

Listening to the world: Cathy Ross, teacher in Pioneer Theology for Church Mission Society, and **Jeff Gollither TSSF** (via Zoom)
Thursday 7th and Friday 8th September

Cathy Ross: Lament as Resistance, Justice and innovation

We currently seem to have very many reasons for lament: eg the effects of the Covid pandemic, invasion of Ukraine, economic austerity, and the effects of decolonisation, in some countries.

Lament as resistance in the Scriptures.

Lamentations of Jeremiah – visceral and embodied cry of anguish and lament, naming the loss, staying in the suffering, and then inviting us to move on to engagement, towards justice or a new phase of life.

Maggy Barankitse’s story-Tutsi in Burundi – Oct 1993 massacre – she was tied to a chair by the Hutu, then she witnessed the death of 70-odd people.

Afterwards, she prayed in lament ‘My mother taught me you are a God of love...’

Her lament led her to found Maison Shalom, (House of Peace) which now cares for 30,000 orphaned children, with schools, training courses, recreational facilities.

She said ‘We Christians, our duty ... is to give back to the person dignity. We can give them clothes but if they do not have dignity, it is worthless’.

She also says, ‘Love makes us inventors’; love is actually our identity – so the story of love explodes from within; love allows her to invent a new future.

She says, ‘It is so stupid to hate the others because they are different from us, because together there is harmony, richness’.

In the village, along with the school, she built a cinema, mechanics shop, swimming pool, carpenters shop; and a morgue. Places of leisure were an important part of meeting the needs of the whole person, not just giving them clothes. The swimming pool also symbolised the water of baptism and cleansing from the killings. The children needed to not only survive but flourish. Her love had deepened through her suffering and lament – cf Christ on the cross. ‘My dream is to build all over the world, Shalom House, to say that we are only one family – like John Lennon’s song “Imagine”’.

In 2015, more violence and Maggy had to leave Burundi. So in Rwanda, she started all over again another Maison Shalom – especially the vocational courses. She says we are created out of love, for love.

We do what we can with the resources in front of us and leave the rest to God.
Franciscan communities – counter cultural.

If God’s love invents a new social reality in history, that reality begins, not in the centres of power, but at the margins of society, with the overlooked, wounded individuals and communities. – Emmanuel Katongole

John V. Taylor – over 50 years ago ‘Enough is enough’. Included practical suggestions to live more carefully on the earth.

Today, 'doughnut theology' – takes more consideration of how we might live on the planet.

Hope

Lament as newness and hope.

'To lament, we must name the damage, express grief, act out restitution, and so access restoring forgiveness. Hope, like lament becomes a way of being in the world.' - Hannah Malcolm

Young people wanting change – XR, Arocha, 'Me too', etc

Rowan Williams: 'Hope is a condition here and now; not a foretelling of what lies ahead, and certainly not an inoculation against loss, but the affirmation that God is bound to the finite reality that God loves, and it is God's business to honour that binding. Meanwhile, we keep ourselves open to the God who acts and speaks in the present, and we labour at whatever we can do to prevent catastrophe, even if we are fearful that all our effort is too late.

'We still celebrate the swallow in the moment; anticipating loss can be away of slipping away from a gift that is here and now. Without the celebration now, the loss would actually be softened, in a strange way. The risk of loss gives the joy a kind of fierceness.'

Denise Leverton – poem *The Beginners*

'We have only begun to love the earth ...

Cathy also recommended a book, *Braiding sweetgrass* –by Robin Wall Kimmerer

'Listening to the World' Jeff Gollhofer TSSF (Thursday)

Listening to Mother Earth

The transition that we are all sharing in, is the situation of our climate and the ecological emergency that we facing.

July 2023 has been the hottest month in the world; the sea temperature is now almost 1.5⁰, sooner than anticipated at the time of the Paris Agreement (20-30 years ago). Paris Agreement was that the carbon emissions would be cut by half by 2030 compared to pre-industrial levels. However, often behind the scenes and subverting the agreed goals, has been the fossil fuel /oil companies.

The wake up call is getting louder; indigenous voices have been saying for some time 'the earth is exhausted. The earth is now trying to cleanse itself'. We need to help Mother Earth to heal.

A Franciscan style 'conversion of life' is essential for continuing life today.

Do we know where we live?

'Think globally, act locally'.

Sacred ecology – not 'environment' as somewhere 'out there' to be exploited, used, turned into a profit as part of the green cycle; 'out there' is not part of our life. But we need conversion of life, to see that it is part of us, and we need to listen again to Mother Earth.

What made it possible for Francis to 'think the unthinkable'?

How can we be more organised about speaking about the state of the planet?
Diversity of our order can be a stumbling block, as some parts of the world are more the benefactors of industrial development than other places.
Showing the diversity of our own community is helpful too.

Jeff – Q & A

Q (John) – we are all being colonised in a new way – can you say more?

Jeff – economic situation changing since 1980s so that corporate control of global economy is the source of the colonisation process - eg to do with communication, social media, artificial intelligence, etc eg use of Zoom – these changes are removing us from the web of life in what we perceive and the way we live – we need to be getting *more* into our bodies, to be incarnate. Today, we are not engaging with the realisation that there may be unintended consequences of new technology. (like the unintended consequences of cars, which aided transport but caused increase in carbon emissions.)

Q (Michael Twum- Darko) Current model of the world is very exploitative – but the concept of restoration is confrontational with people who are wanting to make money.

Jeff – agrees – the Church needs to become the source of moral dialogue. But confrontation needs to be in the protest in order to actually protest, as governments around the world are making it illegal to engage even in non-violent confrontation eg re oil pipelines in USA.

Q (John H.) The most accurate indicator of carbon emissions is GDP and so we need to change to other ways of measuring a healthy economy, not constantly looking to economic growth.

Jeff – this question re economic growth is the underlying issue and has never been taken seriously. The ‘western’ world (more of a global problem) is not changing our way of thinking and doing. New technologies – including carbon capture that will take carbon out of the atmosphere, are used in order to allow us to keep emitting greenhouse gases. So the economy is still based on exploitation. Another aspect of this is that human population needs to be reduced to help the earth – this has a controversial edge to it, and global cooperatives after the earth summits in 1993 have not taken it very seriously, though it is has always been on the UN agenda.

Q (Christopher John) – in Solomons, carbon trading occurs. A village will get money for not chopping down the trees – the polluters can pay the small fine, and there is a benefit there to the villagers; how can we communicate the message that there are mixed dangers?

Jeff – 2009 in Copenhagen, there were conversations about carbon trading – one of the major issues involved carpentry. NGOs understood it as a form of bribery, as what it does is maintain the underlying system to keep the economics the same rather than address the real issues. On the whole, it has not worked.

Cathy Ross

Creating space: Hospitality and Community Friday

Hospitality is done differently in different places

Sam Wells – the most important word in theology is ‘with’ – existence only has value if it is in relationship with God, people, creation.

Biblical concepts of hospitality

- fundamental is welcome of guest and stranger; involves risk – sometimes the stranger brings good news and sometimes there is bad news.

Jesus – Emmaus Road – not recognise as who he was until he took over the role of host; Cornelius and Peter – both are changed by the hospitality of the other.

Book – ‘Making Room’ by Christine Pohl

To love our neighbour is to enter into the presence of God – all human beings are created in the image of God. John Taylor – ‘The Go-between God’ – one cannot choose to be open to God and closed to the neighbour.

African concept of Ubuntu – we exist in relationship to one another, the essence of who we are.

Practice of hospitality challenges fear of the other.

Hospitality can help us not to hold tightly to possessions – we give them away. Jesus says about having a dinner party and inviting the poor, the lame and blind who cannot repay: foretaste of the great banquet of heaven.

Eucharist – holy meal – church has fenced it round as to who can come; Jesus is quite literally the host.

Asylum seekers in SSF friaries – welcomed without scrutiny or questioning; they are not there on condition of sharing anything about their lives/story.

Hospitality as seeing the other – sight and insight.

John Taylor – The holy Spirit is that power that opens eyes that are closed... and minds ...

Cf Matthew 25– Lord, when did we see you a stranger hungry, in prison etc – living out a different set of values, including those who are so often excluded.

Good Samaritan – sees another person as made in the image of God.

Who are we blind to in our context, and therefore practice a theology of exclusion rather than a theology of embrace?

Hospitality can be acknowledgement by another of one’s pain: ‘You have been hurt’.

Bonginkosi – in his language greeting is an act of hospitality: ‘I see you’.

Hospitality as Nourishment – offering food and drink requires time and effort – some things cannot be done quickly.

Food and drink were essential to the ministry of Jesus. He celebrated the messianic banquet but with all the ‘wrong’ people. But it is at the heart of his mission; it was part of the reason he got crucified.

Food often goes with listening (intentional listening) to one another, and with laughing and rejoicing. Eating together is a profound leveller.

Ephesians – Jews and Gentiles eat together – the test of their coming together is the meal table; previously it was a place of separation, as Jews and others did not eat together. Eating together is a political act- - including *where* we eat and where our food comes from - and to be grateful to the earth that feeds us

Renee Brown – we live in the ‘not enough’ culture – not enough time, not good enough, not clever enough etc – to counter this we need to practice whole-hearted living, / gratitude / thanksgiving. Gratitude subverts the whole economy and that is good news for people and land alike.

Jesus received hospitality, too – Martha’s house, Mary or other woman who anointed him / his feet. Everyone has willingness to offer hospitality.

Hospitality from or at the edges

Christine Pohl – times in church history when hospitality has been most vibrant is when the hosts have been marginalised. Maybe poverty is the place to start.

Hospitality and mission require compassion and authentic love.

Poverty both from within and without – poverty of heart and mind; our hands are empty until God fills them. We recognise our own need for compassion and hospitality.

Al Barrett (Birmingham) – says that hospitality at the edges is actually at the centre of Jesus’ way. A guest is always a blessing.

Church can receive, listen and learn, and discover the treasure that is already there – ‘mission is finding out where God’s Spirit is at work and joining in’ (John Taylor).

Can’t do this with 5-year targets and limited funding.

Hospitality as creating space

Trinity – eg Rublev icon -allows us to welcome others in; relationship, nourishment, ‘at home’; oak tree as tree of life; the circle is not closed, but one is invited in.

Henri Nouwen – Hospitality means primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy (if they want to).

Celtic prayer - I saw a stranger last night, I put food in the eating place, drink in the drinking place, music in the listening place, and in the saving name of the Triune, he blessed myself and my house and my cattle and my dear ones. And the lark said in her song, ‘Often, often, often goes Christ in the stranger’s guise’. Amen.

Jeff’s presentation Friday

Ecology and the sacred.

How to approach the need to bring government leaders together to work on this – inspiration of the person who was key in this back in 1970s was St Francis.

All the efforts we have been making on a planetary basis are due to St Francis – but this was kept quiet so as not to be divisive.

How we as Franciscans can make a contribution to the kind of solutions we need will deepen our understanding of who we are and strengthen our own order.

Eco-fascism – hit is not about our life together as a whole, around the world, but my life/ wants as against your life.

Solutions are not like a blueprint that can be issued and everyone follow the blueprint. Rather, questions and diversity of solutions and approaches - that can help us to weave together the web of life again. The solutions are closer to home than we realise. Involves 'conversion of life'; we move into the uncertainty and unknowing in faith and with one another.

The world needs a conversion of life right now, and urgently. Mother Earth is exhausted – and we have made it so; we need to be agents of the cleansing.

3 core questions – experiential ones

Do we know where we live?

What do we see? (cf prophet Amos)

Who is my neighbour? - Bonhoeffer 'Our Life together' – on a planetary basis.

Do we know where we live?

Our address – awareness of its place on the earth, and the environment is not separate from me, out there for me to exploit.

What do we see?

God asks Amos – God showed me that the Lord was standing by the wall with a plumbline. The world at that time was becoming very unjust between rich and poor. So do we see where we live? It is God's creation. Our political and economic systems do not allow us to re-vision our life together. Consumerism rather than relationship. A lot of churches are listening to Wall Street and following the plumbline that is very out of balance.

Democracy – out of plumbline – some forms of non-violent protest are becoming illegal eg in US to protest against water rights or oil pipelines, [in UK re asylum seekers].

Diversity is a strength – despite what politicians try to tell us. Friendship – and being able to disagree – foster community, and are attractive.

Our agency as Franciscans is probably being expressed more than we realise.

Who are our neighbours?

Catherine Preston – the most miraculous part of earth's agency is not how she makes mountains rise.... It is how she invites people into relationship. Listening is part of relationship, not just speaking. Reciprocity of relationship is far more expressive of kinship than 'rights'; 'rights' tends to turn people into objects. Love is more powerful than laws.

Q & A

Q (Pat M). People of other faiths – potentially our allies – are they our neighbours? Jeff – for political reasons, this is probably most important question of our time- we are not separate, in the larger whole. Very important theological question is how do we learn to live together.

Conversion of life – no part of the web of life is disposable. We share relationship, being neighbour, with the whole of the web of life.

Who am I? – question to be answered in communal context, not in individualistic way.

Relationship to move beyond concept of a good steward to a good sister. Kinship. Ruth Valerio of Tearfund.

Q (Thomas Choi) Pantheism – vs panentheism –

Jeff - Nature – it is all sacred, but it is not God. But there is a problem when we remove the Holy Spirit from nature; but still nature is not God.

Q. (Maureen) – how can we make a difference and not lose heart?

Jeff – for me, to pay most attention to how I live every day, and let my faith in God be lived out in that way. There will always be things that make me doubt that the love of God and of neighbour is true.

Maggy (in Rwanda) -radiating joy.

Jeff – final thoughts - Franciscan charism – penitence and conversion of life – changing our relationships with mother earth and with each other.