
LUTHERAN STUDY GUIDE TO POPE FRANCIS' LETTER ON CLIMATE CHANGE

Week 2

Claimed by God, Claiming our Calling

What you will need

- Bible
- Copy of Pope Francis' Letter, *Laudato Si'*
- Lutheran Study Guide
- Article: "Weathering the Storms: Global warming and faith intersect in the ELCA's northernmost congregation," *The Lutheran* (2004) http://www.thelutheran.org/article/article.cfm?article_id=1028
- Barbara Rossing's short video on eco-Reformation: <https://vimeo.com/lstchicago/review/123208390/40aa084650>
- Optional readings:
 - David Rhoads' essay on eco-reformation in *The Seminary Ridge Review*, Autumn 2012: <http://www.ltsge.edu/about-us/news/seminary-ridge-review>
 - Shishmaref, ten years later: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/12/14/shishmaref-alaska-climate-change-relocation_n_6296516.html



Opening

Prayer

Merciful and most high God, creator and giver of life, you have called creation from darkness into light, from error into truth, from death into life. Grant grace to us with all creation and bless us. Raise us by your Spirit. Revive us by your word. Form us by your hand. Bring us to the water of life and the bread and cup of blessing, that with all creation we may bear witness to your grace and praise you forever, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

(Adapted from *ELW* prayer for those preparing for baptism, p. 75).

Scripture

Read Psalm 104 together.



In love, through Christ, God has claimed us as daughters and sons. Luther's famous "Freedom of a Christian" recounts the freedom flowing from this claim: we are freed from pouring our resources into achieving God's love and freed for love and service to neighbor. In 2017 we will commemorate 500 years since the beginning of the Reformation. In the scope of the Reformation tradition little thought has been given to our non-human neighbors. It is now becoming increasingly clear that where we do not care for our non-human neighbors our human neighbors—and we ourselves!—suffer the consequences also. In light of this situation and the upcoming anniversary of the Reformation, a number of Lutheran scholars suggest a new kind of reformation would be a fitting tribute to the one Luther and others initiated: an

eco-reformation. Describing this call, New Testament scholar and Professor Emeritus at The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, David Rhoads, writes,

"I am proposing that we inaugurate a new reformation. We Lutherans have always considered "perpetual reformation" to be an ongoing dimension of our common life. Nevertheless, what I am proposing is more than mere adjustments in Reformation trajectories. We are facing unprecedented changes in our life on Earth and the times are calling for something much more substantial. If we are to be prepared to face these crises and to address them, some paradigm shift, some foundational transformation of our church, needs to take place.

The ecological crises, particularly the alarming progression of global climate change, are rapidly becoming matters reaching to the heart of faith.

Twenty years ago, in the social statement "Caring for Creation," the ELCA issued a warning for the church to respond to the looming ecological crises and the social justice issues related to them. Now it is time to meet the challenges presented by that document. This is a clarion call for a new re-formation.

The list of crises we are facing as a planet is long and substantive. To name a few: global climate change; unpredictable weather patterns; increase in frequency and intensity of storms; drought; rampant wildfires due to dry conditions; deforestation; desertification; shifting agricultural conditions; movement of species of plants and animals; loss of species diversity; deterioration in air quality; pollution of fresh water sources and oceans; degradation of soil; rise of seas levels, human overpopulation, and more—all of which produce negative impacts on human life, particularly the most vulnerable people and societies. Every eco-system on Earth is under stress. Earth itself is under stress.

Father Thomas Berry has said that humanity is entering a new era, the Ecozoic Age – an age in which ecological issues will dominate our global life together. He argues that creating a sustainable environmental lifestyle on the planet is the "great work" of our time. It is a work in which all people can participate, a work that all must embrace if human life on this planet is to be sustained. This work will require intention and sacrifice; and it can be joyful.

The environment is not a fad. It is not an add-on, not one more issue alongside others. It is not just for those who happen to be interested in this cause. Earth is our home. It involves everyone. It has an impact on all living things. And we humans, we Christians, we Lutherans, need to step up and embrace dramatic changes in ourselves and in our life together for the sake of Earth – and for the sake of the God we confess to be the creator and preserver of our planet and the whole universe.”

What would it look like for the church to claim a calling to what Berry refers to as the “great work” of our time? What would it look like to claim this calling *as Lutherans*? What resources might we draw from? Where do you see this work being done? What Lutheran themes would be most fruitful in this regard? These may not be questions you are prepared to answer yet! Hopefully, in the course of engaging in this study you will begin to find resources for reflecting on these questions.

The rest of Dr. Rhoads’ essay can be found in *The Seminary Ridge Review*, Autumn 2012: <http://www.ltsg.edu/about-us/news/seminary-ridge-review>

The ELCA social statement Rhoads references, “Caring for Creation,” can be found at <http://www.elca.org/en/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Caring-for-Creation#sthash.AH1TvXKc.dpu>

***Laudato Si’*, “What is Happening to our Common Home”**

Chapter One of Pope Francis’ encyclical lists several areas of ecological concern:

- pollution and climate change
- water
- loss of biodiversity
- decline in the quality of the human life and the breakdown of society
- global inequality
- weak responses from global leaders to these problems

Discussion

Choose one area of concern that seems most relevant to your local community and one that may most affect people far from your local community. Read both sections corresponding to these areas of concern. Share with the group:

- What issue seems closest to home for you? How do you see this issue emerging on a local level? Who is or will be the most affected by it? Who has the power to change it?
- What issue seems the farthest away for you? Who is (or will be) the most affected by it? Although the issue seems far away are there ways you are indirectly impacted by it or that you and your community directly or indirectly contribute to this issue? Who has the power to contribute to change in this area of concern?
- Identify the parallel or repeated concerns Dr. Rhoads and Pope Francis articulate.

Laudato Si', "The Gospel of Creation"

Read or review together The Lutheran 2004 article, "Weathering the Storms: Global warming and faith intersect in the ELCA's northernmost congregation."

In Chapter two (section 84) of *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis writes, "The history of our friendship with God is always linked to particular places which take on an intensely personal meaning; we all remember places, and revising those memories does us much good. Anyone who has grown up in the hills or used to sit by the spring to drink or played outdoors in the neighborhood square; going back to these places is a chance to recover something of our true selves."

Discussion

- What places in the world hold special meaning for you? Are there places where you feel God's presence most profoundly? What places or experiences come to mind when reading Psalm 104?
- Think of one of these places that holds special sentimental, ancestral, spiritual, and even economically sustaining meaning. What would you do to protect this place if it was in danger? How do you imagine the people of Shishmaref feel?
- Some Lutheran congregations and institutions are doing exemplary work, honoring their particular place in the world. The Lutherans Restoring Creation website gives several examples (under the "Stories" tab: www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org)

Eco-Reformation Video

Watch Barbara Rossing's short video on eco-reformation (link above)

Discussion

- How do you and your congregation plan to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017?
- Which of Rossing's ideas for celebrating an eco-Reformation would make most sense in your context?
- Rossing suggests this can be a hope-filled time in spite of dire circumstances. Where do you find hope? What actions might your church and community take to share that spirit of hope for a sustainable future?
- Could you envision cooperating with a local Roman Catholic congregation on an eco-Reformation project?
- Do a little brainstorming. What other ideas can you come up with for marking 500 years of the Reformation with an eco-Reformation?
- Find inspiration from other Lutheran communities at the Lutherans Restoring Creation website (link to the left) or get involved with ELCA Advocacy.

Preparation for Week 3

- Return next session with Bible, Study Guide, and encyclical
- Optional: Reading ahead
 - In Chapter Four ("Integral Ecology") read subsections: "Integral Ecology," "Environmental, Economic, and Social Ecology," "The Principle of the Common Good," and "Justice Between the Generations."
 - Read Joseph Sittler's "Called to Unity" speech: <http://www.augie.edu/pub/values/sittler.pdf>

Questions or comments on this study can be sent to Terra S. Rowe, trowe03@gmail.com