

I light the peace candle this morning thinking and praying for those whose lives have been overturned by natural disasters, especially hurricanes, and what we as Christians can do about it.

This past Wednesday, Panama City was one of the towns along Florida's coast that was pummeled by Hurricane Michael. Winds gusted up to 130 mph. Emergency crews there are still working to clear downed trees and debris. The city remains both without water and power. There is no timetable for when those services might be restored.

The roof of the Saint Andrew United Methodist Church is still in place, and the pews are still there. But where the back wall should be, there is only blue sky. Imagine: the back wall of this church... gone.

Pastor John Blount was sheltering inside the church along with two dozen other people when the hurricane hit. The wind ripped two of the walls away, but Blount didn't even hear it because the storm was so loud. Blount says he's grateful that everyone in the building survived. Now he's looking ahead to this weekend.

"We'll have worship service on Sunday somewhere and have a very simple service just proclaiming that God is good," Blount said.<sup>1</sup>

The massive hurricane came just two days after the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) issued a major report, warning, with new urgency, that humanity has only a dozen years to mitigate climate change or face global catastrophe, with severe droughts, floods, sea level rise and extreme heat set to cause climate refugees and poverty.

What do scientists know about the relationship between climate change and hurricanes? Scientists know that warmer ocean water equals more fuel for hurricanes, allowing them to gain strength. Scientists know that a warmer atmosphere holds more water vapor, which in turn results in heavier rainfall. Scientists know that rising sea levels creates higher storm surge.

So how should Christians respond to climate change? Simply discussing it is a good first step. I did that this past New Year's Eve when I talked to this congregation about the Biblical responsibility of God's people to care for His Creation. I shared with you a quote from the poet Wendell Berry, that "God made the world because He wanted it made. He thinks the world is good, and He loves it. It is His world; if God loves the world, then how might any person of faith be excused for not loving it, or justified in destroying it?" And as the Rev. Dr. Christopher Wright states in *The Mission of God*, we cannot have a relationship with God if we fail to care for what belongs to him. "...if the greatest commandment is that we love God, that surely implies that we should treat what belongs to God with honor, care and respect. ... To love God... means to value what God values."

And yet for decades scientists have warned that rising atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases from the burning of fossil fuels risks adversely affecting the climate, and therefore we are inherently failing to value what God values; we're not being stewards of Creation.

The IPCC report was commissioned in 2015 by the then 195 signatories of the Paris Climate Agreement—which commits them to keep warming "well below" 2°C and to "pursue efforts towards 1.5°C" (below pre-industrial temperatures). The effects and technical feasibility of keeping warming within this tighter limit were the report's focus.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2018/10/12/657023586/crews-in-panama-city-fla-working-to-clear-debris-restore-power-water>

The scale of the global effort required to transition off of fossil fuels to renewable energy is unprecedented. A mix of alarm and apathy has both galvanised efforts to secure a 2°C future, and also stymied them. A target of 1.5°C is no more likely to be met, but may nonetheless encourage the world to try harder.<sup>2</sup>

This sounds scary, but we don't need to be fearful. There is, 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." Matthew 25 instructs us to "care for the least of these"

So how should Christians respond to climate change?

1. Let us pray. [see [http://issuu.com/micahchallenge/docs/prayer\\_to\\_change\\_the\\_world](http://issuu.com/micahchallenge/docs/prayer_to_change_the_world)] As the song goes, let's go back down to the river to pray. The Lord will show us the way. I believe we need a faith that is more fervently grounded in Christ. When we do that, we might just find that there is hope, there is joy, there is peace. And it's found right here on Earth, with each one of you.
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. Let us advocate [see <http://www.micahchallengeusa.org/take-a-stand>] for those currently living in extreme poverty who are facing climate change as a life-threatening issue every single day.

I've been thinking about this a lot -- what kind of meaningful things could we, as a congregation, do to make a difference? It may surprise you to learn that the United Church of Christ has a Creation Justice Church program [see [http://www.ucc.org/how\\_it\\_works\\_becoming\\_a\\_creation\\_justice\\_church](http://www.ucc.org/how_it_works_becoming_a_creation_justice_church)]. Perhaps we should explore becoming a Creation Justice Church. The Creation Justice program aims to help congregations collectively discern their higher calling to care for creation and seek justice for the oppressed, and to engage in critical thinking about the socioeconomic dimensions of environmental justice such as race, class, and global inequality. It allows congregations to foster a deeper sense of connection to God, to each other, and to the world in which we live, and to unleash our imaginations and creativity as a sense of purpose propels us to make a difference. And what kind of tangible differences might we make? Let's seek innovation! We have a perfectly good, large, south-facing roof. Maybe we should look into installing solar panels on it.

In conclusion, I pray that there not only be peace on Earth beginning with each one of us, but that, to quote from Pope Francis' Encyclical on Climate Change and Inequality: "enlighten those who possess power and money that they may avoid the sin of indifference, that they may love the common good, advance the weak, and care for this world in which we live. The poor and the earth are crying out."

Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2018/10/13/why-the-ipccs-report-on-global-warming-matters>