

Karen Hollis | Oct 4, 2020  
Deuteronomy 11:13-17 | Hosea 4:1-3 | Colossians 1:15-20  
Season of Creation 4: Sin & God's Recreation  
Sermon Title:

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be reflections of your word to us today, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen

I think sin in the context of creation is a difficult topic for us in the age of climate change. We are living with the undeniable truth that the way humans have lived for the last 100 years is causing the global climate to change such that it is more difficult to sustain life. We live in a culture that was designed to oppose nature . . . advances in technology since the industrial revolution required more and more natural resources, which brought more modern conveniences. And now we're riding this machine that simultaneously supports the norms of our lives and is destroying the planet . . . and it seems like there is no way to get off.

Theologian Sallie McFague writes: "we do not have to commit active sins in order to contribute to [this] . . . All that we well-off North Americans have to do is to live like everyone else around us is living. The Christian tradition calls this the sin of omission

rather than the sin of commission, and in many ways, it is more insidious because we don't feel we have done anything bad."<sup>1</sup>

We know we're good people; we live with awareness of our impact on the planet, we have learned to recycle, we are mindful of our gas consumption, we have heat pumps, we're water conscious. We are living with awareness that the choices we make matter. We are still a part of this machine that feels unstoppable. We do what we can - but is it enough to make a difference?

Sometimes . . . like when a new climate change report comes out, we just want to look away and give up in despair<sup>2</sup> . . . because the problem is so massive and costly and seemingly unsurmountable.

There aren't clear, easy answers, and yet there are responses to despair. God's recreation is a process of renewal: through death to new life. God didn't design creation to sustain itself through life alone, rather composting and renewing. Death is a part of this cycle, as devastating as it can be. The kinds of deaths we associate with climate change are species, habitat, people. In order to heal the earth, there are other kinds of death we probably need to

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<sup>1</sup> McFague, Sallie. *A New Climate for Theology*. 2008. 153.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 157.

face . . . like the things we need to let go of in order to make a change. We got to this point because of a series of human choices, as humans adapted to progress, as we made incremental shifts to our lives. Incremental change is still a powerful tool at our disposal to now, with awareness, to make further lifestyle adaptations to intentionally turn us in the direction we want to go.

Sally McFague writes: “When I want to turn away in despair and give up, I am brought up short by a remark by Dorothy Day, who spent 40 years in one of the poorest areas of New York City. Of people who called her a saint, she said, ‘Don’t dismiss me so easily’ – meaning, *Don’t let yourself off the hook so fast*. She claimed that to live as she did does not require great talent or courage, but mostly hard work. ‘I have done nothing well,’ she said. ‘But I have done what I could.’ . . . People are not born . . . saintly – they become so through small, daily, continual changes in behaviour and insight. Seeing differently and behaving differently appear for those most successful at it to be a cyclical process of small but persevering decisions.”<sup>3</sup>

The cycle in Christian theology is centered on Jesus Christ. He not only is the image of the invisible God, as Colossians proclaims, he is also the image of God’s recreation; he lived, died and was risen. He is the image of hope offered to us when we are deep in the Holy Saturday of climate change. The day of waiting . . . that can last for years. He is the symbol of the resurrection that God still promises when we feel like we’re nowhere. He is the beginning, the one who goes before us, who reminds us to ask: what is possible now? What is possible now? He goes before us and we follow, remembering in him that death isn’t the end, but it is part of the process . . . even from of the most painful and disorienting of deaths, new life will invite us into new places. In Christ all things hold together . . . he holds us in our grief and resistance, in our fear; he is there in the emptiness, spaciousness of Saturday; he is that persistent force of renewal that presses into what is possible now.

Every time we make an adjustment in our lives, we are engaging in this process of death to new life, making the change required to heal the earth from the ground up. We have the power to create change and influence further change; it is not a magical,

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

saintly effort, it's just **doing** the next step, then the next, then the next. Humans have an amazing capacity to effect change on the earth – perhaps that is why God gave us responsibility in the first place.

At the 2018 Synod meeting of our diocese, we committed to eliminating single-use plastics in our churches. The Synod office is thus asking us to do this by 2023. As we discern our way forward on this, and figure out how to adjust the practices of the church to align with this commitment, there will be an inevitable impact on our own lives. ‘The church is taking these steps . . . I wonder if I could make a similar change at home?’ The sum of small changes that effect more changes becomes a creation-healing movement that has already begun.