



Faithful Climate Action



JUSTICE IN THE HERE AND NOW

A HOMILY BY BISHOP DON BOLEN

This resource was prepared for the lead up to November 2015 Climate negotiations in Paris as part of CPI's "Prayers for COP21 in Paris" campaign. However, it can be used at any time to bring climate justice themes into worship.

Scriptures: Jeremiah 33:14 – 16, Luke 21: 25 – 28, 34 – 36

The promise of God, which we hear in daily Mass readings throughout the season of Advent, is that God will come bringing justice. From the prophet Amos we hear God's call to "let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:21-24). From Ezekiel we will hear God say to the hurting people of Israel, "I myself will search for my sheep, ... I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured.... I will feed them with justice" (Ezekiel 34:11, 16). In Advent we always hear a great deal from the prophet Isaiah, who tells of a day when "the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy" (Isaiah 35:5-6); a day when "the wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid," and they will not hurt or destroy on all God's holy mountain (Isaiah 11: 6, 9). On that great and promised day, God will make for all peoples a feast of rich food and fine wines, and will destroy death forever (Isaiah 25:6-7).

While these great texts are still to come, we begin the season of Advent this year with the prophet Jeremiah, who prophesies of a day when a righteous branch will spring up from the line of David, bringing justice and righteousness to the land. The reading ends with the people of Judah being given a new name; they will be called "the Lord is our righteousness" (Jer. 33:15-16). That is to say, Israel's identity will be defined by God's faithfulness, God's fulfilling his covenant with them by bringing mercy and justice.

During the season of Advent, we feast on these great prophetic readings in order to ponder God coming at the end of time, to fulfill our deepest dreams and desires; and in order to prepare ourselves to celebrate the Incarnation, God coming among us in the



CITIZENS FOR PUBLIC JUSTICE

flesh in Jesus. When Jesus came among us, he did indeed open the eyes of the blind, he did search for the lost sheep and bind their wounds. In him, justice did roll down like a mighty flowing stream. And in his death and resurrection, he did sow the seeds of a hope that, one day, death will be destroyed forever, that God would prepare a banquet for all peoples. And so we prepare to celebrate the great miracle of his birth, his coming among us, with great expectation.

But today's Gospel presents us with a difficult and challenging text. Jesus uses apocalyptic imagery to speak of the end times: "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars and on the earth distress among nations... people will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world" (Luke 21:25-26). Just prior to where today's Gospel begins, Jesus speaks of wars and insurrections, nations rising against nations, great earthquakes, famines and plagues, and the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. These cataclysmic events, characterized by chaos and dread, are contrasted with the restoration of all creation with the coming of the Messiah. "Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with great power and glory" (v.27).

What was Jesus trying to tell his hearers, what was he asking of us by using this apocalyptic imagery? Why did Luke think it important to include this in his Gospel? Scripture scholars have lots of room to speculate in this regard, not least with reference to the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D., which would have been fresh in the minds of Luke's readers. This was havoc and devastation that they knew firsthand.

At its heart, I think that Jesus is contrasting the destruction and chaos of present and future moments in history with the age to come, when God's ultimate victory at the end of history will be assured. He invites a confident trust in the outworking of God's purpose in history, but also invites his hearers to be vigilant, to be alert and awake in the here and now.

And what is the Lord asking of us in our own day? We do well to ask this question in relation to an important event taking place during the season of Advent this year. From Nov. 30 to Dec. 11th, the first half of the season of Advent, tens of thousands of political leaders, journalists, corporate leaders and NGOs from around the world are gathering in Paris for the COP 21 Climate Conference. The aim of this United Nations gathering will be to achieve a legally binding and universal agreement on climate, with the aim of keeping global warming below 2°C.



In anticipation of this Conference, Pope Francis issued his monumental Encyclical on the Environment, *Laudato Si'*, this past summer. In it, he offers an overview of scientific findings which warn that human practices over the last 200 years have led to changes to the climate that, if unchecked, will have grave implications for future life here. Pope Francis's Encyclical offers a strong wake up call. He noted that our world is falling into serious disrepair, that we have "hurt and mistreated our common home like never before" (53). Our way of living is contaminating the earth's waters, its land and its air; we are losing forests and woodlands, and stripping the world of its natural resources; each year thousands of plant and animal species disappear, while we generate millions of tons of toxic waste. Further, environmental degradation has a particularly negative impact on those who are poorest and most vulnerable. Many parts of the world no longer have access to safe drinking water. In sum, our technological and scientific discoveries have not been accompanied by a proportionate ethical development. And instead of addressing these issues directly, Pope Francis notes how we and our governments often mask the problems, sweep difficult questions under the carpet while prioritizing short-term economic gain for ourselves over a concern for the global common good and for future generations. While it is not too late to intervene positively, Pope Francis is clear: the time to act is now.

The prophets promised God's justice, but they also called people to justice in the here and now. Those two went together, as they did in the teaching and ministry of Jesus. And so it is to be for us. We can live with confidence that God is ultimately in charge of history, that God is doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves. But we are also called to put our lives at the service of God's great dream for humanity by being people who seek justice and show mercy.

In our day that Gospel call to be awake and alert summons us to listen and respond anew to the cry of the earth, and the cries of our brothers and sisters in the developing world who are negatively impacted by our way of life here. We would do well to prepare to celebrate the Incarnation by asking in what ways we - in our homes, families, communities and nation - can show our love for the earth Jesus came to redeem. Rejoicing in the Lord's coming among us, let us trust in his promises, and trust them enough to hear and respond to the ways he is calling us to change our lives.



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