

Grace Notes in Miniature

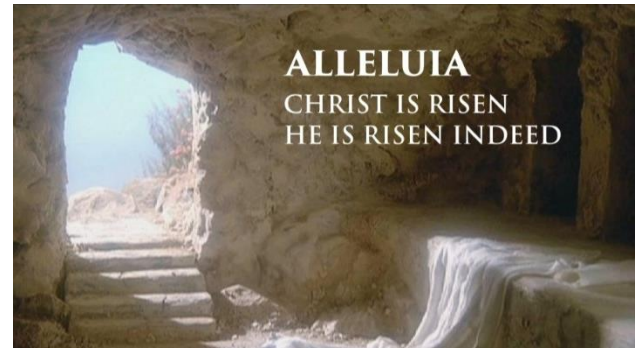
For Friday, May 22, 2020

Dear friends:

With the dawn of another beautiful day, I decided to go for a walk. Our home backs onto a park which is part of the Etobicoke Creek Trails system and I thought it might be a source of inspiration and it was – but not in the way I had anticipated. There are many beautiful trees and shrubs in the valley and the birdsong was delightful – but I started to become overwhelmed with the ubiquitous garbage: fast food and candy wrappers, coffee cups, pop and beer cans, glass bottles, overwhelming numbers of water bottles and plastic grocery bags. The creek was filthy and full of dumped clothing, broken furniture, rubber tires, paint cans – and the usual dam of grocery cart matted with shredded plastic and other garbage. It made me think of this song I first heard in the 1960's: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KM-yIBVEgF4> Whilst somewhat comedic, it did point a finger at the tendency for humanity to despoil beautiful places. A Washington Post article last June <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2019/06/06/mount-everest-garbage-pounds-waste-human-bodies/> called Mount Everest “the world’s highest garbage dump” and reported that over 24,000 lbs of garbage had been collected by the Nepalese Army in a 45-day period. We’re probably all acquainted with the Great Pacific Garbage Patch(es)



<https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/great-pacific-garbage-patch/> and even seeing the way people discard their debris at Tim Horton’s drive-through or a similar fast food outlet makes it clear that attitudes towards garbage are cavalier. As a high school teacher in the eighties, I battled garbage in the desks, carrying a rubbish bin around my portable so students could empty the contents of the desk into it. On one occasion, I asked a student why they wouldn’t have dumped the green, fuzzy fries and sour chocolate milk in the desk at which they were sitting to be told, “I didn’t put it there so it’s not my problem.” Obviously, this attitude has intensified. In previous years, our city has had a spring clean-up day when youth organisations, church groups and service clubs don rubber gloves to gather huge bags of garbage in public places and roadsides. That this hasn’t been able to happen this year is probably why I noticed the mess. But how dreadful that we have to rely on this kind of activity to keep our community clean. It’s been said that once one piece of litter has been discarded, others are bound to follow. Laudato



[Sù. On Care for our Common Home](#),¹ by Pope Francis, has been acclaimed as a pivotal document for our time; however, it doesn't mean anything unless everyone buys in. Along with our concern for carbon emissions, we must address how we behave with what we throw away. And how we treasure what we have. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tvfJPs8IDgU> (Joni Mitchell, 1970) As



people of faith, we need to turn back to the sources of what we believe: "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it." (Ps 24:1) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pVSf5QISmA8> and to remember that from the very beginning, human beings were tasked by God to be stewards of the earth – Gen 2:15 - The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. (NRSV)

Biblically, Hell has been compared to Gehenna, a burning rubbish heap in the Valley of Hinnom south of Jerusalem. We need to take more care to prevent that image from spreading as we work on building the kingdom here on earth. William Blake's poem set to Parry's music, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MKRHWt6xdEU> may be the height of English nationalism; however, the sentiments could be echoed by every country on earth. If mills (industry) can be described as "satanic", it may be not only the destruction inflicted on people's lives but also the damage that has been wrought on our world. The reports of clear skies over places usually shrouded in smog in such a short period of shut down have some people musing that we have lessons to learn from the effects of Covid-19 on the world; perhaps, rather than returning to 'normal', we need to be acting on those lessons as we move forward.

The 1972 movie, "Silent Running" starring Bruce Dern, was a post-apocalyptic science fiction film about what happens to the national forests of the USA after they can no longer survive on earth. The haunting theme song by Joan Baez has a lesson which we still have time to learn. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NkF05D-NJMU> The sixties and seventies may be remembered as the age of the "peace-niks" but the seeds of environmental sensitivity were being sown then too. It seems that we are slow learners; however, there are lots of signs of hope. Our young people are holding us accountable, and activists like Greta Thunberg have a large following among their contemporaries. Let's make sure we all join in!



Gillian

¹ http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html