

Prayer: God of the least of these, help us to understand that what we do impacts our neighbors. May we find ways to take care of your creation in more purposeful ways. Inspire us to be co-creators and restore your creation where needed. Helps us hear your voice as we grow in partnership to take care of your beautiful creation. Amen.

Hello, my name is Beth Monke and I'm a Luther Seminary student and I attend Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Fergus Falls, Minnesota. And I would like to talk a little bit today about Psalm 146. Especially verses 5-8 which read, "Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob. Whose hope is in their Lord their God. who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever; who executes justice for the oppressed and who gives food to the hungry."

So Psalm 146 is a prayer of praise for God's faithfulness and help and what I would like to focus on today is an area in which our species and all of creation is in great need of help. This is the conundrum of climate change, which impacts seas, rivers, crops trees, animals, humans, and all of what God created in the beginning. My climate story intertwines with my faith story and starts back in 2006 when my family took a vacation to Holden Village, which is a beautiful Lutheran retreat center in the Cascade mountains of Washington. It's also host to some of the most renowned Lutheran theologians in the world, and when we were there in 2006, I had the fortune of being able to attend a workshop by Dr. Barbara Rossing of Yale Divinity School. And the workshop was entitled "The Impact of Climate Change on the World's Poor."

In her presentation, Dr. Rossing emphasized that the people who have done the least to cause the climate crisis will, and are, suffering the most from it. Rossing has written in one of her essays on climate that the cruelest injustice for communities of people living on the edge of climate change is this: the poorest and most vulnerable people of the world, people living near the tropics and polar regions, pay the highest price. Those who did the least to cause the crisis are the first victims. Along with this, the world's poor have fewer resources for relocation. And many lives have already been lost to hunger, drowning, heat stroke and devastating tornadoes and hurricanes. Poor women who are forced to migrate often end up in servitude, or in the sex trades. In her book, "Saving Us" by Katharine Hayhoe, she states that it is estimated that climate change could displace as many as a billion people by mid-century.

It's important to note that in the 1980's, billion-dollar weather events occurred about every 82 days. And now billion-dollar weather events are occurring about every 18 days. And this has a devastating impact on the world's poor. As Christians in the United States, we must be willing to look into the mirror and recognize our role in the devastation of God's creation.

The famous Catholic theologian, Elizabeth Johnson, has written that every year 20% of the earth's people in the richest nations use 75% of the world's resources and produce 80% of the world's waste. As Americans, we are about 5% of the world's population and historically we have produced about 20% of the heat trapping gases responsible for climate change.

It is not enough to take mission trips to poor communities after devastating floods or hurricanes, although this is a good thing to do, but we must also grapple with the complicity in this problem that is ravaging our seas, wildlife and human beings. Psalm 146 reminds us that God made all of creation. This passage tells us that God made heaven and earth, the seas and all that is in them. In Genesis 1:28, God gives us marching orders that we have dominion over all that's been created. But in this, God entrusts us to take care of God's creation because we are intricately intertwined.

Creation was expertly designed for sustenance, not for destruction. For instance, when we breathe out CO₂, the trees inhale CO₂, and as the trees exhale oxygen, we inhale oxygen.

Our bodies are made up of the water that God created. Indeed, 60% of the human body is water. The seas that this verse discusses are filled with sustenance for the world. It's estimated that 3 billion out of the world's people rely on fish for their sustenance. How amazing is this creation that God has made? Psalm 146 reminds us what God does to bring us hope. God grants us, through His glorious creation, all that we need for sustenance. And God executes justice for the oppressed and gives food for the hungry. But how can God do that if we're the ones standing in the way? Matthew 25 reminds us that we are the hands and feet of God in this world for the poor and oppressed. As we have done it to the least of these, we have done it to God. Again, we see how we are all intertwined - God, and all of creation.

The problem with climate change is that it is overwhelming and it's scary. Research shows that one of the reasons we are not acting fast enough is that people shut down due to fear and feeling helpless at such a daunting task. However, Psalm 146 gives us hope. There is nothing that we cannot accomplish if we trust in God and look to God for guidance. God will and is showing people the way to live once again sustainably on this planet. In 2022, 93% of proposed new utility projects are wind and solar projects. And although we don't blindly put our trust in world leaders, thousands of Christians and non-Christians alike have lobbied congress on climate issues. And because of this, there are now incentives for solar power, heat pumps and electric vehicles.

On an individual level, we know that by reducing our consumption of meat, we can make a huge difference to our planet. Industrial production of meat takes a huge toll on the environment and it uses an enormous amounts of resources like land, crops, water, and energy while producing a lot of CO₂. Even things like having a meatless Monday or reducing your portion sizes, buying grass fed beef; these are all things that can make a difference. Composting your leftover food also reduces methane from landfills, which is the most potent of greenhouse gases. Our God is the God of creation and justice. and Jesus told us that we are the children of that mighty God. God has blessed us with hands and minds to be God's hands in this world to bring justice to all of God's creation.

What is God whispering in your ear today about your relationship to creation?