
Advent 2

Matthew 3:1–12
Creation—Not for Sale



C R E A T I O N

Gracious God, this day you call us to actions which speak at least as loudly as our words and to words which indicate a change of heart and growing regard for your creation. Bless us in our Advent journey as we seek your incarnate presence in every aspect of our lives.

Amen.

In today's Gospel reading we hear John the Baptist calling the crowds to repentance, to a turning around of their lives, to a turning to God. This turning must not be shallow, flaky, or fickle, but rather, deep, whole-hearted and unwavering. "Bear fruit" he cries out, "worthy of repentance" (v8). Let it be seen that your life indeed has turned around, that your focus is re-framed, and your priorities are re-set. Let it be seen that your actions line up with your expression of repentance.

This is an important message as we consider the theme *Creation—Not for Sale*, one of four themes adopted by our sisters and brothers in the global Lutheran community as they mark the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation. (The over-arching theme is *Liberated by God's Grace*. The other themes are *Creation—Not for Sale*, *Salvation—Not for Sale and Human Beings—Not for Sale*.) As we consider God's creation, there is an urgency of concern about the global environmental crisis. We can no longer deny the harsh realities of islands drowning as sea levels rise; of deserts expanding in the face of unchecked deforestation; of weather patterns changing and growing violent as global warming continues; of lifestyles and livelihoods disappearing as the Arctic ice cap melts.

Really coming to terms with these realities was very much the focus of the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference—COP21—held in Paris. "COP21" refers to the "Conference of Parties" and to those countries which have adopted the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). In the midst of that great gathering of political and religious world leaders, and among thousands of ordinary citizens from every corner of the globe, a huge ecumenical service was held in Notre Dame Basilica. I had the great privilege of being there.

A message from the Council of Christian Churches in France included the following:

“Aware of the impact of the lifestyle of most of the developed countries, we need to call into question the logic of our consumption and to allow our attitude and witness to experience conversion—practising restraint and simplicity, not as a form of heroic renunciation, but as a form of joyful sharing. Our hope as Christians rests in our belief that our world is not destined to despair, but to transformation, and that human beings capable of self-destruction are also capable of uniting and choosing what is good.”

This “conversion” is the very thing that renowned environmentalist David Suzuki calls “the necessity for a massive change of spirit” on the part of leaders in government and industry and on the part of consumers in society...which includes us all. Suzuki has said he looks to both business communities and faith communities to provide leadership in calling for this “change of spirit”.

The liturgy in that great basilica concluded with a litany of repentance and of pledges to have us think and act differently. Here is an excerpt:

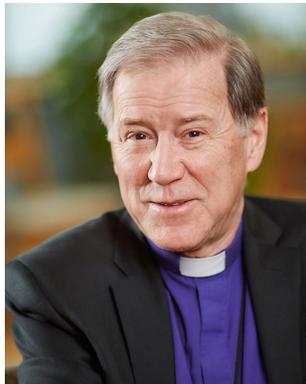
“Creation is suffering because of us.
The land has deteriorated.
Jesus Christ calls us to vigilance and commitment.

Our common home is damaged.
The poorest are excluded.
Jesus Christ calls us to solidarity and sharing.

(Continued)

Before you Creator God,
we pledge to take specific actions and to change our practices.
Jesus Christ calls us to conversion.”

We pray that by our decisions, and by our actions upon them, we
may “bear fruit worthy of our repentance.” ♦



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A series of Advent devotions prepared by the leaders of Anglican and Lutheran churches in full communion.