played on the word water and urged people to drink in his teaching. He knew the injustices of a world without reference to God its creator and taught the wisdom of re-aligning earth with heaven. That's why he gave us a prayer for God's will to be done on earth as it is done in heaven. The Lord's Prayer. It's a prayer for the earthing of heaven.

The planet which is our home is going through a dramatic change. Once we were a small world living on a big planet, now we are a big world struggling to survive on a small planet.

70% of its surface is covered by water but only 1% of it is drinkable. And there is no fair or even access to that 1%. In some parts of the earth women and children must travel miles to find it and will risk their lives to drink it for fear of the toxins that have poisoned it.

But still God does not give up on us. In the last book of the Bible there is again a vision of fresh water renewing the earth and watering the trees with leaves for the healing of the nations.

Our desire for God must be bound up with a longing to see a renewed world become like a watered garden where all the children of the earth play and delight justly in the fruits of his Creation. Such a vision should make us live differently as we pray and work together for the earthing of heaven.

“Like as the hart desireth the water brook so longeth my soul for Thee, O God.”

The Right Reverend James Jones KBE