

Lord, bring the day to pass

Ephesians 1:3-10

November 20, 2011

*Lord, bring the day to pass
when forest, rock, and hill,
the beasts, the birds, the grass,
will know your finished will:
when we attain our destiny
and nature lives in harmony.*

God's plan, which God will complete when the time is right, is to bring all creation together, everything in heaven and on earth, with Christ as head ...

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What is God's plan? Is there anyone here who doesn't know what God's plan is? If someone were to ask you, "What is God's plan?," would you know how to answer? God's plan is to bring all creation together!

What is included in this plan?

Does God's plan include forest and rock and hill? Does God's plan include beasts and birds and grass? Does God's plan include mountains and rivers and oceans? Does God's plan include sun and moon and stars and planets and asteroids and comets?

God's plan includes all of creation, everything in heaven and on earth. God's plan is about this: this earth, this life, everything you can see and taste and touch. The world is not a stage on which some kind of spiritual drama gets played out. This life is not a mere testing ground for the real life to come. This is what is real! This is what matters! This is what God plans to bring together!

Does God's plan include poor people as well as rich people? Does God's plan include women as well as men? Does God's plan include blacks as well as whites? Does God's plan include gays as well as straights?

Does God plan to bring Palestinians and Jews together? Does God plan to bring Muslims and Christians together? Hutus and Tutsis? Serbs and Croats? Sunnis and Shias? Hawkeyes and Cyclones?

It's clear, isn't it, that what God has planned is far bigger than anything any one of us would plan? There are people and things we would leave out: poison ivy, mosquitoes, tropical storms, snakes, our enemies, bad people, people who are just plain bad and know it and don't care.

Does God's plan include tyrants, torturers, murderers? Does God plan to bring together oppressed people and those who have oppressed them? Abused people and those who have abused them? Broken people and those who have broken them?

It's clear, isn't it, that God's plan must make things right, must deal with sin and all its effects, must provide both forgiveness and justice?

But how is this possible? How is God going to do it? Two words: through Christ.

God has blessed us in our union with Christ ...

God chose us to be his through our union with Christ. It was through Jesus Christ that God made us his children ...

It is by the blood of Christ that we are set free, that our sins are forgiven ...

And God will complete his plan by means of Christ, his plan to bring all creation together with Christ as head ...

Christ is the one who does it. Christ is the agent, the catalyst, the power by which God will bring all creation together. Christ is the reconciler, the one in whom all things are reconciled, the one in whom all people are reconciled.

Christ breaks down the walls that divide us. In Christ there is no difference between male and female, between Jew and Gentile, between slave and free. It is in union with Christ that we are reconciled to God and in union with Christ that we are reconciled to all of creation.

But it's more than that, too. In our union with Christ, we become part of God's plan. We are baptized into union with Christ, not just into faith in Christ or into hope in Christ or into love for Christ, but baptized into union with Christ!

Do you get it? Christ and we ... become one! He is with us, but more than that he is in us, but more than that, he is living in us and through us. We are Christ's body, and bodies are the means of carrying out the plans of heart and mind.

We are part of God's plan to bring all creation together! We are agents of reconciliation, people by whom other things and other people are reconciled -- to us and to each other and to God. We are doers of God's justice, agents of God's mercy, makers of God's peace.

Do you see how this has everything to do with the stewardship we have been talking about for the last ten weeks? God is a faithful steward of creation. God will not neglect his creation or let it tear itself apart or wind itself down to its own demise. God, the faithful steward of all he has made, will bring all creation together, will restore to it its proper beauty and harmony and purpose.

And God calls us, in union with Christ, to be faithful stewards too, to do what he does. God calls us, in union with Christ, to be about his business of bringing things together: by showing mercy just as God shows mercy, by caring for each other just as God cares for us, by welcoming outsiders just as God welcomes outsiders, by taking the side of the poor just as God takes the side of the poor, by forgiving others just as God forgives us, by being generous with what we have just as God is generous with what he has.

To put it negatively: whenever we hold tight to what we have, whenever we close our eyes to need and to suffering, whenever we turn our backs to people we don't like or don't want to deal with, whenever we build protective walls around "our" stuff and "our" people, whenever we refuse to show mercy or offer forgiveness, whenever we pledge our allegiance to any power or person or thing before Christ ... we are working against God's plan.

Or, to put it positively: whenever we make Christ our head, our care above all other cares, our loyalty above all other loyalties, our love above all other loves, and whenever, in union with Christ, we open our hands, open our eyes, open our homes, open our churches, open our hearts ... we are helping to complete God's plan.

Today, we are opening our home, we are opening our church, to nine men and women who have expressed their desire to join our church family, to join us in being about God's business. This is part of God's plan! This is part of God's plan to bring all creation together!

It's just nine people, and we are just three hundred and ninety-some people, but it is what we share that matters. It is our common faith in Christ, our shared commitment to follow where Christ leads, that brings us together. And whenever people are brought together for that reason, whenever people stay together and hang in there with each other and work side by side for that reason alone, people inside the church and people outside the church are offered a clear sign of the world God intends to bring into being.

We have opened our church to them, so let's open our hearts to them, too! God has brought them to us and us to them for a reason, for a purpose, so let's get on with it!

Lord, bring the day to pass! That's our prayer. Lord, bring the day to pass when forest, rock, and hill, the beasts, the birds, the grass, will know your finished will: when we attain our destiny and nature lives in harmony.

That's our prayer, but as the old African proverb so wisely puts it: *When you pray, move your feet!* So let's move our feet! Let's obey our call! Let's be active agents, all of us, of God's plan to bring all creation together!