

Jeremiah 4:11-12, 22-28, and Luke 15:1-10

May the words that are spoken, and the reflections of our hearts, be worthy of your grace, O God, to whom all honour and glory is given now and forever more. Amen.

Peace with the lost

In September, we celebrate the Season of Creation, with the theme ‘Peace with Creation.’ This week, we focus on ‘Flora and Fauna,’ which may not be at peace with us. Before we explore the theme with the two readings today, I’d like to talk about a Japanese movie titled *Plan 75*.

In the near future of dystopian Japan, the Japanese government has created a program called ‘Plan 75’ that offers free euthanasia services to all Japanese citizens 75 and older. They sought a highly effective and efficient method to address their rapidly aging population. It will also save their economy, as they currently spend too much money on aged care. *Michi*, a 78-year-old woman, lost her job - a hotel cleaner as customers didn’t want to see older people working at the hotel. Despite her tight budget to live on, Michi’s pride wouldn’t allow her to accept welfare payments. When Michi learned about *Plan 75*, initially she brushed up such an idea, but eventually she signed the contract. In the meantime, the Plan 75 staff contacted her regularly to ensure she wouldn’t change her mind. At last, the day arrived, and Michi was prepared to fulfil the contract as scheduled. While Michi was looking outside from her veranda, the movie ended there. It left viewers to ask: “Can people be disposable like things used by date?” But when a society treats people or nature as expendable, both fray into ruin as in Jeremiah. God, however, refuses to write off the lost in Luke. And our call is to refuse the *Plan 75*-like logic and to steward creation with relentless love.

Jeremiah is disheartened by the broken relationship between Israel and God, which has led to disastrous natural events, including polluted land, earthquakes, and drought. He seems to understand what we know now: “the world is so interconnected . . . human words and deeds . . . human sin and evil can have . . . wide-ranging effects in the world of nature.”¹ God has already warned it before in chapter 3. Jeremiah isn’t saying God arbitrarily punishes nature; he’s saying human folly sets creation itself groaning. If we see it from the present environmental crisis, it’s quite clear. We haven’t thought much about when we use things to make our lives much easier. Take an example. A refrigerator was invented for home use in 1913, and in 1920, Freon was

¹ Terence E. Fretheim, *Jeremiah* (Macon: Smyth and Helwys), 100.

introduced as a coolant, of which we didn't know the harmful environmental effects for decades. It was eventually banned and phased out by 2020. The same goes for fossil fuels, to name a few. We see a clear link between human activities without the consideration of the desolation of creation, which, in Jeremiah, is expressed as God's judgment. Paul makes the same point: creation itself suffers under human folly, waiting for God's children to live as faithful stewards.

Yet amidst these ruins, Jeremiah still remains optimistic in the fact that God still offers Israel hope through repentance that will bring God's blessings to them. No matter how far we wander, God refuses *Plan 75* logic. Instead of discarding the guilty, God waits and calls them home. The same hope is found through the faithfulness of God in Luke 15:1-10.

In Luke, God refuses to write off the lost: a shepherd leaves ninety-nine to find one; a woman sweeps a whole house for one lost coin. God values the lost. If God will not relent until the lost are found, then the vocation of God's people is to refuse to let anything — person, animal, or habitat—be written off. It tells us about God's faithfulness through one crucial truth. Without restoring the lost one, God will not stop searching for it. In the case of the lost sheep, the number 99 is incomplete without the lost one. The shepherd is restless until s/he finds it and returns it to its sheepfold. This includes the relentless search on the plain, spending rough nights in the bushes; enduring the heat of the sun during the day while thinking of the lost sheep. When s/he found it, the joy was greater when the sheep was safely kept. The joy is sharper because of the risk endured.

In the case of the lost coin, for the woman, the coins may not have been just ordinary silver coins. In a Jewish custom, possessing ten Silver/Gold coins from the Bridegroom symbolised the woman's relationship with the groom. She wore them daily on her veil, a sign she was spoken for. Now it is lost, and what will she do? What would the Groom think if he found out? The lost coin is entirely without value unless its owner possesses it. Likewise, just as each coin symbolised covenant, so each species, each patch of land, has covenantal value before God — not disposable, not replaceable.

Broken relationships among people, as depicted in 'Plan 75,' and the land correlate with the contemporary human broken relationship with creation. When we begin to think that things such as flora and fauna can be exploited for our economy, or a convenient lifestyle and so forth, are we going to dispose of them if they are of no use? The same mindset will eventually lead to a dystopian world like that in *Plan 75*. In Romans 8:19:23, Paul urges that the creation waits

with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God. Creation groans, not because it is worthless, but because it waits for us to take our place as faithful children of God. When we are truly the children of God, it's when we can listen to the voice of creation as its good stewards.

Faithful stewardship involves small, steady practices: tending a patch of native plants, supporting elders and people with differently abled in and outside the church, so they are not pushed aside. Also praying for creation while actively practising zero waste at home and in the church, and upcycling things are other. These acts refuse the logic of *Plan 75* and embody the shepherd's and woman's restless love. Are we at peace with the lost?

Let us pray: O God, who searches for the lost and calls all creation by name, give us restless love: for our elderly and frail community people, the lands, and all living things. Turn our hearts from the economy of discard toward your economy of restoration. Give us the courage to honour the sparrow and the forest as much as the elder and the child. In Jesus' name, Amen.