

The Island of Java in Indonesia is home to 148 million souls on the world's most populated island. It is bordered by the Indian Ocean on one side and the Java Sea on the other. One problem the people in the mountain regions have faced for over a generation is drought. Decades ago, land was indiscriminately cleared for cultivation. The trees that were part of a delicate eco-system were burned. And an unintended consequence was the drying up of rivers and lakes in central Java.

One native man worried that nature was out of balance. He devised a plan to plant banyan and ficus trees in order to restore the balance. These particular trees are a bit like camels, they store lots of water. The native man set out to reforest the land one tree at a time. He sacrificed from his own meager resources to fund the project. Over the last 25 years, he has planted enough trees to cover 617 acres. This helps to retain groundwater and prevent land erosion. Thanks to his effort, springs have formed where once there was barren and arid land. The area does not get a lot of rain and farmers were once limited to a single harvest each year. With a healthy and restored eco-system there is enough water to sustain two or three growing cycles each year.

People have seen the results and they are very impressed. But at the outset, they had little appreciation for his wisdom. He says, "People ridiculed me for bringing banyan tree seeds to the village, because they felt uneasy as they believed there are spirits in these trees." Through his efforts clean water is readily available to meet the needs of the people in several villages.

The caring soul who was once considered a madman is now a well-respected national treasure. He has generously served the common good not for any personal reward but out of a sense of deep respect for others. He wants the people who live in that region of Java to have prosperous lives and live happily. And to learn their lesson never to burn the forest over and over again.¹

We know the eco-system of the Garden of Eden was upset when Adam and Eve in their pride thought they should eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The serpent lied to them and they believed God was hiding something from them. The Lord had not denied them anything. Yet, they chose to listen to the devil and disregard the limits put in place by God for their own protection.

Sin continues to plague each generation including our own. With a false pride we too are deceived into thinking God is hiding something from us. The devil takes something that is good and holy and twists it just enough that we are somehow attracted to that which has the outer shell of something attractive, but which in reality is deadly. With each sin we continue to burn the trees thinking we can cultivate the land better without God.

In our first reading, Jeremiah tells us "The days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant" (31:31). The scribes and Pharisees ridiculed Jesus. They thought he was a madman and accused him of being in league with the devil. Jesus came to offer his life as a ransom for many. As part of the New Covenant, the Lamb of God willingly sacrifices his life for the forgiveness of our sins. "Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word, that he might present to himself the church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" (Eph 5:25-27).

"Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit" (Jn12:24). Jesus died for our sins and invites us to die to our rebellion, die to our selfishness, die to our lust, our greed, our envy, our sloth, our prejudice, our pride. He invites us to pick up our cross and to follow him. "So be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and handed himself over for us as a sacrificial

offering to God for a fragrant aroma. Immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be mentioned among you, as is fitting among holy ones” (Eph 5:1-3).

When we try to live in this way, people will call us mad. They will ridicule us. They will accuse us of prejudice, of hate, of misunderstanding. Like the man from Java, we must have a broader vision of the common good and plant one good seed at a time in order to rebuild the forest.

ⁱ [reuters.com/article/us-water-day-indonesia-trees-idUSKBN2BB0IO](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-water-day-indonesia-trees-idUSKBN2BB0IO)