

Sermon TUMC - September 12, 2021

Season of Creation: Wisdom cries out

Proverbs 1:20-33, Psalm 19

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As Peter has told us, we are embarking on a short preaching series called The Season of Creation. This is in line with an ecumenical effort to invite churches to reflect theologically on our place and our possible influence over this planet where we live (seasonofcreation.org). As we usually do at TUMC, we'll put our own spin on it as members of the Preaching Team interact with scripture each week and have this as our guiding theme.

Here is how the organizers of Season of Creation state it's purpose

We regard the Earth as our home, and "celebrate the integral web of relationships that sustain the wellbeing of the Earth."

"We hope that this Season of Creation renews our baptismal call to care and sustain this ecological turning so that life may flourish, and all creatures may find their place to flourish in our common home."

I don't know about you, but I'm not sure that my baptism ever said anything about care for the planet. And that gives me great pause, to reflect what was implied in my commitment about how I walk within my ecosystem. Perhaps we need to reflect on that a bit more. Historically humans have seen ourselves in a position above Creation, in domination of the elements and that most certainly needs to shift.

In a Season of Creation we have an opportunity to question many aspects of how our faith and ethics interact with the ecological state of affairs in our world.

Ecological crisis is increasingly a matter of justice and conflict as well, and thus a matter of concern to us as people of peace. Humanity already fights wars over natural resources (mostly oil) though we like to disguise it as fighting about other things (including religion).

This weekend marks 20 years since 9/11 and the spectacle of when two airplanes flew into the World Trade Center in Manhattan. And the aftermath was

a foil for another protracted war that killed so many more and from which we are still gathering its poisoned fruit in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

There have been and continue to be other tragedies adding up around the world, and many of them are fuelled by changing ecological factors. People who know about wars predict that within a growing climate crisis future conflicts will be about access to water. And that too gives me pause.

Worship services are not really a place to unpack climate change in a fulsome way— and anyway I am ill equipped to do so. There are many other places to gain knowledge, educate ourselves and to engage. One of them, Shannon told us about (<https://fortheloveofcreation.ca/>).

And so I urge you to use this season of creation as an opportunity to educate yourself and to engage with the matter of how we related to Creation as people of faith. I'll remind you that Melana has an effort underway called Project Neutral and you can ask her more about that. There is also an Anabaptist Creation Care Network (<https://mennocreationcare.org/>), Kairos Canada (<https://www.kairoscanada.org/renewing-the-oikos-of-god>), and many other places to find support from a faith perspective.

Yet our worship and our preaching certainly *are* a place to bring our anxieties and fears and confessions about climate change. They are a place to reflect on how we understand God in the midst of all this and how we live our lives faithfully to God's vision. We may also lament the state of things and find solidarity in how we will respond to the crisis. This is how we will use this Season of Creation.

Before I go further, I'd like to talk about the use of the word "Creation." Unfortunately in our North American context it can bring up negative connotations related to "creationism" which is a science-denying literal reading of the first chapters of Genesis. The belief that a person called God made our universe out of nothing in literally 7 days, with no account for evolution, big bangs, dinosaurs, galaxies, black holes, quarks or geological evidence. Nor an anthropological understanding of how stories and myths form people and how they function in a culture.

I do not wish to enter that particular quagmire from the pulpit. Only to clarify that concept of Creation is a narrative that shapes us in the Judeo-Christian tradition, so we will use that term in its theological context. Our scriptures have at least two, possibly three narratives of how our world came into being. It describes a

generative and sustaining force behind the emergence of the natural world we live in. We call it God, the Divine, the Lord, the Life Energy, the Creator, the Eternal One, Wisdom, Sophia. We have responsibility for the creative energy that iGod's image in us carries. We'll talk about that as our theme evolves.

I should say, just in case there's any doubt, that we also respect the facts of science. You see, science and faith are not in competition, they just speak in different languages in trying to understand how things hang together. And you don't have to choose between believing in God or trusting in science.

This week I listened to a podcast from CMU, called So What?¹ It quoted Dr. Katharine Hayhoe. She proposed that Faith and Science are two sides of the same coin. In a clever twist on Hebrews 11 she talks about how faith is believing in what is unseen then science is believing in what is observed. [That is not a direct quote, but the general idea. I commend the podcast to you, even though I don't quite agree with everything she said.] (<https://media.cmu.ca/so-what-climate-science-and-faith>)

So now that I've explained what we're up to, let us turn for a bit to our Proverbs passage. [I confess that it was hard for me not to hear this in relation to vaccinations, but that is not how we are going to apply it here! See what the Spirit says to you through this passage in Proverbs.]

"In this passage [that Linda read to us], Wisdom, believed by many to represent the ever searching, ever calling, ever challenging Spirit of God is personified. Wisdom shows up in the places where human beings live their lives. She shows up in busy streets. She shows up in the public square. She shows up in the bustling intersections. She shows up with a challenging question – "Is anyone out there listening to me? She shows up with a stern warning – "To ignore wisdom is to choose destruction." She shows up with a compelling invitation "those who listen to me will be blessed."²

Elaine T. James points out that "The book of Proverbs features two loud women. Both of them stand in public places, making noise. Both of them are articulate and shrewd as they persuade and seduce passersby. Both of them are disruptive. Of course, these are not real women. These two personifications

¹ <https://media.cmu.ca/cat/audio/so-what>

² H. James Hopkins, Homiletical Perspective Proper 19, Feasting on the Word, Year B Vol 1, p. 51

function as moral emblems of vice and foolishness, on the one hand, and virtue and wisdom, on the other.” The texts oversimplify things in a binary world view for the sake of memorable clarity.³ Which is to say that we need to be careful in applying this directly to our perceptions of who God is and how God functions in our world.

“The greater part of Proverbs 1 focuses on the consequences of ignoring wisdom. This is part of a pragmatic worldview that understands the links between cause and effect.

The author reflects that “a parallel might be drawn to the global ecological crisis. The proportions are vast, and we are indeed being struck with ‘storm’ and ‘whirlwind’ (verse 27), with more natural consequences to follow if we do not act. How long will we continue to ignore wisdom? How long will we refuse to listen to indigenous voices protesting new pipelines? How long will we shut down, ignore, or obscure the findings of environmental scientists? How long will we ‘hate knowledge’ and ‘ignore counsel’ and refuse to accept reproof for our anthropocentric solipsism? [Yeah, I had to look it up it means: “the view or theory that the self is all that can be known to exist.”] Anthropocentric solipsism, thinking that it is all about you. How long will we ignore wisdom, as we ignore the voices of the prophets?”

Wisdom is different than knowledge in that it requires a response. It’s not just about knowing it is what you are going to do about it.
Where have we heard Wisdom calling out, and how are we going to respond?

In contrast to the Wisdom shouting, the poetry of Psalm 19 offers us a different Divine voice to listen to, the wordless cadence of day and night, of sun and moon “their voices can’t be heard— but their sound extends throughout the world; their words reach the ends of the earth.”

Both voices coming from God call on us, people of faith to pay attention, to consider and change our ways. Both voices call on us to unite knowledge and practice.

Wisdom requires heeding. The silent sacred text of nature calls us to the sacred text of Scripture which requires love of God, love of neighbour and love of self.

³Elaine T. James (<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-24-2/commentary-on-proverbs-120-33-5>)



For my vacation I went to NS, in part to make up for my frustrations for not being able to travel during my sabbatical. And in larger part to intentionally put myself up against the elements of Nature — from the comfort of my airbnb or a cottage, of course! I know that there are far more valiant people among us who do wilderness canoeing.

I don't yet know what I learned from putting myself up against the mosquitoes and no-see-ums that feasted on my blood at one point. But I did find that being at cliffs, or by the sea, or by a lake, is something that speaks profoundly to me.



It is humbling to look upon the horizon, it can put us in our place and give perspective on the world. For example, I experienced that each sundown people come in droves to Peggy's Cove — a rocky spot by a lighthouse along our Eastern coast — and they wander on rocks or sit mesmerized by the waves and the sunset. I was among them.



The heavens, the wind, the waves and the waters did tell us of the glory of God — whether or not those words would have been used by everyone on those rocks. And in a weird and comforting way, they told me of my own relative insignificance.

I don't know about you, but when I'm overwhelmed — such as in the case of the Climate Crisis — it is helpful to know that the world is bigger than I am and that God's imagination is broader than mine.

So we place ourselves within earshot of Wisdom, not fear and despair, and we listen for what God will be saying to us in this Season of Creation. This is our invitation to you.