

Incarnation and Redemption – A Natural Connection

Rev. Patrick Stephens

Fifth Week of Lent

Saturday April 9

Scripture

Psalm 24:1

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world and those who live in it.

Reflection

Nestled in the very rock of the earth, caves offer shelter, protection, and a glimpse into the substance of earth itself. Whether naturally occurring or human made, caves are a well-established part of our experience as people.

Some caves serve as attractions for visitors; they offer an opportunity for adventure, beauty, and wonder. Some caves are much more functional in their use by people; they provide stability and structure for everyday human activity, at the same time, reminding us of our place in creation. The story of Jesus' bodily life begins and ends in caves.

Tradition locates the birth of Jesus in a humble dwelling, where animals and people shared accommodation together. There is every reason to imagine that this stable-home would have been a cave. Cave homes would have offered security, shelter, and welcome relief from the hot desert climate. Could it be that the saviour's earthly experience begins within the earth itself?

After his death, scripture describes Jesus' body being laid to rest in a rock-hewn tomb – a cave. Such a cave-tomb would have offered just the right balance of dignity, security, and functionality for the purpose of burial for Jesus' time and place. It is from exactly such a place as this cave, that the resurrection of Christ occurs.

Not much investment in the geographic (or geological) details of Jesus birth and burial is needed for the spiritual truth of the Gospel stories to shine through. It may, however, be helpful for us to imagine the two most important moments of Jesus' earthly experience to have occurred from within the earth itself.

I believe that the story of Jesus is a means by which creation is blessed. If, in Christ, God becomes part of the experience of creation, creation itself is forever changed by hosting the fullness of God's presence in the person of Jesus Christ. The stones and the earth itself are marked as holy by the holiness of the story they enable. The earth is in relationship with God through creation and the incarnation. Redemption is an opportunity to which we are called. And we bring our relationship with the earth into that redeeming work

Prayer

*Creator God,
You have sculpted the very rock of this planet.
Thank you for the goodness of your creation, Which inspires awe and wonder.
As we meet you in the sacred stories of Jesus,
May our faith be deepened
Trough the revelation of your love to us.
Help us to recognize the mark of your love,
Which you have left upon the Earth itself.
May we become living stones,
Proclaiming the wonder of creation,
Receiving the glory of your incarnation,
And proclaiming the hope of redemption,
Through Jesus Christ,
The chief cornerstone of our faith.
Amen.*

Rev. Patrick Stephens, St. Barnabas Anglican, Deep River

Typhoons test resilient Filipino community

The Filipino towns of Namitpit and Patungcaleo sit on the winding Abra River in northern Luzon. The island is home to 53 million people, but that population is concentrated in Manila and Quezon City. The area around these two villages is rural and mountainous like much of this archipelago country, but also full of wide, flat rice paddies, the major crop of the area.

Since the 1980s, PWRDF has been a partner with Cordillera Peoples Alliance (a consortium of more than 250 community-based organizations) of which Cordillera Disaster Response and Development Services (CorDis RDS) is a member specializing in disaster preparedness and response. Last October, the area buckled under the weight of back-to-back typhoons. First, Typhoon Karen blew in with heavy rain, but Typhoon Lawin came in with stronger winds, combining to make a one-two punch. At the height of Lawin, the Abra River suddenly swelled and caused flooding of a thick residue of whitish silt, pebbles, stones and boulders that buried the rice fields. It wasn't mud from the river, but rather, suspected tailings from the Lepanto gold mine upriver.

The people of Namitpit and Patungcaleo are no strangers to this kind of deposit. Just a year before their paddies were buried in 74 centimetres of mine tailings from Lepanto at the height of monsoon rains triggered by Typhoon Ineng. The peasant farmers painstakingly cleared the land of the silt and recultivated it. To protect the land, the local government installed gabion dikes along portions of the riverbank. But they weren't able to stand up to Lawin's forces.

This time the silt deposit was much denser. The farmers, understandably, were reluctant to clear the land, for fear it would get buried again. Almost 500 homes were affected by this disaster. They have lost not only rice land but also swidden fields, banana groves and livestock. In addition, 10 farmsheds were destroyed, and six more were partially damaged. Lawin blew the roofs off 15 homes, and damaged water pipes and irrigation canals. The people met to discuss solutions and agreed to pool their labour to retrieve and repair the roofs, restore the water systems and repair some of the roads.

They also submitted reports to the local government that resulted in relief goods from both the local government and the Department of Social Welfare Development (DSWD). However, this aid came in the form of one sack of fertilizer per household. For those who had no land left to till, it was not exactly helpful.

The DSWD delivered food relief twice. But each delivery was barely enough to last the people for one week. The people of Namitpit and Patungcaleo told CorDis staff that food relief was appreciated, but would surely run out. What they really needed was help with their livelihoods. It was harvesting season when the typhoon struck, thus their source of food and income which was expected to last for a few months was submerged in one day. Packing the food for distribution.

PWRDF contributed \$11,139 (401,000 Pesos) to provide additional relief. On December 18, 2016, CorDis purchased some of the relief goods in Baguio and packed them at the CorDis office with youth volunteers and other community agencies. They set out in the wee hours of the morning to arrive at Quirino, Ilocos Sur at 8:45 a.m. Men, women, and children of Namitpit and Patungcaleo were eagerly waiting. The men devised a makeshift shed and then explained the distribution, which took more than two hours to finish. Even though this was two months after the typhoon, the people were still badly short of food and it was greatly appreciated because in December, they have less food resources.

Representatives of all 511 affected households came to receive their relief packages. The beneficiaries remain in a quandary as to how they will survive with most of their rice fields gone. They continue to strive to rehabilitate their rice paddies and start gardening again because they cannot rely on relief packs from other NGOs or from the government. Some of the beneficiaries regularly go out of Quirino or Ilocos to find manual work and earn money for their daily expenses.

Read the whole story on our website at

<https://pwrdf.org/typhoons-test-resilient-filipino-community>

Tomorrow:

*On Palm Sunday, take a Sabbath rest
and reflect on last week's readings*