



NATIONAL PREACH-IN ON CLIMATE CHANGE FEBRUARY 14•16, 2014

Notes for Lutheran Faith Leaders

on the Revised Common Lectionary readings
February 16, 2014, 6th Sunday after the Epiphany

Deuteronomy 30:15-20 or Sirach 15:15-20

Psalm 119:1-8

1 Corinthians 3:1-9

Matthew 5:21-37

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SERMON GUIDE

This year's theme for the Preach-In is a message about personal agency, about taking specific and concrete actions in our lives related to climate change. The theme also calls us to hold our elected officials and other governmental agencies to a different relationship with Creation, also around the pressing issue of climate change. God's Law is a common thread found in today's lectionary readings; which can seem challenging when we'd rather shy away from anything eludes to a works/righteousness relationship between God and our actions. The particular challenge with these texts will be to preach the thread of the law as a *response* to the gospel, and in particular as a *response* to the good news that we are a part/stewards of God's creation.

OT: Deuteronomy 30:15-20, Psalm 119:1-8

These are words of covenant, but they are also words of tension as God's people have both life/death and prosperity/adversity set before them. For the people of God in this context, a covenant is a binding relationship between two parties, which is often hierarchical. In the case of this text, the covenant involves *the land* as well - specifically the Promised Land. In our modern context, how might our parishioners be challenged to consider our investment in our own promised land? How does the intricate relationship between Creator and created get played out for us in our sense of promise with God? The Deuteronomist urges God's people to choose life (v. 19). We might read this as choosing to live in such a way that *life is possible* - for us, for the land, for all of God's creation. The Psalmist also carries echoes of choosing to live in "right" ways with God. When we read these law-themed passages through the lens of the gospel of God's grace, how might we think of our choices as honoring, giving praise to and caring for God's creation? Perhaps not as law, but as means of living in one accord with the fullness of God in God's whole creation.

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 3:1-9

This passage is Paul's response to a contentious and quarrelling community. His admonition against taking sides over leadership leads us to the image of cooperatively tending a garden. God is the foundation of all change and growth, not one leader over another. "For we are God's servants, working together." (v. 9) While God is the source of the garden's life, we are those who work as stewards. What is your community's 'garden' to be tended? What are the contentious issues that divide you and hold you back from this common work? What is the message of cooperation you want to bring to those who serve public policy? Ultimately, the question you might ask of parishioners is whose garden are we tending? When the answer is "God's garden", it helps to strip away the personal, political and economic investments. It's not always easy to tend a garden that is not our own!

Gospel: Matthew 5:21-37

The focus of this particular gospel in light of creation care and climate change need not be on the particular behaviors being prescribed. Instead, use Jesus' radical reversal of legal ethics as the focus here. Jesus' discourse "you have heard.... But I say to you..." is a call to consider a move beyond focusing simply on particular behaviors and to move towards considering emotions and motivations as an influence in ethical/moral being. How might we use the structure of Jesus' commentary as a call to consider our motivation in the way we *behave*? The good news here is that Jesus has created space for us to consider how our behavior is not separate from but is deeply connected to our feelings, thoughts and emotions. We can move beyond discussion of simply what is written in the law as an expectation of external behavior and begin examining our internal motivations. In this, Jesus does not negate or erase the law... but instead *fulfills it*, making our interaction with it more holistic. It is no longer action followed by blessing/curse, but an interrelated web of internal and external motivations/behaviors/ethics/morals etc. What are our internal motivations in the way we interact with our environment? What needs to change about our internal dialogue before our external behavior patterns can begin to have a positive effect on climate change? A big way to start tackling this is to ask what about our culture/economy have we internalized that has a negative effect on the environment through our external behavior.