

*Reflection: A Prayer for the Amazon by Lanni Lantto*

Driving here I passed the construction on US41—the multiple bill boards and rising up of stores that cater to my every want and desire. Yes, I need a new car to be able to drive here, Yes, I need Halloween decorations to put in my lawn, Yes, I need a new TV to plug into our culture, Yes, I need my sirloin beef cut for dinner tonight.

Amidst the hustle and bustle of the backhoes and excavators, there is a presence that has been there before I was born. An ancient and steady flowing of abundance that provides life for all who cross its path – a gift freely given, not built by human hands.

The Dead River lies just beyond the urban sprawl. How do I not know that she is there? How do I not value what she is for me and for the ecosystem around her? How has she gotten to be something that gets in the way of our human progress?

In the Amazon rainforest, home to hundreds of thousands of animal & plant species, and nearly a million indigenous people, fires are raging, destroying the ecological architecture of one of the most biodiverse and important ancient ecosystems in the world. It is a living, breathing cathedral, shaped by the evolutionary forces of God, and entrusted to human hands. Arsonists have set God's Cathedral aflame.

These fires are mainly being set by ranchers and farmers clearing land for cultivation. Slash-and-burn tactics are a result of economic interests that encourage deforestation, which in Brazil, means 80% of forest destruction is related to cattle ranching. This is the result of an increased global demand for meat. Once cleared, these forests will never be restored to their original condition.

The ecological crisis we now find ourselves in is a part of a broader crisis of a whole world-view and system; One that puts profits & consumption above preservation, above the welfare of people- especially those most on the margins or without a 'voice'.

But what our reading from Wisdom shows us that there are voices we can seek for guidance; there are those who cultivate a relationship of belonging to creation rather than dominating it- they understand our interdependence; the call to be guardians of the other, of the environment because if the Amazon suffers, we suffer.

A Waiapi Tribal Chief and Elder in the Amazon said, "Our concern is that if the forest is gone, people will also end. If we humans misuse this planet, our creator will make a great flood that will melt the planet, there will be great fires and fires that will destroy the planet." What does this sound like to me coming from a Christian tradition? The apocalypse from the Book of Revelation! But apocalypse in this context does not mean catastrophe and disaster as we tend to use the word. It means disclosing, exposing, and prompting us to thought- the message is one of 'Wake Up!'

The prophet Isaiah exclaims, "All you inhabitants of the world, when a trumpet is blown, hear!" (Is.18:3). Prophet Jeremiah warns, "Give heed to the sound of the trumpet" (Jer 6:17). The prophet is a watchman or woman. They blow the trumpet to warn us of impending danger. Today, we are being awakened to the warning voices of rising sea-levels, pollution of our earth; its rivers and forests... and to respond by calling ourselves to repentance, by changing our lifestyles.

If I come to see that the Dead River is more necessary to my survival than my big box vanities of vanities; that is shifting my perspective. If I continue to realize that the protection of this watershed, the protection of the Amazon ecosystem is necessary for the survival of my son; then how can I not hold myself accountable?

We all have a role to play in the preservation of the Amazon. If images of this month's forest fires have stirred emotion within you, then it's incumbent upon us to reflect on our personal behavior and understand how our consumption fits into the story.

The cattle sector may be the key driver of deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon but in other areas of the world it is more than just what we eat. As Pope Francis says it is our contemporary lifestyle due largely to our culture of instant gratification, which is unsustainable and will only precipitate more catastrophes.

The call to repentance is always a call to action. It is a call to reshape our economy, our ways of living, our way of farming, our way of being in the world. It is personal to each of us on how we will respond.

Together in community, let us know read together our Call to Action found in your brochure and after that we will send our prayers up and out into the world.