

Bible study led by Bishop Chad Gandiya (Harare, Zimbabwe) during the ACEN meeting of Eco-Bishops, women leaders and youth leaders from Southern, Central and East Africa which took place during the Season of Creation, 19 to 23 September 2018, at the Good Shepherd Retreat Centre in Hartebeespoort, South Africa.



God tried to bring his people back in many ways. God gave them the law but they broke it. They went into exile. Their relationship with God was never perfect. God in his love sent them the prophets and other people to try and get them back. But things did not improve. This history of the children of Israel, from the beginning to the time of the prophets, God never gave up on them. God was always working out his purposes.

St Paul, Galatians 4: But when the time had fully come, God did something. God sent his son, born of a woman, so that those under the law could be redeemed. What Paul tries to explain is picked up by Gospel authors who explain it in their own ways.

John's Gospel: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The same son of God, sent by God, to redeem humankind and all creation. God incarnate dwelt in our environment so that all creation can be saved. This is God's own doing, own plan, for the salvation of humankind. A relationship that had been broken, between humans and God, between humans and creation, humans and humans. The Word that felt the pain of the fallen world.

'He was tempted like us all but did not sin.' Jesus was totally immersed in the environment in which he grew up. He ministered mostly outdoors, grew up in Nazareth, spent time around Galilee, in the wilderness.

Mark's Gospel: 'He was with the wild beasts'. God so loved the world (the cosmos) that he sent his only son. We make a mistake to replace 'the world' with 'me'. For we who love God, this is the example he sets. We too should love the world (the cosmos). 'We are to take the Gospel to all creation.' (The other Gospels do not express the commission in this way.)

What does it mean for us to take the Gospel to all creation, to preach the Good News to all creation? How can we participate in what God is doing?

Paul describes the earth groaning and waiting for the liberation of the children of God. Our own salvation is identified with that of all creation. We are redeemed along with the world that God created. In the new order we read about a new heaven and a new earth where we will be with God. The crosses we wear are symbols of our salvation, of God's love for us. We wear the cross to remind us that Jesus died to restore our relationship with God, with one another, with creation. The new commandment, 'Love one another'.

We create dumps and the poor live on them. The slum dweller is our neighbour, whom God died for. Let's talk less, do more. What does it mean to love our neighbour? Good things are not just meant for me but for all God's people.

Example: In our farming communities, the chemical fertilisers are washed by the rain into the streams. The effects are felt downstream. If we pay attention to our piece of land and treat it with great care, it will show our love for our neighbour who lives downstream.