

### **Homily: “On a Wing and a Prayer”**

“On a Wing and a Prayer” is a popular ecological saying. It is almost the secular environmentalist’s equivalent to saying “I trust the Will of God.” In fact, this secular symbol of faith, betrays a Biblical sensibility. This is because many thousands of years ago, God spoke through Isaiah, “Even youth [and elders] grow tired and weary, and young men [and women] stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD [The Legitimate Authority of God] will renew their strength like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not faint.”

I was once this youth who grew tired and wearied. I was once this young man who stumbled and fell. This is because the environmental activist life is hard. As Kermit the Frog said “it is not easy being green.” As an environmentalist you have to face intense opposition from literally “all the principalities and powers of the world,” to people in your own movement, even within yourself. As an environmentalist you have to fight an all-fronts battle.

Yet I come here tonight with the “good news” that there is life after “burn-out.” Light bulbs “burn-out” but “the human spirit” is enlivened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, the “Wisdom, Power and Goodness” of the Living God.

If my soul is like an eagle, God’s first got me off the ground by helping me accept that I was a young man living with Asperger’s. Embracing Asperger’s allowed me to get medical treatment and government disability services, allowed me to radicalize and helped identify my ecological strengths. This is what ecotheologian McFague calls “your wild space.”

Through new studies, experiences, mediations, prayers, God then shepherded me outside to live near wild Nature, where I could “renew my strength like an eagle,” a “healing space” where I could rest, heal and recoup from Compassion Fatigue, so I could rejoin the planetary struggle. Which I did! For the first time in my entire life I could be myself. Then my re-integration back into society and the movement began to fall into place. This revelation gave me newfound freedom.

All of this building up to my “key insight” about God-world relationships, quoting from early wilderness preservationist John Muir, “In God’s wildness lies the hope for the world.” That God is saving the world, through direct actions on behalf of the planet, despite human folly. God showed me two “signs of hope” that the world is being saved. First, miraculous return of the frogs in our bioregion, even though frogs have been declining worldwide. An Act of God! Second, I discovered that once polluted streams, rivers and lakes in our bioregion have been cleansed of pollution. In fact, many of our local waterways are so clear and cerulean that they “sparkle like crystal.” The fruits of the environmentalist’s labors! Several decades of hard work on recycling, clean water and tough new stormwater management standards finally paying off! This revelation gave me newfound empowerment.

Thanks to God, I am now a Compassion Fatigue survivor; I am now back, stronger than ever.

You can find more in my latest book, *Have Mercy On Me, An Ecological Sinner: How The God of the Bible Helped Me Rise Above Compassion Fatigue and Not Give-Up On The Ecological Struggle*, Amazon.com.

Now if you are like most who are concerned about the planetary crisis, you may, like me, feel the need for healing from Compassion Fatigue. I am going to talk about two strategies for healing from Compassion Fatigue based on my book. I offer additional strategies for healing from Compassion Fatigue in my book.

Your first step toward rejoining this planetary struggle is to develop your own personal relationship with the Natural World outside of what you watch on television, encounter online or even read in academic books. You do this by actually going outdoors into wild Nature. Visiting local parks and gardens, taking hikes and bicycle rides, going on long country drives, birdwatching, wildflower identification, breathing fresh air, playing with a pet, whatever activity helps you positively connect with “the world around us.”

Because the planetary crisis is overwhelming by nature, you can best serve the planet not by attempting to do everything or even what is most urgent. Rather you serve the planet best by starting with the part of the planetary agenda which you are most passionate about, what you are really good at, meaning you can actually “get things done” on behalf of the planet, discovering your own “ecological calling” in the process.

In other words, when you peacefully reconnect with the Natural World in a spirit of wonder and reverence, you’ll receive direct, unmediated guidance from the world itself, on how to save the world, a Judeo-Christian Western addition to a respectable tradition in many First Nation societies around the world who have been living relatively sustainably for the Earth for thousands of years. I contend that you need not go out to a pristine wilderness area to have this mystical experience, a local meadow, forest or marsh would do.

Your second step to rejoining the planetary struggle is to go back to the Bible. Well-known ecopsychologist Glendenning tells the story of a Westerner who visited a Native American man who was confused why the Westerner did not know where the watch which he was wearing came from. This is because in this man’s particular Native American culture a person does not use a particular technology unless he or she knows where the technology came from through knowledge and rituals passed down from generation to generation. They believe that “if your ancestors do not have an explanation for it, then there is something really wrong, if you really think about it.”

We might apply this to Christian environmentalism, arguing that the real reason why there are so many aspects of the Bible which twenty-first century readers find “irrelevant” is not because there is something inherently wrong with the Bible, that the Bible is “irrelevant” to the twenty-first century context or we are personally “excluded” from the Biblical narrative. The issue is that there is in fact “something really wrong” with our twenty-first century, modern reality marked by globalized alienation, institutional animal cruelty and planetary crisis. The Bible is not wrong. It’s countercultural, even prophetic, meaning the Bible does in fact speak to our age of planetary crisis, offering us guidance and hope, even in the twenty-first century.

Biblical religious language is written in organic language, the language of premodern societies. According to environmental historian Merchant, traditional, pre-Enlightenment societies before the eighteenth century used “body” metaphors to describe the nature of the Universe and human being’s place in it.

Because until the Enlightenment, human beings believed that the Universe was a living organism. But the Enlightenment introduced “machine” metaphors for describing the Universe, where the Universe, even our own bodies were understood as “complicated machines” using metaphors like car, computer, clockmaker or “create your own reality.” The Natural World was depersonalized objectified and demystified causing human beings to lose ecological restraint, for all the taboos against ecologically destruction, were removed.

The Bible keeps alive this ancient, life-affirming language of discourse, using non-mechanistic symbols to describe “the world around us” and metaphors like beauty and wonder to celebrate the non-economic values of the Natural World, leading one to treat the Earth with “dignity and respect,” creating “ecological restraint” in the process. In other words, the Bible is part of “the non-mechanistic foundation of Western civilization.”

We find in it, a detailed scheme of life-affirming, Nature-based, extravagantly poetic, sacred images, metaphors and stories. The Bible offers us a celebration of the beauty, wonder and glory of God’s Creation, enlivening “the world around us” with meaning and purpose, flaming our ecological passions, motivating us “to seek after every green thing.”

Once you have been outside, exploring God’s world, now that you have gone back to the Bible, hopefully receiving ecological guidance in the process, you are ready to rejoin the planetary struggle stronger and more effective than ever before!

Remember: “keep hope alive” at all costs! “Don’t let anyone turn you around”! The only “failure” is “giving up”! For Heaven’s Sake, “don’t give-up the ship”: Spaceship Earth! Do something! Anything! Run the race! Fight the good fight!

“Don’t ruminate, but agitate!” “Act Now, Apologize Later!” Know in the end, “good will prevail over evil” in the epic struggle to Biblical proportions to save All Life on Earth! “Let Go and Let God!” “Keep the faith!”

Go in peace! Grace be with you!