

January 15, 2012

Moderator's 2012 Epiphany Message

Epiphany: Witness, Leadership, and a New Path

Hope was born in a stable, and those the world had judged wise came to see. After witnessing this fragile new hope, the Magi "went home by a different way." They were not the same.

My thoughts this Epiphany are filled with both the fragile new hope that I saw born at the UN climate change talks in Durban, and the bitter disappointment that calls us to go home by a new and different way.

On the one hand, according to the best science available, the Durban talks failed to produce large enough emission reduction targets to avert destructive climate change, of which last year's extreme weather is the merest foretaste.

And yet, for the first time ever, all nations have said that they will commit to enforceable climate action by 2015.

And even though Canada bitterly disappointed the world, many nations still hold the fragile hope that Canada will commit itself to a generous way of compassion and justice.

If we are to return home by a different way, we are called to nourish this fragile hope.

Witness

I speak often about the interrelationship of soul, community, and creation. In my view, everything good begins in the soul, that inner place where we listen deeply to the "still, small voice" that speaks to us of truth.

When we hear that still, small voice, our soul longs to fulfill its call in community. Our souls need community to help us align our inner knowing with our outer work. This is what allows us to act with integrity in the world. Caring for God's creation arises from souls and community in harmony with each other.

Christians and other people of faith have a particular responsibility as people who listen to that still, small voice and create community where it can be heard more clearly. In our United Church Song of Faith, we sing of participating in God's healing of creation. Shared worship and work, prayer, scripture, and other language of the heart help us find our way home to God, one another, and creation.

In Durban, I met with Peter Kent, Canada's Minister of the Environment. To my surprise, Mr. Kent was forthright in calling climate change a "disaster in the making." I became convinced that he understands the causes and consequences of climate change. He spoke of a climate change presentation in Durban that he said made the hair on the back of his neck stand on end.

I take Mr. Kent's words to mean that he knows in his soul that Canada must choose between contributing to global disaster or to global healing-so I wonder all the more about his resistance to actions that would prevent further climate change. I therefore feel compassion for him, as he must have a terrible inner struggle, knowing we could be doing so much more to prevent massive

suffering and death. If he finds the courage to embrace the fragile hope born in Durban, he will need our support.

Leadership

As Moderator I have learned something about the ambiguities of leadership and the complex interrelationship between the one who is designated "leader" and the people of his or her community.

It matters whom we include in our community. We need others with whom our understanding and compassion will be stretched. I believe this is a fundamental requirement of leadership. I hope Mr. Kent is able to claim all Canadians and, indeed, all global citizens as his community. If the relatively small community of climate skeptics in Canada is the community he chooses to identify with, it will become harder for him to remember the cries he heard in Africa from people begging for climate justice, and for their lives.

For myself, I choose to claim Peter Kent as part of my community. I will not exclude him from those I am prepared to talk and work with to prevent the disaster in the making. In Durban, Mr. Kent told the General Secretary of the Mennonite Church Canada and me that he is prepared to keep meeting with us. This holds the possibility that a difficult and necessary conversation about the choices facing Canada will continue.

As Canadians, we need to convince our leaders that we will support morally responsible choices for the sake of life for all. Morally responsible choices embrace the needs and the wisdom of others in our global community. Morally responsible choices stir us to march alongside youth, to the beat of impatient hope.

A new path

Hope was born in a stable, a hope for all humanity, a hope for the whole world. It came as a helpless infant, so all of us should understand the need to nourish and care for it. God entrusted us to care for God's Son the same way God entrusted us to care for God's creation. We cannot care for one without caring for the other.

As humanity, we have only one home. Science tells us we must limit climate change in order to survive as a species. Faith tells us we must limit climate change because God calls us to love one another as God loves us. To return home means to embrace Earth as the place that sustains us and as the gift God gives us.

I pray that you will find opportunities this year to listen carefully to that still, small voice and discover what it means for you to go home by a different way. I pray that you will feel part of a community that helps you celebrate your right place and relationships in God's good creation. I pray that together we will protect and nourish the fragile hope born in Durban. We are people of soul, community, and creation.

Moderator,
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