

This story touches on many others – not least our place in the universe, or, perhaps, the place of the universe in us, for, as its very name implies, it's all one and, as the story implies, this also has something to do with God's nature as one. What we do on earth matters because it's related to a much larger picture than our life alone: it reaches to the heavens. What we do and what we don't do has implications and repercussions that reflect who we are, not only in relation to each other but in relation to God and who God is in relation to us. Everything is connected. We're getting used to this idea now in the gradual dawning of our responsibility for global warming. There's a way of living on this planet which keeps it, and us, whole and healthy, and a way of living which is ultimately destructive of both. The unforgiving servant in today's gospel story fails to make a connection between this larger story and his own. He forgets to forgive, and getting and giving are at the heart of the matter. I was recently given a beautiful book entitled, 'Braiding Sweetgrass' written by Robin Wall Kimmerer, 'a mother, a scientist, a decorated professor and an enrolled member of the Citizen Potastomi Nation' of native American Indians. My initial reaction was 'Not another book about beans and turtles!' but, if one gives oneself to it, it's surprisingly forgiving – full of eucharistic energy and grace, with many connections to the deeper wisdom within our own tradition. Just look at the words in this morning's office of Lauds:

*Transcendent God in whom we live...
 Creator of all things that are
 The measure and the end of all...
 All you works of the Lord, O bless the Lord
 And you mountains and hills, O bless the Lord
 Let everything that lives and breathes give praise to the Lord.*

Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

It's all part of one cycle of giving and forgiving. The native Americans, and many other indigenous peoples, have always known this and live sustainably by giving as well as getting: offering the first fruits back to God, or the earth; not taking everything they find; passing on to others the fruits of their labour and always giving thanks. A scientific study of why some sweetgrass meadows prospered and others failed found that sweetgrass did best in close association with native communities which still harvested it by hand. When harvesting stopped, sweetgrass disappeared. Or, in the words of Robin Wall Kimmerer,

*The grass gives its fragrant self to us and we receive it with gratitude.
 In return, through the very accepting of the gift, the pickers open up
 some space, let the light come in, and with a gentle tug bestir the
 dormant buds that make the new grass. Reciprocity is a matter of
 keeping the gift in motion through self-perpetuating cycles of
 giving and receiving. (p.165)*

Keeping the gift in motion – not a bad summary of Christian life.

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