

Living Faithfully into a New Climate

Sermon Notes

A resource in support of church education and engagement on the road from the September 2014 United Nations Climate Summit to the December 2015 international climate change negotiations (COP21).

*With excerpts from **Living Ecological Justice: A Biblical Response to the Environmental Crisis (CPJ, 2013).***



*The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it,
the world, and those who live in it.*

Psalms 24: 1

Introduction

Creation Advocacy and Care. Through a sense of wonder with creation we are invited to seek insights into God's will for a just society, a fair economy, and a flourishing land. Creation care rests on biblical foundations uniting spirituality with scientific, ecological, and political insights into dynamic and energizing relationship.



Creation advocacy sets its sights on God's vision of an abundant and ecologically flourishing life for all creatures; it aligns itself with God's passionate work in the world, enacting the divine purpose through faithful worship, engaged community, and prophetic action.

The Climate Crisis. It is now widely accepted that the massive increase in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are largely the result of human activity. And, as the concentration of GHGs continues to grow, climate change is causing the rising of sea levels, species extinction, and glacial melting. Agrarian and fisheries-based livelihoods are threatened by extreme and volatile weather, resulting in conflict over natural resources, food insecurity, hunger and poverty.

The [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#) has clearly stated that in order to limit global warming to 2°C above pre-industrial levels — the threshold for “dangerous climate change” — most known fossil fuel reserves must stay underground.

The Road from New York to Paris. In response to this global crisis, United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has invited Heads of State along with business, finance, and civil society leaders to a Climate Summit on September 23, 2014, in New York. The [UN Climate Summit](#) is part of a global effort to mobilize action and ambition on climate change. It comes just one year before countries aim to conclude a global climate agreement at the 21st meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP21) in Paris through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

A Role for Faith Communities. Union Theological Seminary in New York will hold the [Religions for the Earth Conference](#), September 19-21. Alongside the UN Climate Summit, the World Council of Churches and Religions for Peace will organize an [Interfaith Summit on Climate Change](#), September 21-22, also in New York, in order to highlight the specific contributions that faith traditions bring to the international climate debate. And environmentalists active in the 350.org movement are planning the biggest March New York has ever seen.

A Call to Engagement and Action. To have an impact on the climate agenda, action needs to happen at all levels. As key leaders meet in New York, their efforts will be supported by grassroots activities around the world. Canadian Christians are urged to get involved.

“**Living Faithfully into a New Climate**” is a package of materials assembled by Citizens for Public Justice, a member of the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) Commission on Justice and Peace, that aims to assist Canadian faith communities to highlight the importance of the September 2014 events, and also to enable increased engagement in creation advocacy and care as we move towards the December 2015 COP21 meeting in Paris. It is our hope that these resources can be used in the worship activities of all of the 25 member Christian denominations of the CCC.

“Living Faithfully into a New Climate” includes a wide variety of resources that can be used as part of Sunday worship or to support additional learning opportunities in communities of faith. All are centred around responding to God’s call to care for creation.

- A Bible Study on Creation Advocacy and Care
- Sermon Notes for September 21, 2014 (this document)
- Hymns for Creation
- Prayers of Intercession
- Activities for Youth and Young Adults
- Additional Activities
- A Living Faithfully into a New Climate Infographic (available at cpj.ca/climate)

All of these materials are as PDFs at cpj.ca/climate. Text-only versions of these resources (except the infographic) are also available.



Sermon Notes:

The pages that follow contain speaking notes from three Christian denominations which represent the three main traditions of the 25 members of the Canadian Council of Churches: Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox. Depending on your own tradition, there are different Biblical texts used for this Sunday – so we have provided various options to inspire the potential homilist. They are available as inspirational sermon notes for use in September 2014 – ideally, on Sunday, September 21, 2014.

These notes have been generously contributed by:

- Mardi Tindal, Immediate Past Moderator, The United Church of Canada. A vocal member of the World Council of Churches' delegation to the UN Climate talks in 2009 and 2011.
- Heather Eaton, a professor in Conflict Studies at Saint Paul University in Ottawa.
- Dr. Paul Ladouceur, a member of the Archdiocese of Canada of the Orthodox Church in America.



Speaking Notes for Preachers on Sunday, September 21, 2014

by Mardi Tindal, Immediate Past Moderator, The United Church of Canada

Context: The United Church of Canada is among those who mark the Season of Creation liturgically, as 'Creation Time in the Season of Pentecost'. Their [resources](#) are available for anyone to use. When you explore the online lectionary resources for September 21, 2014, found at [The Text this Week](#) you will discover that this third Sunday in the Season of Creation, within Year A, titled [Creation 3A](#) includes reflections, sermon starters, music ideas, and more.

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 .

Model Sermon:

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.

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, Immediate 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.

Sermon: United Nations Climate Summit, September 21 – 22, 2014

by Heather Eaton

Readings: Isaiah 55: 6-9; Philippians 1:20-24, 27; and Matthew 20: 1-16.

Climate change is accelerating. We watch, we wait. Climate Change conferences are taking place with greater frequency. This weekend, world leaders gather in New York. They will be in Lima, Peru in December. And Paris at the end of 2015, out of which we must have a new post-Kyoto Accord to limit emissions. Canada's Climate Change Ambassador is in New York negotiating for us.

Canada is in a precarious position. Having withdrawn from the Kyoto protocol, and unable to reach the new emission targets of the United States, Canada's federal Conservatives seem increasingly unable to respond. Their inaction is noticed around the world.

Also in New York, right now, is the *People's Climate March*. Citizens are mobilizing around the world, insisting their governments respond to climate change. Their motto is, "*To change everything, we need everyone on board.*" The World Council of Churches, and The Canadian Council of Churches are present at the *United Nations Climate Summit*.

As political and spiritual leaders and responsible citizens gather to consider the climate changes occurring around the planet, we are together in this church, in communion with other religious traditions and grassroots activities around the world. The world is gathering, knowing we must prevent more climate change. Climate change is a great threat to the Earth Community. In hope, the world community gathers, uniting people from many religious traditions, or none at all, ready to work together on climate change. Actions are needed.

What can we do here? Religious communities are responding to climate change and other ecological concerns. They are becoming politically mobilized and spiritually active. Pope Francis is preparing an encyclical on the environment, with a strong criticism of ecological devastation. All of this requires a new way to listen to the gospel.

We are reminded in Isaiah that we must seek God, and we must be careful of certainty, because the ways and thoughts of God are not our ways and thoughts. The Philippian passage asks that we live our lives in a manner that is worthy of the gospel. Both of these readings speak of the high ideals of the gospel. It requires that we discern, and at times distrust, our thoughts and our ways, in order to make our lives worthy.

The gospel story of the labourers in the vineyard is intriguing. According to an easy interpretation, it does not seem to matter when you show up for work: you will be fully paid, and the last get paid first. What can we learn from this story? Perhaps we don't share God's notion of fairness. God makes agreements and keeps them, but is free to choose the terms of these agreements. However, we become concerned if someone seems to get a better deal than we do. Now that is tough. We like sameness. Our idea of equality is sameness. Generosity to some feels unjust. From this gospel, it is clear that this ours is not necessarily God's idea of fairness.

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We know that showing up late for work is not good for the resumé. And yet, in this Gospel story, not only do they get a full days pay, they get paid first. And then there is the teaching that “the last shall be first.” What can this mean?

We need to reflect on who we are in God’s creation, or who we think we are. For us here, in the affluent part of the world, we are asked to consider our lives, and if our lives are worthy of the gospel. We, in this part of the world, see ourselves as first: our lifestyles are better than those with less. To ‘have’ is good. To work and play, have the latest technologies, clothing, leisure and travel. These are good, and we are worthy of living well. We have worked for these, and so we should be paid. Surely this is fair? Surely everyone should have all this?

Our lifestyles, as good as they are for some, are related to climate change. There is no denying it. The fossil fuel economy is about consumerism. It must be tackled, and faced with honesty. Not only do we have too much, and more than most, the consumerism of the affluent increases the poverty of the poor. Our thoughts about the good life, the worthy life, are not the thoughts of God. God’s ways are not our ways. We have equated consumerism with what is good and worthy. It is affecting climate change. We cannot forget that gospel stories always say that God has a preferential option for the poor. God’s ways are not about affluence, consumerism and ecological ruin. God is generous and free.

The second challenge is what we consider climate change to be about, from a spiritual viewpoint. Is climate change an unfortunate consequence of human advancement? Is it lifestyles, affluence, industry, energy, solar flares, the apocalypse, the final judgment? Climate change is happening, and what we think it is will affect what we do about it. Climate change will destabilize planetary systems, and many life communities. We have to address it, prevent what is possible, and adapt. In a life worthy of the gospel, we are instructed to study our thoughts and change our ways. Human ways have led the world to climate change. Surely it is not the way of God to destabilize and destroy this magnificent planet! Surely it is not God’s way that we disrupt the climate system that keeps the planet, and ourselves, alive. Pope Francis is deeply distressed about climate change, and ecological concerns. On July 11th the Pope said: “the environment is one of the greatest challenges of our time. This is our sin, exploiting the Earth.”

Climate change is a sin, our sin. Sin requires that we recognize how it occurred, we repent, and we change our ways. This means joining the world in reducing emissions. It means requiring our government agree to emissions limits. It means we change our lifestyles. Nothing less will do. The third challenge is about who are in the grand scheme of things in creation. If we are honest, we see ourselves as first on the planet. We assume we are superior to other life forms, and we assume the planet is ours for the taking. After all, we are in the image and likeness of God. Given environmental issues, we need to be better stewards, and take better care of creation. But in our thinking, we are still first, and the rest of creation is last.

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Does this reflect God's ways? What if all of creation matters? What if our thinking is wrong on this? What if God freely chooses, without our consent, to give generously to all life forms? Is it possible that here again, the last shall be first, and the first last?

What if the beauty and goodness of humanity can only flourish in the fullness of God's creation? What if the whole of creation is in the image and likeness of God? What if God chooses all of life, all those who labour in creation? Then, whatever reduces the fullness of creation is a sin.

Indeed, addressing climate change becomes a spiritual focus, a political agenda, and a personal, communal and global concern. Climate change is then one of the greatest challenges of our era.

Today, the world community assembles at the United Nations to consider the Earth community and climate change. Leaders and citizens are gathered. Climate change is uniting the human community, beyond political and religious differences, discerning a way forward. All of us, there, and here, are involved in this moment. We must find a life worthy of a generous God, and of the whole of creation.



Heather Eaton is a professor in Conflict Studies at Saint Paul University in Ottawa. She holds an interdisciplinary doctorate in theology and ecology from Saint Michael's College at the University of Toronto. Her work includes inter-religious responses to ecological issues, incorporating the significance of evolution, Earth dynamics, social justice and religious imagination. Current work focuses on peace and conflict studies, gender, ecology, religion, animal rights, and nonviolence. Heather presents and publishes extensively on these topics.

A Sermon on the Environment

by Paul Ladouceur

Readings: Genesis 1, Genesis 2:15, Romans 8:19–21.

On a path on Mount Athos, the monks put up a sign for passing pilgrims: “Love the trees.” Father Amphilochios, an elder on the island of Patmos in Greece, used to say, “Do you know that God gave us one more commandment, which is not recorded in Scripture? It is the commandment ‘Love the trees.’”

“Love the trees.” Why should this be important for Christians?

The Genesis account of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden contains two valuable indications of how humans should relate to the world around them. In the first chapter of Genesis we read, “God said to the man and the woman: Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (Gn 1:28). This suggests that humanity stands at the summit of creation and that the rest of creation exists to serve humanity.

Why should this be so?

God created humans in his image and likeness (cf. Gn 1:26) – no other part of creation has the dignity of being in God’s image and likeness. But a different command of how humans should relate to the world is given in the second chapter of Genesis, “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden *to till it and keep it*” (Gn 2:15). This suggests that humans do not own the garden – the world or creation – but that creation belongs to God and humans are its custodians.

God tells humans “to till and to keep” the garden. “To till” suggests that humanity is to use the garden – all of creation – in order that creation may produce what is necessary for the survival of humanity – for the fulfilment of God’s command to be fruitful and to multiply.

But how are we to understand the command “to keep” the garden?

Both the Hebrew word (*shamar*) and the word in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (*phylassein* in the Septuagint) clearly imply the idea of “keeping” in the sense of guarding, watching over, caring for something. Not possession, but a watchful, caring, even cherishing custodianship. Humanity has a divinely-given responsibility for caring for creation, of protecting and fostering creation, as creation’s steward. Since the industrial revolution, humanity has acquired increasingly powerful means of transforming the earth for its own uses. Humanity has all too often concentrated on the first Genesis indication of “dominion” over creation and has neglected the second command of “keeping” creation.

This attitude has led to an unconscionable large-scale, self-centred exploitation and destruction of the natural world and the environment with all the consequences that we are aware of: pollution of

land, water, oceans and air; the disappearance of animal and plant species of all kinds; an increase in the temperature of the earth, accompanied by melting of glaciers and permafrost; an increase in the level of the oceans; and unpredictable climate change and more severe climatic conditions.

It is time to concentrate on our responsibility before God for the caring, protection and fostering of God's creation. Creation care is thus both a spiritual duty and a spiritual opportunity.

Many Orthodox writers (such as Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, Metropolitan John Zizioulas and Father Alexander Schmemmann) speak of humanity as the "priest of creation."

How are we all priests of creation?

A priest makes an offering to God on behalf of the community. The Eucharist is the model of the offering to God. Christ is simultaneously the one who offers to God, on behalf of the community and through the agency of the priest, the one is offered as the divine-human sacrifice, and the one who receives the offering, as one of the Holy Trinity. The bread and the wine used in the Eucharist are the material offerings of the community, harvested from nature and transformed by human agency.

The idea that all of creation is sacred underpins Orthodox concern for the environment. The Genesis account of creation repeats after each day's creation, "and God saw that it was good" (Gn 1). All of creation is good before God and hence all of creation is sacred.

There are several aspects of humanity's task as priest of creation.

The first is to see the handiwork of the Creator in creation – to rise in our spirit from creation to the Creator. Beauty and harmony in creation can uplift us to see God's hand at work. God is reflected in creation, he is truly but mysteriously present in the universe, and creation becomes a means to elevate the human spirit to the contemplation of God.

Fr. Dumitru Staniloae stresses the personal spiritual importance of the contemplation of God in the natural world. From the contemplation of God in nature, we can offer thanksgiving to God for creating such marvels and for allowing us to witness them and to partake of them. This is the essential meaning of "eucharist" – to offer thanksgiving.

The natural sciences are also an aspect of humanity's response and reasonability to creation. By seeking to understand creation, we can better appreciate God's handiwork and providence at work in the world. To be in awe before creation is to offer a prayer of worship and thanksgiving to the creator. With Christ the Saviour, we have a co-responsibility for the sanctification of all of creation, to bring creation to its fulfillment in God.

Saint Paul writes, “The earnest expectation of the creation eagerly awaits for the revealing of the sons of God... because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Ro 8:19-21).

All creation is called to a form of union with God, to theosis, when God will be “all in all,” in Saint Paul’s words (cf. 1 Co 15:28).

Humans are “liturgical beings,” *homo liturgicus*. Our vocation is to praise God and to offer creation to God, to restore creation to a rightful relationship with humanity and with the Creator. We cannot offer, like Cain, an imperfect or despoiled and polluted gift to God. Like Abel, we must offer the first-fruits of ourselves and of creation to God.

Wilful pollution of the environment is not only a human error, it is a moral evil – the needless destruction of what does not belong to us of what God has entrusted to us as his custodians.

To reinforce Orthodox concern for the environment, in 1989 Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios proclaimed September 1st, the first day of the new ecclesiastical calendar, a day for Orthodox Christians to offer prayers for the preservation of the natural creation.

And since his enthronement, Patriarch Bartholomew I has emerged as a world leader on the environment. He is called the “Green Patriarch” for his constant calls upon the Orthodox and all Christians to be mindful of the environment.

In the past Orthodox faithful prayed to be delivered from natural calamities, but now we are called to pray that the planet may be delivered from the abusive and destructive acts of human beings. A service for the environment may be celebrated in Orthodox churches on September 1st or the first Sunday in September.

Let us pray from this service:

Almighty God, who created all things with wisdom and who watches over and guides them by your all-powerful hand, grant well-being that all creation may prosper and remain unharmed by hostile elements; for you, Master, commanded that the works of your hands should remain unshaken until the ends of the age; for you spoke and they came into being and they receive from you mercy for the turning away of all harm, and for the salvation of the human race which glorifies your name which is praised above all. Now and ever and to the ages of ages. **Amen.**

O Lord, who created the universe at the beginning and gave to each thing his own rank, do not despise the works of your hands, but with an eye of mercy look from heaven upon this vine and restore it according to your will, turning aside from it every purpose that brings corruption and every destroyer; for you are our Shepherd and Deliverer and Saviour and from you we receive help in mercy and acts of compassion, as we glorify you, O Master.

Let us offer glory and thanksgiving to God, with words from the Akathist in Praise of God's Creation composed by Metropolitan Tryphon (Turkestanov):

Glory to you for calling me into being,
Glory to you for spreading out before me the beauty of the universe,
Glory to you for revealing to me through heaven and earth the eternal book of wisdom,
Glory to your eternity within this fleeting world,
Glory to you for your mercies, seen and unseen,
Glory to you for the feast-day of life,
Glory to you for the perfume of lilies and roses,
Glory to you for each different taste of berry and fruit,
Glory to you for the sparkling silver of early morning dew,
Glory to you for each smiling, peaceful awakening,
Glory to you for the warmth and tenderness of the world of nature,
Glory to you for surrounding us with thousands of your works,
Glory to you for the depth of your wisdom: the whole world is a living sign of it,
Glory to you: on my knees, I kiss the traces of your unseen hand,
Glory to you, O God, from age to age.

Some Orthodox References on the Environment:

Bartholomew (Ecumenical Patriarch), *On Earth as in Heaven* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012).

John Chryssavgis and Bruce V. Foltz, eds. *Toward an Ecology of Transfiguration: Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Environment, Nature, and Creation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013). (32 articles by leading Orthodox personalities on environment, nature and creation.)

Dumitru Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, Chapter 24, "The Contemplation of God in Creation" (South Canaan PA: St Tikhon's Seminary Press, 2002), 203-223.

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CITIZENS FOR PUBLIC JUSTICE

a national organization inspired by faith to act for justice

We at CPJ hope you have found these resources useful, educational, and inspiring towards your pursuit of climate justice.

CPJ has been a faithful voice for public justice in Canada for more than 50 years, bringing together justice-oriented Christians, churches, religious orders, and organizations. Still, there is much work to do – and we could use your support! CPJ depends on donations from committed citizens like you who value our unique Christian perspective on justice issues. Please go to cpj.ca/support and join your voice with ours!

For additional resources or to support our work, visit:

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