

The Eleventh Commandment

A conversation with trees

Bishop Duleep de Chickera

I took a walk the other day. There were some signs of life. Clothes had been left to dry on the bushes and somewhere a radio played plaintive music. All else was shut in. Life hidden to save life.

Further on, I drifted into stillness; the universal and inclusive language of the ages, had been waiting with the patience of the ages to welcome me. Always soothing, always respectful, I like millions then and now, felt charmed by the invitation. Rocks, strong and content, where they had been placed by an unseen hand, and a rugged path, walked and left un-walked for the next pilgrim; stepped out, warm hosts of the stillness, to calm and claim those who passed by.

But passers' by were few. A feared, unseen enemy was also passing by, picking and choosing whom to devour.

To whom could we turn for care?

A sign was given from where the path rose to encircle a rock; and I looked up. A tree, heavy with fruit smiled and beckoned in the breeze. Just below a tender little shoe flower, the first born of a young mother, nodded her agreement as she discovered the blowing was not the enemy.

Fruit and flower; gifts of real living friends and symbols of unfailing faithfulness. Their mothers and fathers had from the beginning stayed at their task of caring; providing food and brightening up our path. Now, through dire sickness and disease they would still watch over us.

The feared, unseen enemy, could not harm them. Another deadly virus, the Human Virus, had for centuries plagued and preyed on their ancestors so relentlessly, that they had developed a tough immunity in sap and pollen, roots and bark. Just as they had recycled our bad air to keep us humans alive, they had absorbed unspeakable acts of violence upon violence to grow resilient and generously feed the very hands that yielded the axe and the saw.

Walking into introspection

Our own fathers and mothers and we in turn, had wrecked carnage on our real, best friends, for no good reason. Exactly the same way the faceless enemy was doing it.

Overwhelmed, I asked for permission to sit on a rock and place my feet on the rugged path. There was one final question that had to be asked. It came slowly. On whose side is Covid 19? There was a pause, just like when the surgeon, after saying what went right, looks away from family faces to explain what went wrong. And then it came.

“You will only know, when humans endeavor to keep the eleventh commandment.” Conditioned to ten of them, masterly summarized into two commandments, I was curious to know. It came again, this time with solemn certainty; ***‘Thou shall not take too much.’***

As I slowly made my way back home, the little shoe flower gently brushed against my hand. “Take this back as promise and prophecy,” she urged. ‘Learn to take a little’.

She may not have known it, but she had just done what Jesus did. He turned the Commandments around from tenets of moral adherence to inescapable social obligations. To take a little, is to ensure there is enough for all.

With peace and blessings to all