

Creation's Separation Anxiety

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I don't know about you but I'm a bit of a sucker for animals and I enjoy those vet programs on TV. I was watching one recently where a woman and her neighbour was being driven to despair because every time she went out, her dog would bark and bark and bark. The vet gave this a name: separation anxiety. The dog got anxious when he was separated from his owner and complained vigorously by barking.

Those of us who have animals as part of our household know how powerful the relationship between humans and animals can be. Animals can suffer pain and joy as we do and that pain and joy is bound up with our relationships with them. Sadly, some treat animals as disposable objects rather than as living beings. Animals are abused, neglected, abandoned as if they are bits of stuff to provide amusement and then to be thrown away.

Our pets are members of God's creation and we feel their joys and their pain. But what about the rest of God's creation? What do you see and hear in the world around you. Do you see and hear exclamations joy and delight as a tree bursts into blossom? Do you hear howls of distress as another species falls away into extinction?

Our daily news is increasingly dominated by stories of melting ice caps, polluted rivers, changing weather patterns, and threatened species. Drought. How many generations will know the beauty of the Great Barrier Reef? Will our oil driven economy reach a crisis? Will our water run out? These are distress signals for the human species. But could it be that God's created world is crying out in distress? How are we to respond to that cry? How are we to live out our God-given vocation to live in the image of God? What does it mean to live creatively in this wonderful God-given world?

Just as we run the danger of treating our household animals as disposable objects so too can we treat our planet as a massive supermarket with an endless storehouse. If something runs low on the shelves or if a product we buy is faulty, we live with a happy confidence that the shelves will be refilled and the faulty products fixed or replaced. If the oil runs out, we happily assume that more will be found or something even brighter and better will replace it.

But God's creation is not a supermarket. It is an expression of God's living and loving relationships. God loved the created world into existence and loves us still. All things come into being by the Word of God.

Loving communion is at the heart of creation. The very Trinitarian being of God is all about loving communion, the communion of Father Son and Holy Spirit. God creates and relates to creation in this spirit of communion. We, as human beings created in the image of God, are called to be part of this loving communion.

The ecological distress we hear in the world is like creation's separation anxiety. When the relationships we have with other creatures and with our home, the Earth, are

not life giving, then loving communion is damaged. We separate ourselves – or try to separate ourselves – from the rest of creation, by treating our world as an object to be manipulated and plundered at will. The result is a profound separation anxiety that the whole creation, including us, feels. The earth is crying out for our love and attention.

If our technology continues to be driven by attitudes that see the earth as a resource to be plundered rather than as an expression of God's creation to be cherished, nothing will be solved. The solution lies in our attitudes being informed by truly living in the image of God.

Sometimes we think of God creating the world in six days, winding it up like a clock and leaving it to run under our supervision. But God is not like an absentee landlord. Creation is ongoing and God remains intimately involved with creation. The whole creation is groaning in labour pains. We long for the fullness of creation when the loving communion that God intends is complete, when all is reconciled.

In Christ we have tasted that loving communion and we have glimpsed the kingdom of God. Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. Christ has shown us what it means to be called to live in the image of God, to live a life in loving communion as part of God's creation. Christ's life was not one of exploitation, selfishness and arrogance. He called us into communion with each other, with God and with the world around us.

Are we and all of God's creation suffering from a profound form of separation anxiety? Do we long for reconciliation, not only with our neighbours but with the land, the seas and the skies? Have we fallen short of our vocation to live in the image of God, a God whose very being and creative actions speak of love and communion?

If so, where is the hope? The hope is that we are not on our own. God does not and will not abandon his creation. He calls us back into healthy relationship with Creator and creation. Our wisdom and creativity flow from healthy life-giving relationships. The ecological problems of the world can be addressed. However, if we try to address them complacent in our own cleverness, in isolation from God our creator and despising the ecological needs of our world, our efforts will be futile. The way forward for us all is to stop and listen to God in prayer, to listen to what the created earth is trying to tell us in its distress, to bring all our creative talents to bear in working together for the good of the whole of God's creation, and to give glory to God to whom we and all creation belong.

So next time your cat or dog complains or seeks your attention, give a thought for this whole wonderful world which God invites us to care for and delight in. How might we love and understand this world better and more deeply, not out of self-interest but ultimately because this world is of God as we are God's.