

# *Much love from Africa: Friendship with God's Earth*

Notes from a sermon by the Vey Rev. Ken Gray following a meeting of the Anglican Community Network in South Africa

2018 Season of Creation SERMON ONE

Sunday, Sept 30, 2018, St. Paul's Cathedral, Kamloops BC

---

Dear Friends, I bring you greetings from the congregation of St. Bernard the Martyr, Atteridgeville, S. Africa, a township on the outskirts of Pretoria where I gathered last Sunday with a mixed congregation of all sorts of folks from local areas and more recently, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and as far north as Nigeria. S. Bernard's hosts two Sunday morning congregations, at 6:30 and 8:00 (or when the first service ends)

- Robust Anglo-Catholic tradition, bells and smells (S. Barnabas, Victoria, S. James, Vancouver; S. Thomas, Toronto (a.k.a. "Smokey Tom's))
- Fine congregational singing, traditional hymns, choruses, mostly in parts
- Find organ playing, marvellous opening procession
- Due to holiday weekend, only 300+ attending last Sunday
- Much celebration . . . and then came the drums. Wow
- Heritage Day in S. Africa, thus everyone in traditional dress and a lunch following hosted by parish youth, all sorts of traditional foods, some recognizable

As preacher, I replaced a bishop who was unavailable. I was asked to present in relation to stewardship, and on John 15. Well, unaccustomed as I am . . . I did my best! Jesus, in the upper-room discourse, gives special instruction to those who will follow as disciples/apostles

13 No one has greater love than this, to **lay down one's life** for one's friends. (Remember, I read these words . . . in S. Africa)

14 **You are my friends** if you do what I command you.

- I began with an assertion: Though we have not personally met, we have a relationship in Christ. Our “friendship” is already established given our friendship with God-in-Christ.
- I took some time to think aloud about those qualities of friendship I most value. I then transposed them to our relationship with God and with each other

16b I appointed you to **go and bear fruit, fruit that will last**

- The appropriate question following the discovery of friendship is “So What.” What does gratitude for friendship look like?
- And following this question, what is “fruit . . . that will last?”
- I took time to speak of why I was in Africa. I could not quote from the conference communique recently agreed but I can this morning, for which I beg your indulgence. A full copy will appear in this Thursday's email and hardcopy will be available next Sunday.
- Some extracts:

## **An Urgent Cry for Ecological Justice: Reclaiming the Gospel Imperative for All Creation**

We, bishops, women leaders and young leaders, united by a passion for climate justice, gathered during the Season of Creation 2018 at the Good Shepherd Retreat Centre in Hartebeespoort, South Africa. We came from 17 dioceses in 14 African countries and met under the auspices of the Anglican Communion Environmental Network. Our worship, reflection

and discussion were guided by the theme 'Adaptation, Mitigation, and the Witness of the Church in an Era of Climate Change'. Statement components (which I will not read now) include the following:

- We affirm and celebrate our heritage: Four points
- We acknowledge and lament: Five points
- We make certain commitments in four areas of mission and ministry
- We conclude with a Cry: (SA is the land of **Cry the Beloved Country**, and **Cry Freedom**)

**Our urgent cry** is to the Anglican Communion, our Dioceses, Provinces, CAPA, and Lambeth 2020, that Good News for creation and ecological justice be placed at the top of the agenda. All of us are invested in this and all are part of the problem, whether in the north, south, east or west. **Our Communion provides opportunity for global witness and resources to tackle this global challenge together.**

So back to my question: So what is "fruit . . . that will last?" In a single word: Friendship. If we can be friends with each other, as a result of our friendship with God, can we include planet earth in our friendship circle? Let's all answer YES.

If friendship involves both celebration and sacrifice, what must we now sacrifice for the health of this new friend? Our Season of Creation this year it titled "Simply Living." What then does living simply mean and involve? This year we will examine lifestyle in a variety of creative and I hope, helpful ways.

My Atteridgeville listeners would not likely have heard of "Friends of the Earth . . . a voice for the environment, nationally and internationally,

working with others to inspire the renewal of our communities and the earth, through research, education and advocacy.” No matter, the idea is simple and relevant and necessary: We can and urgently must become better friends with God’s earth. This is our human and spiritual vocation.

So welcome friends, to our third annual Season of Creation. More to come in the three weeks ahead; I look forward to sharing the journey with you. And again, thank you for enabling me to continue my work with the ACEN, work which will end next June. But yes, other projects will likely appear, hopefully closer to home.