

A Biblical Reflection on Faith and Climate Change Action

A Preamble for the EMO Fossil Fuel Divestment Resolution

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1)

“The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world and all who live in it.” (Psalm 24:1)

Jesus tells us the greatest commandment is this: “Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” The manifestation of the Lord in this world is the Lord's creation, this round earth on which we dwell and all that lives over, upon, and within it – so to love the Lord with all our parts and powers is to love His manifestation below, above and all around us. This love calls us to prophetic witness against the destruction of God's good creation (Genesis 1:31), not only for our own sakes, but for our collective children, perhaps the most important of our neighbors in this respect.

Continuing, Jesus reminds us that “The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself.” Through the parable in Luke 10, Jesus reminds us that “neighbor” includes especially those we are least likely to love and to respect, just as Matthew 25 reminds us that acts of kindness and support to the least of our brethren are ministry to Christ himself and failure to fulfill those acts is a repudiation of Christ himself.

Given this call to love the creation and its inhabitants, and in these times in which the very existence of God's creation is threatened – and certainly the existence of many of our neighbors upon it – the words of the prophets ring with unexpected resonance and urgency in our own time:

“Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says: My anger and my wrath will be poured out on this place – on man and beast, on the trees of the field and the crops of your land and it will burn and be quenched.” Jeremiah 7:20

“Despair you farmers, wail you vine growers, grieve for the wheat and the barley, the harvest of the field is destroyed,

The vine is dried up and the fig tree is withered. The pomegranate, the palm and the apple tree – all the trees of the field – are dried up.

Surely the people's joy is withered away.

How the cattle moan! The herds mill about because they have no pasture, even the flocks of sheep are suffering.

To you, Lord, I call for fire has devoured the pastures in the wilderness and flames have burned up all the trees of the field.

Even the wild animals pant for you; the streams of water have dried up and fire has devoured the pastures in the wilderness.

Blow the trumpet in Zion! Sound the alarm on my holy hill!” Joel 1:11-2:1a

“I looked for someone among them would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found no one.” Ezekiel 22:30-31

It is not too late. The people of God can indeed sound the trumpet, can stand in the gap on behalf of the land so that it will not be destroyed. The call is urgent, but the task is huge, daunting, and may give rise to hopelessness and paralysis. But there is a blessing, a hope beyond all despair: with every prophecy of desolation and destruction, there is given a promise.

“As the rain and snow come down from heaven and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. Instead of the thornbush will grow the juniper, and instead of the briars the myrtle will grow. This will be for the Lord' renown, for an everlasting sign that will endure forever.” Isaiah 55:10-13

“Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad, let the sea resound and all that is in it. Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Let all the trees of the forest sing for joy. Let all creation rejoice before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness.” Psalm 96: 11-13

As Paul reminds us (1 Corinthians 12: 4-31, Ephesians 4: 7-16, Romans 12:3-8), the people of God are the body of Christ in this world. We are his instruments: the hands, the feet, the voices of prophecy and persuasion of the One who sends us. The voice of God's righteous judgment is spoken through us. Let us be faithful to that call, for the consequences of inattention will be severe, more severe than the seeming security of inaction.

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking for your own interests but each of you for the interests of others. In your relationships with others, have the same mind as Christ Jesus.” Philippians 2: 3-5

Let it be so. With the mind of Christ, in the justice-seeking spirit of the ancient prophets, may we go forward boldly and humbly to do his saving work on and for our planet home that has been entrusted to our care for our children, for all the generations of humanity and for all of life.