

It All Matters

The Sixth Sunday of Easter (Year A, RCL)

April 27, 2008

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Permafrost is melting. Migration patterns of fish and fowl, changing. Oceans, acidifying. Sea levels, rising. Wetlands, disappearing. Water sources, evaporating. Dry lands, flooding. And world round, our sisters and brothers who are poor, already suffering, are suffering more.

Global warming.

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Our Eucharistic Prayer speaks of God as creator of “interstellar space (and) planets in their courses,” which, of course, include “this fragile earth, our island home.”¹ No doubt, some of us at St. Mark's doubt that God is creator, even God's existence. However, given global warming, we *are* certain about the fragility of the earth. Yes, we may disagree about the severity of climate change. We may debate about how close we are to the “tipping point” of humankind's overuse, verily, abuse of natural resources beyond the earth's capacity to renew and beyond which only catastrophe lies. Yet, given the weight of consensus in the scientific community, we, being good rationalists all, cannot dismiss the *fact* of climate change, which makes our care for the earth of paramount concern.

Why? At the very least, for the sake of our self-interest in ensuring the viability of the world for ourselves and especially for our children and grandchildren.

Yet, I believe there are other, greater reasons.

For Christians, this is the Easter season. The season of resurrection. Not only for Jesus, but also for us. The power of the Jesus-story, whether we take it literally or metaphorically, lies in its constant, daily call to us to die to an egoistic life of preoccupation with self so to rise to a new, self-sacrificial life lived for others, *all* others, not only those of our kith and kin.

Even more, I believe that the Jesus-story is about love and justice, not only incarnate the life and ministry of Jesus, but also embodied in *us* in the world. Therefore, our confronting global climate change for the sake of the least, the most vulnerable of our sisters and brothers is perhaps *the* quintessential love and justice issue of this or any future time. Truly, if we don't address it, there is little promise in a future time.

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As we contemplate our role as collaborators with God in caring for the creation, we face with an immediate, obvious dilemma. The issue of climate change overwhelms us. Globally, there are national and international economic and political forces that make

¹ Eucharistic Prayer C, [The Book of Common Prayer](#), page 370

any change from our present course difficult. Personally, there are the self-centered habits of our human nature. And then, there is the sheer size of the problem. It's hard to wrap our minds around 100-year predictions – that *none* of us will be alive to see come to pass or not – that an additional 600 million people will suffer malnutrition or 1.8 billion people will dwell in water-scarce lands.² Such gargantuan numbers incapacitate thought, making it difficult to conceive of any one or more individual, let alone corporate actions to address the crisis.

Still more, some have suggested that the problem is not only too big, but also too far gone to do anything. To paraphrase Ecclesiastes, who, in despair beheld the vanity of all striving, we might just as well “eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.”³

At times, that is precisely what I want to do. I *don't* want – and, in many ways, I don't *have* – to think about climate change. After all, I am a privileged American. According to the website, *Global Rich List*,⁴ I am in the top .66% of the richest people in the world. (Actually, I'm the 39,615,049th richest person in a world of 6.6 billion people!)⁵ Daily, I can live without conscious notice of many of the dread effects of climate change.

Yet, a reality of my post-sabbatical life, verily, the *rest* of my life is this. Having traveled around the world, having seen among our African sisters and brothers the worst of the world's poverty, having lived among our European sisters and brothers who, seemingly, almost to a person, live with a daily mindfulness of the insanity of waste and the necessity of preservation, I see the world and my self differently. Now I know as never before that I “live and move and have my being,”⁶ in common destiny with every living thing. What I do and don't do affects others. What others do and don't do affects me.

Even more, as I seek to follow Jesus, keeping his commandments,⁷ which, for me, are just loving and loving justly all others, then, I must act with a daily intentionality to preserve the world for the sake of others *and*, in my role as rector of St. Mark's, call all of us to continue and to do more of what many of us are already doing; seeking greater energy efficiency, buying locally produced goods and services, and reducing our dependence on carbon-based energy.

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I am a Christian realist. I follow a Jesus who suffered and died. I am not naïve. I believe that life is filled with tribulation. All suffer, and some more greatly than others. Thus, it was, is, and ever shall be. Yet, although my realism, which generally sees the

² Statistics taken from *Human Development Report 2007/2008. Fighting Climate Change: Human Solidarity in a Divided World* (December 2007) by Kevin Watkins for the United Nations Development Program.

³ Ecclesiastes 8.15. Contrarily, see also Isaiah 22.13, where the prophet denounces those who would continue to revel in the face of imminent destruction.

⁴ www.globalrichlist.com

⁵ A result of my having keyed in my annual income on the Global Rich List website.

⁶ Acts 17.28. A reading appointed for the day is Acts 17.22-31.

⁷ An allusion to John 14.15-21, the gospel passage appointed for the day.

world through a skeptical lens, always runs the risk of becoming a “what’s the use” cynicism, in the face of the overwhelming evidence and brutal reality of climate change, I maintain hope. The reason for my hope⁸ is that I believe that all, *any* effort to change the course of a crisis matters, even if it only forestalls the inevitable. Matters now for us who live even if we guarantee but one more day so that our children and grandchildren have an opportunity to do far more, far better than we.

In my office, I have a symbol of my life in South Carolina twenty years ago where, blessedly, I met my wife, Pontheolla. It also reminds me of my environmental stupidity. Three sand dollars – marine animals that live just beneath the water’s surface, usually in sand or mud. One sand dollar is bleached white. I bought it at a souvenir shop in Charleston. The other two, which, I found at water’s edge while walking along the beach, are green. Later, I asked a friend why one was white and the other two green. He said, “Paul, you dummy, the ones you took from the beach were alive. You’ve killed them.” Every day, these sand dollars remind me of where I met Pontheolla, the love of my life, *and* where I took life. I am determined to be smarter than I was about caring for the creation, for all, *any* effort matters.

I end with an oft told story.

At dawn, a man walked along a beach. It was covered with countless starfish. At a distance, he saw a child tossing starfish one at a time back into the sea. As he approached, he called out, “The sun will soon rise, you know. The starfish will dry up and die. How can *you* make a difference?” After tossing another into the sea, she picked up another, turned toward the man and said, “It will make a difference to this one.”

To care for the creation, all, *any* effort matters.

⁸ An allusion to 1 Peter 3.15. The epistle appointed for the day is 1 Peter 3.13-22.