



Interfaith Power & Light

A Religious Response to Global Warming

Earth Sunday: John 21:1-19

Grace Cathedral

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The Rev. Canon Sally Bingham

You can listen to the audio of this sermon at http://www.gracecathedral.org/mp3/sermon/ser_20100418.mp3

It is indeed a pleasure to be here today and have the chance to speak to you on the 40th anniversary of Earth Day. Thank you Bishop Lee for giving me this honor.

On April 22, four days from now, there will be celebrations all over the country and regenerated activism about care for creation that you will no doubt hear about. I am happy to report that when it comes to talking about the environment in churches, there is a very different climate now than there was when I started my ministry over twelve years ago. Not only has the changing global climate become more severe, but the response to it has changed rapidly, too. I preached one Sunday in 2003 about global warming and was accused of promoting world government and of being a communist. Pause Most of those voices are quiet now having been drowned out by the overwhelming evidence that humans ARE destroying creation and that climate change is one of the most challenging moral issue of our time. People have increasingly accepted what the science tells us and the religious community (Jews, Muslims, Buddhist and Christians) has begun to address not only the subject of climate change, but also protection of the entire communion of life.

Why the change???

Listen to what the head of Yale's school of forestry says in the introduction to his latest book.

"Half the world's tropical and temperate forests are now gone. The rate of deforestation in the tropics continues at about an acre a second. About half the wetlands and a third of the mangroves are gone. An estimated 90 percent of the large predator fish are gone, and 75 percent

of marine fisheries are now over fished or fished to capacity. Twenty percent of the corals are gone and another 20 percent severely threatened. Species are disappearing at rates about a thousand times faster than normal. The planet has not seen such a spam of extinction in sixty-five million years, since the dinosaurs disappeared.”

Ladies and gentlemen, we are standing at the edge of two worlds, the one that God Created and the one that humans are making. The one that humans are making is not sustainable. It may be a matter of life and death. It is just that serious.

So let me ask you. Is this who we are? Was this God’s purpose for the human species. I don’t think so. We were given dominion over all that is. That is “dominion” not domination. It is dominion in the same sense that we have dominion over our children and that God has over us. Care and compassion, love and generosity. We don’t give black eyes to our children or break their ribs; we don’t purposely destroy their chance for a healthy life. Quite the contrary, we help our children in all ways possible to be the best they can be and that is what God expected from us when we were given dominion.

We are asked to love one another. That means not destroy the very basic stability that poor nations and poor people around the world need for survival. But poor nations of the world are paying for mistakes that wealthy countries have made without their contribution or knowledge.

Fortunately, religious people have come to see the destruction of creation as a moral issue are getting involved and speaking out. Over the last ten years care for creation has taken hold in most major denominations and congregations have green teams that are helping with reduction in energy use and less wasteful use of paper and plastic. An Episcopal church in New Jersey had the congregation save it’s trash for two weeks and then open the black garbage bags and lay the contents all over the courtyard. The congregation was asked to put on rubber gloves and sort what was really garbage from what could be composted or recycled. It was a life changing experience for many when they saw and touched what was going into landfill when it could have been reused, composted or recycled. I just picture it being done here on our courtyard on a beautiful day this spring.

Fortunately we in San Francisco are very accustomed to recycling and we are good at it. Mayor Newsom claims that over 80% of San Francisco waste is recycled or composted, and he is very proud of our city and it’s participation in the green movement.

While that is a step in the right direction, the destruction of Creation is a global issue and needs to be addressed as such. Every one of our actions and behavior affects someone else on the planet. Our individual choices matter, but we need every institution, every industry, every business, every industrial utility, every hospital and every school to be looking ahead at what we are leaving behind for our children and grand children to deal with.

Caring for God's creation takes on more urgency with each passing day. Focus back on what Gus Speth wrote. The climate continues to warm, half of all the earth's wetlands are already gone, we're losing an average of one species of plant or animal to extinction every hour, and all the while Americans are consuming their weight in stuff every day. This is NOT who we are, we don't have to do this- we have one earth and one shared purpose-to be the stewards of Creation.

I am often asked what the condition of the environment has to do with religion and if you are wondering that, too it is a fair question because for many of us the notion of environmental stewardship as a religious concern is relatively recent. But what's interesting is that through out scripture we are asked to love one another and to serve the poor. The BCP and our baptismal vows call us to renounce any evil that destroys the creatures of God. Prayers for the people –give us the courage and will to use your resources rightly. Care for creation is the basis of our Christian religion. I am not an environmentalist in spite of my Christianity but because of it. You cannot sit in a pew and profess a love of God and let what God loves and called “good” be destroyed.

In every Eucharistic prayer we proclaim the glory of God on earth. “Holy, holy, holy, Heaven and earth are full of your glory”. The earth is full of God's glory.

For 200 years we have been burning fossil fuel for energy and in the last twenty years, scientist have discovered that this form of energy is harming creation. Green House gases as they are called have formed a blanket like cover that is preventing heat from escaping and thus warming the planet. The fuels we are heavily dependant upon are finite, dirty and dangerous. The time as come to switch to clean renewable energy that comes from sun and wind, geothermal and other resources that don't pollute the air with carbon dioxide and other harmful gases.

Why now? Well the situation has reached a crisis to the extent that many of our most influential scientists think we may already have reached a point of no return.

What does Jesus say about change or switching to new ways and ideas? He says, “if your not catching any fish on one side of the boat- try the other side”. He says, think out of the box, there is more than one way to do something. Open your minds to a new way of doing things. I cannot possible suggest what Jesus would do if he were away of what humans have done to the planet, but I suspect that, being a healer, he would want to help the poor nations of the world that are disappearing because of sea rise. I suspect that he would want to save endangered species of all kinds, restore forests and wetlands to health, prevent the ice caps from melting. I think he would say-put your nets on the other side of the boat. What you are doing isn’t working-try something else. There are abundant resources; you just have to think creatively, in a new way. Jesus continually used natural images in his teaching and while they were simple images like fig trees bearing fruit or mustard seeds or fishing from the other side of the boat, these teachings have profound meaning for us. Fishing from the other side of the boat is such a strong metaphor for DO IT DIFFERENTLY when the old way isn’t working.

Three times Jesus commanded Peter to “feed my sheep”.

Certainly, this feeding refers to the spiritual food of the Gospel and the Eucharist. But it can also extend to the literal, physical sense that we must feed our sisters and brothers who are hungry. Another call to serve one another and in this case do all in our power to assure that people around the world are not starving due to our behavior here. If global warming is extending droughts in certain parts of Australia and Africa as science says it is and people are unable to find or grow food, don’t we have a responsibility to help out?

What I suggest for us in a new way of thinking about the human purpose on Earth. Why are we here and in light of the climate crisis and other destructive measures that humans have visited on God’s Creation, don’t we have a shared responsibility-

Is this our shared purpose? Crisis can and often does mean danger, but it also is an opportunity and we mustn’t waste this opportunity. We have the chance to do what few generations have had and that is to come together with a shared purpose and the joy of working together as a unified force with a regenerated view of the human purpose on earth. The view that we are one, one shared human purpose, one earth, one atmosphere and one global climate.

I challenge each and every one of us to take a long hard look at what Jesus was saying when he suggested, “cast your nets to the other side of the boat”.

We can do this. We can fish from the other side of the boat and be fed abundantly.

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