

How closely allied to the weather are our moods. Two weeks ago we were enjoying clear days – cold at night but dry and pleasant in the daytime, and now, at last, the rain has come, to the relief of the farmers and the gardeners among us but for some it's an invitation to a certain heaviness, depression, being 'under the weather', so closely linked are we to the world. But, as Jesus prepares his disciples for his departure once again, one might say, so in John's gospel it might appear that he is preparing *them* in a sense to depart from this world also, in the sense of living in the world but not belonging to it; indeed, being hated by the world because of their manner of living in it, as 'the world' has hated him. Now there are several different things going on here which can lead us into all sorts of directions which are not necessarily of God. We could, for example, see the world as unimportant to us, as it is, and our job to hunker down in our own sacred enclave until it's time to leave, whether through natural death or supernatural second coming. We could even, perhaps, seek to bring this ending on, for example, encouraging the Jewish settlers to complete the Jewish take-over of the Holy Land before their own conversion to Christ. Or, we could ignore the world's desperate race to consume all its living space and allow the end to come through this trashing of the world's limited resources. We could retreat to a monastery. The point being that John's apparently negative view of the world could be seen as rendering it as of secondary importance to us as Christians. Our real task is to separate ourselves from its corrupting influence.

Then, of course, we can go to the other extreme and enjoy everything the world offers precisely because it doesn't ultimately matter – it's there for us to use in any way we like because, after all, we've been appointed to rule creation. And so on.

But it's much more subtle than this and there's a strong Franciscan tradition which says that God became incarnate in the world, not because of the world being intrinsically bad and in need of rescuing, but because it is essentially good and always has been. It's this tradition that Pope Francis is invoking when he asks us not to ignore the world but to engage more fully with it, especially in its present environmental woes:

Some respond to the suffering of a crisis with a shrug. They say, 'God made the world that way. That's just how it is.' But such a response misinterprets God's creation as static when it's a dynamic process. The world is always 'being made'. Paul, in his letter to the Romans, (8:22) says creation is 'groaning' from birth pangs. God wants to bring forth the world with us, as partners, continually. (Let us Dream p.4)

In this respect we are all, always, under the same weather. The irony being that if we fight for the world in this, initially at least, counter-cultural way, then the world will, of course, hate us.

There's a lot more to be said here of how this counter-cultural stance is made possible for us by the 'overflow' of God's Spirit but that properly belongs to Pentecost when we too are taken up into God the Father's love for the world.

God so loved the world that he sent his only Son.

Br John Mayhead
Monastery of Christ Our Saviour