

# Sermons at St Paul's

The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost  
Carroll Anne Sheppard –Licensed Preacher

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*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*

*Laudato Si! "Praise Be! On the Care of Our Common Home"*

That is the title of Pope Francis' new Encyclical, released officially on Thursday. It takes as its title the first two words of verse three of St. Francis of Assisi's beautiful *Canticle of the Sun*, a hymn in praise of God and God's creation.

*Praise Be, My Lord, through all your creatures,  
Especially through my Lord, Brother Sun.*

St. Francis goes on to sing that God is praised through Sister Moon and the stars, Brothers Wind and Air, Sister Water and Brother Fire, and our sister, Mother Earth. Pope Francis, in his global (encyclical) letter calls for a new world economy that will change our "throwaway" consumerism and the methods of production that deeply harm our planet. By referencing St. Francis, he invokes Creation as God's sacred community – a family of brothers and sisters. Pope Francis urges both leaders and consumers to play their parts in realizing what we are doing and by making radical changes to the way we live. One heavily tweeted line on Thursday was "We have taken our beautiful planet and turned it into a mound of filth."

As Christians, we should feel that despite the raw newness of the Encyclical, its call to what our Prayer Book calls "the just and proper use of Your Creation" is deeply familiar. We have heard this before, from many sources – if not in the same words. Each era's prophets must speak in their own language, telling us over and over what our proper relationship to God and God's creation should be.

It seems that we humans must be taught the same lesson again and again: We are not the center of creation. That bears repeating: we are not the center of creation; we are not the point and purpose of it. We do not know why Creation exists; nor do we know why it continues, nor how it will end. But in some pre-Copernican desire to think that we, like the earth, are the center around which everything revolves, we continue to get it wrong.

The Book of Genesis tells us in ancient Hebrew poetry that God's creation of the world happened in stages, moving from formless darkness to light and land and plants and animals. Today our scientists speak of the Big Bang and evolution. In neither cosmology do humans come first.

The Book of Job speaks of God's power to control what God has created, and the proper relationship of God and humans:

*Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? ...Who determined its measurements?...who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy? Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb?...and set bars and doors, and said: 'Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stopped?'*

All these stories and theories lead to the same conclusion: we are a part of creation, and a "Johnny come lately" in fact. Vast eons of time – what our eternal God experiences as a "day" – says the writer of Genesis, pass before each stage is complete and God is pleased that what is, is good. Our scientists tell us that hundreds of millions of years elapsed between the stages of cosmic evolution, the formation of the earth and the atmosphere, and the first dawning of living things. When we should be humbled, realizing how insignificant a role we have played, we have laughed like idiots and gone on a buying and building spree.

If you were here on Trinity Sunday at the end of May, you heard me say that the root of the word idiot comes from Greek, and means the "separated self." The words idiosyncratic and idol come from the same root. I contrasted "Idiocy" with "Community" and the ways in which acting like an idiot are contrary to the well-being of the larger community. Being idiots is what Pope Francis and Genesis and the Book of Job are all writing about.

Where did we go so wrong? What is this idiotic consumer mentality that makes us think we can go on burning, mining, poisoning and plasticizing our way into oblivion, and there will be no consequences? "This fragile earth, our island home" as the Prayer Book says; this "Spaceship Earth" as Epcot Center calls it; it is ours only briefly. The model of the Trinity is clear: if God's three persons are in intimate, loving and mutually enhancing community, then we, being made in God's image, should also be in intimate, loving and mutually enhancing relationships not only with the community of humans, but also the community of creation.

In our gospel passage today, Jesus rebukes equally the wind and the waves that are making the disciples afraid, and the disciples, as well, for having no faith. Perhaps we strain to see the equation, but Jesus didn't. Wind, waves and disciples are all part of God's creation, which must live in community. Violence and fear wreck community.

Several years ago, our Archdeacon Jim Ley invited me to the city of Chester, where a mission group was working from an old Presbyterian church. The pastor, a woman wise in years of ministry,

asked me why so many people refused to come to Chester. She was hurt when I said they were afraid, because of all the violence they had heard on the media about her city. “Yes,” she responded, “and that’s why Chester will continue in poverty and trouble, because those who could help are afraid.”

Jesus not only rebuked the wind and the waves; he rebuked the disciples: ***“Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?”***

So what shall we do in response to Pope Francis’ wake-up call? The Dalai Lama, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the leaders of many faiths, as well as the current and past Secretary Generals of the UN, joined the Pope in urging prayer and action to create a sustainable economy.

First, we need to read and pray together about the Encyclical and other guides to a healthy planet. We need to ask what we can do as a human community to strengthen the community of Creation. Then we need to do a “Laudato Si” analysis of our own immediate lifestyle. The words that jumped out at me in the Encyclical were: “...while others have not the faintest idea of what to do with their possessions.” My husband and I are in the process of getting ready to downsize, and I have two rather fragile old wooden chairs that have been sitting in my dining room for months, because I literally have not the faintest idea of what to do with them!

Well, St. Paul’s, guess what? The rummage sale collection starts on Wednesday. Your “Laudato Si” household analysis can have a focus this year. In the name of Jesus, ask whether you need all the things that are cluttering up your life; whether you have possessions that others can use. Perhaps, like me, out of a certain kind of fear, you have been holding on to things you inherited or bought and never used.

We need to change the way we think about consumption. Ask whether you need to buy everything new, each time you shop. Take your re-usable bags with you everywhere. Clean out all the things you have hoarded. Go get a copy of *Grid* magazine, free from Weaver’s Way or Primex, to read and think about each month. And then ask yourself, what is one thing I can do today to strengthen the earth and God’s creation? Then do it! And perhaps you will say a prayer each day for insight and guidance, for each of us and our leaders.

Let’s start now.

*Oh God, our Creator, in whom we live and move and have our being,  
help us to fear less, do more, and have greater faith that You,  
who made us for community as You yourself are sacred community,  
will help us become true citizens of your earth and stewards of Your Creation.*

**Amen.**