

We are perishing. Where is your faith?

Pitt Street Uniting Church, 18 September 2016

A Contemporary Reflection by Rev Elenie Poulos

Creation 3C 2016 – Storm Sunday

Job 28:20-27; Luke 8:22-25

Video Poem: *Dear Matafele Peinem*ⁱ

This reflection can be viewed on You Tube at <http://www.pittstreetuniting.org.au/> under “Sunday Reflections” tab

I love the story of Jesus and the disciples in the boat. I have two depictions of it on the walls at home. One comes from Greece and it's a ceramic, created in the style of an ancient orthodox fresco. The other is a lighter, more impressionistic and contemporary representation – a print done by my very talented and dear friend, Eve Gibson.



© Eve Gibson

There are a number of things about this little story that I love; mostly the idea of Jesus asleep on this boat, oblivious to what was happening around him. You'd have to be both very tired and very at home on the water to fall asleep on a small boat. Jesus was a carpenter so I'm not sure how he came to be so relaxed on the water. I'm sure the disciples were tired too. They'd been travelling all over the countryside with Jesus, visiting cities and villages, dealing with crowds of people all wanting a piece of Jesus, having to cope with the disapproval of many powerful people, and coming to terms with the radically inclusive ministry that they found themselves part of. Some of them may have been fisherman but they were not so relaxed that they could fall asleep. Curious, if they were so tired!

A storm hits, the boat starts filling with water and still Jesus sleeps. They're desperate to wake him up. I don't know what they thought he could do but they're shouting at him, "*We're going to die! Wake up! Wake up!*" I guess they just needed him with them – present to them and to the danger. Eventually he woke up and he "*rebuked the wind and the raging waves*". I love that image of Jesus waving his finger at the elements, telling them to calm down! Then after the winds and the seas calm, Jesus has a go at the disciples for not having enough faith. He doesn't kind of embrace them and say "*it's all right, its Ok, it's gone now.*" He has a go at them! For their part, the disciples are in shock at Jesus' power and possibly more terrified in the calm than they were in the storm.

I love this story for the very strong images that it brings to mind. But I'm never really sure what to do with it. The miracles of healing which follow this story, I understand. They're stories about the radically inclusive Jesus who reaches out to those shunned by society because of their illness, their difference or their place in the social order and, depending on your point of view, either draws them to the centre or opens up the boundaries to embrace them. But this, this is different.

This is a story about a man who controls nature, a man-god; a god like the gods of the Greeks and the Romans, the Babylonians and the Egyptians before them; in control of thunder and lightning and wind, in control of the oceans and the skies. Not a god that I'm particularly comfortable with.

Of course this story relies on the biblical tradition of God appearing in storms and being revealed in the heavens. Luke's point is clear; Jesus is in and of creation, at one with it as God is, while the disciples are not. Maybe what happened here was that Jesus connected with the wisdom that's described in the reading from Job – the wisdom inherent in God's own creation, the wisdom in creation that only God can find. The disciples, on the other hand, are at the mercy of the forces of nature and fear what they can't control.

Throughout the Bible there are many stories that draw a connecting line between human hubris and arrogance, and separation from the sacred earth. The Book of Genesis has two of the classics: the story of Adam and Eve and the story of Noah and the great flood. In Leviticus we read that a central plank of the law received by Moses was the idea of the Sabbath year. This was an idea to counter that disconnection.

After six years of working the land, there would be a year of rest for the land. The people could consume what the land gave up but not work the land. They had to rely on God's bounty. And during the year of Jubilee, the year after seven Sabbath years, so every fifty years, the land would be rested again. As in the Sabbath years, the land could not be worked but any produce the land gave up could be consumed but the Jubilee year was much more comprehensive. It was a time of reconciliation – debts were forgiven, slaves were released, property was returned to its original owners. These laws were a recognition that humans were not always good at balancing their individual needs with the needs of others, the needs of the earth and the requirement for a righteous life before God. The human tendencies to greed and arrogance often got in the way of right relationships.

The existential threat now posed by human-induced climate change is the ultimate wrecking of God's sacred creation through human hubris and greed. It is happening because the minority culture in the world, the most disconnected from nature, my white, western, neoliberal, individualistic, growth-hungry, consumer-driven, fossil-fuelled powered culture, has arrogantly refused to listen to the groanings of the planet.

While humans have never possessed the Christ-like ability to still storms, we have sure stumbled across how to make them. Tim Flannery made the point in 2003 when he titled his book on climate change, *The Weather Makers*. Never before has one species so dominated the planet. And not in a good way.

The devastating effects of climate change are already upon us. Aboriginal communities in the Torres Strait, the Tiwi Islands across the north of Australia are already suffering the effects of human induced global warming as are our friends and neighbours in the Pacific on the islands of Tuvalu, in Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, the Cook Islands, Niue, Solomon Islands and many more. Rising sea levels have depleted agricultural land as king tides surge through the island's communal gardens as water rises up through the soil – salt water. Houses and infrastructure are threatened by more frequent flooding, extreme storms and weather patterns. Fresh water is becoming scarce and coral bleaching and changing weather patterns have impacted heavily on local fishing industries.

The leaders and the people of these most vulnerable communities, the least to blame for what's happening, are trying to wake us up, yelling at us, "*We are perishing! We are perishing!*" But mostly, we remain asleep through the storms of our own making.

BUT! Signs of hope. Many of us in Australia are slowly waking up to what's happening.

BUT! It seems like our government is still sleeping, dreaming of the small changes they might be able to make without having to upset, not only the fossil fuel industry, but the whole neoliberal project for unrestricted growth and private profit.

But they must sleep no more. Those reluctant political leaders around the world have to wake up. Now. And they must wake up prepared to make radical changes to the way we understand and seek prosperity and wellbeing. They must strive to hear the wisdom of creation in the waters, the air and the earth; and in hearing, they, like all of us, must find ways of reconnecting with the natural world. It is not an option to maintain the fallacy that we sit outside and above the natural environment, somehow separate from it. We are utterly intertwined, utterly inter-dependent, irrevocably connected, for better or worse. When one part of creation suffers we all suffer.

We are perishing.

Where is our faith?

Our faith is in God and God's creation. In God's creation we are one, all part of the sacred life breathed into being. Our faith is found in the heavens and the earth, in the winds and the storms, in the God who has provided enough for all of us and who continues to breathe life into all creation; for the sake of the planet and all its people now and in generations to come.

Amen.

ⁱ The UN Climate Summit Poem, *Dear Matafele Peinem* can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DJuRjy9k7GA>