

*Lord, open our ears to hear your Word spoken to us; Open our hearts to be changed by Your Spirit. Amen.*

*"This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me";*

*"There is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile,  
but the things that come out are what defile."*

*"But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves.*

There's kind of theme going in our readings this morning, which could be summed up as: "You gonna talk the talk, you better walk the walk."

But we all know the disconnect between what we say and what we do,  
what we profess and how we behave, what we aspire to and the evidence.  
I experience that every Sunday at coffee hour when my desire to stay low cal  
encounters those delectable egg salad sandwiches,  
Or whenever I let work take away time for exercise or rest.

Few places is that disconnect more marked than in the way we address the  
climate crisis the world is facing. It didn't have to get this bad, but we –  
and by we, I mostly mean western societies addicted to over-consumption –  
we saw the data, saw the pictures of the polar bears on their shrinking ice floes,  
heard the pleas of scientists and poorer communities on which the effects  
are disproportionately felt, and basically shut our doors and turned  
up our air conditioners, as though that would tune out the realities.  
You know what turning up our air conditioners does to an already overly warm  
planet? Warms it further. You know staying cold in 70 degrees does to us?  
It causes us to lose our capacity to tolerate heat. It's bad for our bodies.

The climate crisis, environmental damage is bad news. And it's been bad news.  
And there is something in us that causes us to turn away from bad news –  
I sure do it. And don't we come to church for good news?

And there are so many issues to care about – poverty, war, immigration,  
income inequality, reproductive rights, gun violence, crime...

We all choose where to focus and for many environmental concerns come  
down the list. But let me tell you – as horrific as the genocide in Gaza is,  
as ghastly as immigration policy is, as frightening as our political situation is –  
if this planet ceases to be inhabitable for our grandchildren, or we continue to  
lose species and wild places, those other issues aren't going to matter much.

We are going to focus on environmental concerns this this month, using resources compiled and created by the Episcopal Church for September, a Season for Creation.

It is essential for churches to take leadership in this realm – we worship a God whom we believe created all things, and created them for mutual benefit. And created us to tend and nurture the life around us – *The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.* Genesis 2:15 But because of a poor translation of two words in the previous chapter, “subdue” and “dominion,” western cultures saw the rest of creation as resources to be exploited rather than sacred gifts to be honored and enjoyed in partnership. Add in economic models that only value endless growth, and you can see how we got here.

But it is also essential for churches, for Christ-followers to take leadership in addressing the climate crisis because we have a super-power: faith. And we know a super-power: Jesus.

We know there is also a human condition called sinfulness at the root of the problem, and that condition needs the healing we find in Jesus Christ.

We can often discipline ourselves to do and say the right thing.

But the condition we can't do anything about on our own is the general sinfulness that lives in us along with everything that is bright and beautiful.

We're a mixed bag. And the way out is not “trying harder,” or “putting up appearances,” but allowing the power of God to work through us.

We need the power of the One who made the universe to work through us To reorient us and to heal this earth.

It will take a combination of faith and action – either one without the other doesn't get us very far. Faith without action is dead, James tells us.

Action without faith is a recipe for exhaustion and often failure.

It's not that “being good” has no place – what counts is how we get there.

Getting there on our own efforts is religion.

Getting there through the love of God, in which we can be real about who we are and still loved – that's relationship.

That's freedom, that's grace, that's God's perfect gift for us,

not the nitpicking of “thou shalt nots,” but the perfect law, the law of freedom, which is what we get when we're conscious of being in relationship with the God who knows us, loves us, and does not turn away from us.

Then we find ourselves making choices that are “good” because being known and loved is such a huge gift, we want to respond in goodness.

James has a similar message. Don’t just say the “right thing,”

the thing you’re supposed to say, the thing that will make others think you’re pious and concerned. Walk the walk.

We can’t say, “Oh, isn’t too bad that turtles are being killed by plastic straws,”

if we’re not going to do anything. But neither should we work to abolish plastic straws without asking the Spirit to guide us to the right people and places.

God wants us to care from the heart.

When we act out of a sense of obligation, we are in the business of meeting needs.

Fine business – not the business of the church, the community of Christ-followers.

Our business is to connect people with the fiercely accepting love of Jesus –

And when we are about that mission, we cannot help but care for justice, care for the forgotten, care for this planet meant to sustain us all.

Our business is – and here I am again quoting Dwight Zscheile’s excellent book,

*People of the Way*, “Our business is to follow “the energy of the Holy Spirit as it (*sic*) moves in the midst of our churches and neighborhoods, creating and restoring community, challenging patterns of injustice, and bringing peace.”<sup>1</sup>

My reusing paper towels and plastic wrap and turning off my air conditioner as often as I can is not going to solve the climate crisis.

But if we all do it, and if we implement new patterns in the way we do things at church, that’s bigger.

If we can turn our love – our love of God, our love of our neighbors, our love of our children and grand-children, our love of our gardens and rivers and fruit, if we can turn that love into action to heal the earth, we have a shot.

I grew a pineapple this year. Or rather, the pineapple plant I had nurtured for a

few years surprised me by bearing fruit. I had nothing to do with it – but I

loved that little pineapple. I even named it, Penelope. I kept my cats away from it.

That pineapple was pure gift. Everything God has given us is pure gift.

How might we nurture it so that it thrives, and we thrive along with it?

*Amen.*

---

<sup>1</sup> Dwight J. Zscheile, *People of the Way: Renewing Anglican Identity* (2012, Morehouse Publishing), p. 99

**James 1:17-27**

Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God's righteousness. Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls.

But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing.

If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

**Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23**

Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.) So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?" He said to them, "Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written,

'This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.'

You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition."

Then he called the crowd again and said to them, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile." For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."