



#Beat Air Pollution

World Environment Day

2019

Sermon and Liturgical Resources



CHINA
2019



When you no longer see the Rainbow

World Environment Day 2019

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Genesis 9:11-17	The rainbow as a sign of the covenant.
Psalm 19	All heaven declares the glory of God
Rev 4:1-11	The rainbow and the throne of God
Matthew 24:29-35	When the skies are darkened – is this the End Times prophesied?

SERMON NOTES

Introduction

This World Environment Day our theme is “Air Pollution”. Research shows that more people now die from Air pollution than from HIV and Malaria put together. ⁱ

Beijing, China which is the host country for World Environment day only saw 195 “blue sky days” in 2017 ⁱⁱ. They place huge TV screens in public spaces on smoggy days so that people can see a fake blue sky, otherwise they become too depressed.

Nine out of ten people globally breathe polluted air, and there were 7 million premature deaths last year to air pollution.

The Rainbow as a sign of the covenant

In Genesis 3, as a result of the Fall, the Earth is cursed and cannot reach its full potential. Humans also inherit corrupt attitudes and impact negatively on the Earth and the whole web of life. (Gen 3:17-19)

God then offers us the covenant of nature (Gen 9:11-17), a covenant between and God and all of creation, symbolised by the rainbow in the sky. As with any covenant of promise, it requires obedience. The rainbow offers a message of hope and inspiration, God is with us and the earth will be renewed. Any exploitation of nature is an attack on God as well as a violation of the humans made in the image of God. With our theme of air pollution, we need to ask ourselves, what happens when we are using so many fossil fuels that we cannot even see the rainbow due to smog!

The rainbow and the throne of God

Revelation 4:3 indicates God’s affinity with the rainbow as a visible and colourful sign. As one of the most amazing natural wonders the colourful bow encircles creation. It is a symbol of grace that reminds us that we will not be destroyed again. ⁱⁱⁱ

In this passage all of God’s creatures come to worship at the Throne of God, the great web of creation is symbolised by the four living creatures, the first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. It is interesting that humans do not have a greater

place than other creatures as we worship God. Humans, wild animals, birds and domesticated animals; every tribe and every creature worships God together. What a tragedy that the voices of so many creatures are being silenced.

All heavens declare the glory of God

Psalms 19 reminds us that all heavens declare the glory of God. God speaks to us through the wonders of the sunrise and sunset, through the glories of the sky and nature. In the Early Church they often talked of the “two books of God”: the book of Nature and the written book of Scriptures. What happens to us as the human race and to our children when we are cut off from nature due to air pollution? When we can only experience nature on our TV or cell phone screens? We will lose the sense of the awesomeness of God.

Heaven and Earth will pass away

"Immediately after the distress of those days `the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken”.

It may seem that the end time is upon us, we are facing devastating climate change, the destruction of 1 million species of animals, insects and birds, due to human actions. ^{iv} The skies are darkened due to pollution and smog.

What does the Bible mean when it talks about the Earth passing away and a new heaven and Earth? Are we to give up on this planet? Some Christians believe that we should not worry about climate change and environmental degradation. These are all signs of the end times. Christians will be taken away from this planet at the Rapture. Upon winning that battle of Armageddon, Christ will send all unbelievers into the pits of hellfire, re-green the planet, and reign on earth in peace with His followers for a millennium. Climate change and its consequences are foretold in this passage.

Matthew 24:7: “[T]here shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in diverse places”.

People under the spell of such potent prophecies cannot be expected to worry about the environment. Why care about the earth when the droughts, floods, and pestilence brought by ecological collapse are signs of the Apocalypse foretold in the Bible? Why care about global climate change when you and yours will be rescued in the Rapture?

And yet we are misreading the Bible. When the Scriptures talk of a “new” earth , there are two words for “new” in Greek: Neos and Kainos. For example if I smash my car completely and my car is written off, I get a brand new car from the insurance – that is “neos”. If my rusty old car is panel beaten, and given a new engine , that is “renewed” or “kainos” Not brand new, but renewed and restored, redeemed, upcycled. We have no Planet B!

So how do we work for a renewed Creation?

How can we work for a renewed Creation? How do we fight air pollution so that we can see the rainbow of hope, and God can speak to us through the beauties of creation? How do we protect the health of children and unborn children from air pollution?

Open waste burning and organic waste in landfills release harmful toxins into the atmosphere. Globally, an estimated 40 percent of waste is openly burned. The problem is most severe in urbanizing regions and developing countries. Improving the collection, separation, and disposal of solid waste reduces the amount of waste that is burned or Separating organic waste and turning it into compost or bioenergy improves soil

fertility and provides an alternative energy source. Reducing the estimated one-third of all food that is lost or wasted can also improve air quality.

In many countries, energy production is a leading source of air pollution. Coal-burning power plants are a major contributor, while diesel generators are a growing concern in off-grid areas. Industrial processes in the chemical and mining industries, also pollute the air.

The global transport sector accounts for almost one-quarter of energy-related carbon dioxide emissions and this proportion is rising. Transport emissions have been linked to nearly 400,000 premature deaths. Almost half of all deaths by air pollution from transport are caused by diesel emissions, while those living closest to major traffic arteries are up to 12 percent more likely to be diagnosed with dementia. Reducing vehicle emissions is an important intervention to improve air quality, especially in urban areas. Policies and standards that require the use of cleaner fuels and advanced vehicle emissions standards can reduce vehicle emissions by 90 percent or more.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Introduction

Sky refers to the all the domains of creation above and around Earth. Sky especially refers to the domains close to Earth—the wind, the clouds, the air—the atmosphere. It is important to note that the term translated ‘heavens’ in the Old Testament normally means sky, not some abode of God far above. It is the sky in Psalm 19 that proclaims God’s glory, God’s visible presence on Earth.

It is appropriate to create a sense of sky in the sanctuary with various symbols of domains around Earth—stars, galaxies, clouds. Images of sunrise, moonlight and storms can be projected on screens.

A special focus for this service is the use of prayer flags in all the colours of the rainbow. In a number of cultures, flags with prayers written on them are waved or suspended on cords in the air for the wind to carry the prayers to God. The spirit in the wind aids us as we direct our prayers to the skies. Each person may wish to write his/her own prayer on a standard prayer flag that is suspended on chords above the altar or above the heads of the worshippers. Children may also bring flags and wave them in the procession. These prayers may reflect our concern for creation: “Help us heal creation”. “Help us keep the trees”. “Help us save the birds.” “Let us stop air pollution”^v

Gathering

**Praised be my Lord God with all creatures;
and especially our brother the sun,
which brings us the day, and the light;
fair is he, and shining with a very great splendor:
Praised be my Lord for our sister the moon,
and for the stars,
which God has set clear and lovely in heaven.
Praised be my Lord for our brother the wind,
and for air and cloud, calms and all weather,
by which you uphold in life all creatures.
Praised be my Lord for our sister water,
which is very serviceable to us,**

**and humble, and precious, and clean.
Praised be my Lord for our mother the Earth,
which sustains us and keeps us,
and yields diverse fruits,
and flowers of many colors, and grass.**

St Francis' Canticle of Creation

Confession

**Jesus Christ, teach us to empathise with Earth. Make our spirits sensitive to the cries of creation,
cries for justice from the air, the clouds and the sky.**

Jesus Christ, make our faith sensitive to the groans of the Spirit in creation, groans of longing for a new creation.

**Jesus Christ, we confess that we have damaged your fragile earth, and pumped pollution into your fragile
atmosphere. Christ teach us to care**

Amen ^{vi}

Prayers of the People

Prayer for World Environment Day

Heavenly Father, we thank you for giving us this beautiful land: we have sunshine, rain, and air to nourish earth, sea and sky. For our greed, our excessive exploitation and consumption of resources, polluting the air you have given to us, we beg for your forgiveness. Give us hearts to cherish your creation, so that we can work together to protect the land. We also pray for all countries in the world that they may work together to formulate better environmental policies to improve our atmosphere so that we can again see the life-force provided to the world through the growth of nature, and in so doing find a closer relationship with you. In the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen

Bishop Andrew Chan, Diocese of Western Kowloon, Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui

Sending out

L Christ calls you to be his disciples,
to serve him with love and compassion,
to serve Earth by caring for creation,
especially the atmosphere above
that gives breath to all creatures of Earth.

P **We will celebrate the winds!
We will plead for creation!
We will flood the sky with prayers!**

L Will you care for creation?

P **We will care for creation!
We will nurture our planet!
We will celebrate with the sky!**

L May the Spirit of God, who is above all and in all and through all,
fill you with the knowledge of God's presence in sky and Earth

and the pulsing of Christ within you. Go in peace!
Serving Christ and loving Earth!

**P We go in peace,
serving Christ and loving Earth.**

Children can join the procession holding prayer flags.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MhIZ50HKlp0> “Under the dome” video about air pollution in China
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rJBx0ARSzOM> “The Bliss of Ignorance” video about air pollution in South Africa from coal powered electricity.

<https://youtu.be/UF1GzWSzsss> “Walk home” impact of air pollution on children

For more information on World Environment Day <https://www.worldenvironmentday.global/?xv=1&c=1>

ⁱ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/sep/16/more-people-die-from-air-pollution-than-malaria-and-hiv-aids-new-study-shows>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.caixinglobal.com/2017-11-17/beijing-area-sees-fewer-blue-sky-days-this-year-101172743.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ Adapted from a talk by Peet Van der Walt

^{iv} <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/2019/05/ipbes-un-biodiversity-report-warns-one-million-species-at-risk/>

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