

Column

As I wandered around a local garden shop, I remarked to an employee, “It must be nice to work out here.” Her response was: “People are actually so much nicer and seem happier outside among the flowers.”

An interesting observation. People do seem happier outside when the weather is agreeable. On occasion, this phenomenon may even invade the halls of academia, with the words scribbled on the blackboard: “We’ve gone out under the trees.”

Why do people feel happier outside? For one thing, to quote the poet Gerald Manley Hopkins, “The world is charged with the grandeur of God.” Being out under the trees can be a vehicle for reconnecting with the God who breathed all into being, ourselves included.

According to the story recorded in Genesis, we human beings started out life in a garden and were placed there to be wise caretakers of God’s good creation. Just perhaps, there remains in the human psyche a lingering memory of this primeval state.

Of course, if we are familiar with the Biblical story, we know that a roadblock came down in front of God’s good creation project – humans rebelled and sought to have it their own way. As a result, Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden.

All, however, is not lost. After reporting what theologians call ‘the Fall’ in Genesis 3, the rest of the Bible is the story of God’s plan of redemption and restoration.

Put another way, God does not crumple up creation and cast it into the dustbin like a soiled piece of paper. Rather, he sets in motion a plan to save it. This plan includes not only human persons but creation itself. Speaking of this plan, Paul in Romans 8 writes: “Creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God” (RSV).

The picture Paul paints here is of creation itself ‘standing on tiptoes’ waiting for God’s image-bearing creatures (humans) to be put right. When this happens, creation itself, he says, will be put right.

At this new moment in history, humans will again to be able to exercise perfectly the role God gave them in the beginning . . . to serve as God’s viceroys over creation. This presumably will take place in the realm of God’s restored world -- the ‘new heaven and new earth’ spoken of in Revelation 21.

Just perhaps, wandering around in a garden shop picking out plants gives us humans a hint of God's magnificent future. We feel His warmth, rejoice in His providence and anticipate His tomorrow.

O HEAVENLY Father, who hast filled the world with beauty; Open, we beseech thee, our eyes to behold thy gracious hand in all thy works; that rejoicing in thy whole creation, we may learn to serve thee with gladness; for the sake of him by whom all things were made, thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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