



Faithful Climate Action



RESTORATION IS COMING

A SERMON BY KYLE MEYAARD-SCHAAP, CRC OFFICE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

This resource was prepared for the lead up to November 2015 Climate negotiations in Paris as part of CPI's "Prayers for COP21 in Paris" campaign. However, it can be used at any time to bring climate justice themes into worship.

Scriptures: Jeremiah 33:14 – 16, John 1: 1 – 14, Colossians 1: 15 – 20

The Old Testament lectionary reading for today from Jeremiah 33:14-16 has me thinking about creation. The reading is set within Jeremiah's larger project of making some sort of sense out of the destruction of the kingdom of Judah and its subsequent deportation to Babylon. What message of hope and comfort can he possibly offer to a community whose suffering gave rise to the pathos-filled opening line of Psalm 137: "By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion?" "God had finally done what he had for so long been threatening to do", they must have thought. "He abandoned the covenant and has left us forever."

It is into this despair that Jeremiah – who had, until now, made a career out of fiery oracles of destruction and judgment – speaks the words of 33:14-16. Words – not of bitterness or even satisfied vindication (though he deserved to gloat a little had he wanted to) – but of reconciliation and restoration. Jeremiah reminds the people that God's anger will not burn forever, for he is a God who cannot help but desperately seek the reconciliation and restoration of his people – even when that reconciliation comes at an unspeakable cost.

And what is the Gospel if not the definitive revelation that this reckless, divine love extends beyond Israel and encompasses the whole of the created cosmos? In Jesus, we see firsthand the truth that matter has always mattered to God. God creates the world – sun, rocks, birds, bacteria – and rejoices in its goodness. God creates humans, both male and female, and calls us to be caretakers of his beloved world.



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God shows us his power in water, delivers his healing in leaves, promises grace through rainbows, sustains life through soil. God is praised by the trees, and worship breaks forth from the mountains. God lavishly displays his love in the world around us and is always using the stuff of the world – be it flesh, water, bread, or wine – to reveal himself. Nowhere is this more powerfully on display than in the incarnation, when the Word that created matter assumes it in order to redeem it.

In the incarnation, we see that God is so concerned with the created world that he freely chose to enter into it and die on its behalf rather than see it succumb to the consequences of sin and death. But do we share that concern? Do our lives display a similar love and appreciation for the created world? Do we allow the power and magnitude of the incarnation to transform our relationship with the creation? Or do we evacuate the physicality and earthliness of the paradoxical God-man and reduce him to a spiritualized religious dogma? If God views the stuff of earth as worthy of participating in the work of redemption and as worthy of redemption itself (Col. 1:15-20), what keeps us from celebrating creation and engaging in the sacred work of “serving and protecting” it (Gen. 2:15)?

The Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC) has been trying hard to think through these questions and to find new ways to live out its conviction that God loves his creation immensely and calls us to share in the task of restoring it and reconciling it back to God. In 2012, the CRC became one of the first evangelical denominations in North America to adopt an official statement that affirmed the scientific consensus around anthropogenic climate change as a “moral, religious, and social justice issue” (*Acts of Synod 2012*, pp. 803), and that called on denominational bodies, congregations, and individual members to take public and private action to do something about it. Among other things, the CRC has attempted to respond to this call by developing a four-part video series and reflection guide called [Climate Conversation: Kenya](#). The CRC has also conducted a year-long congregational energy stewardship pilot project, made considerable energy-saving changes to its own denominational headquarters, and become only the second denominational headquarters in the US to earn ENERGY STAR certification by scoring in the 97th percentile of all office buildings nationwide.

Perhaps the most ambitious response to date to the CRC’s position on climate change is the [Climate Witness Project](#), a major organizing effort that will hire ten regional organizers in the US and Canada, recruit thirty interested congregations, and will send a four-member CRC delegation to the UN Climate Change Conference (COP 21) at the end of the year.

The goal is both to engage more and more CRC churches in education and advocacy around climate change and to make sure that the voice of the CRC – and of Christians the world over who believe that matter matters to God – is heard in the public square.

Some will ask why we are doing this at all; why we are getting involved in such a politically divisive issue. I've encountered this question a lot over the years, and I'm beginning to think that my best answer might just be to borrow the words of Jeremiah. We do this work because we believe that the creation is living in exile, but not forever. Restoration is coming, and the incarnation is our first and sweetest foretaste.

How fitting then, that COP 21 is occurring during Advent – that season in which our waiting seems most pronounced, most plaintive, and most hopeful. We are waiting, but we are not without hope. We are waiting because there is something coming worth waiting for. We are waiting, but we are not passive. We are waiting with hope and we are waiting with action. Today may seem dark, but take heart – Christmas is coming. The time is coming when we will remember again that the Creator of the universe loves his creation so much that he put on skin and moved into our world in order to give us a hope that can never be extinguished.



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