

It's Not Easy Being Green

Preached by the Right Reverend Grant Lynn Ford at the Sunshine Cathedral on Sunday, March 9, 2008

THE WRITTEN WORD

The Eighth Point of Progressive Christianity

By calling ourselves progressive, we mean that we are Christians who recognize that being followers of Jesus is costly, and entails selfless love, conscientious resistance to evil, and renunciation of privilege.

The Light from a Teacher of Truth

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

“Cowardice asks the question, ‘Is it safe?’ Expediency asks the question, ‘Is it politic?’ But conscience asks the question, ‘Is it right?’ And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular but because conscience tells one it is right.”

The Light of the Master Teacher

Matthew 10:16-20

¹⁶“Look here: this assignment is not going to be easy. You’re going to be like sheep among wolves! So as they say: ‘be as wise as a snake and harmless as a dove.’”

¹⁷“Keep on your toes! There are those who will slander you, accusing you of all sorts of things. They’ll do their best to haul you before civil authorities and religious councils. ¹⁸They’ll even try to turn political leaders against you. But that’s O.K. They’ve just created an opportunity for you to speak for truth and justice. ¹⁹Don’t worry about what you’re going to say. The right words will come to you when you need them. You won’t be speaking all on your own; Spirit will supply every word.”

THE PROCLAIMED WORD

“It’s not that easy being green; Having to spend each day the color of the leaves. When I think it could be nicer being red, or yellow or gold...or something much more colorful like that. It’s not easy being green...”¹

Kermit the Frog found it difficult at first to own his ‘greenness’, if you will. He continued, however, to sing:

“But green’s the color of spring. And green can be cool and friendly-like. And green can be big like an ocean, or important like a mountain, or tall like a tree.”

He begins to realize that being green isn’t all that bad after all. So I suppose you’re wondering what all this has to do with our lessons today. You might think I’m going to preach on global warming and the necessity for being ecologically conscious. You’d be partly right on that, but there’s more.

Kermit found out that when you’re skin is the color of wilted spinach, you stand out. And ‘standing out’ is not always a safe place to live. But sometimes we are called to ‘stand out’, to ‘take a stand’, as it were. In fact, being a person of faith, standing up for what is right, being on the side of justice and mercy can sometimes even be life-threatening. Ask the many courageous people who marched alongside Dr. Martin Luther King—Christians, Jews, black, white, brown.

Listen to the words of Dr. King: “...there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular but because conscience tells one it is right.”

People who stood up against slavery knew all about that. People who have stood up for the rights of minorities know that. Our church members in Jamaica know it when they risk their lives to attend our worship services.

It’s not easy being green, says Kermit. And we’re reminded by Principle #8 of Progressive Christianity, that “being followers of Jesus is costly, and entails selfless love, conscientious resistance to evil, and renunciation of privilege.”

Why, if we were to take Kermit literally, I would suggest that being green in this society takes enormous dedication and extreme sacrifice. When was the last time you turned up the thermostat, shut off the water while brushing your teeth, shortened the time in the shower? See what I mean? What about recycling all those empty plastic bottles? Simple little things like that, and all too often we just fail to do it.

But as people of faith the words of the Psalmist ring true with us: “The earth is the Almighty’s, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.” *Psalm 24:1*

The Apostle Paul, in the midst of a debate on whether or not to eat meat that had been offered to a foreign god, reminded his readers—by quoting Psalm 24:10—“The earth is the Almighty’s, and the fulness thereof.”

We know that God is expressing in all of creation. Ibn Al-'Arabi (1165-1240), a Spanish Sufi mystic poet, said: “God is essentially all things... God sleeps in the rock, dreams in the plant, stirs in the animal, and awakens in humanity.” It was he who inspired the famous Persian poet Rumi.

Earlier, Proclus (412-485), a Greek poet and philosopher, said: “...Nature generates, augments and nourishes all things... What is...Nature? God is Nature, and Nature is God. Understand it thus: out of God there arises something next to him. Nature is therefore a certain invisible fire, by which Zoroaster taught that all things were begotten, to whom Heraclitus the Ephesian seems to give consent.”

If we know that all created order exists by the will of the Creator—indeed, is an expression of Spirit—how can we treat our earth-home with anything less than reverence and respect?

Lest I sound like an Oregon-born tree-hugger (which actually I am!), may I remind you that this is only one facet of following Jesus. Remember our Progressive Principle: “being followers of Jesus is costly, and entails selfless love, conscientious resistance to evil, and renunciation of privilege.”

It is the constant attention to these finer details of the life in Spirit that makes it less than easy. Let’s break it down into three categories.

First, **selfless love**: Abdu'l-Baha, son of the founder of the Bahá’í faith, said: “Love is the cause of unfoldment to a searching mind, of the secrets deposited in the universe by the Infinite! Love is the spirit of life in the bountiful body of the world!”

Tablets of Abdu'l-Baha v3, p. 525

The Apostle Paul gave us a clear picture of love: “Love is patient; love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”

1 Corinthians 13:4–7 (NIV)

The 20th-century rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler is frequently quoted as defining love as “giving without expecting to take.”

Michtav me-Eliyahu, vol. I

To which an anonymous pundit said: “Love is grand; divorce is a hundred grand.”

So it’s not always easy to love. But Jesus summed it all up by saying: “Love God with all your heart, your soul, your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself. It’s it, in a nutshell!” *Matthew 22:37–40* my version!!

Next, **conscientious resistance to evil**: It was Albert Einstein (1879-1955) who said: “The world is a dangerous place, not because of those who do evil, but because of those who look on and do nothing.”

Irish statesman and philosopher Edmund Burke (1729-1797) agrees: “All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.”

And the Q’uran tells us: “...surely good deeds take away evil deeds.” *The Holy Prophet 11.114*

Finally, **renunciation of privilege**: Jesus said: “Seek first the kingdom of God, and everything shall be added unto you.”

“This is renunciation,” explains Vivekananda (1863-1902), who goes on to say, “Live for an ideal, and leave no place in the mind for anything else.” He further says: “‘Comfort’ is no test of truth; on the contrary, truth is often far from being ‘comfortable.’”

Being a follower of Jesus, as we Progressive Christians understand it, is not easy: it’s “costly, and entails selfless love, conscientious resistance to evil, and renunciation of privilege.”

Then again, as Kermit will remind us, being green isn’t easy either. But we as Progressive Christians can also echo his words when he says: “When green is all there is to be, It could make you wonder why, but why wonder why? Wonder, I am green and it’ll do fine, it’s beautiful! And I think it’s what I want to be.”

Good for you, Kermit. When it comes to the cost of following Jesus, of being a Progressive Christian, I think it’s what I want to be, too.

And that’s the truth!

THE FINAL WORD

Feminist author, Episcopal priest and seminary professor Carter Heyward, said: “Love, like truth and beauty, is concrete. Love is not fundamentally a sweet feeling; not, at heart, a matter of sentiment, attachment, or being ‘drawn toward.’ Love is active, effective, a matter of making reciprocal and mutually beneficial relation with one’s friends and enemies.”

¹ From "The Sesame Street Book and Record". 'Green' is (c)1970 Jonico Music, Inc.