

Bible study led by Bishop Ellinah Wamukoya 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.



Eucharist and the Environment

In Genesis: After Adam and Eve had been chucked out of the garden because of their disobedience they were told they would now have to struggle to earn a living from the land. Their bond with the Creator was broken. But through the incarnation, and Jesus breaking bread with his disciples, the Eucharist followed re-establishing **communion** with God through Christ in his death.

John 26.26: After Peter has said let's go back to fishing, Jesus appears. 'Let's have breakfast'. A piece of fish is cooked over charcoal, with bread. Charcoal is wood, the fish is a creature, and bread is what we have made with our hands. This too is Eucharist.

In our day when the priest celebrates the Eucharist, he brings life to the community. Going through the motions is not the point but the awareness that Christ's body and blood are present to the faith of the believer as really as the bread and wine are present to their senses. But this presence is "spiritual", that is, the work of the Holy Spirit. We therefore need to be mindful that eating and drinking enable us to touch the clouds, the sun, and the earth, everything in the cosmos. The kingdom of God is holistic. Christ is food, not just bread. He is life because food is a principle of life.

The Eucharist reminds us that hungry people are all over the world. They do not have John 10.10; life in abundance, because they don't have the basics – food.

When Jesus died, his blood would have touched the ground. New life emerged. The Eucharistic liturgy addresses the issue of reconciliation. It is sinful when we don't look after creation. When we come to the Eucharist we come on behalf of all creation, understanding the profound relationship between creation and the recreation in the resurrection. In the Eucharist we look for forgiveness of sin, including sin against creation. We too can die to greed, give up what we think we need and want to amass, to serve God's creation.

The divine can be experienced through substantial things: water, oil, wine, bread. In the Season of Creation we pray: 'Come feast with God in faith and with thanksgiving'. Jesus chose the materials of wine and bread as the sacrament of the new covenant. He has established a link between sacrament and ecology. They are linked through Jesus Christ.

The Eucharist stands out in that it brings human beings, nature and the Creator into contact with each other. This interconnection is drawn from the fact that bread and wine come from the soil and is transformed. This rejects the belittlement of nature. It also teaches us that we can do with just enough. At the Eucharist just enough bread and wine is consecrated and distributed. These are holy

things, representing the body and blood of Christ. We don't worship the bread, wine, cross, but these things are in remembrance of what Jesus stands for.

The Season of Creation prayer of penitence: 'As we remember what we are, what we have done, as we turn away from self-centredness, may the Creator welcome us, forgive us and strengthen us to live a new life, cooperating with creation...'

Anglicans are used to praying with the book. Spontaneous prayer is sometimes difficult! So let's put such prayers in the book! At the Eucharist we are welcome. 'Come and receive!' As we are welcomed we are taught to be welcoming – of people and of creatures. We encounter Jesus' hospitality in the Eucharist and in the Word. Welcome includes our neighbour, and our neighbour includes nature.

In the Eucharist we share in the body and blood of Jesus. Jesus was first to share himself with us, closing the gap created by us by our sinfulness. We are reminded that as we eat and drink we are to share ourselves with others, including nature. This is a joyful thing! We cannot expect to be happy when nature is no longer able to share the joy with us.

We are the Church. Most people don't understand the above. How do we communicate with others who don't know?