

Proper 15 C
August 15, 2010
St. John's Episcopal Church
The Rev. Susan J. Latimer

I have been an avid watcher of the Weather Channel since we first got cable in Atlanta. There I relied on the Weather Channel to warn us about tornados, high pollen counts, and dangerous air quality. When we moved to Maine, The Weather Channel took on an even more serious role in my life. It was helpful to be forwarned about winter temperatures of 20 below zero, windchills of 40 below. On those days I drove the kids to the bus stop, even though it was just down the street, so that they could stay in the heated car until the bus showed up. (On those days you dressed in as many layers as you had, and moved quickly from house to car to office.) In Maine, the weather could be a matter of life and death. Had I stayed in Southern California I may have never gotten into the Weather Channel – for weather there is so predictable it is boring!! Morning clouds and fog, afternoon sun, high of 78 degrees.

Lately I have been riveted to the Weather Channel, watching the heat advisories and severe storm warnings over much of this country and Europe.

Talk to someone about the weather – and that does seem to be a popular topic of conversation lately – and they are likely to suggest that the wild weather patterns we have noticed over the past few years are a sign of climate change.

Whether you call it “global warming” or “climate change” – it is becoming clearer to many of us that our world is going through tremendous changes.

How do we interpret the earth and sky in the present day
– and what does that have to do with our faith tradition?

We are in an ecological crisis.

We are losing species of creatures on this planet at an alarming rate

– and more than any other time in our recorded history.

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“...researchers are doing the numbers, and saying, yes, if present trends continue, a mass extinction is very likely underway.” PBS – evolution

169 mammal species are listed as critically endangered.

The background level of extinction known from the [fossil](#) record is about one [species](#) per million species per year, or between 10 and 100 species per year (counting all organisms such as insects, [bacteria](#), and [fungi](#), not just the large [vertebrates](#) we are most familiar with). In contrast,

“estimates are that we may now be losing 27,000 species per year to extinction from tropical forests alone”. PBS – Evolution

The day before we left California, Hugh and I and my mom visited the San Diego Wild Animal Park and saw a Northern White Rhino. While on the tram tour we found out that this rhino is totally extinct in the wild – and one of only seven left in captivity. I left the tour with a sad and heavy heart.

Many scientists predict that unless the world drastically reduces carbon emissions now – right now – in the present moment, month, year

- the mounting emissions will push the planet over the edge
- into a spiral of warming that will be impossible for us to stop.

It doesn't help matters that we are also in tremendous economic crisis.

It seems that we as a nation have been like the ostrich – burying our head in the sand – ignoring this growing ecological crisis, or denying its existence, or claiming that we cannot act because it would cost too much money, for far too long.

In the midst of such overwhelming global issues it is easy for us to fall into despair – to give up – to think that nothing we do could possibly change things.

But that is precisely where our faith comes in.

Never despair, says God. Always hope.
There is always something we can do.

Barbara Kingsolver – Animal Vegetable Mineral –

As a nation we consume 400 gallons of oil a year per person simply for **agriculture** - and most of this for transportation of food. Most food in this country travels an average of 1,500 miles to reach local supermarkets or restaurants.

If every person in the US ate just one meal a week of locally, organically raised meat and produce we would reduce our country's oil consumption by over 1.1 million barrels of oil every week!!

Think of all the oil saved each year, just by the existence of the Manna Meal garden!

This is why the community gardening movement can be a radical force for change. We need healthy, affordable foods in every community – especially impoverished communities. Right here in Charleston, an initiative is underway to put a community garden in the East End.

Of course, this is not nearly enough. But it is a start.
And if we start here we may be inspired to continue.

How do we interpret the earth and sky in the present day
– and what does that have to do with our faith tradition?

The Kingdom of God realized on this earth has to include all of God's Creation. Surely God weeps every time a species disappears forever. Surely God weeps every time humanity makes selfish choices today that will foul the earth for generations to come.

In today's difficult Gospel passage, Jesus tells the disciples that divided loyalties will by necessity create divided families. Those that put God first are likely to have conflicts with others in their household who have different priorities. The ultimate vision of God's kingdom is peace – but the journey to its fulfillment will require conflict and sacrifice.

The journey to our earth's wholeness will not happen without conflict and much sacrifice from all of us, particularly those who benefit from the way things are now – the way we have been doing things – from corporate agriculture to chemical companies to transportation and energy companies, to stockholders in all of the above, and the list goes on. It will require changes in habits – habits of buying and habits of consumption.

Jesus came to tell us that the Kingdom of God is near. We have to work with him to make it a reality on this earth – for people and for all of God's good Creation – the polar bears and the rhinos, the whales and the manatees, for all creatures great and small that God has created and we must protect.