

XIV Sunday after Pentecost

SAINT PAUL'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

SEPTEMBER 6, 2020

PROPER 18A

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We respectfully acknowledge that we are on the traditional land of the Coastal Salish People; the Skagit, Upper Skagit and Swinomish peoples.

There is an old story that I know. I probably picked it up in the Midwest over the years and it may have been told here at some point. To me it sums up where Ezekiel, Judah and ourselves find themselves at this time.

There was a country preacher traveling along a back road and he comes across a farmer who is just cussing and beating on a mule that would not move. The preacher walks up to the farmer and takes his arm and says this is no way to treat one of God's creatures and violence, threat and fear do not work for long. The farmer defends himself and explains that this has been going on all morning and the mule just keeps stopping. The preacher offers to work with the mule and get him to move.

The preacher approaches the mule slowly and quietly and starts to pat and stroke him. Whispering to help calm him, using all the experience he has had gained with God's creatures over the years. The mule refuses to accept any of these enticements to move and the preacher keeps trying. Eventually he steps back and looks around and finds a 2x4 which he picks up and with a mighty swing strikes the mule between the eyes. The farmer, aghast, asks why he did that? And preacher replies that the gentle approach usually works, but once in a while you have to get their attention.

Jerusalem and Judah, the territory around the city has just had its first encounter with the Babylonian 2x4. Ezekiel is a younger contemporary of Jeremiah and has

been taken to Babylon in the first exile from Jerusalem Ten years later the city will finally be destroyed. Like Jeremiah he is from a priestly family but was too young to be a priest when he was taken into exile. God appears to Ezekiel in Babylon and commissions him to preach to his people and warning him that the people will not listen. Ezekiel sees what is happening back in Jerusalem in visions and speaks to the people about the continued waywardness of Judah to the people in exile.

Word then comes that Jerusalem has fallen been destroyed and God has departed the Temple and the people finally figure out that chasing after other gods, and oppressing those who have less than they will lead to retributions: “Our transgressions and our sins weigh upon us, and we waste away because of them; how then can we live?” and God tell Ezekiel: ¹¹”Say to them, As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?” *Eze 33:10* There will follow more transgression and ignoring the prophet and we will get to the Valley of the dry bones before there is full reconciliation.

Now a word about Hebrew and early Christian prophets, They are seers. In the Bible they proclaim the word of God as it is given to them. Basically they look at what is happening around them compare that to their experiences and visioning and give a warning. Ezekiel is made a sentinel or watchman for the house of Israel. A sentinel or watchman’s job is to observe and warn of approaching dangers or armies and give warning. It is not to do something about that danger but to give warning. The taking of action falls to the leaders and people that are being warned.

Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the other prophets in the Hebrew scripture warned of following other gods and neglecting the covenant and of the care and support of neighbors. One of Jesus’ frequent prophecies has to do with irritating the Romans and warning of the destruction of the Temple for many of the same reasons that

Ezekiel and Jeremiah spoke. If you continue down this path, this will surely happen.

The thing about Ezekiel is that some of Israel, after the second 2x4, finally recognized what the prophets were warning and began to repent. That is when. God's promise: "None of the sins that they have committed shall be remembered against them; they have done what is lawful and right, they shall surely live," 33:16 and Ezekiel becomes a more pastoral prophet.

Who are the prophets in our own day? In August I heard four of them during a Provincial Deacon's Conference that took place over two days on Zoom. In many ways better than spending part of August in Phoenix. Province VIII and Province VI deacons with the support of the Diocese of Arizona put together a climate focused conference called, **Our Fragile Island Home: Protecting God's Creation.**

In the Anglican Communion we are the autonomous Province of The Episcopal Church which has nine internal provinces, subunits made up regionally of diocese. Province VIII consists of the diocese in the western third of the continental United States starting at Navajoland and including Alaska, Hawaii, and Taiwan. Province VI is the upper Midwest and western states. Because of CoVid 19 it was on Zoom and therefore really carbon friendly There were 140 participants from around the country.

The four prophets who addressed this conference were:

Dr. Katharine Hayhoe, Climate Scientist, Professor in Public Policy and Public Law at Texas Tech University and co-directs the Climate Center at Texas Tech. She is an evangelical Christian and much of what is below is based on her work.

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Marc Andrus Bishop of the Diocese of California whose climate advocacy work took him to the United Nations Climate Conferences as well as the Dakota Access Pipeline demonstrations at Standing Rock, North Dakota.

Dr. Shelia Moore Andrus who is currently facilitating development of a web-based tool for carbon tracking, to promote education, advocacy and action to address climate change in faith communities, more on this later.

The Rt. Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori, PhD, former Presiding Bishop and Primate of the The Episcopal Church, her PhD is in oceanography and works to build trust to enhance communication between the scientific and religious communities.

I would love to share all that these people had to say. But, we can talk later if you wish. They all brought their knowledge, gifts and experience to the conference and connected the theology to the science. While there is a sense of urgency for working together to respond to the threat of climate change on the carrying capacity of the planet. There is a sense that change has started and the more we work together the sooner will be the solution. This was ten hours of conference packed full and the 140 in attendance stayed until end hearing it is still possible to come together to protect the creation we have been given responsibility for.

And while individual actions around carbon usage, light bulbs, electric cars, eating lower on the food chain and less food waste are all good things it is going to take policy change, politics, on a national and global scale to curb what is happening to the climate. We need to relearn how to listen to each other. We have known about carbon dioxide and the greenhouse effect since the 1850s when Eunice Newton Foote in the US and John Tyndall in Great Britain showed that the proportion of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere would change its temperature. This not new news and there have been 2.6 million studies to back it up. We are basically adding a down comforter to the blanket, we call the atmosphere, that regulates the climate of the Earth.

The interesting thing about the human brain is that it gets a kick out of new information, maybe we are getting too much information today and not enough time to hear, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest the information we are receiving or as T. S. Elliot puts it, in *Choruses from The Rock* (1934), “Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?” Neuroscience tells us that new information, we do not agree with, we shut off. The more information, the more we resist change. The scarier the information the more we shut down and the more the information conflicts with our beliefs the more we reject it. All this leads to polarization and inaction.

Where is the good new in all this? How do we break the cycles of finger pointing and reach each other? The Yale Climate Opinion Map, <https://climatecommunication.yale.edu/visualizations-data/ycom-us/> as of September 2, 2020, for the United States and Skagit County show that majority of our neighbors are not only aware and recognize climate change as a problem and a threat, but are willing to do something about it. The survey also shows that we do not hear or talk about it. Trying to limit the statistics, I hope, the number that jump out to me are; 64% of Skagit County is worried about climate change but 41% of Skagit County and 43% of the United States feel that they are not directly affected by climate change, 30% say not at all, a real disconnect. The other numbers that catch one are 38% remember discussing climate change, at least occasionally and 29% remembering hearing about it once a month in the media. We cannot deal with what we won't talk about.

Interestingly, my health insurance called me to warn me I live in an area threatened by wild fires and that I should be sure my prescriptions are filled. Today the weather service upgraded it's fire weather watch to a fire weather warning for the entire Puget Sound basin through Wednesday. Sounds fairly direct affect to me. The 2x4 has been swinging.

Every issue we care about is affected by climate change; homelessness, hunger, drought and fires, 11,000,000 million acres in the West would have burned naturally in normal times, it is part of the ecosystem we have chosen to live in. The actual number is close to triple that because the West is so dry. Immigration and refugees, are on the move because of climate disruptions, sunny day flooding, Miami is raising their streets two feet to combat flooding. Highway 20 near Anacortes is having more tidal flooding. If you know or have met people from New Orleans, Huston or New York City then you know people who have been affected by climate change. Katharine Heyhoe has adopted the term “threat multiplier” from the military to describe climate change. Climate change increases the effect of the weather.

This is the open door for all us to hear the watchman and take action, talk about who or what is it the most important to you and where they or what is being affected by climate change. Grandchildren, fishing, skywatching, snow pack, skiing, jobs and birdwatching are all at risk. What kind of ancestors do we want to be?

Here is an easy action that is not threatening and includes the entire community. 40% of the United States carbon footprint comes from five areas that you have direct control of some or all; electricity, home heating, transportation, food and waste. There are affordable, money saving and accessible options for all five of these. To help connect on these The Episcopal Church at the 2018 General Convention passed **C008 Encourage Sustainable Choices to Combat Climate Change**. The resolution called for the Church to develop web-based carbon tracking tool such as “Sustaining Earth, Our Island Home” available to all Episcopalian and can be accessed at <https://www.sustainislandhome.org> I will send this website to the Weekly Reflections.

If you go through this website then you join The Episcopal Church, North Puget Sound and are connected to the community of Saint Paul’s so we can support each

other. It isn't difficult to navigate there is no shaming or deadlines. There can be a competitive piece, if you are bent that way, by gaining points and showing how much carbon has been saved and estimating how much money has been saved by completing the tasks as you are able. Some tasks are as simple as completing some education, lights off and light bulb changes and some are as complex as solar panels.

Paul, calls us to "Love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law." Matthew has us working on communicating with those we have disagreements with and remember the fault may not lie with them or ourselves. We may have chosen not to hear each other because our beliefs appear to be different. Do we interpret "dominion" to the point we need a 2x4 to refocus that we are meant to serve God's purposes more than our own, which prevents us from domineering all that God has put under our control?

We the people and all of creation are the Beloved Community