

Easter Sunday

James Dunn

RCL: Acts 10:34-43 or Jeremiah 31:1-6; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Colossians 3:1-4 or Acts 10:34-43; John 20:1-18 or Matthew 28:1-10 LM: Acts 10:34a, 37-43; Psalm 118:1-2, 16-17, 22-23; Colossians 3:1-4 or 1 Corinthians 5:6b-8; John 20:1-9

One of the Christian notions about God that has special meaning for anyone concerned about endangered human life is the idea that God is Creator of the universe. Begin at the beginning: it all comes from God (Gen 1:1).

If we really believe that God made it all and keeps the world going (Acts 17:28), then the believer is simply a caretaker, not the owner of natural resources. We are trustees, managers of the limited land, air, and water; caretakers, not undertakers.

For Christians, God gives all good things (Jas 1:17) and expects the recipient to make good use of them. How ironic, then, that some emotionally defend their doctrine of God as Creator in a pulpit harangue delivered in a wastefully air-conditioned auditorium to an overstuffed people, who, after church, drive their gas-guzzling SUVs to a restaurant for big, juicy steaks. If, indeed, God is Creator, this affects the way God's people live. They ask, "Am I supporting famine in the way I use God's gifts?" A related idea is that God alone is worthy of worship (Exod 20:3). The first of the Ten Commandments prohibits worship of any other deity but the Lord. For all practical purposes, there is an idolatry of narrow nationalism (America, love it or leave it) and a form of materialism (does it pay?) that take God's place in many people's lives. Some of those studying world hunger have reduced the problems to economic projections. Overreliance on the study of economics (economism) is no less idolatry than the implicit belief that science has all the answers (scientism). One idolatry is as bad as another.

What is there about God's nature that helps us know how to respond to hungry people? God is a moral Person, not an abstract principle. God is just and righteous and holy and "light" (1 John 1:5) and "love" (1 John 4:8), sovereign God of the universe, yet also a caring Father. Believing that human beings are made in God's image (Gen 1:27) is so important that any difference between one person and another is relatively insignificant. Not enough has been made of the belief that all persons individually are created like God and capable of responding to the divine imperative (Psalm 8). Julius K. Nyerere, once president of Tanzania, said: "We say man was created in the image of God. I refuse to imagine a God who is miserable, poor, ignorant, superstitious, fearful, oppressed and wretched—which is the lot of the majority of those He created in His own image."¹

This teaching that humans are made in God's image invests in individuals a worth and dignity that allow no easy escape from ethical responsibility. After all, each one is a replica of God. Norman Cousins said it well: Desensitization, not hunger, is the greatest curse on earth. It begins by calibrating people's credentials to live and ends by cheapening all life. . . . Famine in India and Bangladesh is a test not just of our capacity to respond as human beings, but of our ability to

understand the cycles of civilization. We can't ignore out-stretched hands without destroying that which is most significant in the American character—a sense of vital identification with human beings wherever they are. Regarding life as the highest value is more important to the future of America than anything we make or sell.²

The Christian understanding of being made in God's image includes the oneness of the human family. Belief in the solidarity of the human race, a prominent theme in Scripture, has been slighted. John Donne's "No man is an island . . . any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind" sounds very much like Paul's "We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves" (Rom 14:7). Most Christian sympathies would be with G. K. Chesterton, who said, "We are all in a small boat on a stormy sea and we owe each other a terrible loyalty." Both our value and our oneness come from the very Nature of God. Can you imagine a follower of Jesus Christ praying, "Give me this day my daily bread?" We need to make flesh those sentiments of solidarity.

Children's Time

[LH] Mention to the children that there's a phrase adults sometimes use that says, "Life goes on." We usually say that when we're facing a problem that's hard to overcome, yet we know that we have to move on and keep living day by day, even if our lives are more difficult. On Easter, though, the phrase "Life goes on" is a joyful one—it says that God has raised Jesus from death and that God loves us forever. God's love and life are meant to be shared, and that's why we happily reach out to those in need, so that all our lives can be full.

Musical Suggestions

[LH] Now the Green Blade Rises—LBW 148 Christ Is Alive—UMH 318 Praise the Living God Who Sings—BP 118 Because You Live, O Christ—NCH 231

1 The Radical Bible (New York: Orbis Books, 1974).

2 Norman Cousins, Saturday Review (March 8, 1975) 4.