

# For Love of the World



The Reverend Rebecca Newland is Rector of St Philip's Anglican Parish in O'Connor, Australian Capital Territory

*[www.stphilipsoconnor.org.au](http://www.stphilipsoconnor.org.au)*

The Reverend Linda Chapman is Rector of the Anglican Parish of Moruya, New South Wales

*[www.moruyaanglicanparish.org.au](http://www.moruyaanglicanparish.org.au)*

© 2012

## For Love of the World

---



### Introduction

Rebecca Newland

In 2006, six years ago now, my husband and I went to see *An Inconvenient Truth*, Al Gore's film about climate change. We came out of that movie stunned and motivated. Although both of us had heard about the issue, neither of us had realized the scale or the potential impact if something was not done and done quickly to halt the change. Although the film created enormous controversy, partly because there were some issues with Gore's use of scientific data, it remains a watershed documentary and it changed many people's lives. Although many, many gifted people had been alerting us to the problem of climate change there is nothing like moving pictures, colored graphs and celebrity to get our attention!

David and I both saw the need to do something—something within our limited power to get some action on dealing with what was eventually called the 'greatest moral challenge' of our time. Two colleagues of mine, the Revd Linda Chapman and the Revd Sarah Bachelard, worked together to arrange a multi-faith climate change rally held at the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture. The rally, called *For Love of the World*, was an opportunity for those gathered to hear the voices of a scientist, a poet, a farmer, a theologian, a conservationist and children articulating their responses, including lament and hope, to the reality of climate change. Bishop George Browning led other faith leaders in signing an appeal for action to the Australian Parliament. Those people who attended were provided with practical ways to address climate change in their own lives. We had speakers from the Australian Conservation Foundation, representatives from many other faiths and no faith at all. Guest speaker Michael Leunig was a particularly persuasive voice. There was hope in the air and a sense of purpose.

In my ministry I began to talk and preach about how caring for the environment was part of God's call and purpose for human beings. I talked about how Jesus Christ saw his own mission as proclaiming the Kingdom of God. That phrase, 'the Kingdom of God' is one of those slippery theological terms that Jesus himself never defined. Instead he lived, breathed and taught it from birth to resurrection. As I understand it, it is nothing less than the reconciliation, the healing of the whole of creation, heaven and earth, justice and peace for all on a global scale. It is everything ending up as God intended—at one with him, whole, complete, in all its and our diversity and complexity. Human beings are integral to this process—how we got here and what we must do.

The medieval mystics saw it and scripture confirms that humanity and the natural world are inextricably linked. Aside from the thousands of species that will become extinct over the coming decades, it is the poor who suffer the most from global warming. It seemed clear to me then that we needed to change our behaviour. In orthodox language, we needed to repent.

However, what I began to do in my ministry was nothing compared to what my husband began to do. He is a scientist, not a climate scientist but a wildlife biologist. Like all good scientists, he is able to look at data sets and analyse scientific papers. And that's what he

began to do. He came out persuaded that we needed to address this issue and we had to do so immediately. He was also convinced that it was a political issue and we had to get our politicians to take action. And so he campaigned. He gave talks. He protested. He nagged his colleagues and friends. He carted thirty five-foot blowup penguins around Canberra, put up placards, constructed laminated graphs, sat out in all weathers, handed out pamphlets. He was a one-man activist army.

Many people around the country were doing similar things, working for change and believing they could turn the tide. The winds of change were very much in the air as Kevin Rudd and the Labor Party were elected to government in 2007.

And this is where it begins to get very perplexing.

Scientists and those with an understanding of the dilemma thought that if we just present the facts, the statistics and the overwhelming probability that anthropogenic global warming was real, and then the lights would go on and we would seriously begin to address this critical issue. At the very least we thought the precautionary principle, would motivate policy change.

But since then, nothing much seems to have changed. Compared with the size of the crisis there has been a very limited amount of action and almost no consensus. Much talk, lots of hand wringing but little change. Although we now have carbon pricing legislation the actual public motivation and energy to do something about the crisis has actually lessened. And it's not because we think the government has the issue well in hand.

Recently I chaired a CES (Christians for an Ethical Society) forum about climate change denial and came away from that evening pondering one question. What was the Christian response? What was it that I must do as a follower of Christ the Lord? One word kept coming to me—prayer and repentance. Repentance is not a particularly attractive word but one that persistently spoke. It is both feeling grief and sorrow for what we have done and its negative consequences and a change of heart, mind and behaviour. Repentance is turning to God. It is a rebuilding of a relationship. In the context of climate change and our response, it's also fundamentally about the rebuilding of our relationship with God's beautiful and wondrous earth. After true repentance comes changed behaviour.

These studies are neither about the science of climate change, nor a policy debate about how to tackle the problem, nor a list of suggestions about how we as individuals may reduce our carbon footprint. They are about our relationship to God and to the earth—the world—that God loves. In the end, what ever we do, whatever happens, we must be able to say that we faced this problem, that we were indeed the priesthood of all believers who followed Christ to the cross and beyond. We must be able to say that we loved the world just as God in Christ Jesus loved us—or we at least did our very best.

Linda and I hope you find these studies assist you in discerning your response, your next steps, in the great journey of following our Lord.

Each study is focused on the gospel set for that Sunday in Lent and considers a pattern, a practice and discipline. There are questions to consider individually and as a group. At the back of the study is a summary of the climate change issue taken from *The Science of Climate Change: Questions and Answers* an Australian Academy of Science publication, August 2010. The publication with all references can be found on-line at [www.science.org.au/policy/climatechange2012.html](http://www.science.org.au/policy/climatechange2012.html).

## For Love of the World

---



### Session 1: “Repent and Believe the Good News” (Mk 1:15)

Rebecca Newland

Gospel = Mark 1.9-15

Pattern = Denial

Practice = Courage

Discipline = Prayer

When I was a teenager growing up in the 70s, I came across a wilderness magazine. I can't even remember the title, but in it I found an article about the dangers of nuclear annihilation. It was frightening and appalling. The generation before me had already been confronting this possibility, having lived with and through the reality of Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Nuclear war on a global scale was annihilation on a grand scale. At the push of a button whole sections of the Earth would become obliterated and uninhabitable for centuries. It could still happen. Yet as the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century approached we were faced with another crisis—ecological deterioration. Concerned scientists had for decades been warning any one that would listen that the ecology of the Earth was under threat from pollution, over-population, unsustainable farming practises and deforestation. Climate change is now considered the most critical of environmental issues for we have found that even the slightest amount of global warming can have devastating consequences for entire ecosystems, the survival of other species, food security, border protection and humanitarian needs of all types.

As the warnings grow more urgent, we have all become more aware of the issues and have sensed the need to do something. However, while the nuclear threat is clear and stark—it involves someone, somewhere, pushing a button to begin the process of annihilation<sup>1</sup>—ecological deterioration is subtle and gradual. It involves the daily, seemingly insignificant, activities of every human being on the planet. Turning around human behaviour is extraordinarily difficult. We are creatures of habit. We are often driven more by selfishness and greed than by altruism. It seems we can be altruistic for a moment, as when we respond to immediate human need presented in natural disasters like the Indonesian tsunami of 2004 or the Japanese earthquake of 2010, but sustained altruism that involves daily delaying of pleasure and want for long period of time is much more difficult.

We are indeed much more like children who mindlessly consume and take than rational human beings who consider the facts and take appropriate action to avert catastrophe. We are not very good at delaying pleasure to attain a higher good—and I include myself unreservedly in this assessment.

One of the patterns that contribute to this ongoing issue is denial. We humans are

---

<sup>1</sup> McFague, S. *The Body of God*, 1993.

masters at denial. It is one of the most common defence mechanisms we use.

- “Christmas was wonderful thanks” — even though we were depressed for most of it and over ate for the rest.
- “I don’t have an addiction problem” — as we find ourselves being unable to say no to that second glass of wine.
- “There is no such thing as global warming” — even though the peer-reviewed science overwhelmingly says it is true.
- “The consequences won’t be that bad, what’s a slightly warmer summer matter?” — even though we are already feeling the adverse effects of increased temperatures on a climatic scale.

Or perhaps you are more like me: I know the facts, I’ve studied the science, I’ve read books and talked to experts, but *I just don’t want to know*. Give me an entertaining movie to watch and let me forget all the difficult and confronting aspects of existence.

Scientists and those with an understanding of the dilemma have been perplexed by the response or lack of response by others. They thought that if they just presented the facts, the statistics and the overwhelming probability that anthropogenic global warming was real, then the lights would go on and we would seriously begin to address this critical issue. At the very least, they thought, the precautionary principle would motivate policy change. Yet we are stalled, caught in the politics of fear and the chains of denial.

A stark antidote to denial is our Lord Jesus Christ. In our gospel passage he steps up and proclaims, “The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe the good news”. John the Baptist had just been arrested, surely a warning to any relative, acquaintance or anyone with a similar turn of mind. Jesus did not run from the facts or his commitment to do the work of his Father. He had just looked sin and temptation in the face and now he began to call others to the same task.

Yet Jesus’ proclamation holds together two seemingly opposite invitations. One is to repentance. In the Old Testament the idea of repentance is represented by two verbs: to return and to feel sorrow. In the New Testament the word translated as ‘repentance’ is the Greek word *metanoia* which, roughly translated, means “after/behind one’s mind”. Repentance is therefore primarily an after thought, different from the former thought—a change of mind accompanied by regret and change of conduct. It’s a change of mind and heart or a change of consciousness. Sorrow, a change of heart, a return to God—these are some of the words that capture the notion of repentance but behind them is the ability to look at reality squarely, a reality that is not pleasant to confront. Like the prodigal son, a cold hard look at the facts is a prerequisite for a change of heart.

The other invitation is the invitation to hope. Jesus says, “repent and believe the *good news*”. This is the core of the proclamation. We can repent, that is feel grief and sorrow and change our mind and heart precisely because in Christ Jesus we are offered good news, the very best of news. This may seem counterintuitive in the context of ecological deterioration and the almost apocalyptic scenarios run away global warming presents, yet this is the profound message of hope that comes from the God of love through Christ. When we have faith, that is trust God, then in the midst of any calamity or difficulty we can find hope—hope in our brothers and sisters and always hope in God.

The invitation to repentance and hope takes the practice of courage. Courage is a virtue that is critical in living a life to the fullest, entering God’s Kingdom. It takes courage to



repent. The prodigal son had to summon up courage to take those steps that led him home. It takes courage to admit we have made a mistake. It took courage for Jesus to confront his tester in the wilderness and to choose God's path over the easier-looking path of power and glory. It took courage for Jesus to stand and preach when his cousin had just been arrested. It takes courage to look at the facts of climate change and truly sit with what it will mean for our earthly home if we as a species do not change our behaviour. It takes courage to sit with grief and sorrow.

How then did our Lord find that courage? Where does it come from? I would like to suggest that it comes from the discipline of prayer. It has been said many times but it is worth saying again, Jesus prayed—a lot. Prayer is our whole life of communion with God, a oneness with our creator. Evelyn Underhill wrote these words about prayer:

Amid all the varieties of prayer there are two movements which must, I think, be present in every spiritual life. The love and energy of prayer must be directed on the one hand toward God and on the other toward humanity ... Furthermore, "thou shalt love the Lord thy God" comes first (not only in the commandments, and not only in action, but in prayer). This means adoration, and not intercession or petition, is the very heart of prayer.

When we spend time praising, loving and adoring God we open the door to receiving God's Spirit and grace. With this will come a deepening trust in God's faithfulness and love. With this comes the gift of courage when we need it.

This is not like magic. It takes time and discipline, a continual turning to God, a putting into place a habit of prayer and a growing consciousness of God. It is said it takes over two months of *daily* repetitions before even the most simple of behaviours becomes a habit—and longer for more complex behaviours. If you want to deepen your relationship with God, it really is a case of fake it until you make it—it really is all in the practice.

Spend some time considering the above and the Gospel passage. Discuss the Gospel passage first. What words and phrases in both stood out for you?

### **Questions for individual reflection and sharing if you wish**

1. Look at the photo below. What thoughts come to mind as you look at it?



2. It is an old and weathered mangrove on a rock shelf that is battered by the ocean in high seas. What does it tell you about its resilience? What does it tell you about its

fragility?

3. There are forty days of Lent, a little over a month, not quite long enough to form a habit. What needs to change in your life for you to form the habit of daily prayer, that is daily communion with God? If you have managed to do this, what helped you? What hindered you?
4. Grief and sorrow are difficult emotions to sit with, yet sorrow is part of repentance. Take a walk through your local park or sit in your garden. What feeling arises in you when you look at God's created beauty? Wonder, hope, fear, sorrow, concern? In what way's does it touch or move you?
5. In what ways is denial such a successful defence mechanism? What have you denied in the past but have then confronted? What was the difference?
6. When you read the words of Jesus, "Repent and believe the good news", what was your response? Your first thoughts? Your after thoughts?



## For Love of the World

---

### Session 2: “Let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me”

(Mk 8:34)

Rebecca Newland



Gospel = Mark 8.31-38

Pattern = Selfishness

Practice = Surrender

Discipline = Simplicity

By my reckoning, there are two critical questions to answer in life—“Who am I?” and “Who is Jesus Christ?” A third question is “What is the relationship between these two, myself and Christ?” It takes some reflecting and pondering to arrive at an answer that fits well. Yet in our culture, we are more likely to ask, “What can I get from life, from God, from others, from this situation?” Our whole consumerist society is built on the idea that we have a right to the good life, to having our wants fulfilled and our dreams actualized. At no other time in human history have individual human beings been more the centre and focus of their universe. Yet, at the same time, we are more disconnected from that universe than ever before.

In Western developed nations we live in a highly mediated society. That is, we are cut off from the natural world by plumbing, insulation and concrete. The world comes to us via the Internet, television and radio. We are not longer ‘in’ it. If you have ever lived for any period of time with a tribal people who live directly from the land and have no access to electricity and water on tap this becomes almost painfully obvious. The culture shock is not being in that community. The culture shock is when you step out of the plane at Sydney airport into an air-conditioned terminal, a taxi and a concrete jungle. More than half of the world’s population now lives in cities and towns and the number is set to increase. As Sally McFague puts it,

Many of us and many more of our children have never known wilderness or experienced nature relatively free from human tampering. We do not know wilderness as a yardstick, which provides a yardstick of how we have changed the environment.<sup>2</sup>

Our mediated, disconnected existence contributes to our denial and the illusion that we are in control.

In this context where does the question, “Who is Jesus Christ?” lead us? Just prior to Jesus telling his listeners that if anyone wants to be his follower they must deny themselves, take up their cross and follow him, he had a revealing conversation with his disciples. He asks firstly, “who do people say I am?” They offer various answers. He next asks, “But who do you say I am?” Peter answers, “You are the Messiah.” This short passage is called the turning point in the Gospel narrative. It is a turning point for us as

---

<sup>2</sup> McFague, S. *The Body of God*, 1998.

well and leads to more questions! Who and what is the Messiah? The theology of the New Testament is largely an attempt to answer that question.

Here are just some passages that offer an answer: John 1.1-9, Colossians 1.15-20, Romans 1.1-7, Galatians 5.1, 1 Peter 1.3-5.

If you read them and many others you will find that they offer an almost unimaginable vision of who Jesus the Christ is. The world, the Earth, was made through him. He is before all things and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the Body, the gathered believers. His purpose is freedom. He is our imperishable, unfading hope. Our creed states that he sits at the right hand of God. With God and the Spirit, as God, he sustains the whole of creation and his Spirit is the very breath of all life. Without his sustaining power we, everything, cease to exist.

Such a vision should cause us to stop and to jettison any picture that our Lord is distant and removed from our daily existence, from the environment and the people we meet. That old picture we have of a bearded, male God sitting on a heavenly throne, distant and inaccessible, should really be ditched once and for all. Instead, every breath we take is a wonder. Every insect, tree, fish and fowl is a miracle. Everything is a moment of beauty and we should all be on our knees in awe and humble adoration. Maintaining our selfish, ego-driven lifestyle simply keeps us in chains and disconnected from the presence of God. What gets in the way of us knowing God, as in knowing intimately, and knowing his Reality (which means God and everything else) is the walls of our self.

That is why surrender is such a critical step in connecting to God, in healing the fractures in our lives and our relationship to earth. We, as in the ego-self, need to get out of the way, to let go of power and the illusion of control. This illusion of control is dire when it comes to the environment. The knowledge we possess will be useful and critical in solving many of our environmental problems, but the greatest advances will be made when we develop a realistic picture of who we are and our relationship to God's universe. We are not lords over the planet. We are the product, via the creative power of God, of its processes—four billion years worth, fifteen billion if you add the rest of the universe.<sup>3</sup>

Surrender of the self is the practice (daily if needed) that takes us into our true reality and freedom. The discipline that helps us consciously to connect to creation and order our lives is simplicity. Richard Foster in his well-known book *Celebration of Discipline*, quotes an old Shaker hymn:

'Tis the gift to be simple,  
'Tis the gift to be free,  
'Tis the gift to come down to where you ought to be,  
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,  
'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.  
When true simplicity is gained,  
To bow and to bend we shan't be ashamed.  
To turn, turn will be our delight  
'Till by turning, turning we come round right.

---

<sup>3</sup> McFague, S. *op. cit.*

True simplicity is an inward reality that results in an outward lifestyle.<sup>4</sup> Lance Mitt has developed a simple formula to bring that inward and outward reality together: Clarity + courage + calendar = simplicity. He makes it sound very simple and I suspect it is. He writes,

First, I must get clarity around what is really important in my life. Because of the drift towards clutter and complexity, this must be revisited on a regular basis. But it is not enough to simply have clarity. I must also have the courage to execute based on clarity ... Finally, the courage to execute gets very practical when I calendarize my priorities.

Putting a high priority on what we value means we make room for it in our lives. Do we value our relationship with our Lord? Do we value the gift of our Earth home? Do we value other people and their place in God's heart? Do we value our family and friends?

### **Group reflection**

Spend some time considering the above and the Gospel passage. Discuss the Gospel passage first. What words and phrases in both stood out for you?

### **Questions for individual reflection and sharing if you wish**

1. Look at the photo below. What thoughts come to mind as you look at it?



The pattern is from the tracks made in the sand by very small molluscs. Their lives are determined by the ebb and flow of the tide. In what ways could this be a picture of surrender and simplicity?

2. The pattern is from the tracks made in the sand by very small molluscs. Their lives are determined by the ebb and flow of the tide. In what ways could this be a picture of surrender and simplicity?
3. Write a short answer to “Who am I?” and “Who is Jesus Christ?” Ponder that third part, “What is the relationship between these two—myself and Christ?”
4. What thoughts come to your mind as you reflect on the idea of surrender? What is hard about surrendering to God? What makes it easy?

---

<sup>4</sup> Foster, R. *Celebration of Discipline*.

5. If the triune God is truly part of the fabric of life and all things, what does this tell you about your own body and the world in which you walk? How would this change the way you live each day? Experiment with this idea and try consciously to live this reality for twenty minutes as you go about your normal activities?
6. Spend some time reflecting on your daily life. List the things that you value the most in life. How much of your time and energy do you spend on those things? Is there anything you can say "no" to that would free up more time for those things you value?

## For Love of the World

---

### Session 3: "Stop Making my Father's House a Marketplace" (Jn 2:15)

Linda Chapman



Gospel = John 2.13-22

Pattern = Consumerism and greed

Practise = Detachment

Discipline = Fasting

Recently I went into one of the many large, enclosed shopping spaces found in cities around the world and experienced, not for the first time, a sense of profound discomfort at the 'too-muchness' of it all. The sheer volume of shops full of 'stuff' to buy can be overwhelming. The shopping centres themselves, sealed off from the natural world, become contained environments that promise to fulfil human desire through the provision of those 'things' that will make us the person that the advertisements suggest we should be. They are temples of consumerism. In some respects we have commodified creation and everything is up for sale. And our human identity is becoming that of the consumer. Indeed there may be no clearer **pattern** of human behaviour today, at least in the developed countries, than that of consumerism. Underlying consumerism is a kind of greed.

As one reads the Gospel passage for this week, one can feel the anger and frustration of Jesus at what the people have done to the temple. They have made the sacred profane. Jesus' cleansing of the temple is an act of purification of the holy place that it may be restored to its true purpose as a house of prayer.

If we understand the Earth as God's creation and the Creator as the Triune God who "unremittingly breathes the Spirit into his creation"<sup>5</sup> and is therefore present in creation, we might come to perceive the Earth as a sacred place. In this case we might ask ourselves are our human patterns of consumerism (a kind of ideology) turning our Father's house into a marketplace?

During this week of Lent we are exploring consumerism, detachment sufficiency, and fasting. It is in no way the intention of this study to suggest that we ought to renounce all our worldly possessions or a reasonable level of material way of life. Nevertheless it is important to consider the difference between needs and wants, between having enough and having too much. A spiritual practice that can help us see clearly our own addictive patterns of consumerism in light of our true needs is the **practice** of detachment. We can choose to be driven by consumerism or we can learn the way of letting go that Jesus teaches. Sell your possessions and follow me (Mk 10.21-22), travel lightly (Mk 6.7-10), practice detachment (Mk 1.17-20) are all teachings of Jesus who invites us not to deprivation and privation but to liberty. The freedom from the compulsion to consume liberates the human being for our true life. We find through detachment that our

---

<sup>5</sup> Moltmann, J. *God in Creation*. Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1993, p. 9.

deepest desire is not for things but for God. We realize that we are meant to be in full relationship with the Creator and through him with all creation.

Detachment in the Christian tradition has been known as the process of becoming 'poor in spirit'. We are only free to love unconditionally when we are liberated from an attachment characterised by a kind of desperate clinging to our possessions, roles, relationships, ideas and even images of God. Detachment is not about giving up everything but is giving up anything when we are called to do so. In a world faced with the effects of over consumption, we might ask ourselves whether we are being called to contract or decrease our levels of consumption. The season of Lent is the very time to begin the practice of detachment that leads us to a sense of sufficiency—of knowing when enough is enough. The old maxim to 'live simply that all may simply live' applies here. Our personal practice of detachment and sufficiency is for the common good—the good of the whole Earth community. David Hallman in his book *Spiritual Values for Earth Community* notes a distinction made by Aristotle between two types of economy, namely 'chrematistics' and 'oikonomia':

Chrematistics can be defined as that branch of political economy relating to the short term manipulation of property and wealth so as to maximise short-term monetary exchange value to the owner. Oikonomia by contrast, is the management of the household so as to increase its use value to all members of the household over the long run.”<sup>6</sup>

For chrematistics, more is always better. For oikonomia there is such a thing as enough. Our present economic system is based on the former. In God's economy and the running of the household of the Creator, it is the common good of all that matters. In the Christian tradition this has been practiced through the monastic life. The Rule of St Benedict for example, in Chapter 33, considers private ownership as an 'evil' to be uprooted and removed from the monastery. Benedict refers to Acts 4.32 that 'all things should be the common possession of all' when he exhorts the monks to have concern for the common good and life of the community rather than individualistic impulses to private ownership. In Chapter 34 of the Rule it is written: Distribution was made as each had need (Acts 4.35), exemplifying a way of life based on a healthy and balanced realization of the needs of all. When we base our economy on the maximising of individual profit no matter the cost of that to others, then it is inevitable that the most vulnerable, be they human or other-than-human, will be sacrificed to this system.

In the gospel reading Jesus drives out of the temple not only the money changers but also the innocent animals. This signifies the end of the old cultus of animal sacrifice and the start of a new worship 'in spirit and truth'. There is to be a new, living temple—the sacrificed body of Christ who makes the one true sacrifice for all. The temple or house in which we are to make our spiritual sacrifice is the whole creation interpenetrated with the triune God.

Sacrifice, however, is an uncomfortable word in this age where we are conditioned by the advertising of our culture to believe that we deserve the best and that 'me' is the most important person in town. Adopting the practice of detachment may be seen as a form of sacrifice that requires self-discipline. The ancient **discipline** of fasting may be a helpful way of exploring just how attached we are to our own pattern of consumption and greed (or over indulgence). The discipline of fasting may liberate us from our

---

<sup>6</sup> Hallman, D. *Spiritual Values for Earth Community*. WCC Communications, Geneva, 2000. p. 67.



addictions and attachments releasing us into the larger Self to which are called (Mk 8.35).

The discipline of fasting may be taken literally to mean abstaining from food. Or it may for our purposes be seen as fasting from some other aspect of consumption; some personal attachment that we are conscious of in ourselves. The important thing to remember is that fasting is not about an unhealthy self-denial but rather a re-alignment in understanding our true needs as against our over-indulgent desires. Fasting may also be understood as the discipline of simplicity. Simplifying our lives leaves us clearer about our real needs. Living simply frees up energy to live for the other.

In this study we are encouraged to understand the whole Earth as God's house, our own patterns of over-consumption and attachments, and to observe the discipline of fasting as a way to simplify our lives for the good of the world that God so loves.

### **Group reflection**

Spend some time considering the above and the Gospel passage. Discuss the Gospel passage first. What words and phrases in both stood out for you?

Forests have been called nature's cathedrals of God. Reflect on forests you have walked in. What were your thoughts at that time? In what ways did the experience help you to see God more clearly? In what ways was it perplexing and/or confusing?

### **Personal exercises**

Before each of these exercises spend some time in prayer asking that the Lord reveal to you what you most need to see.

1. If you are able, take the time to walk slowly through:
  - A large indoor shopping mall
  - An outdoor farmers' market.



Do this with as much self-awareness as possible. Notice the different experiences.

What happened as you walked through the shopping centre? What temptations were triggered in you? What happened as you walked through the farmers' market? Did you notice a difference?

Note: If you are unable to do physically walk through these scenarios do it imaginatively. Visualise yourself with all the details in each of these settings. What do you notice?

2. Spend some time getting in touch with your most obvious, everyday, material attachments.

Choose one and commit to 'fasting' from it for the rest of this period of Lent. Keep a journal of your experience of fasting. Note how you respond to letting go. Reallocate the money or time saved through 'fasting' to a worthy cause. Share your experience with the group if helpful.



## For Love of the World

---

### Session 4: "For God so Loved the World" (Jn 2:15)

Linda Chapman



Gospel = John 3.14-21

Pattern = Fear and Resentment

Practice = Love

Discipline = Contemplation

One morning, as I was swimming in calm ocean waters, I noticed a dark shape ahead of me. Supposing it to be a clump of seaweed, I continued to swim in its direction. Then I realized that it was moving towards me quite rapidly. It was not until it was almost under me that I saw that it was an enormous stingray with whom I had come face to face. In those few seconds I saw it very clearly. I stopped swimming forward and very slowly and gently began moving back slightly in a kind of backward breaststroke motion. At the same time the stingray gracefully slid under and to the side of me moving away. I swam back to shore with a sense of wonder.

What struck me was that, possibly because I had only realized at the last moment that it was a very big stingray, I did not have time to feel afraid. In fact I was left with a sense of awe and privilege that I had come so close to this ray. It felt like a moment of intimacy with one of God's 'other' creatures. The silent, graceful, movement of the ray filled me with a sense of respect and gratitude for its presence in this world.

Often when we encounter something quite foreign or 'other' to us we move towards fear. We know that fear usually results in the flight or fight mechanism. This is an essential evolutionary mechanism for survival. Yet it seems there is a human **pattern of fear** of nature that may be destructive. The 'otherness' of the natural world and its wildness is something that we human beings have set out to tame and conquer for our own purposes. Of course we have always relied upon the Earth's resources to meet our needs; everything exists interdependently. Yet there is also a sense in which our pattern of fear of that which we cannot ultimately control causes us to want to defend against it by destroying it.

However our over-exploitation of nature, our plundering of her bounty, has become a real problem. We need to look at how we relate with the non-human creation. Do we feel threatened by and fearful of the creation that is so 'other' to us? Fear often lies behind violence. And what or whom we fear we can also resent. This has profound consequences for the way we are in relationship with those others whether human, animal or some other form of creation such as ocean, forest and so on. As well, we are now faced with the very real fear of the consequences of global warming. It is frightening to consider the reality of a planet that may experience a rise in temperature beyond 2°C. The people of the Maldives and some Pacific nations are presently living with the fear and reality of their island homes being submerged. We will all have to deal

with the fact of environmental refugees. Will we react fearfully and resentfully? Or can we allow our fear to be transformed by love? Through this transformation we can learn to relate with each other and the Earth in a more creative way. How are we as Christians called to be in relationship with God's creation?

In the beginning God called his creation very good (Gen. 1.31) and he so loved the world that he sent his only Son into the world not to condemn it but in order that the world might be saved through him (Jn 3.17). Clearly a Christian way of relating to this world is the **practice of love**. To believe in Jesus Christ is to believe in the One who so loved the world that he gave his life for it. Jesus of Nazareth was a threat to many and became the innocent scapegoat for all who feared and resented him and his subversive message of the Kingdom of God. Yet through Him the world is saved. His great commandment was to love one another. Today we might extend that love to all including our 'non-human' neighbours.

But how do we love? Many people love nature in a general way. We enjoy the natural beauty of the world and even understand it as a way to God. We resonate with Gerard Manley Hopkins words that the "world is charged with the grandeur of God". Indeed, nature can be seen as one of the privileged places, together with the Scriptures and the Eucharist, to which we go to put ourselves in the Lord's way. Yet nature is not simply the backdrop to human salvation history. We are called to love in the way that God loves and to give ourselves in service to the other. God's non-human creation is implicitly valued in and of itself by the Creator (Gen. 1.31).

As Christians, we understand that God is incarnational; the word became flesh and dwelt amongst us (Jn 1.14). Ours is an embodied faith through which we can love people and the natural world for their intrinsic worth, loving them in all their difference, detail, otherness. To love in this way we must practice paying attention to the actual reality of the other in an I-Thou stance as compared to an I-It attitude. The other, the Thou, is our neighbour whom we are called to love. The other deserves our attention. When we give our full attention to another, when we are fully present, we are in an attitude of prayer (Simone Weil). I wonder how often when we look at something do we really see it. We need to take the time to stop and really look; to pay attention in order to truly love. This is **the discipline of contemplation**—a long, loving look at the real. Contemplation begins when we stop being totally preoccupied with our own concerns, including our own fears and resentments, and allow an 'other' to take our attention. We cannot love another without coming to know them and we cannot know another without being fully present and attentive.

The discipline of contemplation\* is particularly important in the season of Lent, as it calls us to the self-emptying or *kenosis* of Christ on the cross. To practice love by giving our full attention to the other we must die to self. Contemplation calls for time and patience to become still and quiet enough to truly see the 'other' as a beloved creature of God. As we begin to see in this way so we begin to love and to act on that love for the good of our little corner of creation and therefore the whole of it. Contemplative looking ultimately opens us to see the reality of God in creation.

Eternal life (Jn 3.16) is about the fullness of the presence of God in any given moment. This is the experience of contemplation in which there is no space for fear and resentment. Jesus' relationship with the Father was one of the greatest intimacy, love and knowledge. He gave his complete attention to his Abba in prayer, not least of all in

the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus gave himself for the whole world. We are indeed one body beloved by the Lord of life who gave his life that we might live.

\* The discipline of contemplation is the simple practice of the presence of God. It is a way of silent prayer that does not use words but rather requires that we focus our whole attention on one thing during a given time.

### Group reflection

1. Spend some time considering the above and the Gospel passage. Discuss the Gospel passage first. What words and phrases in both stood out for you?
2. Look at the photo below. What thoughts come to mind as you look at it?



3. Recall a time when you have felt afraid in the face of nature. How have you reacted out of that fear? What did you feel towards that natural event or creature? What do you feel now reflecting upon it?
4. Spend some time sitting quietly contemplating the reality of some part of the natural world that you would not necessarily consider beautiful or attractive to you. It might even be some creature or place that you do not feel very comfortable about. (Make sure you are safe!) Or it might be something very small and insignificant such as the needle of a she-oak. Try to simply give this little bit of creation your full attention. Look at it noticing its detail. Do not make up a story about it or recall facts about it but simply be present to it. Notice what happens. Share this with the group or journal it later.

### Personal exercises

1. Each day of this week of Lent give yourself to some aspect of creation by being simply present to it. As you begin each session of this way of prayer ask that the Lord will reveal himself to you. Each time you notice that you are thinking of yourself, your work, family, etc., gently return your attention to the flower, tree, animal ... that you have felt drawn to giving your loving attention.
2. To close this session of prayer, share with the Lord what has happened—what you noticed, how you felt. Finish with a prayer of gratitude for God's good creation.

## For Love of the World

---

### Session 5: “Whoever Serves me the Father will Honour” (Jn 12.26)

Rebecca Newland

Gospel = John 12.20-33

Pattern = Despair

Practise = Hope

Discipline = Gratitude

When I was high school, we studied the poet T.S. Eliot, particularly his poem, “The Hollow Men”. One verse has stayed with me for many years:

This is the way the world ends.  
This is the way the world ends.  
This is the way the world ends,  
Not with a bang but a whimper.

They are words that evoke despair and shattered dreams. Despair is a word that comes to mind when I reflect on Jesus’ state of mind leading up to the Passover and the events of Good Friday. In our gospel reading he says that his ‘soul is troubled’ (20.27). In Matthew he is ‘deeply grieved’ (26.32). In Luke he is ‘in anguish’ (22.43) and in Mark he is ‘distressed and agitated’ (14.33). Jesus of course was overwhelmed by what he suspected or knew was coming—betrayal, pain and death.

At the end of the day, with all the facts about the environmental crisis, as we approach Holy Week and the tragedy and violence of the cross, we too can easily loose heart. If we allow ourselves to ponder the immensity of the universe against the plight of the environment on Earth, the violence of the human species and our own weakness and limitations, it is easy to feel discouraged and overwhelmed. But in a very real way we are feeling compassion: we are “suffering with.” The distress we feel is because we sense our connection to the larger whole of which we are a part. The end point of this distress and discouragement is despair. Not a rage about injustice, not an outpouring of sorrow, but the powerless whimper of despair. Being human and needing to survive, when we approach a state of despair we can often move into disbelief, denial and a double life. And so we tend to live our lives as if nothing has changed, while knowing that everything has changed.

Yet despair is actually a good sign. Dmitri Shostakovish wrote, “When a man is in despair, it means that he still believes in something.” This is of course what made the difference for Jesus. Despite his distress he trusted and obeyed his father, his creator God. He believed in a loving greater power than himself and he surrendered to its greater wisdom and plan without perhaps fully knowing the outcome. It is certainly a more productive place than denial. In Albert Camus’ novel *The Plague*, those who fought the problem did not expect to find a solution. They only decided to live differently while they did live, to live as if life mattered while they had it, to live with integrity in the light



of the brutal reality of their world.<sup>7</sup> Sally McFague writes that ‘one has to get up in the morning and look in the mirror’. Our actions may come lead us to nothing more than that.

How do we keep getting up in the morning in the face of all the things that overwhelm, distress and grieve us? How do we move through despair and to the other side of action?

For countless Christians, for many of centuries, the start of our movement out of despair is through being grounded, rooted, planted in God – day-by-day, moment-by-moment. It is in this reality that social justice and action is sustained. Evelyn Underhill tells the story of the Oxford Methodists, who began by trying only to worship God and adhere to a strict devotional rule. Soon they found themselves impelled to try and ‘do’ good by active social work. Contemplation, love of the divine, goes hand in hand with action. This is the Spirit filled life of a Christ follower. As Ruysbroeck said, “then only is our life a whole, when work and contemplation dwell in us side by side, and we are perfectly in both of them at once.”<sup>8</sup>

This is the wonder and genius of Christianity. It holds in creative tension these seeming paradoxes. But the start is not activism. The start is being at-one with God.

Hope is one of the consequences of being in this place. It is a fruit of God’s spirit in us when we love both God and the world. It is the fruit of trust in God. Hope has been called both the quintessential Christian virtue and its greatest delusion. St Paul listed hope along with love and faith as essential practices, with love being the greatest (1 Cor. 13.13). Ultimately our hope is based on the resurrection, the certain knowledge of new life and new possibility. Jacques Ellul wrote:

Christian hope can face any situation, because it is not based on changeable circumstances, but a settled conviction that nothing can overtake us that Christ hasn’t taken care of. It is willing to risk all on the reality of the resurrection. We welcome the future, because it bears the face of Jesus.<sup>9</sup>

A discipline that most effectively counters the darkness of despair and the dead end of denial to which it can lead is the practice of gratitude. It also counters resentment and fear. In 1 Thessalonians Paul writes, “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” I suspect that Paul encouraged his readers to do this not because he wanted to put impossible burdens before them but because prayer and gratitude *work*. I remember when I first began to practice gratitude on a daily basis. I listed simple things to be grateful about and tried to be grateful in every circumstance. Reality literally shifted. I saw the world through new eyes and I felt full of possibility and hope. With that came energy and focus. Meister Eckhart said, ‘If the only prayer you say in your life is ‘thank you,’ that would suffice’.

Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will be my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour” (John 12.26). This is what Lent and Easter are ultimately about. We follow Jesus as he prays to his and our God. We despair with him as we face reality and the darkness and violence of our world. We surrender with him to the faithfulness and power of God. We lay down all

---

<sup>7</sup> McFague, S. *op cit*.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Underhill, E. *The life of the Spirit and the Life of Today*.

<sup>9</sup> Ellul, J. Hope in time of abandonment in *Still Waters: Deep Waters*, ed. Croucher, R. Albatross Books, Australia, 1987 p.124.



that stops us from following him to the cross. We rise with him into new possibilities. We love and act so that the creation God loves and calls very good is born anew. In this service is perfect freedom and our true end.

### **Group reflection**

Spend some time considering the above and the Gospel passage. Discuss the Gospel passage first. What words and phrases in both stood out for you?

Look at the photo below. It is of a sunset over Batemans Bay. What thoughts come to mind as you look at the photo?



When you look up at the sky what calls to you? Wonder? Hope? Gratitude?

When you think about the environmental crisis, what is your immediate reaction?

A question to ask of ourselves is, "Are we willing to risk all on the reality of the resurrection?" How do you understand the crucifixion and the resurrection? Where do you find your hope to face each day and each crisis in life?

List ten things that you are grateful about and why. Now list another ten things. Write/draw/paint/compose a simple prayer of gratitude to share with others.

### *A prayer of Hope* by Terry Falla

As we grow in faith, love and hope,  
help us to understand that no planning for the future, however necessary,  
no programme, no matter how carefully conceived, can relieve us of the necessity  
of going forward into a future that cannot be planned,  
a future of danger, of hope in your incalculable grace.

Lord,  
be for us the truth on which life and death are built,  
the hope that cannot be destroyed,  
the freedom from which love and justice flow  
and the joy that has eternity within it. Amen.

## Summary of the Science of Climate Change

The following summary is taken directly from *The Science of Climate Change: Questions and Answers* an Australian Academy of Science publication, August 2010. The publication with all references can be found on-line at [www.science.org.au/policy/climatechange2012.html](http://www.science.org.au/policy/climatechange2012.html)

The earth's climate has changed. The global average surface temperature has increased over the last century and many other associated changes have been observed. The available evidence implies that greenhouse gas emissions from human activities are the main cause. It is expected that, if greenhouse gas emissions continue at business-as-usual rates, global temperatures will further increase significantly over the coming century and beyond. The science behind these statements is supported by extensive studies based on four main lines of evidence:

**Physical principles** established more than a century ago tell us that greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), trap heat and keep the planet warmer than it would otherwise be. Increasing greenhouse gas levels raise the temperature of the Earth's surface.

**The record of the *distant* past** (millions of years) tells us that we cannot take a stable climate for granted. Climate has varied greatly through the Earth's history. It has, for example, gone through the Earth's history. It has, for example, gone through 10 major ice age cycles over approximately the past million years. The past few thousand years have been unusually stable. Together with our understanding of physical principles, evidence from the past shows that climate can be sensitive to small external influences.

**Measurements from the *recent* past** (the last 100 years) tell us that the Earth's surface is warming along with rising levels of greenhouse gases from human activities, and that this warming is leading to other environmental changes. Although climate varies from year to year and decade to decade, the overall upward trend of average global temperature over the last century is clear.

**Climate models**, together with physical principles and knowledge of past variations, tell us that, unless greenhouse gas emissions are reduced and greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere are stabilised, global warming will continue.

Climate models estimate that, by 2100, the average global temperature will be between 2°C and 7°C higher than pre-industrial temperatures, depending on future greenhouse gas emissions and on the ways that models represent the sensitivity of climate to small disturbances. Models also estimate that this climate change will continue well after 2100.

A 2°C global warming would lead to a significantly different world from the one we now inhabit. Likely consequences would include more heat waves, fewer cold spells, changes to rainfall patterns and a higher global average rainfall, higher plant productivity in some places but decreases in others, disturbances to marine and terrestrial ecosystems and biodiversity, disruption to food production in some regions, rising sea levels, and decreases in Arctic ice cover. While aspects of these changes may be beneficial in some regions, the overall impacts are likely to be negative under the present structure of global society.

A warming of 7°C would greatly transform the world from the one we now inhabit, with all of the above impacts being very much larger. Such a large and rapid change in climate would likely be beyond the adaptive capacity of many societies and species.

There are uncertainties in climate science. For example, a precise value cannot be given for the likely range of warming because of uncertainties in climate sensitivity to small disturbances, although climate models and evidence from past climate change provide a plausible range of values. Climate changes over small regions and changes in rainfall patterns are very hard to estimate. Tipping points or rapid climate transitions associated



with overall global warming are possible but cannot yet be predicted with confidence. These uncertainties work in both directions: there is a chance that climate change will be less severe than the current estimates of climate science, but there is also a chance that it will be more severe.

*The following is from the NASA's (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) website 'Global Climate Change' [<http://climate.nasa.gov/effects/>]*

Global climate change has already had observable effects on the environment. Glaciers have shrunk, ice on rivers and lakes is breaking up earlier, plant and animal ranges have shifted and trees are flowering sooner.

Effects that scientists had predicted in the past would result from global climate change are now occurring: loss of sea ice, accelerated sea level rise and longer, more intense heat waves.

Scientists have high confidence that global temperatures will continue to rise for decades to come, largely due to greenhouse gasses produced by human activities. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which includes more than 1,300 scientists from the United States and other countries, forecasts a temperature rise of 2.5 to 10 degrees Fahrenheit over the next century.

According to the IPCC, the extent of climate change effects on individual regions will vary over time and with the ability of different societal and environmental systems to mitigate or adapt to change.

The IPCC predicts that increases in global mean temperature of less than 1.8 to 5.4 degrees Fahrenheit (1 to 3 degrees Celsius) above 1990 levels will produce beneficial impacts in some regions and harmful ones in others. Net annual costs will increase over time as global temperatures increase.

“Taken as a whole,” the IPCC states, “the range of published evidence indicates that the net damage costs of climate change are likely to be significant and to increase over time.”

Below are some of the regional impacts of global change forecast by the IPCC:

- **North America:** Decreasing snowpack in the western mountains; 5-20 percent increase in yields of rain-fed agriculture in some regions; increased frequency, intensity and duration of heat waves in cities that currently experience them.<sup>2</sup>
- **Latin America:** Gradual replacement of tropical forest by savannah in eastern Amazonia; risk of significant biodiversity loss through species extinction in many tropical areas; significant changes in water availability for human consumption, agriculture and energy generation.
- **Europe:** Increased risk of inland flash floods; more frequent coastal flooding and increased erosion from storms and sea level rise; glacial retreat in mountainous areas; reduced snow cover and winter tourism; extensive species losses; reductions of crop productivity in southern Europe.
- **Africa:** By 2020, between 75 and 250 million people are projected to be exposed to increased water stress; yields from rain-fed agriculture could be reduced by up to 50 percent in some regions by 2020; agricultural production, including access to food, may be severely compromised.
- **Asia:** Freshwater availability projected to decrease in Central, South, East and Southeast Asia by the 2050s; coastal areas will be at risk due to increased flooding; death rate from disease associated with floods and droughts expected to rise in some regions.