

7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter Year A. 17.5.26

*I'm not a deeply introspective person really ... and I don't have a mystical view of nature particularly... But I remember a particular occasion on a billabong in Northern Australia in Arnhemland. It was very wild and there was a marvellous lake, a big billabong covered in wildfowl of one sort or another, magpie geese and crocodiles.*

*In order to get the shots we wanted we put up a hide and then went there in the dark so the birds wouldn't be aware that you were there. And the sun began to rise over this wonderful lake, with lilies – purple lilies, pink lilies as well as white lilies, and the magpie geese, egrets and crocs, and you suddenly had a vision of the natural world without humanity. That was a... I was going to say a holy moment, but you know what I mean.”*

David Attenborough in an interview with Simon Barnes from the Observer May 3rd in this his 100<sup>th</sup> year. Now the telling phrase in that excerpt is not “holy” so much as “without humanity”. As a sort of naturalist I can identify with that special sense when a landscape is full of nature without a human being in sight, a sense of something deeper going on within oneself, a sense of attachment to the beauty of this world without people, something no doubt primal, something we were once part of but are no more – or seemingly so. The harder bit then is to realise this sense – which David Attenborough wants at first to call holy but quickly corrects himself by saying “but you know what I mean – the harder bit is to find it among humans, within this humanity that otherwise seems to mar the natural landscape. I'm sure David Attenborough knows something of this too – he has a great love for indigenous people and no doubt for the many people he has worked with over the years and his family. It comes across to us too and makes him hugely popular, it may also make him wary of religion, especially Christianity which seems at times to be so concerned with the harder bit, the love of God and of people, as to ignore and trample the love of God in the rest of creation – dominion and all that. Christianity is fast trying to catch up with the love of the natural world, though it is often there in the mystics, in that mystical view of reality which David steps back from and the Church has ignored at its peril.

All this is to say that the harder bit is not to oppose love of humanity and love of nature but to work it out, to allow it to happen within a Christian framework and this is the task Jesus is leaving his disciples with as they wait in that upper room.

Another telling passage from this same Observer is when David Attenborough recounts that most famous of encounters he had with Mountain Gorillas in Rwanda in 1978 – this on the second encounter as he prepares for filming

*“ I crept down a slope to the stream crossed it and crawled up the opposite slope to a point where I thought Martin and his camera would be able to see me and them. John gave me the thumbs up but before I could say anything something landed on my head.*

*I turned and found that a huge female gorilla had emerged from the vegetation behind me and put her hand on my head. She looked straight at me with her deep brown eyes. Then she pulled*

*down my lower lip to look inside my mouth. This was not, I thought, the moment to talk about the significance of the opposable thumb. Something then landed on my legs. Two infant gorillas were sitting on my feet and fiddling with my boot laces.*

*How long this interaction continued I have no real idea. I was in a delirium of happiness. Then the youngsters got bored with my boot laces and ambled away. Their mother watched and heaved herself to her feet to amble after them. I crept back to the film crew overwhelmed with a feeling of extraordinary privilege.”*

If only we could be like that with one another.

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