



Interfaith Power & Light

A Religious Response to Global Warming

Practice Love

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I am encouraged by how many people have accepted hearing about environmental issues from the pulpit and how even politicians are beginning to talk about curbing greenhouse gases to prevent global warming. It is startling how much the climate has changed in the last couple of years over the issue of climate change. There are many more Priuses on the road now, many more light bulb changes and fewer and fewer people are denying the science about greenhouse gases warming the global climate. You can say, "there is human induced global warming," with certainty and few if anyone tells you that the science is not clear.

I cannot put my finger on exactly why this is true, but it is happening all over the country. It may be as simple as enough people have become aware that we have turned an important corner. Reached a consensus, so to speak. For twenty years doctors and scientists told us that smoking was harmful to our health, for twenty years, and then one day.....we got it. We stopped smoking and restaurants banned it. Maybe we have reached that point now with enough people having become aware that our dependency on fossil fuels for energy is destroying life and disrupting the balance of nature. Maybe it IS because politicians are talking about it or enough spectacular weather events have happened, that we have all been touched by the changing climate. The recent Copenhagen conference brought widespread attention to the matter and emphasized the urgency and seriousness of what is already happening in certain areas of the planet. No one can argue that the glaciers are not melting or the seas aren't rising. Maybe that is the reason.....???????

OR maybe it is because the religious voice is speaking out. We are beginning to see climate change as a moral and spiritual issue and clergy across the country are not only talking about it from the pulpit, but are having their congregations reduce their carbon footprints to be examples to the community. They are also walking the halls of legislative buildings and talking to lawmakers about the importance of slowing down the destruction of our natural resources and keeping an eye on the future that our children will inherit.

There is a conscious awareness happening that has awakened many people to the spiritual connection between humans and something greater: the notion that we belong to a divine presence that encompasses everything, not just humans.

And if you are not thinking along those lines, that will be the message to take home this morning. We are part of something larger; something that passes all understanding and we share a meaningful purpose to protect that larger Presence. What is beginning to happen around the world at a deep level is an awareness that we are all in this together. If the international climate conference, recently held in Denmark, did nothing else, it showed unity from all around the world: all generations were

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represented, business, labor, faith, science, media and healthcare. The definition of what it means to be human is being redefined and a collective consciousness is surfacing. Never before has the human species been called into a shared global purpose as has become evident. AND moral values are working their way to the top of the priority list. It is the faith community playing a role in this.

Christians have realized that protecting the environment is about protecting all species of which humans are only one. Political issue or not we have a moral obligation to protect what God loves and called good. We are called to serve one another and leave a healthy future for generations to come.

Up until recently the faith community has abdicated its responsibility. But now, we are stumbling over ourselves trying to make up for lost time. The Evangelicals are in a race with Protestants as to who will have the loudest voice in the Senate over climate legislation. The Jews, Hindus and Catholics all have statements and declarations about mitigation for the poor as we make the transition to clean energy. It is poor and vulnerable communities who contribute the least to the problem, but suffer the most from the consequences.

The faith community is standing up for underserved populations. It is exciting and I think it is what has caused the tipping point and brought the climate issue to the stage it is now. The search for solutions has replaced the need to convince people that global warming is real. Indeed, it is very real and more serious than even the scientists predicted a few years ago.

While there is lots of good news about solutions to the climate problem we still have a long way to go. What I believe has to happen and what I work for is somewhat along the line of what happened when Jesus appeared after he had been crucified-- the seemingly impossible appearance of a dead man. Jesus' appearance changed the world. And his appearance to the disciples was calling them into a new way of being in the world. They were being challenged to change their behavior and readdress their role in the world and their relationship to others. They were being asked to live the life that Jesus modeled for them and to proclaim the truth of his being. God appeared in a cloud and told us to believe in him, too. (Transfiguration Sunday) Speak truth to power, love your enemies, but most of all love God and love your neighbor. This was a new way of being in relationship. Today's seemingly "impossible appearance" is that humans are changing the climate. A hundred years ago that would have been deemed impossible, but now it is happening and people are seeing the signs. This realization calls for a new way of being in the world.

The time is now for us to begin to relate differently to each other and nature and also to redefine what it means to be human in light of the destruction of Creation. How and when, if not NOW will we address what being fully human means? I think there still is a major transition that we need to go through as we redefine our relationship with the community of life. We are continuing to commit crimes against Creation. In order to change that behavior, we need a real shift in how we think about ourselves and our human role in what Mary Oliver calls the family of things. I think this shift is beginning and I want to encourage you to be part of it. There are great glimmers of hope on the horizon.

In fact, this entire journey of religion and the environment is itself a story in hope. Ten years ago, little was being discussed and the church had not even entered the dialogue. Today, that is very different, congregations all over this country are serving as examples to the community. Protection of Creation has reached every mainstream tradition in America. We have earth liturgy, earth friendly practices and adult education happening everywhere. Seminaries are teaching environmental ethics. Young people are hearing more about environmental issues than any generation before us. The ecumenical Patriarch,

leader of 50 million Greek Orthodox called degradation of the environment a sin. Recently the Pope added pollution to the list of sins in the Catholic Church. And in his address on World Peace Day he said, “if you want to cultivate peace, protect Creation.” Sadly, though, the nature of the crisis is far more complicated than any one issue, one disease, one case of drought or flood or the extinction of one species. The problems today are vast, complicated and mostly interrelated. It is about the entire community of life. If we continue on the course we are on, we will collide with the end of life as we now know it.

Science can give us all the facts and figures, but science cannot do it alone. It is religion and our faith that provides transforming power and a new way of being in the world. It is religion that transforms our hearts. There has got to be a sacred relationship between humans and nature. When God made the world and said it was “good”, we were given the job to keep it “good”.

Life isn't about being comfortable. Being fully human is challenging and only after one faces the challenge will one receive rewards. Jesus brought a new message that called for behavior change. It was not well received and yet we know he is right.

Yes, we are sustainable and we will survive. Humans are resourceful, clever and committed once we see or feel a threat. Our faith will give us the courage to make the changes we need to make. Once we fully understand the threat to our life sustaining systems, we too will change our behavior. Many of us already have and more are changing all the time.

One other thing to note is that Jesus brought a message of peace. The environmental message is also one of peace. It is a peaceful movement rooted in love and justice- a perfect theme for Valentine's Day. It cries for love and appreciation of all that God created. Every butterfly that flutters: every bee that pollinates our food. There will not be peace on the earth until every species and person has access to clean air and clean water. Working together we can deliver a message of solidarity, love and peace which will come when we can universally declare an end to the war humans declared on the earth. When we can stand together and say, enough is enough. We want to live and we CHOOSE a resurrected life over death. Thus on this Valentine's Day we will invite the earth and our neighbors to be our valentines. We can begin showing acts of Love toward our neighbor and love toward nature. Make this Valentine's Day the beginning of addressing climate change as an act of faith and do all that you can to lower your own carbon emissions. We can also help the U.S. Senate pass legislation that will create clean energy jobs, boost the economy and strengthen national security. A big challenge, but a necessary one. Practice love.

Amen.