

Care of Creation April 2017

Changing the Harder Things: The Cars We Drive.

Lent is the time we think about mistakes we have made and aim to turn and do better.

Sometimes it is hard to change. In church they will tell us to ask God's forgiveness and pray for help. Out on the road that is good advice, but not easy. I have a prayer book that tells me to give thanks for my car which is a better chariot than anything Solomon had, but it runs on diesel, with a little biofuel added. Today the Toyota man told me there are no four wheel drive electrics, and without that drive I cannot go through wet paddocks. Mitsubishi had one, but a hybrid and beyond my price range.

How did we get into this mess? I read that in the United States, in the early 1900's, there were electric cars, steam cars, cars and tractors run on alcohol (ethanol) and there could have been attempts to use the Stirling engine, as it had been invented, but I don't see it mentioned except for running pumps. Farmers liked fermenting crops that were not selling well, but those were the days of Prohibition and no one wanted drunk farm workers. Steam cars were tricky as boilers can explode. In Texas vast amounts of oil were discovered. The ready supply of oil is why we ended up with the internal combustion engine and have it to this day, giving up on the alternatives that could have been used, and would have been less polluting. The internal combustion engine does not burn clean like a Stirling or steam engine with a few smoke particles, but produces carbon monoxide and other damaging chemicals which are more polluting than an open fire where plenty of oxygen can be fed in. Ships use the dirtiest oil and large amounts of it.

How do we repent? It is not easy in a country where we no longer make our own cars. We do have cheap electricity, largely from rivers. There are also solar and wind and geothermal sources of electricity. The Cyclone engine runs on a very small amount of steam, but has not made it to the market yet for cars. Countries with plenty of sugar cane ferment waste from crushed canes to fuel their cars. There are other options like burning compressed hydrogen or letting it meet with oxygen in a fuel cell which then powers an electric motor. A Stirling engine which can power a submarine could no doubt be used on land but take more time getting started than old tin Lizzie. We are at the mercy of the technology that is available. Electric cars are becoming more available, even if they don't suffice as all-terrain vehicles. A part of repentance involves constant reflection on our choices, and taking a new path if that is possible.

How important is penitence? God made the world and saw that it was good. Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like the flowers we see or the corals deep down where we do not see. It is part of our job to take note, give thanks, take care and not leave a great mess behind us.

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