

IPL Climate Preach-In, Trinity Lutheran Seminary
Epiphany 5A, February 12, 2014
Isaiah 58:1-12; Psalm 112:1-10; 1 Corinthians 2:1-16; Matthew 5:13-20
The Rev. Dr. Lisa E. Dahill

This week is the annual Preach-In on Climate Change sponsored across the country by Interfaith Power and Light. This Preach-In urges pastors, priests, ministers, rabbis, faith leaders of all kinds to call attention to the ways climate change is destroying God's creation already and threatening future life on Earth. All across the U.S. preachers will be preaching this Friday, this Saturday, this Sunday. Here at Trinity we too are taking part, so I volunteered to preach.

I signed up to preach... about climate change. Kind of a big topic. Just a bit – overwhelming.

How big? You know: the forms of the future of life on Earth at stake... millions of species going extinct... catastrophic storms and droughts killing the poorest already – and no idea how much hotter and more chaotic the climate will become just from the emissions *we've already burned* – let alone all the emissions we're planning to keep on burning since even with all the disruptions so far and the warming and acidification of the oceans and the deforestation of jungles around the world and the rising seas and wilder storms and unpredictable growing seasons – even with all this *already threatening the fragile hold the poorest humans on Earth have to life*, we are apparently helpless to find a new way – helpless to stop the gas guzzling and the petroleum-based food systems, stop the fossil fuel extraction, stop the burning and the burning and the burning... Why should we cut carbon emissions when China's not going to? Why should China cut emissions when we're not going to? Why should we mobilize to pull together in sacrificial action across national borders or even, heck, just across political boundaries *within* our national borders, and *act* already when, it's just too big, too diffuse, too far off, the danger screened from our view... and we keep ourselves busy with other things.

So how on Earth do you *preach* about this? How?? Dr. Langknecht – how am I to preach about this? You senior preachers – how...?? It's too big, too huge... there are no words.

There are no words because the ones who would say them – who are right now shouting for the world's attention – will drown when the monster storms and rising seas finally wash over their Pacific Islands home, lowest-lying islands of the world

There are no words because what can we say? God will fix this? Science will save us? The promise of magical salvation doesn't convince the peasant farmers who rely on meltwater from the Kilimanjaro glaciers that will be gone soon. Once their children too have starved, there will be no words.

There are no words because in the face of danger too big to address we hide... of course we do! We shut down. We shut up. We preach about other things – needs we can address, not the ones that jolt us awake in fear for great-grandchildren who will never know a planet as beautiful and abundant and healthy as the one we were born on. We can't bear to hear the cries of those not yet born – there are no words.

Or, even worse – we do hear them, we do hear the science, but how can we act? It's not like we *want* the heating of our homes and the running of our seminary to add *right this minute* to the poison in the air and the heating of the Earth – but what choice do we have? We're all enmeshed in this. We might want to speak out, but what would we say? There's no easy place to grab hold and mobilize; it's too complex and huge and pointless – the system's broken, the powerful won't listen, why speak? Why put ourselves at risk, speaking out when no one else is? [In an earlier generation Christians watched the rounding up of the Jews, week after week, and said nothing – because we're afraid, because it could get us in trouble, because what good would it do anyway?] There are no words. It's too big.

In fact, there is only one Word big enough to hold all this chaos and the planet itself – one Word small enough to inhabit the finest structures of each delicate hair on an insect's back, each drop of water on Earth. We who love *this* Word – this living Word, this Logos through whom all things were made, and are made – we who have no words for our planet's future, but who love this Word through whom it all was made, are poised in an unprecedented place. More starkly than any previous generation of Christians, we are faced globally with this choice: to participate in the speaking now of this living Word, in all its beauty and power, or to be increasingly complicit in the actual ongoing silencing of this Word, the Logos of God in all that is. For make no mistake: it is precisely this living Word, the Logos permeating the creation in unique and marvelous forms all over this Earth, that our present way of life is exterminating. This living Word in all its complexity *is* the very thing our Earth-destruction is unraveling, the very voice and Word and heart and Logos of God woven throughout the intricacy of species and life-forms. Letting ourselves be silenced in the face of this ongoing erasure will permit more and more of that Word being silenced, day after day after day. The longer we continue our present course, the fewer there will be left – of any species – to speak the Word...

That's one option, to be silent about all this. It's safer and quieter and more sickening. But it's not the only way. This day we also hear the call to SPEAK that Word incarnate throughout creation, enfleshed in Jesus, poured out into us! For what do we hear this Word of all-that-is saying, this week? *Shout out, do not hold back! Raise your voice like a trumpet! Call the people to conversion! Be fearless: you're salt! You are light! Don't suffocate yourself under a bushel – speak!* This can only be a communal call, this speaking the living Word in an eco-cidal age. Alone it's too hard. We are a GreenFaith seminary – what will that mean? How will we act?

It's not all up to the president and the Board – but we *need* the President and the Board to set us on a course for real prophetic ecological witness to a threatened world, and to authorize bold discernment and action. Geo-thermal, anyone?

It's not all up to the faculty – but we *need* the faculty to use this curriculum process to think even further outside the box, to equip leaders for radically immersive connection to the Word alive in the natural world, the voice of God spoken and alive, just as deeply as we teach our students to love the Word in the Scriptures.

It's not all up to the staff, to the students, to the spouses, to our congregations – but we *need* every single voice and heart, everyone's best creative joyful imagination, to grow this place into a vibrant seedbed where we learn how to step off the grid and into the soil, how to use our land responsibly and how to breathe the sky and the Spirit and [to give up our privilege and] to rattle the cages of Congress and local leaders and join with others as long as it takes till there's change, and life, and to invite inner-city kids to the woods – and to learn ever more fully to pray in the languages of our creek and our trees and wind and storm and garden.

This living Word is calling us all on Earth to a new immersion in the Logos through whom all things were made, a new intimacy and immediacy of senses, a much bigger circle of kin, a congregation wide enough to include all Earth-systems of life. We are creative people – we are reforming people – we are imaginative people, sacramental people, and we are people of the Word, this Living Word, who calls to us through this Earth and gives us voice when we've lost our voice. When we have no words, in the face of all we've lost already and all we will yet lose in the years ahead – when we have no words in the face of our fear and pain this Word itself carries us. In life and in death we belong to this Lord, woven into our very cells. And this Word enfleshed in all that is will never cease to fill us and breathe in us and come pouring roaring bursting out: *Shout out, do not hold back! Raise your voice like a trumpet! We are salt! We are light! Let's go!*