

A CLIMATE FOR RESOLUTIONS - December 31, 2017

Well, it's New Year's Eve again, another trip around the sun completed. And I don't know about you, but I've come to find this tradition of making resolutions pretty challenging at times, daunting even.

Does anyone else ever have that feeling of "I keep making these resolutions but I never really keep them"? So I'm trying to find a way for myself to look at it as less an obligation and more as an opportunity for positive change.

Most of you know me as a musician in the choir. But what you might not know about me is that I am a meteorologist, with my Bachelor's and Masters from Plymouth State University. So when I approach this new year, reflecting on the past and looking forward to the future, the thing that is preeminently on my mind is climate change. And what can I do about it? And how does that fit with my identity as a believer in Jesus Christ? I don't think Christianity and scientific facts are mutually exclusive. On the contrary, I *know* God created science in all of its minute and magnificent details.

So I wonder why we as Christians in the United States are so hesitant to enter into the discussion about climate change?

The problem is that we hear about climate change in such politically divided terms that it has become synonymous with identifying ourselves politically. We're naturally suspicious people in the realm of politics, so even when we're faced with overwhelming scientific evidence we don't want to believe because it can feel like a political concession. It's not a political concession, though. The fact that our climate is changing and hurting people around the world is a reality, based on facts. Real data.

I just want to interject here that scientists don't base their findings on opinion. Scientists are inherently skeptical, in the truest sense of the word. They question everything, and have their peers review their work. They're not afraid to question each other and themselves, and admit when they're wrong. It's all part of the Scientific Method that you learned about in high school.

Which is why I agree with Katharine Hayhoe, an Evangelical Christian and Atmospheric Scientist, when she says: "People ask me if I believe in global warming. I tell them, 'No, I don't,' because belief is faith; faith is the evidence of things not seen. Science is evidence of things seen. To have an open mind, we have to use the brains that God gave us to look at the science." In other words, you don't have to believe it, it's a proven scientific fact.

So here I am as a scientist who is also a Christian, and I think about the fact that the Bible begins and ends with a garden. Refer to Genesis chapter 2 and Revelation 22. Shouldn't this make us sit up and take note that there's something important about a garden, something that tells us God values the relationship between His people and the rest of His creation? If one of the ways God reveals Himself to people is through His creation, doesn't it stand to reason that we should share in His high value of caring for the environment?

Creation's loving care is the biblical responsibility of God's people. One of God's first commands in Genesis chapter 1 to humanity was to "tend His garden."

To borrow from the poet Wendell Berry, "God made the world because He wanted it made. He thinks the world is good, and He loves it. It is His world; He has never relinquished title to it.... If God loves the world, then how might any person of faith be excused for not loving it, or justified in destroying it?"

And yet we're failing to tend His garden, clearly we're not acting as stewards of Creation.

Pope Francis understands this, to perhaps a surprising level of scientific detail. To quote from his 2015 Encyclical on Climate Change and Inequality: "The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all. At the global level, it is a complex system linked to many of the essential conditions for human life. A very solid scientific consensus indicates that we are presently witnessing a disturbing warming of the climate system. In recent decades this warming has been accompanied by ... [rising] sea levels, and it would appear, by an increase of extreme weather events, even if a scientifically determinable cause cannot be assigned to each particular phenomenon. Humanity is called to recognize the need for changes in lifestyle, production and consumption, in order to combat this warming or at least the human causes which produce and aggravate it. It is true that there are other factors (such as volcanic activity, variations in the Earth's orbit and axis, the solar cycle), yet a number of scientific studies indicate that most global warming in recent decades is due to the great concentration of greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide, methane, nitrogen oxides, and others) released mainly as a result of human activity. The problem is aggravated by a model of development based on the intensive use of fossil fuels, which is at the heart of the worldwide energy system.

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Climate change is a global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic, [and] political. ... It represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day. Its worst impact will probably be felt by developing countries in coming decades."

But there is good news, literally, good news: The Gospel. We have a guidebook. The Bible emboldens and directs us. In Psalm 82, verse 4, David encourages the reader to take care of the poor and needy: "your job is to stand up for the powerless, and prosecute all those who

exploit them.” Paul implores the Philippians in chapter 2, verse 4: “don’t be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand.” The overarching principle in all of this is John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

I believe there are two key words here: love and world. What “world,” exactly, did God love and save by sending his Son? Often, we mentally substitute “all people” for the word “world” when we recite this passage. But St. John used the Greek word “kosmon.” God so loved the kosmon. He could have used “anthropos” – God so loved humanity. But he chose a word that means God loved the cosmos, the creation, and all who dwell in it.

And I believe God’s love for His Creation is also reflected in 1 Corinthians 13:13: three things will last forever--faith, hope, and love--and the greatest of these is love.

To conclude, I want to quote blogger Kimberly Hunt, who is with the Micah Challenge, a global Christian campaign to end extreme poverty. Here’s what she said:

“Are we going to ignore the science just because of political ideology or inconvenience? You might say that the laws, regulations, and plans right now aren’t doing anything to stop or reverse the effects of climate change and are just serving to hurt the economy, but at least we’re doing something. At least we’ve recognized part of the problem. At least we’ve taken steps to address the issue.

I don’t want to leave it at “at least” – I want to be able to tell the generations after us that we saw the problem and took steps to fix it so that they would have a chance. I want to be a part of the generation that seeks answers and innovates. I want to be able to talk to someone who is suffering in a drought right now and can’t farm to feed his/her family that I know there’s a problem, and I’m working my hardest to help find a solution. Don’t you?

So, how should Christians respond to Climate Change?

1. Let us pray.
2. Let us look at how we live our own lives and how it might be affecting the environment.
3. Let us seek innovation.
4. Let us seek alternative options for energy.
5. And let us advocate for those currently living in extreme poverty who are facing climate change as a life-threatening issue every single day.”

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Steadfast God, we confess that we are fickle creatures. We don't live lives marked by the faithfulness that you require or deserve, and our world suffers. Empower us with your Spirit, today and everyday, to bear witness to your covenant in a world that works so hard to bury it. May our lives be imperfect offerings of service as we long for the day when your loving purposes for this world will be made known in every corner of the earth.

We pray that you give your love of fairness to all of us who struggle to raise our voices in the public arena, and to all those in power. Let us rest in the knowledge that you know and are still working for the good of your people and your will. That you are the one who truly hears our prayers and can heal our land. Fill us with an illogical peace and hope.

Lord, give us the strength and let us trust you, do good, live in this land, and feed on your truth. In Jesus' name, Amen.