



Caring for Our Common Home

By Bishop Greg

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My head is spinning. I have been reading and hearing so much information about climate change, that it is overwhelming. The environmental crisis facing us looms large. It seems overwhelming; it is so complex. But to acknowledge the immensity of the crisis is not to abdicate my personal, nor our communal, responsibility and calling.

At the ELCA/ELCIC Bishops Academy I recently attended, Dr. Larry Rasmussen and Dr. Cynthia Moe-Lobeda spoke on the theme “Caring for Our Common Home.” I encourage you to seek out any number of their books and articles. While they summarized the scientific data convicting us of our misuse of God’s good creation, they also led us through theological and biblical reflection on God’s love for our common home, this earth.

We know that something must be done urgently. But sometimes we do not know what to do, either individually or as a community and a country. We can easily become paralyzed in not knowing where to begin and what to do. Of course, I always find it so much easier to point out someone else’s faults (“you should do this or that”). Yet what of my own faults and blind areas?

I, too, am part of the systemic problem facing us. I have grown up in a culture that values economy as the ultimate measure of value and worth. I am part of a system that equates progress with increased consumption.

Consider these two quotes:

1. “We have lived by the premise that what is good for us is good for the world,” said Dr. Larry Rasmussen.
2. “Happiness of the rich is at the expense of the poor,” lamented Pope Francis in the papal encyclical “Laudatus Si: On Care for Our Common Home.”

Our faith in technology will not save us. Yes, there will continue to be technological breakthroughs that will help mitigate CO2 emissions, and ongoing research in green technology is absolutely essential. But it still comes down to our actions and our decisions.

First of all, we must recognize our complicity in climate change. We are part of a massively consuming culture. Furthermore, our consumptive lifestyle causes harm and destruction to other people. We do not just have and use more than our share; we actually impoverish others by doing so. I think it is absolutely critical that we understand that.

Secondly, we must repent. The word repent means “to change direction,” and change direction we must.

Thirdly, while we must make personal changes, we must also make changes as community and as a country.

This is not just a scientific argument trying to convince us about what lies before us, it is a theological one as well. There is a God-given mandate on our lives. In your baptism, as water was poured over your head (Imagine that! Water, the most basic of things absolutely essential for life, is a sign of covenant!) these words were declared: Do you intend to live in the covenant God has made with you ... to strive for justice and peace in all the earth?

In other words, God commissions us. That is our task before us. This is God's world, God's creation, and we are but part of God's creation. God so loves the world — do you remember that line from John's gospel? God loves the world. All of it. Not just humans. And knowing this should re-orient us and call us to seek justice and healing for all of God's creation.