

St James United Church



Message for September 7, 2025 First Sunday in the Season of Creation

“Collective Lament and Action” - Preached by Rev. James Ravenscroft

Jeremiah 18:1-11; and Luke 14:25-33

Each year as summer ends, we reflect on the gift of this world. I relish this time and so wish we'd been marking the Season of Creation for many years more than the twenty-some for which it has been promoted. The season is so new because the inspiration wasn't just appreciation for our planet but the increasing human impact on it. That makes me wonder if we may have treated the world differently if we'd marked the season not just years, but decades, centuries longer. I am grateful we do it now. It's important to reflect spiritually on climate change and other concerns.

That's why I don't want to make this just a heady lecture on global warming. We've heard those, so have the information we need to make informed choices about our collective impact on our planet. But there are lecture-y things I'd like to say. The first is our need to think collectively. Sadly, environmental issues have been framed individually, the focus on what each individual can do. What I can do to lower the CO₂ emissions that I help produce, or what I can do to reduce plastic pollution, or what I can do to decrease pesticide use, or what I can do on any number of issues. This has had two impacts. First, it's left many of us feeling like just an “I” and not a “we” and so isolated, quite powerless, even ready to give up, despite wisdom about the impact of many small steps to bring about big change. Second, it shifted responsibility from the companies producing most of the CO₂, or plastic, or pesticides, or whatever it might be, intentionally, so, they could keep doing what they do while we all, on our own, do our bit. The result, as we well know, has been an increase in greenhouse gas emissions, not less.

Now this doesn't mean we shouldn't still do our bit. I believe we should. The heart of being a disciple of Jesus is caring for other humans and the-other-than-human as well. What we have done to our planet is causing real harm to real people. The wildfires are one example. Extreme weather is another, and those impacted are our siblings, many the most impoverished in our world. And countless plants, animals, other organisms will be lost. We can accept that loss, or we can seek to mitigate the impacts as much as we can. Jesus offers good advice here as he refers to how a builder putting up a tower sits down and determines what he needs to complete his task, or a king before going to war sits down and looks at whether he has enough soldiers. In the same way, we need to sit down and determine what needs to be done, and not just in five-year election cycles but multi-generationally. Jesus says being a disciple will cost us. There are things then that we need to do and to stop doing as well.

Here is where I want to shift from a lecture to something more reflective. Because as critical as it is for us to think in terms of what we need to do, we also need to reflect on what we will lose if we don't, to consider all the things of this Earth that we love and want to preserve. Here then I invite us to sit in silence as we bring them to mind... *silence*...

Let's consider those now... *time for sharing*...

It hurts the heart to name these, doesn't it. Joanna Macy, of blessed memory, was an environmental activist and author, known best for a process called "the work that reconnects" which helps shift us from despair into action. She suggests that we need to begin with lament, to allow ourselves to feel grief for all we named, collectively as well as individually. We tend to shut this down, feeling overwhelmed not just by what we need to do but by what we are losing, and to cope with this we push it away, end up numb. But we can't. We need to consider the cost, to grieve. As we allow the feelings to surface, we come to realize we feel this grief because we're connected not just with other humans but the-other-than-human too. That feeling renews in us the courage to act. Again, doing so collectively, shifting us from isolation into joint action, key to pressuring big business to finally clean up their act, and pressuring government too. One solution I was part of in Ontario was led by the church I was at. It hosted a series of forums where people came together to ask questions, learn approaches, but most importantly realize they weren't alone. It is something that we could do here.

The key in all of this is the capacity for change. In Jeremiah, the prophet goes to the potter's shed where he sees a pot reshaped. In the reading, God may be the potter, but we are the clay. We can be reshaped, collectively, refashion too how we work together in our world, so we preserve it rather than just accept the coming loss. We often presume our present economic and social structures are immutable. They're not. We learned during COVID we can join together to do things differently. We just need to want to. Acting together out of the connection we feel, the love we feel, helps us do that.

So, friends, as we mark another Season of Creation, may we take time to do just that, not just as individuals but together in community, affirming the gift of the Earth, and so also caring for it, for the table of God's love. May it be so. Amen.