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God of life, lead us to justice and peace

(Reflection by Bishop Sofie Petersen, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark)

“Shout out praises to the Lord, all the earth! Worship the Lord with joy! Enter his presence with joyful singing! Acknowledge that the Lord is God! He made us and we belong to him; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.” (*Psalm 100: 1-3*) Every day and this bright summer day too, with sun shining down from a cloud free sky, I feel a gratitude to the scenery I daily have access to: the sea with the icebergs and mountains, the mouth of the fjord, and far into the fjord where people now are hunting reindeer, others out fishing for trout, and others again are out collecting berries. Everybody is in there to collect stocks for the upcoming winter. And although everybody has modern facilities, freezers and such for the fresh produce, both meat and fish still need to be dried, smoked and salted, just like our ancestors have been doing for hundreds of years.

All the modern facilities cannot change this way of life which in its utmost sense is coherent with the nature which surrounds us. We are very much depending on the weather, even though we aren't all hunters, fishermen or men of the sea. Our eating habits are decided upon the availability of the various animals and goods depending on the season. Cod liver mixed with crowberries, angelica, dried fish, heather smoked trout, turnips, fat, dried reindeer or seal meat. We still need these vitamins and energy bombs today, even though we have access to vitamin pills and other food, brought in from other parts of the world. It belongs to our culture where we live in harmony with nature, and as such, always have been able to survive in this harsh nature which surrounds us.

For most of the year it is harsh and cold outside, and most of the time we spend indoors. So when the sun is coming back, bringing the warmth, and summer finally is upon us again, it is hard to stay indoors. As in other modern societies we are bound by our work. So we just can't leave it all to go out in nature. This can create a lot of problems. For example the fishing industry needs labour to process the fish that the fishermen bring ashore as well as vessels which need to be handled and need labour. And in a modern society the inhabitants have a right to get public services in the opening hours. Weather permitting, one

should be out in the nature and fill up ones stock, not only food, but also and most important, the spiritual and mental depots.

The almighty creation, nature and all in it, has life and gives life, a wisdom we inherited, but which we not always seem to be able to handle.

The Creator – God of Life – has given us this to live in and to live of and live with. Each and every creature always stands before his or her fellow creatures, at any time where one is. Therefore: “Complete my joy and be of the same mind, by having the same love, being united in spirit, and having one purpose. Instead of being motivated by selfish ambition or vanity, each of you should, in humility, be moved to treat on another as more important than yourself.” (*Philippians 2: 2-3*) This applies for everything: If one usurps another with force or by other means, imbalance or unrest follows being the opposite of justice and peace. Nature has its own agenda, it regulates itself. If reindeer numbers rise, they die of hunger when their food is not sufficient. When rain doesn't come drought can happen and the harvest fails, with hunger and death as consequences. If heavy rains occur, flooding can also destroy the harvest, and cause a huge loss of human lives. Lately the world has seen some violent forest fires with devastating consequences for both humans and animals and their living conditions. The lack of thoughtfulness, careless behaviour with fire – maybe cigarettes or cooking in the open, where fires haven't been put out properly, such fires can start.

Indigenous people have been brought up to respect nature and everything in it. Each and every little creature belongs to nature, and so has its place to fill. That's why fishermen and hunters, and the rest of us, have been taught by our parents to leave the places we occupy in the same condition as when we arrived. Not even fish guts, bones or other remains may be left behind, even if they themselves originate from nature. They must be collected and dug down in the ground, or left at the water shore. The remaining litter has to be brought home to be disposed of in a proper manner. Also nobody shall catch more fish or hunt more animals than is needed to survive until the next season.

Unfortunately, the wisdom upon which our ancestors have survived and passed on to us is often seen as something bad, even taunted by some, with a result that shows in our surroundings. Reindeer, where only the best parts like the haunch have been taken, is left to rot. This is a mockery of the Creator and Creation which might lead to animals changing behaviour and patterns, and in the worst case, leaving the area or even being extinct. This is mostly done with the prospect of easy and fast made money. Some people pay a lot of money for the meat full haunch, and it doesn't require a lot of effort to transport them down to shore. So it is out of pure greed and egoistic behaviour that some people might ruin it for us all, if the hunting grounds and animals disappear.

Yes greed is unfortunately one of the signs of human behaviour. It shows in both the small and the larger perspectives. Who doesn't recognise the feeling that you always need a little more than your neighbour? That it is hard to settle for just the salary, one is receiving. Everyone knows that more wants more.

As a consequence of the global warming, the icecap in my country, Greenland, is melting rapidly, thus revealing new land areas, with supposedly lots of minerals? And the disappearance of the sea ice has produced a fight about oil and gas deposits. So much that we now witness a fight about the right to the North Pole. Where does the shelf go? In order that it can be determined who has the right to the North Pole, Russia has already planted the Russian flag on the sea bed. Every ones' thoughts are first and all only about their own profits.

Nobody thinks about the consequences that the eventual exploration of oil can cause in such a delicate and vulnerable habitat. Changes in the paths of the animals we hunt will be caused by the vibrations the drillings make and by all the infrastructure needed to supply these operations with.

A village society based on hunting and fishing with a 1000 people living in it doesn't matter much in the global society and economy. But it matters to them whose livelihood gets destroyed and who have to adapt to another way of living. Of course they could be happy, since the interest would give them good economical opportunities. They will be able to get a job in the industry that supplies the explorations and might even get better living standards than before. Yes, maybe it will turn out that way, but experience from all over the world shows that foreign labour is brought in and that the companies take their profit home, without a thought about the native population, and even leaves the "crime scenes" untouched, leaving a trail of pollution behind.

Promises are of course made that everything will be left in the condition as it was before they came. So that everything would be okay, but again experience worldwide shows that this rarely happens, and I don't think, but of course I hope, it's not only for our brown eyes' sake.

Justice and peace is what our Lord Jesus Christ brought with him, and by whom we receive the daily bread that we and our many brothers and sisters across the globe live by. We hope and pray every day for justice in our lives, not only for our families, our countrymen and those who share our opinion, but for all our fellow human beings, whether it's a rich oil magnate or a simple fisherman in Greenland. Each and every one of us has the need and right to justice, also in economical matters. When the riches of our Creator are available to all, peace will follow, because greed and egoistic behaviour have lost. We pray for this daily and that we never will lose faith in a fair and peaceful life for everybody living in Gods wondrous creation, be it in the cold Greenland or here in Crete in warm Greece. "Complete my joy and be of the same mind, by having the same love, being united in spirit, and having one purpose. Instead of being motivated by selfish ambition or vanity, each of you should, in humility, be moved to treat on another as more important than yourself." (*Philippians 2: 2-3*)

May the Holy Spirit lead us and show us the way so that we are sharing our globe in respect and love and have praise in our hearts on the way to Busan: "God of life, lead us to justice and peace".