

Caring For God's Groaning Creation

As I write this article, I am sitting on my patio. It is, in some ways, a beautiful fall day—the temperature is just cool enough for a sweater. The sun is shining, but it is hard to tell, because of the haze that fills the sky. This haze has made its way here all the way from the west coast, a sign of another fire season that has burned beyond our expectations and fears. Air pollution indexes from Oregon the week that I write this are above 500—this is the same air pollution index as the one my husband and I experienced when visiting New Delhi, India last November at the height of their field-burning. Blazes continue to become more frequent and more intense as time passes, a sign of the groaning of creation in response to our failure as people called to serve and care for it (Genesis 2:15). Wildfires are not the only sign of the earth's pain, either—natural disaster, changed weather patterns, and so many more symptoms of hurt and destruction are evident in our world today.

Care for our climate is one of the core convictions of our faith. It is profoundly biblical—care for the earth is, in fact, one of our very first directives from God. It is also, thus, one of our first failures as broken and sinful people. Conversation about climate change has been rife with division and dispute in our country and world for many years, which is tragic. We have let our own sinful tendency toward division keep us for too long from truth-telling and discernment regarding how to repent for this failure of ours and how to turn anew toward faithful practices of stewardship of God's good creation.

Our Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, has helpful words for this. In fact, we can be proud that our denomination has been at the forefront of theological conversations about our climate for a long time. We voted on and published our denomination's social statement on climate, titled *Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice* back in 1993 (now 27 years ago). This statement is a gem, and I commend it to you for your reading if you find the time (it is only twelve (12) pages): <https://tinyurl.com/yymfv7v>. (If you'd like a printed copy of this statement, please contact our office.) As Lutherans we take the scriptural witness seriously, and the entire statement is based on scriptural reference (cited throughout). The main assertion of the document is this: we have been entrusted by God with a role as stewards of the earth, we have fallen short, and we are called to repentance and hope in response.

It is easy for us to respond to conversations about the climate with despair and anguish, feeling as though there is no meaningful impact that we can make as people or as congregations. This fear is valid, and is a sign of our very real concern about God's creation, but our faith moves us instead toward hope. This hope is informed by the power of the resurrection, and moves us to act in ways that can usher in God's dream in this world. The following is the conclusion of *Caring for Creation*: "Given the power of sin and evil in this world, as well as the complexity of environmental problems, we know we can find no "quick fix"—whether technological, economic, or spiritual. A sustainable environment requires a sustained effort from everyone. The prospect of doing too little too late leads many people to despair. But as people of faith, captives of hope, and vehicles of God's promise, we face the crisis. We claim the promise of "a new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation 21:1), and join in the Offertory Prayer (Lutheran Book of Worship, page 109): "Blessed are you, O Lord our God, maker of all things. Through your goodness you have blessed us with these gifts. With them we offer ourselves to your service and dedicate our lives to the care and redemption of all that you have made, for the sake of him who gave himself for us, Jesus Christ our Lord." Amen.

In Peace, Pastor Marissa