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St. John's Episcopal Church
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The Day of Pentecost (John 20:19-23)

OK.

So one Senator says, "I believe in climate change." Another says, "I believe humans have something to do with climate change." A third says, "I believe we need to do something about climate change." A fourth, of course, says, "Climate change is a hoax." But we'll drop that one like a hot potato.

The first three Senators use different language. But they're speaking the same truth. That is, climate change exists and something should – no, something *must* – be done. The truth ekes its way through the various conversations about evolution, humanity's greed, the sin of pollution, and climate change itself. Three languages – over a hundred and fifty, actually, if you count the rest of the world – expressing concern over the very real possibility that the earth is warming, and, in fact, may warm enough to inundate coastal cities, cause severe drought leading to starvation, change the patterns of severe weather like hurricanes and tornadoes. As far as I've heard, the only item on the plus side is that Canada's agricultural zone will spread farther north, giving them an edge in food production. Which, of course, might prove critical if predictions are correct.

The evidence for rapid climate change is compelling and frightening.

According to NASA (remember, that's a responsible government agency)...

- Global sea levels rose eight inches in the last century; the rate in the last two decades, however, is twice that of the previous century;
- Earth's surface temperature has risen about two degrees Fahrenheit since the last century;
- Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets are decreasing in mass; the extent and thickness of Arctic sea ice have declined dramatically in the past two decades; glaciers are retreating everywhere;
- For centuries – *centuries!* – the atmospheric carbon dioxide had never been above 300 parts per million... until it exceeded that level in 1950 and has continued to climb unabated due, in *large* part, to human activity: deforestation to expand arable land and the growth of a fossil fuel dependent economy. ¹

So where does faith fit into all the conversations?

A Buddhist Declaration in 2015 says this: "We have a brief window of opportunity to take action, to preserve humanity from imminent disaster and to assist the survival of the many diverse and beautiful forms of life on Earth. Future generations, and the other species that share the biosphere with us, have no voice to ask for our compassion, wisdom, and leadership. We must listen to their silence. We must be their voice, too, and act on their behalf." ⁱⁱ

The Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Studies says this: "As we humans are woven into the fabric of the natural world, its gifts are ours to savor. Our species, though selected to be a caretaker and steward on the earth, has been the cause of such corruption and devastation on it that we are in danger of ending life as we know it on our planet." ⁱⁱⁱ

A statement by the World Jewish Congress points toward Holy Scripture, in which the dominion of humankind over nature mentioned in Genesis does *not* the dominion of a tyrant who deals harshly with his people...in order to achieve his own personal desires and whims.^{iv}

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has said, "As people of faith, we are convinced that "the earth is the Lord's and all it holds" (Ps 24:1). Our Creator has given us the gift of creation: the air we breathe, the water that sustains life, the fruits of the land that nourish us, and the entire web of life without which human life cannot flourish. All of this God created and found "very good." We believe our response to global climate change should be a sign of our respect for God's creation."^v

And finally, lest we forget our own roots, in 2015 seventeen Anglican bishops from all continents, including Andrew Dietsche of New York, "called for urgent prayer and action on the 'unprecedented climate crisis.'"^{vi}

This is serious science, people, and it is serious theology, and though we speak from many perspectives with many different voices I believe we speak as one when we say that our role as humans is to protect the world that has been given us. We may pray to Allah, to Yahweh, to God; we may worship on Sundays or Saturdays, or Fridays, or daily; we use different holy texts and our structures vary greatly, but we hold one thing in common: We love our neighbor.

And when we pollute the environment or allow pollution to continue we are committing a very grave sin.

I know, I do it. My house is too big, my car is too big. I'm flying on a two jet planes this afternoon. Friday evening I ate the most delicious cantaloupe that had to be trucked here from Mexico. I love raspberries in December. I drive the car to Rics, only four blocks from my house – indeed, I drive to the church, only seven blocks. Though this morning I walked because I was feeling guilty.

But I so appreciated a FaceBook post from a parishioner on Thursday evening. She wrote, "Working in my garden today seemed like the only response possible to keep calm."

And I have been so encouraged by the bold statements of 187 mayors, governors, congresspeople (not our own House member, by the way), and business and industry leaders who have said, "Well, we believe climate change can be slowed by changes in the way we live – and we will continue to affect those changes in our cities, states, and industries to benefit our health, our future, our economy." Let's hear it for Milwaukee, Seattle, Charlotte, California, Massachusetts, and Apple Computer and Microsoft!

If we are to truly express our love of God in whatever language, our commitment to the commandments of Christ (remember, "Love God, love one another"), and our commitments to our fellow human beings – not to mention our respect for Creation – we must prayerfully work toward effective ways of slowing down the disaster that is predicted.

We can come together from different faiths and different languages. Climate change – if it goes unheeded – will quite literally kill people who have no voice. Living through severe climate change will be one more sign of privilege – white, western people at the top of the socioeconomic ladder will live fairly normal lives; people of color, people of the sub-Sahara,

the poor, people who already live on the margins and have no voice, will suffer. And blood will be on the hands of the privileged.

We cannot let this happen. We must pray for the Spirit to work through all humankind to stop taking advantage of Mother Earth.

We cannot let her die.

We cannot let our children die.

We must stop this madness.

In the Name of God, Amen.

ⁱ <https://climate.nasa.gov/evidence/>

ⁱⁱ http://fore.yale.edu/files/Buddhist_Climate_Change_Statement_5-14-15.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.ifees.org.uk/declaration/>

^{iv} <http://www.arcworld.org/faiths.asp?pageID=81>

^v <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/environment/global-climate-change-a-plea-for-dialogue-prudence-and-the-common-good.cfm>

^{vi} <http://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org/2015/03/17-anglican-bishops-from-all-six-continentshave-called-for-urgent-prayer-and-action-on-the-unprecedented-climate-crisis/>