

**Sermon at the Anglican Church of Luxembourg
Preached by Revd Evelyn Sweerts on Sunday 22nd September
2019, Creationtide 3**

Text: Jeremiah 8:18-9:1

Jeremiah's words are funeral songs in advance of the actual event – the destruction of Jerusalem is coming.

It's easy to see parallels with our situation: the destruction of the world is coming down the tracks – should we sing a funeral song in advance of the event?

Well no: I want to believe there is still hope, there are things we can do so it is not inevitable yet. But there is good reason for lament, so this morning let us lament in the biblical style.

Psalms of Lament have a particular structure:

Invocation – addresses God

Complaint – the crisis that prompted the lament

Petition – pleading for help and why God should help

Conclusion – statement of trust in God

Let us sing our own lament psalm for the earth.

Invocation:

Creator God, you who put the stars in their place yet cares for the sparrows and the lilies of the field, why do you hide your face from the Earth? How long, Lord, will you allow this destruction to go on?

Complaint: the crisis

Lord, I hold the earth in my mind's eye and see it hurting everywhere.

Three-quarters of all land has been turned into farm fields, covered by concrete, swallowed up by dam reservoirs or otherwise significantly altered.

Two-thirds of the marine environment has also been changed by fish farms, shipping routes, subsea mines and other projects. Three-quarters of rivers and lakes are used for crop or livestock cultivation.

As a result, more than half a million species have insufficient habitats for long-term survival. Many are likely to disappear within decades.

Our own species now extracts 60bn tons of resources each year, almost double the amount in 1980, though the world population has not come close

to doubling. In other words: we've become greedier. The discharges are overwhelming the Earth's capacity to absorb them. More than 80% of wastewater is pumped into streams, lakes and oceans without treatment, along with 300m-400m tons of heavy metals, toxic slurry and other industrial discharges. Fertiliser run-off has created 400 "dead zones", affecting an area the size of the UK.

Plastic waste has risen tenfold since 1980. And let us not hide from hard truths: most of the plastic in the ocean is not drinking straws: it's abandoned fishing gear. So not only are 1/3 of fish populations over-exploited, and millions of marine animals destroyed as by-catch, the waste from fishing is killing even more animals, particularly marine turtles, seabirds and marine mammals.

Land agriculture is no better. We kill 56 billion land animals a year for food. Meat and dairy production uses about 80% of farmland and accounts for almost 60% of agricultural greenhouse gas emissions but less than 20% of food calories. And these numbers don't even address water and air pollution, or fresh water withdrawals.

These statistics are all taken from the United Nations Global Assessment report, published earlier this year. It paints a picture of a suffocating human-caused sameness spreading across the planet, as a small range of cash crops and high-value livestock are replacing forests and other nature-rich ecosystems. As well as eroding the soil, which causes a loss of fertility, these monocultures are more vulnerable to disease, drought and other impacts of climate breakdown.

Back in 1972, an Abenaki called Obomsawin said:

Canada, the most affluent of countries, operates on a depletion economy which leaves destruction in its wake. Your people are driven by a terrible sense of deficiency. When the last tree is cut, the last fish is caught, and the last river is polluted; when to breathe the air is sickening, you will realize, too late, that wealth is not in bank accounts and that you can't eat money.

So Lord, I lament. I lament the loss of biodiversity. I lament the loss of our appreciation of our dependence on one another, on the web of life in its divine diversity, and on you, our God. My heart is wracked with grief and there is bitterness under my tongue.

The Bible contends that if we are estranged from God it is through our unrighteousness and injustice – just as in this passage from Jeremiah which lays the blame squarely on the people's idol-worship. It would be so easy to weave Jeremiah's condemnation of idol-worship together with our insatiable love of money which drives the destruction of the earth. And then to remember

Jesus' words: we cannot serve both God and money. We cannot be gluttons and save the planet.

But. But... But it's so hard to see how to change things. I feel the problems are overwhelming. I feel like what I do isn't going to make any difference. I feel like even if I could attain moral perfection in care of God's creation, I would still be trapped in the structural sin of our society, that fossil-fuel driven, insatiable depletion economy. The powers that be seem more powerful than my vague attempts to reduce, reuse and recycle. Like Jeremiah, my joy is gone, grief is upon me, my heart is sick.

Petition: asking God for help

So Lord, I beg you – comfort me, and comfort all your people. You are right to judge us for our wanton destruction of the planet and disregard for the poor but I beg you to have mercy Lord. Have mercy on me, have mercy on all humanity, and have mercy on your glorious creation.

Speak hope to our hopelessness. Help us not to succumb to the sin of despair. Remind us that while what we do may be a drop in the ocean, the ocean is but a multitude of drops.

Come Lord Jesus, and break our hearts for what breaks yours. Holy Spirit, remind us of our place within the web of life. Transform our anthropocentrism into a more holistic vision for our lives on the planet. Help us to treasure what we have. Give us courage to act, and wisdom in discerning where to put our energy. Help us to trust in your power to transform situations.

Remind us, Lord, every time we ask you to do something, that you already did: you made us. Help us to be your hands in the care for your good earth and your voice in speaking out for the marginalised and the voiceless: the poor who contribute least to climate change but suffer its greatest effects, and the animals and plants who have no voice at all, but without whom life on earth is severely impoverished or even destroyed.

Conclusion: a statement of trust in God

You, Lord, are God: creator, redeemer and sustainer. You love all your creation from the tiniest flea to the most magnificent supernova. I know that you hear our prayers for your creation. Lord, I trust that even when all seems hopeless you are there, and that you can take what little we offer and magnify its effects. Your power is a gentle power that breaks through entrenched interests, brings new life to places that appear dead, and overwhelms the powers that be with an untameable love.

Let us stand to confess our faith in God, who makes all things new.