

I Think That I Shall Never See a Poem as Lovely as a...

Rev. Dewey Johnson, Pastor Emeritus

For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

- Isaiah 55:12

The above is a prophecy from when Judah was held captive in Babylonia more than 500 years before the birth of Christ. Isaiah is giving his people hope. God will save them. They will return to Jerusalem even though they see no way out of Babylon. But why are the hills alive with the sound of music? Because nature's wellbeing is linked to God's saving his people.

Nowadays, many people in America think of salvation in terms of no more than themselves, their souls. They're going to fly off to heaven while the created world gets tossed on the trash heap of history. Not so in the Bible. In the Bible God saves both humankind and nature. Thus, the trees clap their hands.

In Genesis 2, "The Lord God planted a garden in Eden... and there he put the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil... The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it, commanding him, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat."

The Hebrew word for human is *adam*. The Hebrew word for soil or dirt is *adamah*. There is a relationship established right away between humans and nature. The man, *adam*, is taken from the soil, *adamah*, in a relationship that runs both ways. Humans are dependent upon nature, but then nature is dependent upon humans. For what job did God give the man? He is to till and keep the whole realm of nature – trees, bees, parakeets, etc.

A girl asks another what her boyfriend does. The second girl answers, "He grows apples." ... "No he doesn't," says the first girl. "Trees grow apples." Well, yes and no. Trees may grow apples, but they won't grow them very well or for long without some human help. There is an interdependence.

For example, a fellow had an extremely short dogwood tree. He called in a tree doctor. "Doc, this is a really healthy little tree, but why is it so short?" The tree doctor looked at the dogwood and said, "Actually, it's not that healthy. Its bark is worse than its height." The tree needed some help.

Garden is a word that reinforces the interdependence of humans and nature. In Genesis 1 there is this chaotic, seething mass of water. God's spirit sweeps across the chaos and land appears. Then comes a garden, which means an orderly arrangement, one into which the humans fit. Garden is the opposite of chaos. A rock garden is an orderly arrangement of rocks, a kindergarten is an orderly arrangement of kids, and the garden of Eden an orderly arrangement of nature, including trees. The garden was to supply the needs of the humans, whereas the humans supplied the needs of the garden by cultivating and keeping it.

The biblical story begins with God establishing an interdependent, productive relationship between humans and nature. Like all relationships, it is one that suffers from

sin, our not taking care of nature as God intends. Still, the future of humans and nature is intertwined, which is something people nowadays tend to forget or dispute. Not only does the Bible begin with the tree of life, but the Bible ends with the tree of life.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month: and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there anymore. - Revelation 22:1-3