

The Arusha Call to Discipleship

There is no vaccine for the environmental peril we face

The World Council of Churches' Conference on World Mission and Evangelism met in Arusha, Tanzania, in March 2018. From this meeting the more than 1,000 participants, who were all regularly engaged in mission and evangelism, issued the Arusha Call to Discipleship.

At our own national church General Synod in 2019, resolution A-129 was passed that we affirm the Arusha Call; encourage bodies within the General Synod to integrate this call into the guiding principles of baptismal living for the shaping of national ministries; and commend the Arusha Call to dioceses for study and inclusion in their considerations of evangelism, witness and discipleship.

For one year, Spiritual Development Team members and others will offer reflections in the New Brunswick Anglican on the 12 points within this call. This is Call # 6, written by Jonathan Hallewell.

That creation care is very much a part of our Christian discipleship feels instinctive to me, yet it is not clear to everyone.

The practical steps one takes towards sustainable living are common actions that all responsible citizens should take. What makes anything we do, recycling for example, particularly Christian or a way of following Jesus?

Discipleship makes our faith real. It is potentially dangerous to think about our faith outside of the challenge to become a disciple, as that leads to the notion that beliefs are effective without practice. James says, "faith without works is dead."

To believe in having a healthy diet is of no benefit if all I eat is hamburgers, fries and chocolate bars; and could quickly lead to me being as dead as James' faith without works.

Our faith must lead to a way of life, and it must be about all of life. It is not merely 'churchy' or 'Christian' activities that shape our discipleship.

The Apostle Paul commends us to live in submission to authorities, and to do what is good. Good citizenship therefore is good discipleship.

This year we have all participated in an actual life parable about ways of living — a kind of discipleship.

It is incredible to think that about a year ago, one individual was exposed to a then-unknown virus. Their decisions and interactions over the following days began a chain of events impacting every nation, and nearly every person on the planet.

We now see and manage our lives in terms of bubbles and distancing; becoming very aware of how connected we are to one another, and of how our lives impact not only those around us but everyone on planet too.

Epidemiologists have laid out a basic way of life that in observance we protect ourselves, and the ones we love: keep a responsible distance, keep your hands clean and know when you need to wear a mask. Simple — so one might think.

You could call these simple practices Christian in that it calls us all to act out of love for our neighbour as ourselves, and to do unto others as we would have done to us. If you have this in your heart it makes it easier to adopt these short-term impositions unbegrudgingly, being a good example to others.

This short-term schooling is beneficial for us, not merely to get through this pandemic, but because the threat posed by climate change has the real potential to be vastly more devastating than COVID-19.

There is no vaccine for the environmental peril we face. It requires global changes in the way we live that are far more involved than hand washing.

As with a pandemic, it will be easier with a change of attitude, partnered with true repentance — a change of thinking.

Building in awareness of the



CAROLYN V ON UNSPLASH

Arusha Call # 6:

We are called to care for God's creation, and to be in solidarity with nations severely affected by climate change in the face of a ruthless human-centered exploitation of the environment for consumerism and greed.

This call to transforming discipleship is not a one that we can answer in our own strength, so the call becomes, in the end, a call to prayer:

Loving God, we thank you for the gift of life in all its diversity and beauty. Lord Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, we praise you that you came to find the lost, to free the oppressed, to heal the sick, and to convert the self-centred. Holy Spirit, we rejoice that you breathe in the life of the world and are poured out into our hearts. As we live in the Spirit, may we also walk in the Spirit. Grant us faith and courage to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Jesus: becoming pilgrims of justice and peace in our time. For the blessing of your people, the sustaining of the earth, and the glory of your name. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.

impact of each of our choices is a mindset we need to take forward into this climatic endeavor.

Although the gospels don't address a climate crisis, they set Jesus in an existential crisis of another kind. Jesus could see the crisis engulfing Israel at a heart level.

If people didn't embrace his way of loving foe as well as friend, offering radical forgiveness, then disaster would result.

Sadly, civil war and rebellion against Rome brought destruction within a generation as Jesus prophesied.

You can see the same dangers today in increasingly polarized societies. Just as hatred leads to violence and war, so spiritual emptiness fuels the greed and consumerism that the Arusha declaration highlights. How vital it is to be filled with the Spirit.

To be sure, individual actions have limited potential to

alter the climate. If you recycle and even alter your life to have a net positive carbon impact, the actual impact is more symbolic.

However, it is vital that we make personal strides in stewarding everything well, so the good deeds shine out.

We, individually and as churches, should set examples in moderating consumption, buying local, growing food, preserving water, limiting waste and so on. Global solutions requires international cooperation; individuals, however, can make an impact — just look at Greta Thunberg! Aside from the good stewardship required of all people and organizations; perhaps our role is prophetic and intercessory.

Using renewable energy, even in a limited fashion sends a visual message; a prophetic signpost. We need to speak the truth about the climate crisis, knowing that we might take some heat from people who

dispute the science.

This also reminds us that we have an important intercessory role, praying not only about our own response but for those making decisions, that they be filled with wisdom and granted the fortitude to persevere. To pray for all the people of the earth to be responsive to truth of the situation. To pray that climate action become an area of political consensus and cooperation instead of division.

The call to be good stewards was God's original purpose for humanity; now that Christ has restored our relationship with God, surely we should take up our responsibility to care for His creation anew.

When we do, we stand in solidarity, not only with those nations who suffer the worst effects of climate change now, but also with all the future generations who will follow us.

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