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St. James', Mt. Airy  
9/27/2015

Proper 21/B  
Esther 7:1-6, 9-10; 9:20-22  
James 5:13-20  
Mark 9:38-50

**Gracious God, take our minds and think through them;  
take our hands and work through them;  
take our hearts and set them on fire.  
Amen.**

As you may have read about in the Thursday News email, over the summer Bishop Sutton invited all of the parishes in the diocese to participate in an event today sponsored by *Interfaith Power & Light* and the *Chesapeake Climate Action Network* called **Climate in the Pulpits Maryland**.

Scheduled to coincide with the visit of Pope Francis to our region, the hope was to raise up the care of Creation and issues of climate justice in light of the release earlier this summer of the Papal Encyclical *Laudato Si – On Care for Our Common Home*.

Now I have to say that I know more about this Pope in particular, and the release of this encyclical, than I ever thought I would. I'm not what one would call a Pope-watcher – though I do have some nice Pope swag that has been given to me as gifts by those who know of my love for holy kitsch, including a Pope Francis with a solar cell who waves when in sunlight.

But during my time as Interim Rector at Memorial I came to work closely with the pastors of the Presbyterian and Roman Catholic churches down the block as there was a longstanding relationship between the three churches.

Part of that relationship included an annual Lenten supper series and forum, the topic of which changed yearly. This year, because of the widespread interest in Pope Francis, the forums were about him and each of us were called on to explore a different aspect of his leadership. I focused his stance on environmental theology in anticipation of his then upcoming encyclical.

In the hubbub of this summer I didn't have the chance to sit down and really dig into *Laudato Si* – which in case you're wondering comes from St. Francis' *Canticle of the Sun*: '*Laudato si, mi Signore*' – 'Praise be to you, my Lord.'

And specifically this line: "*Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs.*"

But I did have time to skim it, and to catch a few analyses of *Laudato Si*. I don't give authority to the Pope in the way Roman Catholics do, and I see both shortcomings and oversteps in it, but at its heart I find this encyclical exciting in its bold call for a renewed **solidarity** movement.

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Now as I mentioned in my news blurb, I wasn't yet here at St. James' when Bishop Sutton extended the invitation to participate in **Climate in the Pulpits**, but from what I knew of this community, and seeing its Vision and Mission, had me marking my calendar and requesting the materials offered to review and share.

Accordingly I have placed a few copies of two publications from the National Council of Churches about *Climate and Church* and *Energy and Ethics* at the back of the church, along with petitions to sign for those who are interested that will be sent to our Maryland Legislators asking them to renew the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act and expand Maryland's clean energy standard.

So – **what** – you may be wondering, does all of this – *Interfaith Power & Light*, Pope Francis, and petitions – have to do with **us** and today's scripture?

I think it all comes together with a word I just mentioned – and that is **solidarity**.

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In an article published last week in *Commonweal Magazine* entitled “Embracing Our Limits,” former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams reflected on the lessons of *Laudato Si*.

He remarked on how striking the encyclical's consistent emphasis on **solidarity** is – calling it a ‘rule-of-thumb test’ for the moral defensibility of any policy.

And what is more, Williams expanded on Francis, saying we need to discover a spirituality rooted in “that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity.”<sup>1</sup>

There is a turn here from the classic definition of solidarity.

‘A union or fellowship arising from common responsibilities and interests’ becomes something deeper when it is overlaid with theological import.

Listen to section 240 of *Laudato Si*, which Williams quoted:

“The divine Persons are subsistent relations, and the world, created according to the divine model, is a web of relationships. Creatures tend towards God, and in turn it is proper to every living being to tend towards other things, so that throughout the universe we can find any number of constant and secretly interwoven relationships. This leads us not only to marvel at the manifold connections existing among creatures, but also to discover a key to our own fulfilment. The human person grows more, matures more and is sanctified more to the extent that he or she enters into relationships, going out from themselves to live in communion with God, with others and with all creatures. In this way, they make their own that trinitarian dynamism which God imprinted in them when they were created. Everything is interconnected, and this invites us to develop a spirituality of that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity.”

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<sup>1</sup> Rowan Williams, “Embracing Our Limits,” in *Commonweal Magazine*, reflection on section 240 of *Laudato Si*.

This solidarity is about more than catching together with like-minded people in common self-interest.

This solidarity is about actually believing we are each made in the image of God and then acting accordingly, based not on common self-interest, but on common responsibility rooted in Love.

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Esther was someone who shows us this kind of solidarity, she was someone who had courage for community.<sup>2</sup>

The short excerpts from the Book of Esther don't show the fullness of this complex story, and I highly recommend setting aside 30 minutes to read it in its entirety. But what we do have today shows a Queen who is harboring a secret identity and whose people are coming under attack.

The decision is before her: does she out herself in an attempt to save her people or does she keep her secret and watch them perish?

Self-interest dictates her solidarity should be with the royal household and the political rulings of her husband. But Esther is drawn to solidarity with her people – Jews living in exile and residing in the Persian Empire – not it seems because of connection through religious practices and institutions of Judaism, as they are virtually absent from this text, but from a deep-seated understanding of identity rooted in God and community.

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<sup>2</sup> From *Weekly Seeds* by Kathryn Matthews; [www.ucc.org/weekly\\_seeds](http://www.ucc.org/weekly_seeds)

The plea comes from her uncle Mordecai, “Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this.”

For just such a time as this.

On the cusp of ruin, facing down the assurance of destruction of life as she knew it.

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For such a time as this – when sea levels are rising, weather is swinging between extremes, and we may well be on the brink of the earths’ sixth mass extinction.<sup>3</sup>

Again, Rowan Williams on *Laudato Si*:

Measureless acquisition, consumption, or economic growth in a finite environment as a nonsensical idea. How the multiplication of pure consumer choice produces not greater diversity or liberty but a sense of endless repetition of the same and a lack of hope in the future. The underlying issue facing our world as the loss of meaning.<sup>4</sup>

Heady stuff, but spot on. True solidarity is rooted in incarnation which is in relationship with the divine – and that is where meaning is to be found.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/06/22/the-earth-is-on-the-brink-of-a-sixth-mass-extinction-scientists-say-and-its-humans-fault/>

<sup>4</sup> Rowan Williams, “Embracing Our Limits,” in *Commonweal Magazine*.

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Esther loved her uncle, her people, and her God. That love led her solidarity, and her working the royal system to reverse the edict against the Jews.

This is a bold love because it shows us what it looks like to claim spiritual identity.

Esther was from a people who had assimilated into the Persian Empire around them. It was a time of exile for the Jews. It was easy, under such circumstances, to forget who they were – and to whom they ultimately belonged.

Life is not so different for us. How is it that we as followers of Christ assimilate into American culture? Patriotic observances, sports, celebrity obsessions, political battles...

We, like Esther, at some point must come to *'such a time as this'* when we too must take stock and make a choice about where our solidarity lies – with God and each other and creation – or with the powers that be.

The call of **Climate in the Pulpits** is to pull us toward solidarity with God and each other and all of creation creation. But more importantly, the Gospel calls us toward such solidarity. For the Good News of Jesus Christ is one of Love Incarnate that draws all of creation together in unity and peace.

I'd like to close with one of the closing prayers of *Laudato Si*, a prayer for our earth:

All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe  
and in the smallest of your creatures.  
You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.  
Pour out upon us the power of your love,  
that we may protect life and beauty.  
Fill us with peace, that we may live  
as brothers and sisters, harming no one.  
O God of the poor,  
help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth,  
so precious in your eyes.  
Bring healing to our lives,  
that we may protect the world and not prey on it,  
that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.  
Touch the hearts  
of those who look only for gain  
at the expense of the poor and the earth.  
Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,  
to be filled with awe and contemplation,  
to recognize that we are profoundly united  
with every creature  
as we journey towards your infinite light.  
We thank you for being with us each day.  
Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle  
for justice, love and peace.

~ AMEN ~