

Healing That Affects Us All
2 Kings 5:1-14 Mark 1:40-45
February 12, 2012 Valentine's Global Warming Preach-in

This morning's readings offer us two examples of people who were in need of healing. One was a beggar, a man made poor most likely by his leprosy, the other was a rich and powerful man whose existence as such was threatened by the fact that he suffered from leprosy. In the days in which both of these men lived, lepers were regarded as "unclean" and would have been sent off to live out their lives exiled from the community, separated from family and far removed from friends. The separation was done for two reasons; one was out of fear that some healthy person might catch leprosy from the sick one, and the other reason was perhaps more difficult to define, having to do with the emotions and theology. It was assumed that a person suffering from such a terrible, disfiguring disease deserved it in some way, that they had done something wrong to bring the leprosy down upon themselves. We like to think that we have come a long way from those days of fear and ignorance, but it can be difficult to move past these attitudes when they are so deeply entrenched in us. There are situations in which we fall back into these old, prejudicial attitudes, primarily when our fear taps into emotion or theology. We can think our way out of the fear for our own health and well-being on a physical level, but there is something in us that worries about consorting with those who may have brought their illness on themselves by getting on the wrong side of God.

An irony in this attitude, is the possibility brought up by Carolyn Myss who, when speaking about the presence of disease in our society, raised the possibility that those who suffer from AIDS or cancer or any other disease are actually doing so *on behalf of the rest of us*. Her understanding is that the world in which we live is sick, the culture of which we are a part is unhealthy, and that those who exhibit difficult-to-cure diseases are actually scapegoats for the rest of us. They are living with the brokenness of the world we have all conspired to create, in a very painful and personal way.

This weekend has been set aside for a national preach-in on global warming by more than 1,000 congregations. For a long time the church has ignored the environmental crisis. Some even claim that the Judeo-Christian tradition is responsible for it, thanks to scriptures such as Genesis that encourage people to "subdue the earth." But now, we are seeing almost daily the results of humankind's exploitation of the earth and her resources. The earth is suffering because of our over zealous use of timber and oil, of coal and gas. The air is thick with chemicals and smoke in some areas, making it unsafe to breathe much of the year. Streams and rivers are polluted by fertilizers and concentrated waste from factory farming operations. The oceans have floating islands of trash, and ongoing sound pumped into the underwater world regularly disturbs the thought processes and migration capabilities of whales.

Connecting the dots between human exploitation and the scapegoats of our times, do we recognize our own complicity in this crisis? Do we take responsibility for changing our ways, or are we like all too many people during the times of Naaman and his unnamed counterpart whom Jesus healed, wanting to shunt the problem off to some remote place where we don't have to look at it anymore? Are there ways in which we are scapegoating the earth? Are there situations in which we close our eyes and ears to the realities all around us, just so we can maintain our own status quo, our own comfort? It can be very uncomfortable to take responsibility for the brokenness around us. Even on a small scale, owning up to our complicity in bringing pain to another or doing something wrong, makes us uncomfortable. *I remember how it felt to break something when I was a child. My first response was to consider hiding the evidence and hoping my parents never found out.* But the reality was then, as it is now, that it is much better to face up to your wrong-doing, to confess the worst and get it out in the open. Almost always, when we do this, the ramifications are not as bad as we might have assumed they would be. Dealing with our faults and failings in an open and honest way allows us to learn from our mistakes, make reparations to the injured party, and move on a little wiser for the wear. However, when we *don't* own up to what we have done wrong, when we hide our complicity in a situation that has brought pain, then no one learns anything. The atmosphere remains charged with what is unsaid and unacknowledged. Relationships are hurt by our dishonesty, and healing cannot come for anyone, least of all, us.

I am troubled by the fact that there are still people who argue against the existence of global warming, and those who may acknowledge it as a fact, but then claim that human actions have no effect on it whatsoever. In a way similar to confessing what you have done to the person you have wronged, we need to own up to our part of the environmental crisis. If we don't take responsibility for what is happening all around us, then change is not possible. Improvement is not possible, for us or for the earth's ecosystems. If we pretend that we don't have anything to do with global warming for too much longer, then it may be too late to save ourselves, let alone save the planet. I know this might sound a bit over the top to some, but it is an issue that is close to my heart, one that deals directly with our spiritual health and wellbeing. We cannot be well and whole in a world that is not, especially when we are in some part responsible for making the world the way it is. If we compartmentalize our faith, and say it only has to do with certain aspects of life, but not others, then we are not allowing our faith to have full rein over us, in us and through us. I don't want to be the kind of Christian who comes to church on Sunday to pray and pay attention to God, but then walks out of the sanctuary not to think about God again until I come back next week. I can't help but make connections between God and every other aspect of my life, and as difficult and uncomfortable as this might be sometimes, I would not have it any other way.

One of the beautiful frustrations of following Jesus is that he does not let us off the hook. He didn't let himself off the hook, either, when it came to dealing with difficult and uncomfortable issues. When the leper came to him, asking him to "make him clean," it would have been easy for Jesus to turn away, pretending he had not heard the man, or to have one of his followers usher him away; but Jesus was not interested in avoiding the leper. Touching this unclean man was not something most people would have done. By touching the leper, Jesus made himself unclean, according to the religious laws of the day, but he this didn't stop him. He was willing to do whatever it took to bring healing to the man, even if it made his own situation more tenuous. As followers of Jesus, we have to step outside of our comfort zone more often than we stay safely within it. We have to be willing to take on situations that are unjust. We have to be willing to confront the roots of brokenness and bring our own hand to heal whatever we can.

What would it take to bring healing to this world? What would it take to turn the tide on human over-development so that we can hold out some hope for the future of the planet? Some folks will tell you that people like you and I can't possibly make a difference. They would say that one or two or even a hundred people who care about something are not able to speak loudly enough to drown out the voices of those with vested interests in maintaining the status quo. In the face of this, it would be easier to step back and stop thinking so hard about global warming, about the environmental crisis, about pollution, about toxins, even about our faith, truthfully. It is hard to live by tapping into the depths all the time, it is hard to keep thinking about what Jesus might do in a situation or about what your faith requires of you. But reaching into our faith and making it grow is what we need to do, if we want that faith to have the resilience to sustain us. For our faith to be true and strong, we need to speak up, to act out, to make a difference in any way we can. We need to bring our faith to bear on our lives and in the world.

Christ Jesus, you reached out your healing hands to embrace all who were hurting. You took the brokenness of this world upon yourself and went to the cross, allowing yourself to be crucified. Guide us into caring deeply enough about the world around us that we, too reach out in order to bring healing. Show us how we might begin to heal some of the brokenness that is so evident today. May we live by our faith from our hearts and not just by our words. Amen.

Below is info from Interfaith Power and Light who sponsored the Preach-in today.

Global Warming? Why Should I Care?

The world's scientists agree – the Earth is warming and human activity is driving that change. The emissions from burning fossil fuels, such as oil and coal, are creating a layer of carbon dioxide in our atmosphere that acts like a blanket, trapping heat. This past year tied as the 10th hottest year since record-keeping began in 1850. Arctic sea ice, a barometer for the entire planet, has shrunken to a record low volume,

according to the World Meteorological Organization. Climate destabilization is contributing to record droughts and famine, wildfires, monster snowstorms, unprecedented flooding and dangerous changes in ocean chemistry. However, there is good news on the horizon. The EPA is working to enforce the Clean Air Act with new safeguards that will cut dangerous emissions, protect our health, and heal the climate. These new protections will also save thousands of lives and prevent pollution-aggravated illnesses, if the U.S. Congress does not interfere.

How is it a Faith Issue?

All major religions have a mandate to care for God's Creation. Now that we know global warming pollution is compromising our future, we have a duty to act. All people of faith share a moral obligation to care for the poor and vulnerable. These are the people who are least able to adapt and who are most affected by the climate crisis. We must not turn our backs on the poorest or on future generations. People of faith can join forces to address climate change and build a clean energy future.

Interfaith Power & Light

A Religious Response to Global Warming
www.interfaithpowerandlight.org/preachin
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What Can I Do?

- The most important thing you can do right now is let your elected representatives hear from you. We've made it easy by providing Valentine postcards to your senators urging them to oppose any efforts in Congress to undermine the EPA and implementation of the Clean Air Act. The EPA and the Clean Air Act help to safeguard the climate, human health and the environment.
- Follow up with a phone call. The congressional switchboard phone number is 202-224-3121. Ask for your senators' offices, and then let them know that as a person of faith you oppose any effort to weaken or delay the EPA's ability to enforce the Clean Air Act. Ask them to stand with the people of their state, not polluters.
- Sign the Clean Air Promise if it is available in your congregation. Be counted as a person of faith for clean air. Promise to support clean air policies and other protections that have been recommended by the EPA to safeguard our air quality and climate.
- If you would like to do more, work with your state Interfaith Power & Light to help your congregation and your family conserve energy and become more efficient. This will help reduce global warming pollution and save money on your energy bills. IPL is working on many other programs for cool congregations. Join us at www.InterfaithPowerandLight.org.

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