

Feast of St. Francis  
October 4, 2015

What Matters Most: Stewardship of Creation

Susan J. Barnes  
St. John's, Minneapolis

This Sunday we ask you all to begin prayerfully considering a generous pledge to St John's for the coming year. The Vestry and I are grateful to this year's chair, Bob DeHaven, and to the members who will speak at services this month.

Pledging is just one part of stewardship in the church. Sharing your time and your talent, are vital, too. Yesterday over two dozen turned out for the Work Day. The energy was amazing. We cleared out storage spaces in the building and did major work on the grounds. Thanks to all who took part.

St. John's grounds are a tiny part of God's creation. Tending them was a great way to spend the Eve of the feast of St. Francis of Assisi.

St. Francis' Feast is October 4, today. He is the patron not only of animals but of creation and all who care for it. Rightly, then, Pope Francis lauded him in this summer's encyclical on the environment, "Laudato Si!"

My sermons this fall are focused on what matters most. Today, in honor of St. Francis, I want to highlight the care of creation. In truth the stewardship of this fragile planet is What Matters Most of All, because Climate Change threatens the very future of our species and of all that live. If we don't succeed in reversing it, nothing else that matters will have a chance. Thank God, Pope Francis has brought his voice, his attention, his moral, spiritual authority to the issue at this critical time. I commend his beautiful encyclical to you: it is sobering and up-lifting.

Addressing Climate Change is a huge topic for a short sermon. I decided to summarize my thoughts as answers to the journalist's key questions: Who, what, when, where, why, how?

I want to tick off the first four and dwell briefly on why and how.

**Who** should take on Climate Change? Every person on earth has a part to play, especially Americans. Our model of energy consumption and consumerism is a big part of the problem. We have the power, the creativity, the wealth and the moral responsibility to lead in creating the solutions. The good news: thanks to President Obama, the USA is taking firm plans and commitments to the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris in late November.

**What** can every person do to address Climate Change? Consider, and wherever possible, prioritize the good of the environment in all of our choices--our behaviors, our investments, our purchases, our voices, our votes.

And pray. Because prayer changes the human heart; prayer changes us; prayer changes the energy of the world around us.

**When** should we act on Climate Change? Now

**Where?** At home, at church, in our places of work and play--everywhere.

Now we come to "why?" and "how?".

Well "why" is obvious, isn't it? If all of life is at stake, isn't that enough?

Actually, the question I want to consider is "why me?" "why you?" "why us at St. John's?"  
What do **we** in particular bring to the issue?

We bring our belief that we are all children of God and an integral part of God's "very good" creation.

We bring the responsibilities that are part of our Christian faith. In his encyclical, Pope Francis wrote that for Christians, "responsibility within creation, and... duty towards nature and the Creator, are an essential part of ...faith".

In America, Christians also bring a history of leading social justice movements--from abolition to early education and prison reforms to nuclear disarmament. Climate change is a social justice issue because it disproportionately effects the lives of the poor globally. We are called to lead here, too.

You and I can bring many things to fighting Climate Change: intelligence, passion, commitment to justice, leadership. Most important of all, we can bring our grounding in the Great Commandment--love of God and love of neighbor. Love is the one verb that Jesus used to summarize the whole Law.

**Why** should you and I take on Climate Change? Because if we love God and love our neighbors--especially, the poor--we will love and care for God's creation.

**How** do we address Climate Change? With love, because love is the most powerful motivation on earth. Pope Francis wrote: "God's love is the fundamental moving force in all created things."

What we love deeply, selflessly, personally, we will care for and preserve tenderly.

How do we love personally something as vast, even abstract, as "creation"? Some of you, like the mystic St. Francis of Assisi, feel so deeply connected to God in nature that you are able to rejoice in relationship with Brother Sun, Sister Moon, and Sister Mother Earth.

Being practical and existential myself, I'm starting small; beginning with the particular. I'm recalling the most tender, nurturing love I have ever felt for another. I'm trying now to take that feeling of deep connection, of tender care, and slowly transfer it to the world around me. For me, that love is for another person. For you it could be place in nature, a garden perhaps, a child, a pet. What matters is the feeling of selfless devotion and care.

Love changes our hearts. Love can and will change the energy of the world around us, too. Love can save us from ourselves.

What about action? Act we must, and act we will. The most effective, the most faithful action will flow from prayer and love. It always has.

Let our faith, prayer and love direct and transform us. Let it inspire us to faithful, effective grounded in the truth that Pope Francis wrote. We all are "related... united...woven together by

the love God has for each of his creatures...[That] also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth."

Let it be so.