

Spirituality: Source of Spirit and Life

“You are the Light of the World” (Matthew 5:13-14) Shepherding God’s Creation

“Fracking” is a strange word and may seem a strange place to begin our reflection on being the light of the world as disciples of Jesus. “Fracking” refers to a process of fracturing rocks to release underground reservoirs of gas or oil. In many parts of the world, this process is causing extensive damage to water sources that bring life to many human and other-than-human communities. You may like to find out for yourself more about this process and why mining companies find it so attractive. While it may not be happening in your part of the world, the energy you consume and the light that illumines your home may depend on this process, now or in the future. You may also like to explore how religious communities across the world are responding to this exploitation of creation. Our commitment to shepherding God’s creation calls us to be concerned about such processes and to add our voices in protest against the desecration of God’s beautiful world. Let us bring the pain that the Earth endures through the process of “fracking” into dialogue with one of our sacred stories, the story in which Jesus calls us to identify with the light.

The Gospel Story (Matthew 5:14-16)

¹⁴“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

Images after images bubble out of this text:

- images of light that take us back into the origins of the universe;
- images that take us to the Hebrew Scriptures;
- images from Genesis 1 and the hymn in praise of God’s creation of light;
- images of the whole world lit up;
- images of first century Palestinian cities and homes;
- images of oil lamps and bushel baskets.

It is simply not possible to explore all these images in one little reflection. This is a reminder to us that the treasures of our sacred scriptures are inexhaustible.

Our new consciousness of the evolution of the universe informs us that our own solar system formed in the Milky Way some 4.6 billion years ago. That was not, of course, the initial emergence of light which goes back almost to the “Big Bang”. The liturgical celebration of creation in Genesis 1 celebrates God’s creation of the sun, the moon and the stars. God separates the light from the darkness. God sees how “good” the light is. The sun is the source of light and the energy for the Earth community. It provides the conditions for life to flourish on Earth. The separation of light and darkness, of night and day, becomes crucial to the processes of growth and well-being in God’s new “house” or “home”, the Earth.

In the prophecy of Jeremiah, Israel's God laments the foolishness of the people and what is happening to Earth as a consequence. The prophet adds his own voice to God's lament: "I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void, and to the heavens, and they had no light" (Jeremiah 4:23). These words suggest a reversal of the process of creation depicted in Genesis. The absence of light is associated with the mourning of the Earth: "...the earth shall mourn and the heavens above grow black" (Jeremiah 4:28). For the Psalmist, God is both "light and "salvation" (Psalm 27:1). The usage here is figurative and it is easy for us to imagine why Light became a symbol for God. Our ecological approach to the text invites us to consider the ways in which light literally brings salvation to the Earth community and to consider what it may mean for us, as disciples of Jesus of Nazareth, to be "light for the world".

SME's Instruction

SME speaks of the Institute of the Good Shepherd as an "Institute of faith and love". In this context, she evokes the prophecy of Daniel: "Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever" (Daniel 12:3). She goes on to say: "You are of that number, you who live by faith..."¹ This instruction invites us to consider what it means to live by faith in a very different world from hers, and what it means to lead others to righteousness or right relationships today, including a right relationship with our environment, our whole Earth community. You may wish to bring SME's statement and Daniel 12:3 into dialogue with our opening reflection on "fracking".

Towards Ecological Conversion

- How can you deepen your conviction of being called to bring "light and salvation" to your local environment?
- How can we work with others to promote right relationships with the whole Earth community, especially the most desecrated parts of God's creation?

¹ SME Conferences Chapter 5: *"The Institute of the Good Shepherd is an Institute of Faith and Love"*