

Ocean Saturday 3/9 - Job 38:1-18

Father's Day

My friends Jan Morgan and Graeme Garrett who are a part of this Benedictus community have spent many years listening to the ocean. They developed a practice of standing gazing at the ocean, listening to ocean, then returning home, journaling their experience, and sharing with each other what they noticed.

They invite some questions to ask the ocean:

Are you willing to communicate with me? Is there a message? Is there a lesson? Is there an offering?<sup>1</sup>

Their practice is described in their book 'On the Edge: A-Way with the Ocean.'<sup>2</sup> Many years ago now, they shared this practice with Benedictus in Canberra down by the river near Urriara Crossing.

They quote a striking experience from Graeme's journal entry of 3rd March 2015<sup>3</sup>:

A beautiful day. Tathra at its sparkling best. The sun is out. Golden light all around. The light on the water is breathtaking, lively, alluring blue-green. I think to myself, this is what I have been looking for! This is how I remember it. I'll be able to get into this easily today! But it just doesn't work like that. I can't settle inwardly. It is not that there are extraneous conversations in my head. But somehow I can't give myself over to the practice as I intend. The ongoing unsettlement of spirit persists, lasting most of the session. Near the end of the time, I decide (a bit desperate) to put the question: 'Are you willing to communicate with me?' to the sea. Nothing came back to me. I stand for quite a while-disappointed. Then suddenly it is said to me, or anyway it becomes clear to me: this is a session of restorative justice. Just like that. I know what restorative justice is. The criminal has to come face to face with his/her victim, and in the presence of a mediator, listen to

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<sup>1</sup> Page 63 to 64

<sup>2</sup> On the Edge A-Way with the Ocean Morning Star Publishing Reservoir VIC 2018

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. Breaking open - the self p143

the victim's side of the story; what the crime has done to the victim. I felt the list of crimes being read out to me as a representative of the human race. You have torn the heart out of the web of life I have laboured to create. You have trawled and dug and drilled and sucked the floor of my world, a world that has taken billions of years to build. You have poured hundreds of millions of tons of your sewage, garbage, poisons and plastics into me until the very last corner of my world is polluted by you? The litany then went on. In your (human) legal world these actions go by the following names: rape, the violation of the most intimate parts of another; grievous bodily harm, the violent wounding of the being of another; murder or mass murder, the taking of the life/lives of others wantonly and wilfully; theft, the forceful taking of what does not belong to you; breaking and entering. the violation of another's home. That is what your behaviour does to me. I am interested in what you have to say in your defence: And ... I had nothing to say. I felt really horrified at myself. And that was the end of the session. [G, 3/3/15]

What an inditement. What an experience.

Graeme's journal entry continues:

walking back out along the beach, feeling very stressed, the sea spoke again. "And, by the way, what have I done to you?" My mind ran through the reading I had done earlier. I breathe 15 times per minute, i.e.,  $24 \times 60 \times 15 = 21,600$  breaths per day. More than 50% of the oxygen in those breaths comes directly from the sea. When I woke this morning I shaved, had a shower, a cup of tea, avocado on toast, etc. Every drop of water involved in that consumption (and for the whole day) came from the sea. I have lived this day comfortably in a temperature range that ran from 17° to 24° centigrade, which is a direct result of the "air-conditioning" provided by the ocean. And in this very moment, I am walking in the sun on the wonderful sand of the beach,

listening to the waves, looking at the colours all around. This is what the ocean has done to me. [G,3/3/15]<sup>4</sup>

Powerful stuff, this engagement with ocean.

I'm not sure if I told you of my experience at Robe in South Australia. I visited there with a friend of mine, theology student if I remember rightly. I stood looking out over the ocean near the Lighthouse and experienced this amazing sense of the rhythm of the ocean of the birthing ocean, that it is from the ocean that we all came. I was overwhelmed by this image, this visceral feeling, of home and other and mother. And I asked my friend for a blessing, as you do when you've experienced a moment of awe and wonder. He wouldn't give me a blessing. It didn't fit in with his view of things.

“ who shut in the sea with doors  
when it burst out from the womb,  
when I made the clouds its garment  
and thick darkness its swaddling band,  
and prescribed bounds for it,  
and set bars and doors,  
and said, ‘Thus far shall you come and no farther,  
and here shall your proud waves be stopped’?

Says God in chapter 38 of Job.

Why focus on the ocean? Why consider a relationship with the sea?

This passage is the first time in the book where God speaks. Job has suffered so much and his so-called friends accuse him of having done something wrong to deserve his suffering. Job won't have a bar of it. He just wants to know that God is there with him. He accuses God and wants to know what's going on. Here God doesn't answer his questions, but asks more questions, Where were you Job? Do you understand any of this Job? God could be asking us the same questions. If we are looking for an

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p145

explanation for suffering, we won't find it here, but we will find presence, God's presence.

The writer of this book has obviously had some amazing experiences in creation and is particularly observant of the natural world.

This God figure challenges Job, "look, see me all around. I am here. Even in the craziness of your life."

The book has a happy ending, possibly added by someone later who couldn't cope with tough stuff being the end of the story.

Today we heard this small snippet of the story on Ocean Saturday, poetic words about the creation of the ocean, the tending to it like a mother with a child. And maybe it intimates that even in the crap God is there with Job too. The Christian Scriptures would point to Jesus to show the compassionate suffering God.

God in this text is perhaps talking to us too. Where were you? What are you doing with my special creation? I am here, I am present. What about you? It is a challenging and inspiring text. We can rest in the words, or we can engage with this God, with this God's creation of ocean and play our part in loving this created world. Building a relationship with our primal mother ocean or, we can turn away and just see the surface of things, enjoy the beauty, the sunlit reflective water, waves and sand and delight in our summer holiday. And that is part of it too delighting savouring, paying attention, as is our spiritual practice, opening our hearts to the message they bring to us of the divine, of the sacred, of our connection with each other and our world.

Sylvia Earle says:

'The *living* ocean drives planetary chemistry, governs climate and weather, and otherwise provides the cornerstone of the life support system for all creatures on our planet, from the deep-sea starfish to desert sagebrush. *That's* why the ocean matters, if the sea is sick, we'll feel it. If it dies, we die. Our future and the state of the oceans are one.'

'No blue, no green'.<sup>5</sup>

Who hears the fishes when they cry? Asks Henry David Thoreau.

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<sup>5</sup> Sylvia Alice Earle, quoted in *On the Edge*, p26

Research scientist Monica Gagliano began listening to plants after a life-changing experience as a doctoral student studying fish on the Great Barrier Reef. She tells of the wondrous weeks she spent diving, building trust with damselfish, little, yellow reef-dwellers who, with time, swam near Gagliano and even rested on her hand. But the day arrived when Gagliano was instructed to kill the fish in order to study their brains, thus being able to confirm the theory which to this point had relied on observation.

It was a converting moment for Gagliano. She was heartbroken and disturbed but, at that point, felt unable to question the premise and expectations of the institution. The day she went to collect the fish, she entered the water without a net or weapon yet found they were hiding from her, a profound example for Gagliano of the sonic forms of communication that sound between every living thing. After earning a PhD and becoming a research scientist, Gagliano used this transformational experience to set a new (sometimes heretical, she says) course for her future.

In a Tedx Talk in Sydney in 2021, Gagliano encouraged the audience to ‘stop playing God and start playing midwife’. The deep wisdom needed to bring about healing and restoration is already present. We simply need to listen deeply, attend lovingly and bring forth that which is waiting to be born.<sup>6</sup>

Susanna

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<sup>6</sup> Midwives of Sonic Sound Christine Gilbert in ANSD Newsletter June/July/August 2022 <https://ansd.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/ANSD-Newsletter-June-July-August-2022-v2.pdf>

Research scientist Monica Gagliano has spent the last decade listening to plants. Through the use of traditional scientific methods, Gagliano is discovering that plants can learn, communicate, anticipate and adapt to their environment. Many of her experiments and insights are documented in her book *Thus Spoke the Plant*, an interesting read for lovers of nature or for those who are simply curious about the world.

