



National Bishop Susan C. Johnson's Homily
Greening of the Parish Conference
November 2-3, 2007
North Vancouver BC

Isaiah 55:10-13

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.
For you shall go out in joy,
and be led back in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you
shall burst into song,
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.
Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;
and it shall be to the LORD for a memorial,
for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

Romans 8:18-28

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

Luke 13:6-9

Then he told this parable: 'A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, "See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the

soil?" He replied, "Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig round it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down."

I love these passages of scriptures. The image from Isaiah of singing mountains and hills and clapping trees, the image from Romans of the whole creation eagerly awaiting God's revelation, these are pictures of a lively and vibrant creation that joins in singing praise to God, and that joins in weeping for itself and for us in the midst of the brokenness that surrounds us.

When we were kids my sister Joy had a similar understanding of creation. When we were on car trips she would look at a forest of trees and focus in on one tree and say, "you are special because I noticed you!" A similar understanding of creation was shown to us in *The Lord of the Rings* – both the books and the movies and those walking, talking, deliberate tree-like beings known as the Ents.

These images help us to reclaim an understanding of a creation that itself reflects the image of God. When we have that image clearly in front of us, when we have that understanding in our heads and hearts how can we do anything but confess our misuse of our world and repent and change our ways and treat the creation with reverence and respect?

I admit it's a challenge in that we haven't done such a great job in respecting and caring for the image of God that is reflected in each person we encounter. That's why I love the parable of the fig tree. It is a parable about us. The fig tree isn't doing what it is supposed to do – bear figs. And the owner of the tree gets frustrated and wants to get rid of it. Well friends, we too know what we are supposed to do and we keep messing up.

And God who is our patient gardener keeps trying to help us get it right. And although being dug around and having manure put on doesn't particularly sound like a lot of fun, we know that it's about God loving for us, caring for us and wooing us into God's loving ways of caring for each other and the creation.

So thanks be to God, for all of the good gifts we are given. And thanks be to God for teaching us the way to use and respect those good gifts in ways that will benefit and honour the whole creation.

Amen.