

Climate Change – Vulnerability, Lament and Promise

LWF Sunday 2008

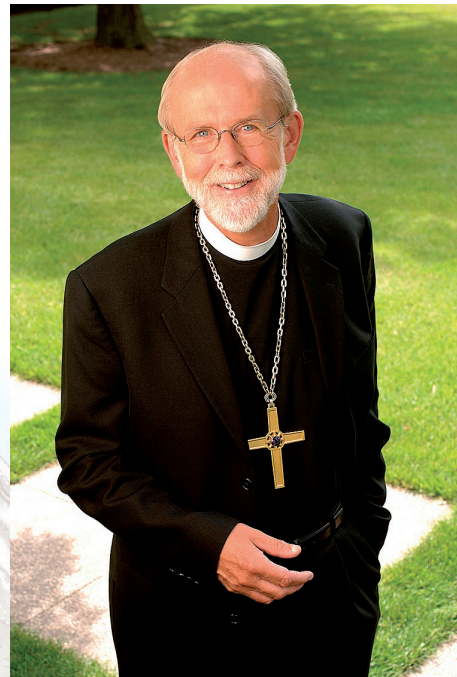
June 2008

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

God created a world of beauty and abundance for us to live in and declared it “very good” (Genesis 1:31). In return the earth and its inhabitants praise God in the very goodness of their existence. Today that life is shadowed by threats to the environment—air and water pollution, deforestation and wetland destruction, soil erosion and desertification.

Yet, God’s promise of new life in Jesus Christ also holds promise for God’s creation. Jesus Christ embodies God’s love and care for the world. Through the cross of Jesus, God reconciles heaven and earth and holds them together in Christ. God’s Holy Spirit, “the giver of life,” renews the face of the earth.

This year, as you gather for worship on LWF Sunday, I invite you to join Lutherans from the 140 member churches of the Lutheran World Federation in renewed repentance, commitment, and hope. As we sing and pray, hear the Word and proclaim it in our lives, let us live to the praise of God’s glory and for the life of God’s creation.



Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson
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Mark S. Hanson

Bishop Mark S. Hanson
LWF President

Praise, Lament and Promise

"Bangladesh has observed some changes in the climate pattern over the last few decades. Disruption of the ecosystem is taking place, mostly affecting cropping patterns and agricultural production. The livelihoods of the poor, wage laborers, marginal farmers and other socio-economic groups are becoming vulnerable to adverse effects of climate change."

Mr Kamaluddin Akbar,
RDRS Bangladesh

"Climate change or environmental crisis is a sign of cultural failures. It is a failure to submit human power to grace, and humanity to work toward the habitation of the places in which we live on terms that respect both human limits and the rest of nature. This stretches from being an environmental crisis to being an immoral and unethical injustice practiced on the land."

Rev. Alfred Chana,
Evangelical Lutheran
Church in Zambia

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

And God saw that it was good.

In the beginning was the Word.

All things came into being through him.

In the beginning God breathed into our nostrils the breath of life.

And we became living beings.

Words from Psalm 104
and responses from our times

Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, you are very great. You stretch out the heavens like a tent, you set the beams of your chambers on the waters, you make the clouds your chariot, you ride on the wings of the wind, you make the winds your messengers, fire and flame your ministers.

God, in times of climate change the waters, clouds and winds have become frightening to us. We have lost our sense of direction, we have lost the attentiveness to listen to your message.

Come, God, send your message anew to us.

You set the earth on its foundations, so that it shall never be shaken. You cover it with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains. At your rebuke they flee; at the sound of your thunder they take to flight. You set a boundary that they may not pass, so that they might not again cover the earth.

God, floods, thunderstorms and earthquakes have shaken the earth. We lament the lives of women, men and children who have died. The destruction and disorder make us tremble.

Come, God, set the earth anew on its foundations.

You make springs gush forth in the valleys; they flow between the hills, giving drink to every wild animal; the wild asses quench their thirst. By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation; they sing among the branches. From your lofty abode you water the mountains; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.

God, the integrity of creation is endangered. Clean water has become a commodity, the land is exploited, and the air is polluted. In the noise of big cities, the singing of the birds is silenced.

Come, God, let your earth see and taste the fruit of your work anew.

You cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for people to use, to bring forth food from the earth, and wine to gladden the human heart, oil to make the face shine, and bread to strengthen the human heart.

God, we confess that we have turned away from your life-giving energy. We use what we can get as if it was simply at our disposal. We assume: "Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die." (Isa 22:13; 1 Cor 15:32). We do not know what it means to be human.

Come, God, renew our hearts with true gladness and strength, let our face shine.

These all look to you to give them their food in due season; when you give to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things. When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground. Bless the Lord, O my soul. Praise the Lord!

Some Biblical Perspectives

“As we come to a clearer understanding of the ways we contribute to the ecological crisis and discover our resistances to change, the various understandings of the gospel in the New Testament will empower us to address our human sinfulness. If we seek to overcome our environmental problems out of guilt or fear or anxiety about ourselves, we will probably only make matters worse. Rather, transformation needs to come from the good news of God’s redemption and liberation. We need to be fed by the grace and compassion and joy of God for the choices and changes that may be required of us in the future as we face the environmental crises.”

*David Rhoads*¹

Genesis 1 / Job 38f.

“We need to challenge the popular belief that God’s primary reason for creating the earth was to provide humans with a home and a resource. Rather, earth exists as something good, in and of itself. In the first chapter of Genesis, before God created humans, God discovered that the world was good and declared it so. God took Job on a journey through the various realms of the cosmos and challenged him to grasp the wonders of creation operating quite independently of human interests and beyond human ken.”

*Norman Habel and Cynthia Moe-Lobeda*²

Jeremiah 5:22-28

“In this passage Jeremiah links ecological disaster and exile with unfaithfulness to the laws and worship of Yahweh. When the Hebrews worshipped Yahweh they worshipped the spiritual source of created and moral order. They honored this order when they followed the moral guidelines in their revealed law for care of the land, respect for their fellow citizens and compassion and justice for the poor. When they abandoned

the worship of Yahweh, they began to worship the objects of material power which they had made from created things, and so idolized the creature instead of the creator. [...] As inequality and oppression grew in their society so domination and destruction came to characterize the human relation to the land and other species.”

*Michael S. Northcott*³

Colossians 1:15-20

“These verses sing out their triumphant and alluring music between two huge and steady poles—‘Christ,’ and ‘all things.’ [...] For it is here declared that the sweep of God’s restorative action in Christ is no smaller than the six-times repeated *Ta panta*. Redemption is the name for this will, this action, and this concrete Man who is God with us and God for us—and all things are permeable to his cosmic redemption because all things subsist in him. He comes to all things not as a stranger, for he is the first-born of all creation, and in him all things were created.”

*Joseph A. Sittler*⁴

Revelation 21:1-6

“Revelation 21 fulfills people’s longings for a dwelling with God not with a so-called ‘rapture’ or snatching of Christians up into the air, as some modern-day apocalypticists claim, but rather with God’s decent down to earth. God will take up residence and ‘dwell’ (Greek: *skene, skenoo*) with people. This Greek word for ‘dwelling,’ repeated twice as both noun and verb, is the same word as in the Gospel of John (‘The Word became flesh and dwelt among us,’ Jn 1:14).”

*Barbara Rossing*⁵

³ *A Moral Climate. The Ethics of Global Warming* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2007), p. 13.

⁴ “Called to Unity”, in *The Ecumenical Review* 14/2 (1962), p. 177.

⁵ *For the Healing of the World. Assembly Study Book*, LWF Tenth Assembly, Winnipeg, 2003, p. 123.

“Climate change is not just about addressing environmental degradation; it is also about fighting poverty and providing for human security. [...] The paradox of climate change—that those who contributed least to the problem are suffering most—means that adaptation funding should be seen as compensation rather than aid.”

Bishop Dr Wolfgang Huber, Germany; Archbishop Rowan Williams, United Kingdom; and Archbishop Anders Wejryd, Sweden

“Over the last few years, hurricanes and rainfall have increased in Nicaragua, making people especially in the rural areas more vulnerable. Agricultural production is also directly affected, thereby threatening basic food security. Women of the Nicaraguan Lutheran Church of Faith and Hope (Iglesia Luterana de Nicaragua ‘Fe y Esperanza’—ILFE) have begun to reflect seriously on the connection between climate change, disasters and food security.”

Ms Zelmira Gamboa, ILFE gender desk

¹ David Rhoads, “Reading the New Testament in the Environmental Age” on: www.webofcreation.org

² *For the Healing of the World. Assembly Study Book*, LWF Tenth Assembly, Winnipeg, 2003, pp. 234–235.

Intercessions

God of life and love,

Out of your love you created the world, out of your love you continue creating. Every creature is a sign of your love, every being a symbol of your grace. Yet the shadow of darkness and death makes your creation groan.

We pray for those who experience the brokenness of creation, the disruption of life-giving relations. Connect us again to your creative, loving power that we may live out of your love, that we may turn from false paths and walk in your ways.

God of justice and peace,

You came into this world to bring peace on earth and just relationships among all peoples. Yet injustice cries to the heavens, violence destroys the earth. Climate change starkly displays the inequities: Those who destroy least, are suffering most.

We pray for those who are most vulnerable. Extreme droughts and heavy floods endanger the crops of subsistence farmers. Cyclones and earthquakes suddenly bring whole regions into a state of emergency. Enable us to act as one human family sharing the responsibility to provide food and shelter for all. Call us out of our self-centered worries and queries and grant us this sense of belonging together, one human communion in justice and peace.

God of creativity and care,

The coming of your spirit at Pentecost brings into being a creative, caring Christian communion.

We pray for creativity and care so that we constructively deal with the effects of climate change. Grant us good ideas to find new solutions for ecological problems, help us to make courageous efforts to abandon life-destroying practices. Enable us

to understand what it means to be human. Accompany women, men and children who care for their families so there might be enough food, shelter and care for everyone.

God of hope and healing,

The parables that Jesus told of your kingdom enable us to see your purpose for this earth, the integrity of creation and humanity in your will.

We pray for all who feel helpless and paralyzed in the face of the complex reality of climate change. Give us a clear mind and a faithful heart to see what we need to do, and to know when to trust your promise that you will not abandon your beloved creation but give hope and healing. We pray for all generations and the generations to come.

Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.

Great Thanksgiving

It is indeed right and salutary that we should at all times and in all places offer thanks and praise to you, holy God, source of healing and life. You brought wholeness into creation through the caress of your hands and the breath of your mouth. In this intimate moment of creation we join the song of fish and birds, trees and flowers, humans and angels:

We sing the "Holy, Holy, Holy"

Holy God, holy imaginative God, you set your tree of life in the center,

enlivening the barrenness, breathing spirit across the dust. You created wholeness. Holy God, holy compassionate God, you saw our brokenness and planted once again in the center the tree of life, the cross from which Christ rose to save and heal us. You reclaimed wholeness. Holy Christ, holy healing Christ.

[Words of Institution]

Holy God, holy generous God, we remember Christ's life and death, his resurrection and ascension which renew the face of the earth. We give back to you what you have given us in creation,

bread and wine, wheat and grapes. We wait for Christ to come in glory.

Holy God, holy Spirit God, shape us together in this earth of ..., in the soil and rivers, in the sunshine and wind, in animal and human faces. Send your Spirit that we may share your bounty with the whole creation. Help us cry out with one voice for re-creation.

To you, O God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be all honor and glory, now and forever!

*Adapted from:
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