

Column – Spring is in the air

As I write this, spring is the air. It is not possible, at least in the afternoon, to sit outside. Dogwoods and other flowering trees are in their glory. People are itching to get their hands in the soil and start planting. Even normally grumpy people seem happier.

That reminds me of a conversation I had in the outdoor section of a garden shop. At the till, I remarked, “It must be nice to work out here on a day like this.” Her response was: “Yes, I prefer it. 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 these words scribbled on the blackboard in a college lecture hall: “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 ourselves to 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 in this garden to be wise caretakers of God's good creation. Just perhaps, there remains in the human psyche a lingering remembrance of this primeval state. We long to be reconnect to the Creator and once-again to fulfil this role.

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. The roadblock came about as a result of human sinfulness and rebellion. 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 dust bin 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 set free from its present bondage to destruction and decay.

At this new moment in history, humans will again 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 heavens 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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