

Church of South India - Department of Ecological Concerns

SEASON OF CREATION | WORLD DAY OF PRAYER FOR CREATION

ECO-HOUR OF WORSHIP

Theme: Uniting with Nature : United to Future

01/09/17 @ CSI EDEN Eco-Spirituality Centre, Othara

(This Sermon was preached by the Revd Viji Varghese Eapen, who, instead of wearing the Clerical Vestments, appeared in the attire of an 'Indian Farmer', trying to deconstruct the concepts of Church, Altar, Liturgy, Sacraments and Priest-Hood, in order to challenge the congregation to become a Church, relevant to the Indian Context, where owing to the rise in fascist corporatism, thousands of farmers were committing suicide.)

O people of my land, my fellow countrymen and women,
What a joy to see all of you gathered in this room as we begin this year's 'Season of Creation'.

I know your hearts are thumping with excitement to join many around the world, many Churches, the World Council of Churches, the Global Catholic Climate Movement, Pope's World Wide Prayer Network, the Anglican Communion Environmental Network, Act Alliance, Green Faith and the Lutheran World Federation in celebrating this Season of Creation.

We should be very grateful to the Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios I, who for the Orthodox Church, initiated in 1989, this 'Season of Creation' starting from September 1st and ending on October 4th, the Day of St. Francis.

I am sure that all of you know the significance of St. Francis, who is venerated as the 'Patron Saint of Ecology'. History says that he loved creation close to his heart, that he used to talk to everything in the nature and he called all animals and plants as sisters and brothers.

So, as the whole world joins in the 'Season of Creation' preceding the 'Day of St. Francis', I wish you all the very best and pray that this Season would challenge all of us to toil together, united with nature for a better future.

O my God, I forgot to introduce myself. I know you expected a Priest, from a Church, who administers Sacraments to be here to preach to you. Well, then I should clarify some things which I believe would help us to celebrate the 'Season of Creation' meaningfully.

For you, the Church is sacred and the world is secular. For me it is not, because I believe that Christ Jesus came, not to redeem the Church, but the whole Cosmos, the World. For me, the world is sacred. This world is my sacred space of worship and 'work-ship'.

You may have a '**liturgy**' in your Church, but how many of you know that the word 'liturgy' means 'work of the people'? If so, is it just what you do for two hours every week, the liturgy? Is it not what I do every second, uniting with this sacred world, the real liturgy? When I plough, when I till, when I sow, when I pluck the weeds, when I manure, when I water, when I harvest...for me, that is the liturgy.

You may have 6 **liturgical seasons**, the Advent, the Christmas, the Epiphany, the Lent, the Easter and the Pentecost. But I am familiar with six other seasons, I call as 'Ritu' (*in Sanskrit*), namely, *Vasanta, Grishma, Varsha, Sarada, Hemanta and Sisira*. Yes, the Spring, Summer, Monsoon, Autumn, Pre-Winter and Winter, divided into two months per year.

You may have arguments and clashes regarding the number of **Sacraments** and the doctrine of Sacraments. I don't have any clashes, for I have only one sacrament, and that is the nature around me, which I believe is an outward expression of inward grace of God. Isn't this nature a great revelation of God's own being? In fact, the bread, wine and water you use as symbols in your sacraments are part and products of this one sacrament, I have mentioned.

And most importantly, you may think I am just a 'Farmer'. Yes, I am. But you know, I believe I am a **Priest**, called to tend and nurture this nature. You may not see me having a 'stole', but I do use yoke (which for you is the 'stole'). I may not have a girdle, because I am always at service, ministering this earth and the whole creation. I have my own mitre, I have my own vestments, I have my own 'staff', hope you saw my Sickle and Hoe. ***And how wonderful to realize that my Father is a Farmer and a Gardner, and as a Priest I represent my Father, that Farmer.***

Hence, this day, as you gather on the first of this year's 'Season of Creation', I want you to relocate our Altars. ***The Altar is not here, the Altar is out there.***

While I love the whole concept of the 'Season of Creation', I feel sad that I found myself missing in the whole picture. You have a Day for Forest, Day for Land, Day for Ocean, Day for Wilderness or

Desert, Day for River etc...but, why do you not have a day for us, the farmers, the fisherfolk, the indigenous communities whose livelihood is intertwined to forest, land and sea? I don't believe that this 'Season of Creation' should be a time only to romanticize nature and say 'I love you nature', 'I care you nature'. Because, nature is no more the romantic creation that you read in poems and other literature, rather has become the location of all exploitation and torture. The creation around us is groaning and we are part of this groaning. Do you hear our cries? Do you hear our sighs? I wish you say, "I have certainly seen the affliction of my people who are in bondage, and I have heard their cry caused by their slave masters. I really do understand their pain".

Don't you know that in the last 22 years, more than 3.3 lakh farmers like me have committed suicide in India? How can you sit quietly in this room and celebrate 'Season of Creation' when we are being strangled and torn apart by our land lords, by the state and by the corporate? I have heard many of you speaking against 'Fascism'? But why do you limit fascism only to the realms of religion and culture? Have you not heard Mussolini, who said, "Fascism should more properly be called corporatism, since it is the merger of state and corporate power." Is it not that happening India? If you have doubt, look at the Union Budget 2017. Just see the amount waived off for the corporates, compared to the very small debts waived off for us, farmers? Is this the government for the Corporates, or the government for the people?

The Church has got only two choices, either to stand with Ahab or to stand with Naboth, either to stand with Goliath or to stand with David, either to stand with the Anti Christ or Christ, either to stand with the corporate fascist state or with the poor and exploited nature and her sons and daughters.

This 'Season of Creation' painfully reminds me not only of the exploited nature but also the exploited body of women. The Sanskrit word, 'ritu' not only refers to the seasonal cycle in nature but also the 'menstrual cycle' of a woman. The 28 days of menstrual cycle of a woman is categorized as Winter (1 – 6 Days), Spring (7 – 13 days), Summer (14 – 20 Days) and Autumn (21 – 28 Days). This shows how much our understanding of earth and women's bodies are culturally linked. Sadly both bodies are often exploited. ***There is no liberation of creation without liberation of woman. There is no celebration of creation without celebration of womanhood.***

Now, my sisters and brother, I urge you to shed off your lethargy and the theology, proclaimed and celebrated within the four walls of your strong and secure structures. If a God who never incarnates is an irrelevant God, the theology that never incarnates too is irrelevant, I believe. ***I want you to destroy your Altars, for the world is your Altar. I want you to destroy your Priesthood, for the human race is called to be the priests of this nature.*** I want you not only to take up the Cross, but also the sickle, the plow, the hoe. And in the process, as Prophet Joel says,

you may have to “Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears”, because we have a fight to fight against all kinds of ecological injustice to make the ‘Season of Creation’ a real time of liberation and celebration.

The ‘Season of Creation’ would become meaningful not when you become like the St. Francis who lived in caves, hermitages and mountain side, but like the St. Francis who started a revolution when he literally stripped naked of his clothing, left behind his wealth, and began to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. To this day, there has been perhaps no other saint who has challenged us to find true happiness and joy by living in contradiction to the profit motives of the world.

This small state of Kerala is celebrating Onam, celebrating the return of Mahabali, the indigenous Dalit and Dravida King who was pushed down into the hell by the Vamana, who represents the Aryan, the aliens who thwarted our people and made us slaves. But Onam says, there is a return of Mahabali. Justice is coming back. Righteousness will spring again and will flow again like a rushing, gushing river. **Today, the Herods, Ceasers, Pilates and Priests may crucify us and the whole creation. But, we believe, three days from now, there is Easter. We will come back. Yes, today, the Herods, Ceasers, Pilates and Priest may crucify us and the whole creation. But, we believe, three days from now, there is Easter. We will come back.**

I do not want to relish in today’s ‘Season of Creation’ because I have a dream for tomorrow.

I dream a tomorrow...a life of liberation...a life of celebration when the heavens be glad, the earth rejoice; oceans roar, and all that fills it; fields exult, and everything in it, when all the trees of the forest shall sing for joy. I dream a day when a shoot shall come out from our stump, and a branch shall grow out of our roots. The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him.

I dream a day when the wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.

I dream a day when the wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing.

Yes, **I stand** here at the portals of this world, the dry land, the altar where many of our lives were sacrificed by the empire, the state and the mammons of this world, and **I see** the angel showing me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city.

Come drink from this river, says the Lamb.

Come dream with me.

Come fight with me.

Let the empire crumble. Let life rejoice. Let us celebrate.

Let us unite with nature. Let us unite for a common future. **Amen!**

[The Revd Viji Varghese Eapen, who holds 'Master in Theology' in 'Christian Theology with Specialization in Liturgical Theology', from the Serampore University (India), served as the Director of the Department of Ecumenical Relations, Ecological Concerns and the Department of Communication at the Church of South India Synod Secretariat, during the period 2011 – 2014. He has been teaching in the Department of Christian Ministry as a Visiting Faculty in the United Theological College, Bangalore, South India. Currently, he serves as the Presbyter at the CSI St, Mathias Church, Karikkaattoor, and is preparing to do his PhD in Lancaster University, UK, under the Faculty of 'Politics, Philosophy and Religion'.]