

Hope when Earth's Future is Uncertain , a Sermon by Richard Walser to Trinity Church New Haven March 4, 2018

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer. Amen.

Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The authorities then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" But Jesus was speaking of the temple of his body. I'll be speaking today about the 'Body of Christ' and how that image can help us in our current challenges with climate change.

My assignment for today is to discuss 'Hope' When Earth's Future is Uncertain' - the two operative words being 'hope' and 'uncertain' or 'uncertainty' and the relationship around those two words. And I would like to add Faith as another word for us to consider. I have a lot to cover - so hold on tight!

The reason I think I was asked to speak on this topic is because of my work in the environmental movement. Climate change is making the world very jittery, as it well should. How can scripture assist us in this time of **uncertainty**?

The theme of this Lenten series 'heirs through hope' comes to us from our post communion prayer. And it reads in part "and dost assure us thereby of thy favor and goodness towards us; and that we are **very members incorporate in the mystical body of thy Son**, the blessed company of all faithful people; and are also **heirs, through hope** (the theme of our Lenten Series), of thy everlasting kingdom. It continues, and this is important...'And we humbly beseech thee, O heavenly Father, so to **assist us with thy grace, that we may continue in that holy fellowship**, and do all such good works as thou hast prepared for us to walk in.'

That is a very complex prayer. And look at what it is doing. It is tying together the idea of the mystical Body of Christ **and God's grace in creation** on the one hand, with the work that we do here on Earth on the other. And it places our hope for the future squarely between these two ideas. Our continuation as a species on Earth (it could be argued according to this prayer) is contingent on our **fulfilling** the good works that God has prepared for us to walk in.

Might the issue of Climate Change affect the elements of this prayer? Well, it most certainly does. All of them, in fact. A difficult subject - so let's dive in!

So we have to begin by asking, what is the Mystical Body of Christ? What are we talking about? How can this idea, this concept, help us in our decision making so that our collective decisions have positive rather than negative

results for the health and welfare of the world? This image first comes to us from St. Paul. Paul speaks about the Body of Christ in several of his epistles. Like our post-communion prayer, Paul tells us that we are both individually and collectively members of **Body of Christ** (sort of like the gut microbes that are members of our bodies) and that we have a role to play in the **fulfillment** of that body. We have to assume by his definition, that, like our bodies which are born and grow, the body of Christ is still in the process of maturing, it continues to evolve to use modern parlance, into what Paul calls its fulfillment. Paul does not describe the Body of Christ as some kind of abstraction or metaphor, it is very real and it is made up of the very substance of the physical and spiritual universe. It is all around us, people. Indeed, you yourself are a part of that body. Paul's vision points to a 'cosmic Christ' in which our language and art, our culture, and yes even our technology all participate in and enrich that Body of Christ in its growth toward fulfillment. That seems to be what he is describing. Other New Testament writers also point us in a similar direction as well. John points to a 'Cosmic Christ' when he tells us that through Christ 'All things were made; and without him was not anything made (in the universe) that was made.' A cosmic vision. And even Luke in the telling of the Ascension is pointing to a 'Cosmic Christ' where he permanently installs the fully '**embodied**' risen Jesus back **into** the universe.

But what about our work? How does our labor tie-in with the fulfillment of Christ, as both Paul and our post-communion prayer describe it? What are the 'good works' that God has prepared for **US** to walk in? Paul seems to be telling us that everyone and everything is in continuous participation in the Body of Christ and that all of our works, good and bad, our labor on this Earth, lasts forever within the Body of Christ, which is why we need to concentrate on doing 'Good Works'. And I think he is quite right. Consider this, could any of us drag ourselves out of bed in the morning if we did not believe deep-down in our souls that the fruits of our labor will somehow follow us into the eternal habitations? Paul tells us that "God has put ALL THINGS (meaning absolutely everything) in the universe in subjection under Christ's feet". If that is true then it means that humanity's role is a very important one, because things like our art and music and literature and all of the other discoveries that we make must somehow nourish and enrich the Body of Christ in its fulfillment. But if that is true, then it also must mean that our pollution, the killing off of species and forests, our cruelty to one another, and the impoverishment of millions of our own people, that these things also participate in, but diminish, diminish the Body of Christ, in the same way that joint pain and fever diminish our bodies. In this season of Lent we must remember that just as surely as Jesus suffered when his body was beaten and nailed to the cross, the Body of Christ continues to suffer whenever we neglect and abuse our world, its creatures and its people. Our participation in the Mystical body of Christ endows Christian life with great

meaning and purpose if we just allow that image to guide our actions towards good works - every second of every day.

But this understanding also means that everyone participates, not just Christian people. And here in the 21st Century I believe no-one participates in Christ's Body more so than our brothers and sisters toiling away in the natural sciences and medicine. Why is that? Well, for the simple reason that the subject of their inquiry is nothing other than God's great creation. Anyone so interested in God's creation or some particular part of it, by their attention to it are demonstrating their love for God's world and is, therefore, a person to be elevated by the faith community, and praised for the insight they can give us in our efforts to bring healing to the world. They are the 21st century's Prophets, in my opinion, and we need to listen to what they are telling us about our world.

And what they are saying is that we need to act now, right now, to avert a catastrophe caused by human made climate change. It is through them that I believe God is communicating to us the 'good work he has prepared for us to walk in.' Every generation seems to have its good work to do. This is the good work of our generation. Time and time again throughout scripture we are told that when God calls his people to do something, they must act immediately to the call. When Jesus calls Peter and his brother Andrew into discipleship, we are told they immediately throw down their nets and follow him. They don't sit around wasting time. And, they don't worry about the 'uncertainty' of the future that lies ahead of them. They plunged immediately into the work. That is the faithful response God expects from his followers. And it will require a great amount of faith for us to succeed when it comes to climate change.

We largely know how to solve the problem. We also know that we have wasted almost all of the time God has given us to solve the problem. What is not known, what is still uncertain, is whether we will faithfully use the time we have left to address this problem or foolishly waste it away. **God has set before us this day life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore, choose life, that both we and our descendants may continue to live.** That is what scripture teaches.

And because of this rich heritage of faith in the presence of uncertain futures, that I believe that it is we in the faith community who are uniquely positioned to lead the world out of this crisis. That is God's call to us - I am all but certain it. And I also believe that there are so many people in this world waiting for us to respond to God's call and by **so doing** restore hope and faith in the future.

There are people out there who would have you believe that the science of climate change is still not settled. No amount of evidence seems to satisfy them. These people are either wildly uninformed, delusional, or just plain

untruthful. Unfortunately, some of the most vocal critics of climate science are our brothers and sisters in the American Christian community and their skepticism and opposition to those trying to do what is right has done immeasurable harm to the church and to our country. They say things like 'I don't believe in climate change' as if they have some Constitutional right to endanger the world with their 'bad faith.' They do NOT. Perhaps they are just afraid. Fear of uncertainty. Fear of change. In the final analysis, climate denial is a profoundly unfaithful act, and it is cowardice, and when it is pronounced in the name of God, it is cowardice masquerading as faith. And their denial is sapping humanity of its hope for a prosperous future.

Moses understood this kind of fear and cowardice. As he was leading his people into the uncertain deserts of freedom, the calls came up pleading "What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt? Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, 'Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness." That is what they said. It sounds familiar, doesn't it?

There are many people, indeed many supposed Christian People in our country, who in their fear would rather continue serving the Carbon Pharaohs of today than to place their faith on a better tomorrow. Well ladies and gentlemen, we have reached the shoreline, the desert has closed in and Pharaoh's army is upon us! There is no avoiding this. Our only faithful choice now is to stretch out our arms like Moses did, part the waters of uncertainty, and march straight into the sea, holding back all the waters of fear, and of doubt, and of deception, and betrayal, and untruthfulness that would break our faith that we can solve this problem, and fulfill the 'good work' that God has prepared for us to walk in. And when we get to the other side and look back and we see that wall of water crashing down and washing away all that doubt and fear and bad faith, our God will be there with us to celebrate our victory!

And our faithful response to this crisis will do so much to restore the credibility of the church to all those millions who have left because they can not understand why a religion that professes to love a creator God has done so little to help them in their efforts to preserve his creation, and has done so much to prevent them from succeeding. Our action on this issue will restore the church even as it provides the means for hope to the world in the uncertain years and decades ahead. And there is so much we can do, starting today....

- Read you Bible! You will be amazed to discover the wisdom it reveals about living in harmony with our world and the greater physical and spiritual creation.
- Join Citizen's Climate Lobby or another Non-Partisan group that is dedicated to solving the climate crisis

- Nothing restores hope like working with others toward a common goal.
- If you are able, put solar panels on the roof of your home. If you cannot, purchase carbon credits through your utility so that the electricity you buy from them goes to purchase an equivalent amount of electricity from renewable sources.
- Never again buy a gas-powered car, an oil or gas-powered furnace or stove, and help your friends here at church and outside of your faith community to do the same. And tell them that this is something that is part of your faith that your church is encouraging you to do.
- Help our church become 100% fossil-free.
- If given a choice between the stairs and an elevator, take the stairs, especially if it is only a few flights.
- Try to vacation closer to home so you don't have to fly long distances.

For God's sake, and for the sake of the Body of Christ, whatever time you have left on this Earth, commit yourself, your church and your country to addressing this crisis.

Amen.