

We touched last week on the concept of ‘re-wilding’ and its metaphorical use for a ‘re-wilding’ of the heart: that is, a deep conversion or change of attitude within those with the power to affect real change. I targeted Boris Johnson in this respect, but this power is given to all of us. This power of ‘dominion’ over nature and the conversion of heart, applies to us all, too. But ‘dominion’ is not all that it seems because nature has a way of taming us, as well as of us taming nature. It is more a matter of a creative relationship: that is, one subject to ongoing creation, with surprising results.

When the writer and naturalist, Richard Mabey, tried to establish a wild life meadow in his garden in Norfolk a few years ago, he was at first pleased and then appalled and then pleased again at the results. It all began well for

*from being largely swamped by aggressive grasses, it exploded with patches of ox-eye daisy and musk mallow and bird's foot trefoil... But in May it started to go tatty. A marauding band of herbivores — pheasants, rabbits, hares, muntjac deer — crept out of the cover of our bit of woodland and began nibbling the flower beds as if they were cocktail snacks. Then the hay rattle turned nasty. I'd introduced it as a way of sapping the vigour of the coarse grasses(it's a partial parasite) but it's now turning all my clover and vetches into dwarves. When I looked it up I found that it was parasitic on at least 14 plant families as well as the grasses. They don't tell you that in the wildlife gardening columns. (p. 30. A Brush with Nature)*

Suffice to say that the meadow recovers but the lesson for Richard is that nature needs to be chewed and frayed by other creatures if it's to do well.

Now, what has that got to do with our readings of today? I'm wondering, too. I've often had a vision of God staring down at his initial creation and watching in horror as it goes badly wrong, from a divine point of view. ‘Good grief,’ he says. ‘So this is what nature does when left to its own devices! I'll have to start again.’ Hence Noah and the flood. ‘But this time I will make a covenant, not only with Noah, but the whole of creation not to destroy it again, and I'll put a sign in the heavens to remind me to pay more attention next time.’ And God leaves us once more to get on with it. But the results are much the same, and always have been. Fortunately for us, as the rains come and go, so does the rainbow, and God cannot leave his creation to simply fend for itself. He sends his Son to show us, and win for us, a way of behaving which honours his original creation. It's a kind of death, both for God and for us; a baptism in waters which can both destroy and give life, and if we immerse ourselves in this water so we discover that it will uphold us, and all creation, as the water of the flood upheld the Ark. It's a risk because, apparently, the Ark has no rudder. It's more of a houseboat or a shed than an ocean-going ship. It's a lesson in ‘going with the flow’; in trusting that God, in Christ, will look after us after all, but not in ways that we might expect or control. It doesn't mean we don't mow the grass any more – at least once a year is recommended – but it does mean that, like Christ in the desert, we can be at peace with the wild beasts once again. Prepared, that is, to be gnawed and nibbled by the processes of evolution, both spiritual and physical, if we are to do well. Or as Annie Dillard put it so well:

*I am a frayed and nibbled survivor in a fallen world, and I am getting along. I am aging and eaten and have done my share of eating too. I am not washed and beautiful, in control of a shining world in which everything fits, but instead am wandering awed about on a splintered wreck I've come to care for, whose gnawed trees breathe a delicate air, whose bloodied and scarred creatures are my dearest companions, and whose beauty beats and shines not in its imperfections but overwhelmingly in spite of them, under the wind-rent clouds, upstream and down. Simone Weil says simply, Let us love the country of here below. It is real; it offers resistance to love.’ (p212 Pilgrim at Tinker Creek)*