

Eco-Sunday Sermon 2021

THEME: LIVING IN PEACE WITH NATURE

Text: Genesis 6:19

INTRODUCTION

What can be called 'original sin', that is, human greed that caused Adam and Eve to break their relationship with God in the Garden of Eden, continues to tempt us to destroy nature and natural beauty in the pursuit of temporary material wealth and pleasure. In a creation care workshop in the Northeast, three participants representing different age groups were asked if they had seen the Western Hoolock Gibbon. Western Hoolock Gibbon is a subspecies of the only ape found in India. While the oldest person said that he had seen plenty of them when he was younger, the middle-aged one said, only in a Zoo, and the youngest participant said that she had not even heard of the name. Imagine, if this particular species is wiped out in India, they will disappear from the whole planet. This indicates the sad reality of the fast reduction of biodiversity.

THE MESSAGE

As we reflect on the theme 'Living in peace with nature' we shall look at the passage and draw insights and inspiration for the mission of creation care. First – the nature of the covenant; second – the command to preserve biodiversity; and finally – the ways in which we can follow the covenant.


THE COVENANT

Genesis chapter 6 talks about the wickedness of the world and the covenant between God and Noah for the preservation of biodiversity on earth, including human beings. The great wickedness of human beings in Noah's time is explained in terms of immorality and evil thoughts in human hearts everywhere and that had to do with greed for temporary wealth and pleasure (v.5). It was in that context that God found Noah righteous, meaning innocent, upright or acquitted. In other words, Noah did not follow the culture and lifestyle of his time, rather, 'he walked with God'. He resisted the temptation of pleasure-seeking evil thoughts in his heart and abstained from practicing them. Noah being such a self-disciplined and caring person found favour with God, and God established His covenant with him (v.18) for the preservation of animals and other living creatures which He created and called very good (Genesis 1:31). Covenant or agreement is always made between two parties involving specific duties and responsibilities on both the sides. In the covenant with Noah, the agreement is that God would save Noah and his family from the flood and Noah, in turn, is to bring animals and other living creatures into the Ark.

THE COMMAND TO PRESERVE BIODIVERSITY

The main point in this covenant is the preservation of animals and all other living creatures from extinction and it is expressed twice in a verb form 'keep them alive with you' (v.19 & v.20). The need is to keep them 'alive'. To participate in God's mission for creation care, Noah had to do two important things: one, to bring a couple each of all animals, birds and other living creatures into the Ark. The Bible does not seem to suggest that Noah had to go around and select the living creatures for the Ark but rather, his duty appears to be more of a facilitating role. In other words, participating in God's mission for creation care, Noah did not presume to be the owner of the mission. In this, we see that the mission belongs to God and we are privileged participants in what God is doing around us.





The second important thing that Noah had to do was to provide sufficient food stuff for the living creatures in the Ark. That involves the task of identifying different kinds of food for each living creature, the amount sufficient for the whole period of the flood and the preservation of them in the Ark. For Noah, to keep all the living creatures alive with him in the Ark, he needs to form a plan by careful research, and then to execute it. It reminds us of the fact that we too have to know the needs of creation, make plans and carry out those plans carefully. As a missional community, we are to use our intellect, heart, emotions and strengths.

Keeping the living creatures alive is about ensuring the total well-being of nature. It not only involves the need for food but also the importance of protection from harm and dangers both from within and outside. Imagine the greatness of variety in the living creatures in the Ark, the amount of planning and care needed to preserve them, and the patience required to deal with each living creature; it is truly a mega project!

THE IMPLICATION FOR CREATION CARE

Having reflected on this passage, one question comes to mind: Why is God so much concerned for the preservation of nature? Generally, the issue of spiritual rebirth derived from John 3:16 is considered the most important part in the work of mission, but this neglects God's concern for His wider world of creation. The question is, 'Are the two concerns unrelated?' The present-day climate catastrophe compels us to reflect critically on the dichotomic understanding of God's concern for human beings and nature and view the two concerns through the eyes of God. God's heart for mission is holistic in nature. His love that covers the whole world (John 3:16) covers the same for salvation. In other words, all that is covered by His love is covered in the plan of His salvation.

We need to seek for the total well-being of the whole of God's creation and live with them in harmony. The biodiversity reflects the richness and beauty of their Creator. Not only that, they are included in the plan of God for salvation as Romans 8:21 says 'the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay.' Moreover, the beauty of Heaven cannot be imagined without the help of nature and natural beauties here on earth. For this reason, the image of God in human beings must not be understood in terms of ruling, exploiting or exercising dominion over nature for the sake of human beings but as a responsibility to care for the total well-being of God's entire creation. Like in the Noahic covenant, the merciful God has provided us His salvation in and through Jesus Christ and our responsibility is to care for all that is included in His plan of salvation.

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of our reflection, we said that the original sin of human beings in the Garden of Eden was essentially greed, wanting to be like what they were not. It was greed that made Adam and Eve want to be like God and as a result, they disobeyed God's command and let sin enter into this world. It is the same greed that continues to tempt us to destroy God's beautiful creation for the sake of temporary wealth and pleasures and today we are very close to the point of no return. God is calling us today for His mission of holistic care and preservation. What God created and calls 'very good' must remain very good. In God's mission of creation care, we are not given the right to choose and 'manage' nature but to accept and care for all that God has given to us. Therefore, let us repent from our sins of greed and keep the biodiversity alive both for the deeper understanding of God's love and His glory. Amen.

