

## **Sermon: Renew our world**

Not long ago in a small town called Churachandpur in Manipur, there was a heavy rainfall one day and in no time, many houses were submerged as the river nearby overflowed. That took many people by surprise - how could such a short duration of rainfall cause severe flood? One possible factor for the natural calamity was the ruthless deforestation in the surrounding hills that left nothing to hold the rain water. The irony is that to make easy fast money by growing certain plants in the hills, some people destroyed forests killing even the roots by using deadly chemicals and leaving the soil vulnerable to landslides and floods. This is one small example of many deadly ecological crises around the world.

The global ecological crises call us to rethink the way we understand God and God's love for us and for the whole creation. How does God feel when innocent people suffer loss due to natural calamities? How does God feel when we exploit nature to satisfy our greed and pleasure? What is our responsibility as God's children? In this short reflection, we shall look at three important things that are closely connected to each other.

**First**, the Bible clearly tells us that God who created the world (Genesis 1:1) and without him nothing exist (John 1:3). The Word of God continues to say that God loves the world and He gave his only begotten Son. In other words, God loves all that He has created including nature (John 3:16). This is clearer in the creation account where it says '*God saw all that he had made, and it was very good*' (Gen 1:31 NIV). The point here is that God created everything in the universe and it is all good. Often, we think that human beings are the most important creation of God and so they can do anything they like with the rest of creation. The Bible teaches us that nothing and no one is worthless, as God created everything with a purpose. Human beings cannot call bad what God calls to be good. For instance, we cannot say that snails are useless because we do not know what kind of role they plan in a wider plan of God.

**Second**, the Word of God also tells us that creation is subjected to frustration and is waiting for her liberation from decay to be brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God (Rom 8:18-21). As we have seen above, God created everything including us with a purpose. Often, or most of the time, human beings disobey God by not fulfilling their responsibility but nature faithfully and patiently do her work. For instance, we sow the seeds and the Earth produces and nourishes the vegetation. In a similar way, trees around us produce clean air for us while we are asleep at night. This is to say that all creation, including human beings are interdependent on each other, as one cannot live without the other. It is God's will that all His creatures, which He calls good, must live to fulfil their purpose of existence and they do so depending on each other.

At the same time, despite discharging its duties sincerely, nature also suffers and waits for the day of liberation (Rom 8:21). Nature suffers at two levels; one, she suffers pain and death because of the fall or Adam's sin, two; today, nature undergoes extreme pain and suffering due to human greed and heartless destruction of natural resources for easy and fast money. What happens when nature suffers? Why should we be concerned about it? We are concerned

about the ecological crises because when nature suffers, and hence cannot live for the purpose that God created them, human beings also suffer. In other words, when nature is unable to support human beings, we struggle to survive on our own. This is exactly what we see today in our towns and cities today. We experience frequent and extreme natural calamities, climate change, scarcity of water and so forth. We also know that thousands of farmers have lost their lives due to severe drought in many states including Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh etc. Does God care about this? Of course, He cares! We have already seen in the creation account that God calls everything He created as good. Based on this, we can say that it pains God's heart pains when creation undergoes suffering. In other words, God suffers with His creation because He loves them so much (John 3:16).

**Third**, if nature suffers due to human action and God cares for their suffering, it is our duty to respond to the ecological crises at every possible level. If serving God is doing His will, then responding to ecological crises is part of doing God's will.

Our theme for this year is 'Renew Our World' and the passage given is Isaiah 58:12 (ESV) which reads, *'And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in.'*

There are two things that we shall see here. First, Isaiah was a prophet and unlike that of priests, the ministry of prophecy was not heredity - God calls certain people to be prophets for a particular message in a particular situation. In most cases, with their God-given messages, prophets risk their lives before those in authority, the kings and the priests alike. In the case of Isaiah, it was a call to rebuild, to repair and to restore. The question is 'why to rebuild or repair or restore that which is already ruined?' This reminds us about God's concerns for the well-being of our world as a whole. It is about God's care for our world that is broken and ruined in the process of the so-called development. Second, what is to be rebuilt, restored or repaired? The given passage clearly mentions that they are the foundation of a new generation, the breach and the streets that need to be repaired. These terms refer to our environment, for instance, the rivers in our towns and cities, the wastes on our roadsides and so forth. In addition the word 'repair' means 'making something new out of what is there already.' In other words, what God calls 'good' at the time of creation must be preserved and cared for.

Finally in conclusion, being called the children of God by His love and grace, we should respond to God's call for action. God's heart pains when innocent people suffer loss in natural calamities. God suffers with nature which is ruthlessly destroyed to satisfy human greed and pleasure. To love God is to do His will and to do His will is to care for creation. Let us renew our world!