



# Faithful Climate Action



## NOTES FOR PREACHING ON CLIMATE CHANGE

BY MARDI TINDAL, PAST MODERATOR, THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA

*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.*

### Readings:

Joel 1:8–10, 17–20, Psalm 18:6–19, Matthew 3:13–4:2 or Mark 1:9–13, Romans 8: 18–27.

I gasped as worship began. It was December 13th, 2009 and I stood in Copenhagen Lutheran Cathedral, alongside other church leaders from every region of the planet. Exposed glacier stones from Greenland, dried up maize from Africa and bleached coral from the Pacific Ocean captured my attention as they called us – dramatically – into worship. As these three 'members' of the procession found their way slowly through the packed congregation, my eyes brimmed with tears. I wasn't alone. These silent three – symbols of global climate change – spoke loudly. They led us into soul-deep lament over what we are doing, into high praise of our Creator, and into a wide hope that we might be revealed as Children of God.

The Secretary General of the National Council of Churches in Denmark read the epistle: Romans 8: 19–25: "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God... in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God..."

Paul wrote about the whole of creation. Alice M. Sinnott makes this point within *The Season of Creation: A Preaching Commentary*. She writes that Paul is "drawing on Genesis 3 and other Jewish traditions that portray creation itself in bondage – in the wilderness, as it were – and therefore in need of its own exodus."

Paul suggests that our freedom as God's children, is found in becoming agents of God's restorative, healing, birthing work. He was speaking to the early Christian community in Rome – a community that was suffering and felt itself to be in the wilderness. Paul reminds them – and us – that God is still involved in all of creation. "Paul explains to his Roman audience that the appropriate stance and activity for God's people while in the wilderness awaiting birth into new life is to wait and pray patiently" as Sinnott explains. In such ways the Spirit works in us, so that we, with a deepened trust in God's lead, will participate more fully in the birth that God is bringing about.



CITIZENS FOR PUBLIC JUSTICE

This passage is heard again today in communities around the world. Another of today's passages, Mark 1:9–13 is Mark's account of Jesus' baptism and has us grappling again with the nature of the wilderness in which we find ourselves. Just as Jesus is driven into the wilderness by the Spirit, we too often find ourselves driven into a wilderness when we respond to God's call. And yet we learn to trust God's transformative work in those places of chaos and struggle. We learn anew that we are not alone.

Christians are people of hope. We've seen God transform our lives, breaking hard hearts open to others, and to all of creation. We know that transformation is possible.

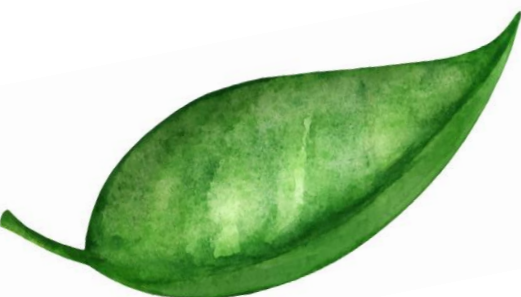
As we left worship in the Cathedral that day, each of us clutching a candle of hope and commitment, we heard the bells overhead ring 350 times, joining a chorus of bells atop churches throughout Denmark, and around the world. They chimed a joyful sound of commitment both to patient prayer and urgent action. They called us to return to a 350 parts per million concentration of carbon dioxide in our atmosphere (and global ocean). To return to a safe limit for humanity, and the rest of creation: to slow the melting of glaciers, the drying up of maize, and the acidification of ocean coral.

Canadian Christians joined the global chorus, in the silence of lament and the loud joy of participation in God's healing work. And it was loud! Congregations without bells banged pots and beat drums.

During my following three years of service as Moderator I continued to join faith leaders throughout Canada and around the world, inviting prayer and action so that creation will be freed from its bondage. Included in those actions was our *Interfaith Call for Leadership and Action on Climate Change*.

It remains a powerful statement of why climate change is among the most urgent spiritual and moral challenges of our day.

Today may we pray patiently – and make a joyful noise – as Children of God, people of hope, revealed for who we really are.



**Mardi Tindal**, Past Moderator, The United Church of Canada, was a vocal member of the World Council of Churches' delegation to the UN Climate talks in 2009 and 2011. Following the COP15 she issued an Open Letter to Canadians entitled 'Where is the Hope after Copenhagen?' [This letter](#) was read from hundreds of pulpits and garnered national media attention.