

A Sermon for Preachers Preparing for the First Sunday of Advent

By The Rev. Jeffrey Metcalfe

"There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken." (Luke 21.25-26)

This prophecy could easily be a description of our times.

You see there was once a time when we had to argue about the reality of climate change.

There was once a time when the interesting debate to be had was whether our actions as human beings could have an impact on the climate.

However, I think, as a global culture, that time has passed.

Climate change is a reality.

In fact it's so dominant a reality that even the world's central banks, global investment funds, and military powers are making plans on how to adapt to it.

In other words, we have moved from the place of trying to understand what is happening in the world, to the stage of *"fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world"*.

As churches, we are not new to this crisis.

In fact, for decades, church leaders like the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, have been calling attention to the ways in which our consumerist life styles are threatening God's Creation. Pope Francis, in his latest encyclical *Laudato Si* has affirmed Patriarch Bartholomew's witness, adding his own voice to those calling for Christians and the world to rethink how they live. In [a recent statement issued by the Canadian Council of Churches](#), leaders from 25 denominations representing 85% of all the churches in Canada have all agreed that this is a "spiritual, moral and ethical human crisis," and one that urgently needs to be addressed.

So here we are.

We know what's happening.

We know what we need to do.

Our church leaders are calling us to do it.

So what's holding us back?



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Since it isn't information, and it isn't the imperative to act, I can only deduce that what is holding us back from addressing this crisis is our desire.

One of the illusions that we live under in our contemporary culture is that we are all fundamentally rational beings who make decisions based on information. But as the Church Fathers knew well, more fundamental than our rational mind is our desire. We may know what we have to do, but before we can do it, we must be moved to do so.

It's like a child who knows she should eat broccoli because broccoli is good for her, but in spite of knowing this, she's still not going to eat it because she doesn't like broccoli. She doesn't desire it. She isn't moved to eat it. Ever noticed how quickly children become so full they "can't eat another bite" when it is food they do not desire to eat? Ever notice how quickly they become hungry again when it's time for dessert? (For those who desire it, there really is always room for Jell-O).

The same is true for our own social, political, and economic action. We know that Patriarch Bartholomew's call to respond to the ethos of consumerism with an "ethos of asceticism, namely an ethos of self-sufficiency to what is needed" would be good for us and for God's creation—but we really love our stuff (and maybe if we wait long enough before we act, technology will give us our dessert).

That movement of our souls to act, that desire, is part, I believe, of why the crisis we are living in is a deeply spiritual one, one to which we are finding it difficult to respond; because simply put, our desire is formed more by our consumerist culture than by God's love for God's Creation.

But here's the thing about God: God's love is actually pretty persuasive and God's grace provides for our salvation, even when we find ourselves thoroughly trapped within the prison of our disordered desires.

In the same passage in which Jesus warns about the fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, Jesus also says, "*Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.*" (Luke 21.28)

Within the entrapment of our disordered desires, the very crisis that those desires have brought into being calls us to an awareness of how our desires have been disordered. I'll admit, that may just be more information, however I think if we take seriously Jesus' subsequent call for his disciples to "*Be alert at all times, praying...*" (Luke 21.36) we might just have found an avenue through which our desires can be healed.

I don't think it is a coincidence that the psalmist prays:

"Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long." (Psalm 25.4-5)



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I don't think it's a coincidence because God has already revealed to us both the form and the content by which our desires might be healed, and chief among them is prayer.

You see prayer is not about information. When we pray we are not letting God know about things that God wouldn't have known about if we had not prayed them. Rather, in prayer, we are opening our hearts to God, so that our desires may be (re)formed by God. In prayer God makes God's paths known to us, and enables us to walk them. In prayer we find the healing of our desires.

Do you want to prevent climate change? Then you should pray. You should confess to God that even if you don't really desire to live in a way that embodies God's love for God's Creation, you do at least desire to do so. Don't think that that prayerful step is too small a crack for God's grace to come through. The glory of God is that God's power working in us can do infinitely more than we ask or imagine (Ephesians 3.20-21).

Preachers, did you see what I did here?

I used the lectionary texts for the first Sunday of Advent in an attempt to draw attention to the ways in which our desires need to be healed by God in order to respond to the threat of climate change. I have attempted to do this not by relaying information, but by trying to elicit your own desire to heal your desire. And now its time to come clean with you, and to admit that I have written this sermon to elicit your desire to use your vocation as a preacher on this first Sunday of Advent to help heal the desire of the people whom you serve. If prayer can help heal desire, then so too can preaching (I hope I've been able to demonstrate how this might be the case with this sermon).

This First Sunday in Advent coincides with the 21st Conference of Parties (COP21) in Paris at which world leaders will be working to complete "a new international agreement on the climate, applicable to all countries, with the aim of keeping global warming below 2°C." So please, use your gifts as a preacher to help God's people to desire to embody God's love for Creation this First Sunday in Advent.

We know what's happening.

We know what we need to do.

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So let's not hold back!

For worship resources (including prayers, hymns, and sample sermons), please visit [Prayers for Paris](#).