

## **The Call to Care**

Summer in Delhi has been unusually different this year. It almost feels like monsoon. With clouds and showers being a weekly affair, the city is enjoying respite from soaring temperatures that usually marks a month like April. While this temporal relief is welcome, these short-term gains are also a cause of immense concern. Such drastic changes in the weather pattern for any particular season is strongly linked to issues of climate change.

For several decades now alarming statistics on environment have been coming to light. Sea level rise, species extinction, rising temperatures and the list can go on. Every new data that is presented makes it more depressing than the one before. And these data are indicative of the reality that is experienced by people across the globe on a constant basis. As with any issue that the world has confronted of late, there are frantic efforts to salvage the situation. Garner support so that our collective efforts can stop further destruction of our environment.

Let us pause for a moment before we form any further thoughts in our mind about the appropriateness of this focus on a Sunday morning. Is this something that the Pastor should discuss about during worship or I, as a Christian, need to be concerned about? Are we going the liberal way when the environment becomes the topic of contemplation in the house of God? Why should just these dampening environmental facts push me towards any action? Aren't there much larger causes to hold my attention than the call for me to care for the environment? It will be appropriate for us to once again rediscover our perspectives from the scriptures and the call that comes to us to care.

### **I. God calls us to care for creation**

Responding to God's call has been of critical importance for each one of us as Christians in our Christian life and discipleship. Often time new learning and understanding causes us to make significant decisions in our life. In such a context it will be appropriate for us to examine what is our understanding on the environment and how it is linked to our faith and identity as a Christian. Most times in life we have no greater compulsion to do anything but for the fact that God calls us to and it is his expectation from me as his child.

The latest species count in the natural world, reported in August 2011, was about 8.7 million. Genesis 1 lays out for us a brief description of God in creation of the 8.7 million and even beyond which might have been missed out by the limited human wisdom and capability and also lost in extinction. We see a God who is intimately at work and lovingly admiring the work of His hands. There is an appreciative reference to every day's creation. Everything is good. The support systems are also carefully designed. We notice the ordered fashion in which the creation of one follows to the creation next day, waters, plants, seasons and creatures to provide for and sustain the complete cycle of life. There is order and there are systems of support. Each of the things he had made had its separate existence, appreciation and blessing to procreate. It is into this beautiful setting that man is placed. Created in God's very own image and likeness is a

crucial point to note and then being entrusted immediately the care of everything on the earth. God's image and likeness in man was critical to the task of being given charge. God trusted man enough to care for the things he had so lovingly made. The call to care comes from God right at the very beginning of the scripture and he has also equipped us for the task with his image and likeness.

The call to care has also been consistent with the nature of God and has not been dependent on world trends or focus on issues of current importance. We are not adapting to times or trends when we call the church to care for environment. We should care for creation more because of the fact that God calls us to care and less because we have alarming facts about environment staring in our face.

So where have we lost that call and mandate. It is high time we recovered our first call from God to care for his beautiful creation.

## **II. God cares for his creation**

God's care for his creation does not end with the initial accounts in Genesis. His concern continues to be evident right through the scriptures. In Psalm 50:11 he says 'I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine. They all belong to him and he considers each one special. Everything belongs to God. Just as much as we belong to God everything that God has created can also claim their reference to God as belonging to him. He also cares for each of his creation and the book of Psalms in particular is replete with references of God's concern. Also at significant points in history as during the flood in Genesis we see God making special provision to care for all creation. Even if sin alienates us from God, he just does not destroy all of his creation.

In the time of Noah, sin required destruction of what God had created but yet he lovingly makes alternate provision for the sustenance of creation. God gave this special responsibility to Noah and instructed him to make room in the ark for his creation as well. It was the desire to preserve diversity of his creation, which was evident in God's command to Noah. Noah was faithful to God's instruction, 'Noah did everything just as God commanded him Genesis 9:22'. Probably today God also entrusts us with that responsibility of caring for His creation in a context of indiscriminate destruction of the world's biodiversity.

God's blessing comes again after the flood. The covenant after the flood was not just with mankind but also with the creatures of the world (Genesis 9:8-16). God's covenant is to ensure that their existence will not be threatened in such a scale in the future. The rainbow is a sign for all living creatures of every kind on the earth. God establishes a covenant with creatures as well that he will not destroy them in such a flood again. This is a vital evidence of God caring for his creation. All of God's creation is of importance to God.

Though man failed God right at the very beginning, God has been unchanging. He continues to care for his creation and all that he has made and expects each one of us as well to respond to his call. Maybe like Noah we need to protect our environment which is facing the threat of destruction.

## **III. Caring for creation is part of loving our neighbors**

Statistics reveal that changes in the environment have also been adversely affecting people of all walks of life. However, the maximum brunt of these changes as usual is borne by the poor and the marginalized. When they are already very low on any securities of life the impact of climate change further alienates them from any progress. Livelihood, shelter, health and anything worth the mention is affected as a result of changes in the environment.

What would a Christian response be in such a context? Of course we rush with immediate relief. What about bringing about some lasting changes that will protect our environment and cause lesser destruction? Lifestyle changes though little by themselves does add their bit to the environment when we do it collectively. Caring requires concerted efforts from all of God's children who love their neighbors. We need to make individual decisions and encourage each other in our efforts. We, who understand and appreciate the significance of creation, need to lead the way in caring for creation in each of our contexts. The earth will not be saved just by our good intentions alone but we need to act. Our efforts may be small but they are efforts nevertheless and will in some way contribute to salvage our crisis situation. As God's children it is our duty to care for our neighbors who will be adversely affected by the impact of climate change by living responsibly in caring for environment.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Among the many things that cry for our attention, can issues of environment take a place of priority? In our pursuit of God and the limited focus that we have been exposed to, concerns of the environment have been totally neglected. We largely live in a context that considers issues of environment lying far outside the margins of the call to discipleship. Church has not been vocal or sufficiently inspiring people enough to care or making aware of environmental issues. We have majored on the significant texts and in the process totally neglected other calls from the scripture. We have failed to take notice of the scripture that calls us to care for creation. It is time we recovered our understanding afresh from the Scriptures and rediscovered the call of God to care for the environment.

As people created in the image of God and endowed with his characteristics we are called to care for his creation. Tend it lovingly and gently just as much as you would have done if it were the work of your own hands. Let us go back to the creation mandate of caring for God's creation. We have no greater compulsion to care for creation other than the fact that God our creator calls us to care.