

Sermon on October 2, 2022 by Jill Seiler-Moon
Church of the Advent, Medfield, MA
Creation Proper 20, Year C
Readings: Lamentations 3:19-26
Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179)
Luke 12:22-32

Dear Mother Earth, you day by day, unfold your blessings on our way. Amen.

Today we are nearing the end of Creation Season, which began on September 1st and ends on October 4th, and this afternoon we will celebrate St. Francis, lover of animals, at our Blessing of the Animals service at 5:00PM. Bring your dogs, cats, snakes, frogs, birds, gerbils, hamsters, tarantulas...bring all your pets, even your stuffed ones, because we are blessing the all-embracing love we have for all of God's creatures.

A few parishioners have asked about our new mission of Creation Care, and what it all means? To begin to answer this question, let's look at the Book of Genesis, Chapter 1. It shows God masterfully orchestrating the events of creation: heaven and earth, day and night, sky, evening and morning, water and dry land, vegetation, plants yielding seeds of every kind, swarms of living creatures: birds, cattle and creeping things, sea monsters, and wild animals. And then God made humankind and blessed them.

These are the things of creation. These are the things that have been within humankind's care from the beginning of creation. And God gave us dominion over all these living creatures, and saw that it was good. There are some people who think that having "dominion" over creation is God giving us permission to dominate and abuse the world.

God calls Creation GOOD six times before human beings are even created, suggesting that nature has intrinsic worth. Romans Chapter 8 Verse 21 says that Creation will be liberated, showing that God has a plan for it. Revelation Chapter 11 Verse 18 says that those who destroy the earth will themselves be destroyed, revealing that God is not pleased with people who damage the earth.

I believe that having dominion over all living creatures is having love for the world, as God loves it, and acting responsibly.

It's no new news to anyone that we are in a climate emergency. A 2021 study tells us that if global warming exceeds 1.5 degrees celsius, the world tropics could become uninhabitable. There are 2.5 billion people that live in the world's tropics. Let us pray for them.

Let us pray and hold in our hearts the people of Pakistan, as 1/3rd of their country is under water. We pray for the drought in Europe, their worst drought in 500 years.

Even if we never had to breathe smoky air from wildfires day after day, like our neighbors in CA, let us pray for those who have.

I believe that our prayers will spur action. The climate crisis can become a doorway to a new way of inhabiting Earth. And I'm not alone in my beliefs.

In March of 2021, our bishops of the Episcopal dioceses in Massachusetts declared a climate emergency in their letter to the People. Quoting excerpts from their letter:

“We recognize that the climate crisis affects low-income communities and communities of color first and hardest. We confess that we, and our churches, have not yet responded with adequate seriousness or urgency to the ongoing, intensifying effects of climate change, and to its underlying causes.

We honor the goodness and sacredness of the created world, recognizing that the earth does not belong to us, but to God. We believe that God is calling us all to embrace brave and difficult change. Everything we do as faithful individuals and as a church must reckon with the unprecedented emergency in which humanity now finds itself. We strongly urge congregations across Massachusetts to pray, learn, act, and advocate as we build a bold and faith-filled response to the greatest moral challenge of our time.” End quote.

So, what does this mean for us, here in Medfield? We're not flying blindly, as I've learned that this fall, the Massachusetts diocesan Creation Care Justice Network plans to launch a framework called "An Episcopal Path to Creation Justice." It's a user-friendly path for congregations to explore in their faithful efforts to respond to the cry of the earth. It will encompass four levels of engagement, and we can choose the options that make the most sense for us. And, we are also a partner with Sustainable Medfield.org, an organization that exists to help residents move toward more sustainable living.

But before we jump in with both feet, how do we develop a sustained HOPE for a better world amidst all this climate chaos? Will we have to give up something, things that we've grown accustomed to?

I am not a scientist, ecologist, or environmental lawyer. I am someone who wants to learn more about climate change, and do more than my regular reducing, reusing, and recycling which I've been doing for many, many years, and I suspect you have too. These acts are part of the solution, but apparently, that's not enough. I want to take a closer look at the things I am buying and learn about where the products come from and about how they might impact the earth.

I'm engaged in my own research to learn about the issues of renewable energy, greenhouse gas emissions and fossil fuels. The book [All We Can Save](#) helps us understand how

the issues of climate change are issues of justice, and are all around us, if we open our eyes to see.

Quoting from All We Can Save: “In frontline communities, places that feel environmental harms first and worst, people are choking on pollution; mothers are burying their babies; people are being driven from their lands, and oceans are being suffocated by plastic. All while fossil fuel companies and others continue a reckless pursuit of profit and power.

It is all too clear that justice is not possible in a capitalist system predicated on there being winners and losers, a system rooted in racism, sexism, and xenophobia. This is the system that has put us on the path to catastrophic climate change.” (end quote)

How are our systemic societal issues contributing to climate change? How do we continue to pray with the heaviness of our hearts? How do we develop spiritual resilience when faced with unimaginable climate losses and challenges? How do we move from despair to hope, and not worry?

As Rev. Dr. Margaret Bullit-Jonas asks: “Are we open to the possibility that God wants to speak to us through tree, sun, and wind, through grass, rock, and sparrow?”

In our Gospel reading today from Luke, Jesus encourages us not to worry about seemingly unimportant matters like

what we will eat or what clothes we will wear. Our anxiety about scarcity can often lead us to hoard and control the creation of which we are a part. God takes care of the ravens who do not have homes like ours and who cannot grow their food. Of how much more value are we than the birds! Jesus calls us to consider every creature as a sign of God's goodness and care.

Our worrying intensifies when faced with disease, poverty, unemployment, climate change. Yet, I truly believe that if we can develop an embodied hope, and live with the knowledge and acceptance that God's love for us casts out fear, and that in God's kingdom, faith conquers anxiety and worry, we will be transformed to live in a new life of hope vs. despair.

As it says on the front of your worship bulletin, God wants us to "Listen to the voice of creation." I believe that voice will give us answers to our suffering and fears.

When I attended a climate retreat entitled "Rooted and Rising in Love" led by Rev. Dr. Margaret Bullitt-Jonas in August of this year, we were asked how many of us have lamented over the awful occurrences of climate change, or expressed grief in a public way? No one raised their hands.

It was not until during an art activity that day that I actually cried. We were asked to draw and/or write anything we wanted related to some of the sad news we hear in the media about climate change. I drew a picture of

a giant redwood tree and beside it I wrote a short note to my granddaughter...

Dear Jordan, I am sad that you may not get to see the giant Redwoods in CA, as every year more and more of them disappear as a result of wildfires caused by climate change. As I finished my picture, a tear ran down my cheek. My outward sign of emotion changed me. My tear helped me listen to God's voice once again, and gave me courage to stand before you today.

Rev. Dr. Veronica Miles teaches at the Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington DC. In a podcast sponsored by the BTS Center, she challenged us to think about our responses to climate change. She said this:

“Our ethical and spiritual call is to imagine a new heaven and a new earth. Is the only thing we can imagine doing... what we have always done since eternity better? How is God calling us as a Christian community in response to this moment that we are in? Are we holding on so tightly to these structures that we've created, diminishing our capacity to not only notice the climate change itself, but also notice the people most affected.

God is trying to call us back to who it is we were intended to be and to the moral and ethical responsibility we have to each other. The voice of God's spirit is calling us toward loving justice and restorative action in the world.” (End quote.)

Here at Church of the Advent, we are already looking to the future with a forward gaze.

I would like to give a shout out to my other Creation Care team members Kimberly Schubert, Christine Babson, and Ian Simoni, who are passionate about protecting and preserving our planet earth. And a shout out to each of you for your ongoing efforts to create a more sustainable environment for future generations.

Don and Nancy Miller updated me on climate actions we've taken in past years. An energy audit has been completed and we have new LED lights throughout the church. Five motion detector switches were installed and our air conditioner units and dishwasher are energy efficient. We recycle, and the heating system is maintained twice yearly. Don made plexiglass window inserts for the church, which are used in the winter. All of our rooms have setback thermostats, and the two new front doors are insulated and energy efficient. Bravo Don and Nancy and Bravo Church of the Advent !!

There are many legacies to leave behind in our lives. Is a reverence for the life that the earth gives us a legacy you want to leave behind?

During coffee hour today, we invite you to peruse a few climate-related tables, and please take a moment to check out the easel with the sticky notes. There you will find two

prompt questions; one about your fears and one about your passions. Do you like to write, read poetry, take pictures, hike in the woods, gaze at the stars at night, ride your bicycle instead of your car? Let us know your passions and how you might use your gifts to help bring about awareness and change in our ongoing efforts to help the Earth.

Join us, join the conversation.

Amen.