**Sin and the Climate Crisis**

September 10, 2023, Season of Creation II

Exodus 12: 1-14 Russell Mitchell-Walker

Matthew 18: 15-20

This month we enter the Season of Creation in the church calendar. A time when we celebrate and honour creation and reflect on what we can do to preserve it in the face of climate change. More and more we are witnessing and experiencing the impacts of climate change. The extreme wildfires – so far more than 16.5 million hectares have burned this summer alone, more than double the last record of 7.1 million hectares in 1995. Cities impacted by smoke thousands of kilometres away. I haven’t been able to ride my bike since getting back from holidays because of the smoke. Huge amounts of rainfall leading to horrendous flooding in places from Nova Scotia to Pakistan, and this week, Hong Kong. Increasing numbers of hurricanes of category 4 or 5, leaving devastation in their wake. This past week there was reports of how much more quickly Peyto Glacier in Banff National Park is melting, where a lake has formed at it’s base, much higher up than Peyto Lake. The [article](https://www.cbc.ca/newsinteractives/features/the-canary-in-the-icefield) indicated that the glaciers in the Rocky Mountains of Western Canada will all be gone by the end of our lifetime. Without these glaciers to feed rivers in the summer, the prairie provinces will have to prepare for hydrological droughts that are more severe than any we’ve experienced. Unfortunately, the examples could go on and on. While the Paris accord agreed upon by the majority of Nations of the world, committed to limiting the increase of global temperature to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, that threshold was [briefly reached](https://www.pbs.org/newshour/science/global-temperatures-briefly-spike-above-key-climate-threshold-scientists-warn-of-more-extremes) in early June this summer. In a MacLeans article this month, called [*Canada in the year 2060*](https://macleans.ca/society/environment/canada-in-the-year-2060/), a bleak picture is painted of the devastation that has already happened and what life could look like in 2060, if we warm to 2°C hotter. Canada has warmed at twice the rate of the rest of the planet over recent years, and the Arctic at four times the rate. Also, while the rest of the countries have reduced their rates of emissions, the US by 7% and the EU by 34%, Canada’s emissions have increased by 11% over the same time, largely due to our fossil fuel industry. We have an industry and some provincial governments, including our own, who don’t seem to see the need to transition away from fossil fuel use.

We are in a climate emergency, yet our leaders are not acting like it. Those of us who read [A Good War, Mobilizing Canada for the Climate Emergency](https://www.sethklein.ca/book), by Seth Klein, keep waiting for the tipping point, our France for this situation. Klein compares the mobilization of the country around World War II and looks at how we need a similar mobilization to address the climate crisis. He noted that it wasn’t until Germany invaded France during WWII that national and global support for the war effort crystalized. He says, we need a ‘France’ to mobilize governments to declare an emergency and take action on the Climate Crisis. I am worried about how bad things need to get for us to get to that point. We know that mobilization is possible as we experienced it during the pandemic. Though we also experienced the danger of individualism, and personal rights being seen as more important than the community and the common good. This is a sin we will need to address as well.

In our readings today, the Old Testament Exodus story while focusing on the establishment of Passover, is in the context of the plagues against Pharoah and the Egyptians. Some of us as the Pandemic began in the spring of 2020 might have been feeling a little worried that we were experiencing something similar, as we moved through climate catastrophes, and the Pandemic, I also recall reports of potential pestilence with things such as killer hornets coming. Our imagination could get take us to scary places. However, in the midst of the initial period of the Pandemic, there was a strong sense that we are all in this together, and were committed to get through it together. I am sure there was this sense as well among the Israelites led by Moses. The Passover was established to remind the Hebrew People of their journey to liberation from the Egyptians that God through Moses led them. As we move through this Climate Crisis, we too are called to liberate the earth and one another from the potential disaster that Climate Change can be, by working together to address the issues and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The gospel reading in Matthew offers a process for addressing when someone sins against you and describes a three stage process of talking to them directly, talking to them with witnesses and then the congregation and if they still don’t listen, then treating them like a Gentile or tax collector. There are a few things that are important to note about this passage. First is the context, that in the beginning of this chapter, Jesus is talking about becoming like a child, not putting a stumbling block before children, and searching for one lost sheep. Jesus is telling his followers, to honour children and the vulnerable, the marginalized, that all are important parts of the community. He tells us that their perspective is kingdom worthy. As we have witnessed around the climate crisis, the young people are leaders that we need to become like and follow. In our reading today, the last part of the process around treating one as a Gentile or tax collector, could lead people and church communities to shunning or rejecting people, as that is how the culture of Jesus’ time treated them. However, this is not how Jesus treated them, he welcomed them into his circles and included them as part of the community. So, when someone doesn’t listen, we are to continue to include them in our circles, offering them community and love, and maybe this will lead to reconciliation.

In the situation of climate change, and this passage, how does this work for corporate sin? The fossil fuel industry, specifically Exxon has sinned against us, because they [knew](https://www.npr.org/2023/01/12/1148376084/exxon-climate-predictions-were-accurate-decades-ago-still-it-sowed-doubt#:~:text=Over%20the%20last%20few%20years,warming%20that%20has%20actually%20happened.) for over 30 years that burning fossil fuels would result in climate change, yet spearheaded and funded a campaign to cast doubt on human driven climate change and the science underpinning it. So how do we apply Jesus’ message to this? While it is Exxon that was called out on this behaviour, it is a fairly safe bet that the whole industry knew about this. They have not changed their ways, so I’d say we are at least at the second stage. For our part, we can write letters, to both the companies and the government, encouraging them to stop fossil fuel production, especially of new production. We can support the Fossil Fuel [Non-Proliferation](https://fossilfueltreaty.org/) Treaty spearheaded by small pacific countries that are at risk of disappearing as sea levels rise, which supports accelerating an equitable shift away from fossil fuels to affordable, abundant clean energy for all. We can support and encourage our government to move forward quicker with a just transition to clean energy, which also trains and provides new work for those impacted in the fossil fuel industry. This may be considered like treating the fossil fuel industry like Gentiles or tax collectors. They are not shunned but provided ways of being part of the community and the new industry. We can support green energy ourselves in our circles, converting to solar energy or geothermal power, where feasible; commit to your next vehicle being electric as soon we won’t have a choice; reduce our driving and change our [driving habits](https://natural-resources.canada.ca/energy-efficiency/transportation-alternative-fuels/personal-vehicles/fuel-efficient-driving-techniques/21038) to be more fuel efficient; and reduce our heating, air conditioning and water usage as much we can. We may think that what we do as individuals can’t make much difference, but that is our individualism speaking. We all need to work together to make a difference. Former Moderator Clarke MacDonald once said, we may feel like grains of sand by the seashore, but it takes all the grains of sand together to hold back the tides.

As we move through this Season of Creation, may we savour the beauty of creation each day, stopping to enjoy the wonder of God’s creation. May we do what we can to continue to address the challenges of climate change and encourage others to do the same. May we challenge individualism when we see it and support the common good. May we work to liberate this earth and one another from the crisis that is before us.