



Interfaith Power & Light

A Religious Response to Global Warming

A Call to Action

A Sermon by Reverend Bob Wohlfort

Delivered at 1st Trinity Lutheran Church, Washington DC March 9, 2008

When St. Paul sent a letter to one of his congregations, he laid out his credentials. So, I need to do that since you do not know me. I am here at the invitation of your pastors and Donna Suchmann. Pastor Knoll and Donna and I have known one another for many years...many. Pastor Moen and I have been acquainted for just a few of those years. Doris and I supported the work of CFLS...really supported it at one of the auctions: we bid against one another for Donna's French Dinner. As a hobby, I craft urns and a few of them are interred in your columbarium. Finally, the core reason I am here (in addition to delivering 2 urns) is in the context of a dramatic phenomena with which you are familiar: that phenomena is climate change and global warming.

Our planetary emergency has propelled me, in my retirement, to be busier than I imagined. I entered into this work of climate change year ago. I traveled to Nashville for training with The Climate Project and with former Vice President Albert Gore. His movie and his sharing the Nobel Prize for Peace has put him back into our consciousness. With this training began a new calling for me...a call to me to be an advocate for our planet, God's good creation...and a call to me to call upon you, the children, the women, the men...in short, the people of God, to be informed, made helpfully uncomfortable and to instill realistic hope that each one of us here in this church can and must make a difference to bring down our planet's fever. We can and we must act now as individuals, families, communities, congregations, cities, states and nations. No one can legitimately be an observer of the continuing wounding of God's creation.

Every sermon needs a text: the text is the psalm for this day: #130. This psalm was spoken or sung as the Jews of Israel went up the mountain to the holy city of Jerusalem. It is a psalm of confession. The people approached the Jerusalem temple, the building that contained the Ark of the Covenant with its stone tablets of the 10 commandments. They came knowing they had done all manner of wrongs: "...if you marked/noticed our sins, who could stand?" "But there is forgiveness with you... forgiveness with you."

In the drama that is unfolding on and about planet earth, there is plenty for us to confess. If God were to hold against us how often and how deeply each of us have wounded his earth...God's earth (not our earth)...no one could stand...no one.

God's earth has been and continues to be severely bruised and abused....How?

We know of the big polluters, the big bruisers: coal fired power plants; car exhaust; airplane exhaust; clear cutting areas of the rainforests; old and inadequate sewer treatment plants. Maybe, these are too much out there, so....

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You leave your room and the lights remain on, the radio oozes music and it is winter and the window you cracked open last night for fresh air is still open...that coal plant has to keep working for you even when you are not using those items and that plant is sending carbon dioxide and mercury into the air because “you forgot.” We must confess our forgetting.

You let the water run continuously and hard in the bathroom sink as you brush your teeth and shave. That water, an increasingly precious commodity, is gone and that coal plant again is fired up for your wasting because the water plant needs the energy to keep the water pressure going, We confess our thoughtless waste.

You stop at the 7-11 for that 6:00 AM cup of coffee and leave you engine running for 5 minutes. The air becomes a bit more polluted; the precious gasoline that was once oil is wasted; the refinery needs to work a bit more for your idling car. We confess our thoughtlessness.

You hear about and see those funny compact fluorescent lights and decide they do not look as nice and are not willing to put out the extra money even though you know that in the long run you will save money because you will use less electricity and that means the power plant will need to work less and pollute less. We confess our turning away. So, we confess to being thoughtless...not mindful. We confess to unnecessary use of polluting energy. We confess to a lack of awareness that we hurt our neighbors worldwide when we contribute to polluting the air so that temperatures rise and the weather becomes chaotic.

We hear and read so much...what is the problem?!?!

Let us ponder the Arctic for a few moments: Arctic Ice... a year ago-gone in the summer by 2040 Today: could be gone by 2013! Polar bears, tundra, permafrost melting. Global temperature rise; wind and ocean currents upset. millions will have to move. Draught here and flooding there. And as so often happens, the poor will be the most vulnerable. The IPCC...this is real and mostly human caused. We have, at the latest, 42 more years to make drastic changes to bring our climate close to where it needs to be so that we can live.

Job 12:7-10; Genesis 9:8-17 Let us remember for first verses of the first book of the Bible...Genesis and its story of the 6 days of creation...at the end of each day, God finds a comfortable place to sit and God gazes over what God made that day and there is a smile. God did not say at the end of each day “Not bad” or “Good enough” or “I’ll do better tomorrow.” God, day by day surveyed the land, the sea, the animals, the birds, the moon, the sun, human beings and God said, “It was good” and in the evening of the 6th day, the last day of work, the text tells us that God surveyed all that God has made, and “It was very good.” And so we confess and yet confession is not enough. The big word is repentance and let’s make it simple. Repentance begins with simply saying, “I am sorry!” “I recognize that I am wounding God’s beautiful creation by leaving those lights on, and the motor running and the water gushing. “I see that and I am sorry!” I am sorry not only for wasting...I am sorry for misusing the creation entrusted to me by a loving God. And guess what!/? Confession and “I am sorry” is a very good start and they are not enough!

3rdly and finally, we take action. We turn out the lights, and turn off the water, and shut off the car and pick up the trash and write to Governor Kaine of Virginia to oppose the construction of a new coal fired plant in Wise County and we clean the street gutter so that the next rain storm does not wash more trash into the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers...because, as the people of faith in our loving and creating God, we want to care well for God’s creation. And there is something else you can do on

behalf of this city in which we are worshipping today. You can write to Mayor Fenty and to the Council and thank them. Thank them. For what?

Every major country in the world, except the USA, signed the Kyoto Protocol in the early 1990s. It was the 1st worldwide attempt to address the issues of climate change and global warming. Since that time, 12 states have taken it upon themselves to “sign on.” And over 400 cities in 40 plus states have signed on. And Washington, DC is one of them. So thank your officials for being good stewards of God’s creation and pledge to them that you will do your part. And encourage pastors Moen and Knoll to continue their leadership and support of the ongoing efforts of the working group of saints of 1st Trinity who will focus on caring for our God’s creation.

I deeply believe that these issues of climate change and global warming are the most important issues facing us at this time in our lives. The 1960s and the 1970s were so defined by the movements for civil rights and the war in Viet Nam. The opening years of the 21st Century, I believe, will be defined by how we address our planetary emergency. I want it to be said of us gathered here in the faith of our loving and creating God and in his son who lived on this very earth that we inhabit, that we took the lead in caring for a saving the creation lent to us by our God.