

FUMC Perry

5 Feb. 2012

What would Jesus do about air pollution?

First scripture reading: 2 Kings 5:1-14

Second scripture reading: Mark 1:40-45

Call to Worship

Creator, author of life on this wondrous planet,
when you fashioned the world, the morning stars sang together
and the host of heaven shouted for joy.

Creator, we give you thanks.

Christ, you reached out to those who were hurting and broken;
you boldly and lovingly sought healing and justice for the unpopular ones.

Christ, teach us your ways.

Spirit, who breathes within us all,
blow through our hearts and minds this morning and open our souls to the
wonders of your creation, the ways we are called to care for the Earth home
You created.

Spirit, strengthen us, lead us.

Let us worship and give thanks for our creative God of love and justice.

Here's where we are in the story.

This is early in Jesus' public life.

He has found the fishermen and invited them to follow him into ministry.

They've been to Capernaum and seen Jesus heal someone's inner demons.

Then he heals Peter's mother-in-law.

Word has spread

and now many who are sick come to him and he heals them.

After an evening's rest,

one morning he gets up really early—

while it is still very dark —

and goes to a deserted place and prays.

Peter and his companions hunt for him,

find him praying,

and tell him that everyone is searching for him.

He says, Let's go into the *neighboring* towns,

so that I might proclaim the message;
for that is what I came to do.

He spent time alone with God,
checked in,
listened,
made sure he's doing what God has called him to do,
perhaps gathered from God what he needed
to continue.

Affirmed and guided one more time,
he's ready to go back into town,
explaining that God's way is here
and *showing* God's love by healing people.

Now a person with a skin disease comes to him.
People with skin disease were called lepers
and according to Leviticus,
they had to wear torn clothes,
let their hair hang loose

and cry out "Unclean, unclean,"
when they approached others.

They had to live alone, "outside the camp."

They were banished from the community
and to touch them made one unclean.

Touching the leper and declaring him clean,
Jesus would have been considered a prophet,
a holy man.

But this gets Jesus in trouble.

And he knows it will;

he tells the leper to tell no one
that his touch has healed him.

The leper cannot be quiet
and, as a result, Jesus can't go into a town
and meet with people openly.

So people came to him here, in the country.

In spite of the unpopularity of his healing acts of justice,
the unpopularity of his teaching

with some,

Jesus continues to speak the truth
and take the action he feels called to take.

Touching and healing lepers

is an act of justice

because it restores these outsiders

to the community

from which they—in Jesus' eyes—

have been unfairly banished.

Established religious authorities

disagree with Jesus about this

and many of his teachings

and the ruling Romans

don't like the crowds of healed people

that gather round him.

But he carries on,

doing what he knows to be God's purpose for his life:

Show the oppressed, the broken,

that God's way

of love and justice

is here.

For Jesus, following God's way

requires the strength and courage

that only constant communion with God

can provide.

In our time,

millions of people

and the very planet

that is our God-given home

are suffering and dying from

hunger,

drought,

floods,

disease,

violence—

much of it caused
by unjust human systems.

I think this story about Jesus
can give *us* the courage
in our day
to face the unpopular truths
about many issues,
go to *God*
and listen for *God's* guidance
and, with constant communion with *God*,
work on the solutions.

Next Sunday
is a national preach-in
on global warming.

Since I'm preaching *this* weekend,
you get to hear the information
provided by Interfaith Power and Light
about global warming

a week early!

Mark's story

about Jesus,

I think,

is a prophetic message to us

in our day:

to face the facts about Global Warming

and, as people called

to care for God's creation,

to take action.

I am fully aware

that there are people

who don't believe that humans

are harming the planet

and they don't want to discuss

or get involved with subjects

like climate change.

What if Jesus had not wanted
to get involved with people
who were "unclean"
or not thought of as part
of "normal society"?

Jesus healed those
who others wouldn't touch.

As Christians, as people who follow Jesus' way,
we have a responsibility
to heal what is broken or destroyed
even if others disagree with our assessment.

When Jesus saw wounds and scars,
he stepped in to heal.

Even though there are some
who denounce that the climate is changing
due to human activity,
we are not allowed to ignore it.

Our responsibility—as caregivers of creation—

is to help everything God created thrive.

Today our air contains 392 parts per million of carbon dioxide.

From the time human civilization began the air contained about 275 parts per million—until about 200 years ago.

If we continue to produce the greenhouse gases we produce today, by the end of the century the air will contain 399 parts per million of CO₂.

Scientists tell us that Earth cannot sustain human life with more than 350 parts per million in the atmosphere.

We must immediately decrease our use of fossil fuel to lower the amount of carbon dioxide in the air to below 350 parts per million.

It is a race now.

The question is:

Can we get to 350 parts per million
or will we have put so much greenhouse gas
in the atmosphere
that life as we know it
will diminish drastically?

Will we do what we need to do
and find ways
to make our air
as clean and healthy
as it was meant to be—
and that our children and grandchildren
need it to be?

Can we as Christians
do the courageous thing
and take on our responsibility
to stand against unjust acts
and heal the planet,
save our descendents lives?

It's not that difficult
to get started.

And Interfaith Power and Light
has ways to support and guide us—
as individuals
and as a church family.

One of their programs
is called *Cool Congregations*.

This is a united effort
by religious congregations across the country
to address global warming
by reducing their carbon footprint
and by becoming inspirations
to their members and communities.

Last year,
550 congregations entered Interfaith Power and Light's
Cool Congregations Challenge.

Today, I invite you to hear some of their stories.

With the goal of reducing their carbon footprint
by five tons a year,

members of St. John's Episcopal Church
in Vernon, Connecticut,

participated in a 6-week program through
Connecticut Interfaith Power and Light
called "This Old House of Worship."

They learned how to perform an energy audit,
and how to calculate the energy and cost savings that
would accrue if new lighting were installed.

Their audit revealed the congregation could reduce its
carbon footprint significantly

by swapping out all the old lighting in the parish hall,
the Sunday School rooms,

the hallways, the offices, and outdoors.

Because they had already installed
new thermostats last winter,

the cost of \$13,000 for new lighting was thought to be prohibitive.

However, they gamely launched an "adopt a lighting fixture" for the entire congregation, and proceeded with the upgrade.

Electricity usage since the upgrade has decreased by 1,328 Kwh, or 22%, over the same period in 2010.

Also, because of the new thermostats, natural gas usage decreased by 15%, or about 1000 CCF (100 cubic feet/ccf) over the past year.

Over half of the lighting costs have now been covered by Creation-loving parishioners or parish groups, and the church is on track to decrease its CO2 emissions by five tons per year.

[The Earth Web committee](#)

at First Unitarian Church of Albuquerque, NM, sponsors courses, sustainability fairs and forums on renewable energy to educate its church community.

They explored solar,
and after analyzing federal and state regulations,
they developed a proposal
for a straightforward lease arrangement between a
vendor and the church,
with the solar energy company
handling all the regulatory and tax issues.

The church has the option to purchase the system
in seven years.

The 48 kW system is estimated to generate
almost 77,000kWh/yr,
supplying about 75% of church needs.

During the dedication ceremony
with the whole congregation participating,
they used water guns to do the 'christening.'

The panels are expected to function for 25 - 30 years.

The system will save
about 42 tons of carbon dioxide per year
and \$70,000 in electricity costs

over the 20-year term of the lease.

The influence of this project has been felt in several ways. Church members have gotten excited about the possibility of solar electricity and at least eight households have installed solar panels, producing a total of approximately 20.84 kWh/mo.

In furthering its ongoing environmental stewardship and education mission,

Central United Methodist Church in Charlotte, N.C., has created and completed several ground and water conservation initiatives in 2011.

Located in an ethnically and socio-economically diverse urban area of Charlotte, NC,

Central has focused its efforts this year on creating a community garden to benefit congregants, local residents, and the church's food pantry.

This outreach provides an opportunity to grow produce on a small carbon footprint

while educating the community about the many environmental benefits of "growing local."

Using volunteer labor and fundraising, Central developed 24 plots, including raised beds for handicapped access and irrigation from a natural water source.

Formerly a barren area adjacent to the parking lot, the space was rife with clay, rocks and asphalt waste before volunteers "harvested" debris, tilled, amended and fenced the space.

To preserve water and enrich soil, volunteers tilled in 48 cubic yards of compost made from county recycled yard waste.

The majority of Central's active membership of 125 people participated in the project.

This year's harvest was plentiful, providing locally grown produce to congregants, neighborhood gardeners, and the church's food pantry, which serves families from Albemarle Road Elementary

School, a local high-poverty, high-ESL elementary with whom Central partners.

A celebration and fundraiser was held in October, where a meal including "fruits of the harvest" was shared by the congregation and neighborhood participants, along with a sustainability workshop covering composting to preserve water and complementary crop planting, combined with rotation, to preserve the land.

As of October, over one third of Bloomington, Indiana's Congregation Beth Shalom households have reduced their energy use by at least one seventh (14%) and/or their carbon footprint to significantly less than half the average for an American household of their size. These reductions fulfill [Beth Shalom's Till & Tend Home Energy Reduction Pledge](#), signed by 39% of the households and ten of the twelve board members. Beth Shalom promoted energy reduction through:

Hoosier Interfaith Power and Light's Task of the Month Program; scriptural teachings; participatory intergenerational holiday programs; an interactive bulletin board featuring each month's energy-reducing task; discounted supplies; and monthly newsletter interviews on what members have done and what challenges they face.

Teams have been providing weatherizing assistance to households that request it.

Tweens from Christian, Muslim, and their own congregation weatherized the homes of older members, and a contractor worked with Beth Shalom and Islamic Center teens to insulate an attic.

By reducing their congregational building's energy usage by one seventh and equipping and inspiring over a third of their members to do the same, Beth Shalom has become Hoosier Interfaith Power & Light's (Hoosier IPL's) first Seventh Day Congregation.

Their goal is to help create a tipping point,
inspiring more of their members and other congregations
in the city and state to follow suit.

They have secured media coverage for many of their
events and, through Hoosier IPL, will share their
experience achieving Seventh Day status with
congregations statewide.

I joined this church
the very first day I visited.
I certainly hadn't planned to,
but I did
because of the spirit I immediately felt
in this church community.

That morning, I felt it,
I asked God about it,
joined
and have felt it ever since.

This church has a welcoming and loving spirit

and when it commits to something,
it proceeds with energy and enthusiasm and dedication
and gets the job done.

In your bulletin today,
there is a fact sheet about global warming
from Interfaith Power and Light.

In the narthex,
you will find more information.

I encourage you to read these.

In the narthex also
are post cards to send to our U.S. Senators
encouraging them to oppose efforts in Congress
to block the EPA's ability to enforce the Clean Air Act,
which has protected Americans' health
and cleaned up air pollution for the past 40 years.

I invite you to sign the cards
and we will mail them to Washington.

You can also sign a Clean Air Promise
which will be sent to Interfaith Power and Light

headquarters.

Oklahoma's chapter of Interfaith Power and Light is getting started on its Cool Congregations program.

It's likely that some of the training will be held just up the road, at Turtle Rock Farm.

Do you think Perry First United Methodist Church might be among the first to take the training in Oklahoma?

Do you think we can lead this community, the Oklahoma Conference of the United Methodist Church and other faith congregations in reducing the amount of carbon dioxide in the air?

If we are to follow Jesus' way,

as disciples of Christ,

we will care for God's good creation

just as Jesus cared for and healed
those who suffered in *his* time.

We will step up
and touch what others want to ignore;
we will gather the courage and guidance God provides
and do the work of healing God's good creation.

Thanks be to God.