

# AN EARTH DAY REFLECTION

- by *Karri Munn-Venn*



## An Earth Day Reflection, 2018

Earth Day is the most celebrated secular holiday in the world. Still, I'm not quite sure what to make of it.

There is no doubt that the level of environmental awareness has risen immensely over the last generation. And, there is real power in being part of a community, a larger movement based in common concern and purpose.

But the celebratory sounds of these Earth Day events may be overwhelmed by the cries of the people on the front lines of climate change. Which begs the question: why are we celebrating?

### **Beyond Greening**

I worry that personal and church greening is sometimes understood as the solution to environmental degradation & climate change. Full stop. It is important, to be sure, but the unfortunate reality is that in terms of carbon emissions, personal and church greening activities are carried out on such a small scale that they have very little impact.

Father Mishka Lysack, an Anglican priest in Calgary, eloquently points out that the greatest value of greening activities is that they “create psychological changes in how we see our relationship with creation, and prepare us for the deep social and economic changes that we urgently need to make.”

In 2017, thousands were killed in natural disasters. Homes and livelihoods were lost to landslides in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Sierra Leone, Colombia, Sri Lanka and the Congo. Devastation was brought by hurricanes in the Caribbean and avalanches in Afghanistan and Pakistan. These were only the worst instances of destruction linked to climate change.

So when I reflect on the words of the prophet Hosea in chapter 4, verses 1-3, it seems clear to me that as Christians we are called to do more than clean up the local park or share our spring seedlings with a neighbour.

“the land mourns... the wild animals languish... even the fish of the sea are perishing.”

And in the New Testament lesson (Romans 8:18-25), we read, “Creation waits... The whole creation has been groaning in labour pains... Hope... that creation itself will be set free from bondage to decay.”

## **Hope & Hypocrisy**

When I heard about plans to mark Earth Day 2016, I was excited to think that this hope might soon be fulfilled. Earth Day 2016 marked a major moment in the global pursuit of climate action – and indeed in the history of constructive multilateral collaboration.

On that day, the Paris Agreement on climate change opened for signature at the UN headquarters in New York. Many of the world’s political leaders, including Prime Minister Trudeau, were on hand to sign this historic agreement

By signing the agreement, they signalled their support for ambitious action to address climate change and limit global warming to well below 2°C over pre-industrial levels.

In December that same year, Prime Minister Trudeau, along with the premiers of Canada’s provinces and territories delivered a new framework for climate action in Canada. A historic development to be sure. Unfortunately, there are also a number of problems with the new framework.

For starters, it is built on the inadequate emissions reduction target that the Liberal government inherited from the Conservatives: to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions 30 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030.

At the same time, the government continues to support the expansion of the oil and gas sector, Canada's largest source of GHG emissions. Between now and 2025 – when federal subsidies are supposed to be phased out – the fossil fuel industry will continue to receive an estimated \$3.3 billion annually in direct federal and provincial support.

And, under Alberta's legislated oil sands emissions cap (set at 100 megatonnes (Mt) annually), emissions are allowed to grow more than 30 Mt over current levels.

Closely related to oil sands expansion, of course, is the Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain pipeline – that has been receiving so much attention of late. Scientific research indicates that due to associated lifecycle emissions, the climate impact of this pipeline will be staggering.

Moving forward, our government must look carefully at its approach to energy development and infrastructure. Canada needs a justice-based approach that respects the rights of indigenous peoples, includes a just transition plan for Canadian workers, and supports adaptation and mitigation efforts in the Global South.

## **A Christian Response**

As Christians, what is our role in all of this? I believe that we are called by God to respond to the human and ecological devastation of climate change with love and justice.

The Fifth Mark of Mission of the Anglican Communion calls us to ‘strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.’

As I understand it, the choices we make and the action we take to fulfill this mission must include both the personal and the political.

With the arrival of Easter, CPJ concluded the second annual **Give it up for the Earth!** campaign.

This Lenten faith-in-action campaign saw thousands of Canadians in 150 communities across the country taking action to reduce personal or household emissions.

The campaign also included a postcard addressed to Catherine McKenna, the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change. It calls on the government to also **Give it up for the Earth!** by ending all subsidies to the fossil fuel industry. We see these subsidies as incompatible with moving towards Canada's climate commitments.

The postcards will be delivered to Minister McKenna to show her that Canadian Christians support more ambitious action to address climate change. And this is critical.

When we delivered the cards at the end of last year's campaign, Minister McKenna was thrilled. In her work to move Canadian climate action forward, it is essential that she has the support and encouragement of Canadians across the board – including Canadians of faith!

## **We Pray for Creation**

In closing, I want to share a bit of the Joint Earth Day Statement issued by the Rt. Rev. Mark MacDonald, National Anglican Indigenous Bishop, the Rev. Susan C. Johnson, National Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, and the Most Rev. Fred Hiltz, Primate, Anglican Church of Canada.

[“In recognition of Earth Day on April 22, 2018, we invite you to join us in praying for the humility and discipline to use Earth’s resources wisely and responsibly. ...](#)

We are reminded that through prayer God calls us to action. ... Consider what we all might do to **advocate** for a more equitable world that recognizes the need for communities to define their own development goals and objectives. ...

Recent important legislative initiatives are a reminder for all of us to continue to work for human rights and to care for creation every day. As the recent collaborative report from Auditors General across Canada highlights, there is need for much stronger federal and provincial relations to meet important emissions reductions targets in order to begin addressing the very real impacts of climate change already being felt in Canada and around the world.

On this Earth Day, let us pray together:

Creator, we stand in awe and wonder at God's great creation, at the diversity of beings, and at the intricate balance of relationships that sustains life. We recognize the need and basic human right for each person to have a place to which to belong.

Inspire in us the will to live in responsible and sustainable relationships to water, land, home, and each other as part of realizing our full humanity.

Gather us together for the love of the world, and send us out, with patience and persistence, to act as your disciples."

**Amen.**

*An expanded version of this reflection was prepared for - and shared with - the parish of St. James Anglican Church, Kingston as they marked Earth Day. April 22, 2018.*

**Find more creation care worship resources at [justice.crcna.org/worship](http://justice.crcna.org/worship)**