



Climate in the Pulpits

VOTE: Committing Ourselves to Climate Justice and Beloved Community 2020

Sermon Starters

Sunday, October 4th, 2020

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Proper 22 (27), Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary Readings

Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20 and Psalm 19, Philippians 3:4b-14, Matthew 21:33-46

Why are Christians called to protect Creation and address climate change?

Adapted from a 2015 statement by the Ecumenical Leaders' Group of Maryland:

Like all people everywhere, we live from and rely on the health and wellbeing of God's Creation – air, water and land, wildlife and domestic animals, local ecosystems, biomes, and the great interconnected ecosystem that the whole Earth shares. Heat-trapping pollution like carbon dioxide and methane, released into the air by humans at unprecedented levels over the last hundred and fifty years, has damaged and endangered the stability of our climate, made our oceans more acidic, and is threatening global health and security. Climate change will harm our neighbors. In our region, we see the impacts of our reliance on fossil fuels in many places. Our traditions teach that we are responsible for the most vulnerable people in our communities, and environmental degradation harms the poor in particular, and makes many sick – older adults face lung problems, young people deal with asthma, and disenfranchised people of all ages are subjected to pollution in their communities. We see the impacts of hurricanes and other disasters made worse by climate change. As leaders in a region with thousands of miles of coastline, we see how many natural and human treasures rising ocean levels will destroy. Caring for God's Creation – including all its inhabitants – means slowing and limiting our use of fossil fuels and significantly reducing our climate pollution.

How can our church community take action on climate change now?

We are called to work together to fight for environmental justice – to move our economy off of fossil fuels, to clean our air, and repair our damaged climate. And one of the most important ways we can do that this fall is to vote our values! Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. called voting a "moral responsibility," and it's a moral responsibility we each hold today.

Even when we're gathered online, we can take action together, and in community! Call on your

community to vote for leaders who share our concern for Creation, and then provide a designated time during online worship for all congregants to make sure they're registered to vote and have a chance to request a vote-by-mail ballot, using our form at <https://ipldmv.org/vote>, or by texting MDLCV to 52886.

Sermon Starter for Sunday October 4th, 2020, Proper 22 (27), Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Readings: **Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20 and Psalm 19, Philippians 3:4b-14, Matthew 21:33-46**

Throughout today's readings, we have imagery that shows us God's connection to God's Creation.

In Exodus, God comes to the people with thunder and lightning, and a smoking mountain.

In Psalm 19, we hear poetically that "the heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork ... In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a strong man runs its course with joy."

And in Matthew, we have the image of God as the keeper of a vineyard, with tenants who are charged with the responsibility to ensure a good harvest.

Of course, none of these passages are particularly *about* caring for Creation. The reading from Exodus is about the delivery of the 10 Commandments, and the parable in Matthew speaks to the people's rejection of the prophets and foretells Jesus's crucifixion. If you weren't looking for a word on the natural world, you might miss it entirely.

And that is so often how we have failed to care for or even notice the blessings of our natural world. Our use and abuse of natural resources, and particularly our wasteful and harmful use of fossil fuels, has brought us a crisis that too often feels like it's lurking in the background.

Burning fossil fuels creates pollution that traps heat. Over time, this heat-trapping climate pollution warms the planet and sets off a chain reaction. Going back to Psalm 19, we've turned the sun's rays – something the psalmist tells us we should greet joyfully – into something insufferable, like a ski jacket on a warm day. The damage caused by our pollution is far-reaching: severe weather, heat waves, sea-level rise, crop failure, and mass extinctions. Because of climate pollution, the psalmist's line that "nothing is hid from [the sun's] heat" begins to feel like more of a threat.

But with so much going on right now, it's easy to feel sometimes like the climate crisis is at the bottom of the list. Between Covid-19, lost jobs, and work for racial equity, congregations have been extra busy caring for the immediate needs of our communities.

If we look closer, however, we can see that the climate crisis is not separate from any of our other problems; our damaged climate is impacting so many neighbors right now, and making all of these other crises worse.

Covid-19 becomes deadlier when it infects communities who have long been forced to breathe the air pollution caused by toxic facilities that burn fossil fuels. And although that pollution affects everyone, it's been especially harmful to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color who have been forced to breathe far more than their fair share of pollution for decades. That pollution is one of the reasons that communities of color have been disproportionately affected by Covid-19.

And as much as this virus has hurt our economy and cost our communities jobs, we know that climate change will be even more damaging. Just in monetary terms, it's estimated that by 2050, climate change could cost us a total of 8 trillion dollars.

When our leaders can see the damage that fossil fuels are doing to our neighbors and to God's Creation, yet continue to invest in their false promises, that is a form of the idolatry that the Ten Commandments forbid.

The sin of idolatry is sharply exposed in today's Gospel reading. In the reading from Matthew, a parable depicts the people rejecting the prophets, and ultimately, Jesus. But the backdrop of this parable portrays the world as God's vineyard, and humanity as its tenants.

We, the tenants, are judged based upon our care for the neighbors God has sent us and our care for the vineyard God has given us. Think about that – Jesus did not tell us that we have “dominion over” the natural world, or that we should use God's resources however we choose. Jesus showed us an image of humanity as tenants charged with the good upkeep of God's Creation.

The charge to care for the vineyard isn't just a suggestion; it's a commandment, with consequences. After expelling the unworthy tenants, Jesus says the owner will “lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.”

So we are called to work together to care for the vineyard, to clean our air and repair our damaged climate. We've seen congregations across our region do just that through actions like installing solar panels, planting trees, and speaking out to our elected leaders. But this fall, one of the most important actions we can take to care for Creation is to vote our values!

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. called voting a “moral responsibility,” and I believe it's a moral responsibility for every one of us, too. Voting is a powerful way that we can choose leaders who will reject the idolatry of fossil fuels. Voting is a powerful way that we can show our care for our neighbors, and value everyone's voices. I think, voting our values is part of what is required of us as good tenants of God's vineyard.

So I hope you'll join so many caring people across [our region] who are requesting a mail-in ballot (Maryland and Virginia voters; DC registered voters will be mailed a ballot and do not need to request one), voting safely, and helping to choose leaders who share our commitment to repairing our damaged climate.

I'd actually like to take a couple of minutes right now to give everyone time to make sure you're registered to vote and to request a mail ballot.

Even when we're gathered online, we can take action together, and in community! So in a moment, we're going to play a few minutes of music, during which I invite everyone to click on the link we're putting [in the chat/in the comments] right now, <https://ipldmv.org/vote>. Click on that link to open a form that will walk you step-by-step through making sure you're registered to vote and have a chance to request a vote-by-mail ballot.

To paste in the chat/comments:

Take action with us
now: <http://ipldmv.org/vote>

Or text MDLCV to 52886

If you're not somewhere where you can use a keyboard right now, then our friends at the League of Conservation Voters can help. Whether or not you live in Maryland, you can text MDLCV – for "Maryland League of Conservation Voters" – to 52886, again: text MDLCV to 52886. We'll also place those instructions in the chat below the form.

Suggested music to play while people complete the form:

In Zoom, "Share Screen" > "Advanced" > share audio. *Please note that appropriate licensing for use of any of the songs below is the responsibility of your congregation.*

One Voice	(The Wailin' Jennys)	3:23
Guide My Feet, While I Run This Race	(Arr. Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon)	4:25

Thank you for taking the time for this moral responsibility. Today we can commit to voting our values and to choosing leaders who care for God's vineyard and for our climate. And every day, we have an opportunity to make choices, in our homes and beyond, for the climate, for God's creatures, for our neighbors, and for future generations.

Climate in the Pulpits / on the Bimah / in the Minbar is a collaboration between Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions, Interfaith Power & Light (DC.MD.NoVA), and Virginia Interfaith Power & Light.

Find more resources at ipldmv.org/ClimatePulpitResources.