

## Sermon: Early and Later Rains

(Preached by the Rev. Paul Wu, at St. Giles PC, Ottawa, October 10, 2021)

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts  
be acceptable to you. O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

During the summer months, much of the Prairie provinces in Canada have endured one of the worst droughts in recent memory. The lack of rain, or should we call it the non-existence of rain, has caused river beds to dry up, soil to crack open, and crops to fail under extreme heat condition. We have heard reports of crop yield pummelling to historical low, Western ranchers having to make the difficult decision to cull 1/3 or half of their herds because there simply was not enough hays to feed the lots. We have seen how the drought has driven up food prices, impacting our grocery bills. Then came the late rain in August.

In southwestern Manitoba, farmer Curtis Brown said the weekend gifted him with "the perfect rain." It has given people hope as soil condition moistens and some crops grow. Yet, significant precipitation is still needed this fall and winter, in order to replenish moisture level above ground, and wells and reservoirs underground.

Tom Johnson, another farmer in Manitoba, said to a CBC reporter, "Oh God, we need a real good snowfall like we used to years ago." It wasn't really a prayer, at least I don't think Johnson meant it as a prayer. But at the very least, he has openly acknowledged what many farmers across time and space have known—rain or the lack of it is entirely in God's hand. It is part of God's domain.

Prophet Joel, in trying to rebuild the fragile psyche of the people of God during the time of post-exile, explains that early rain is a sign of God's blessings, and late rain is a sort of finishing touch just prior to a bountiful harvest—of figs, grain, wine and olive oil, constituting the main produce in the land of Israel / Palestine. "*O children of Zion, be glad and rejoice in the Lord your God; for he has given the early rain for your vindication, he has poured down for you abundant rain, the early and the later rain, as before.*" (Joel 2:23)

It should be noted that the condition of lack of rain and the corresponding locust swarm, according the prophet, was the result of God's judgement against the people. The unfaithfulness of the people of God

brought disaster, not only to people but to the whole of God's creation. So top soil, animals in the field all suffered alongside the children of Zion. Conversely, the vindication of the early rain and blessings of the later rain affects all equally as well. It speaks of connectedness of humanity to the land, to the planet earth that is put into our collective care, our collective dominion, and our collective responsibility.

Drought in the Prairie, or forest fires in the west coast, or flooding in various parts of the country are not one-off events, nor a statistical fluke. Rather they represent an emerging trend of global warming that has been scientifically established as the result of greenhouse gas emission due to human activities.

Climate change is real, despite the repeated claims of denial. Digging a hole in the sand and putting our collective head in it won't change the reality of the climate change. The challenge for the faith communities is to have a credible and theological response to this change. Does the Triune God have a word of the Lord for us, in Canada here and now?

A recent report from a Berlin-based think tank, titled "1.5-Degree Lifestyles: Towards a Fair Consumption Space for All" provides a sobering look on Canada. The report analyzes the per capita carbon footprint of ten select countries from different developmental curve, and concludes that Canada has the worst record by far—at 14.2 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per capita, as of 2019. In comparison, the next worst is Finland at 9.7, and the United Kingdom at 8.5, and in India, it's 3 tonnes per capita.

If Canada is really serious about meeting its stated objective of cutting its total CO<sub>2</sub> emission by 40 to 45 percent by 2030, and transitioning to a net-zero emission by 2050, the report suggests that we will have to cut that per capital CO<sub>2</sub> emission by 95% from our current level! That will have a real impact on our collective way of life. An impossible goal, some may say. But the report suggests that it is actually an achievable goal, by focusing first on four particular lifestyle choices that are particularly carbon intensive: 1) eating red meat and dairy products; 2) driving fossil fuel cars; 3) flying; 4) living in large houses with high energy consumption.

While the situation of climate change is serious, the report's tone is not apocalyptic, and its conclusion is actually quite hopeful. Of course, to truly get to our stated goal on climate change, Canadian businesses and governments all have to play their parts, not just individuals.

Might I add, that Christian communities can also play a vital role in shaping this discourse from a theological perspective. First and foremost, on this Thanksgiving Sunday, we have to redefine what we are giving thanks for. Here is a fruit for thought: **a bountiful harvest cannot be the sole criteria of evaluating God's provision and God's blessings. Less is quickly becoming more. Consuming less is becoming the new norm.**

In tacking the challenge of climate change, the PCC through Synod of Quebec & Eastern Ontario, has put together an online conference from October 14-16. I would like invite you to register to this event by showing you this video clip: [Conference Climate Change Video.mp4]

If you are interested to attend, the registration link shown in the bulletin is incomplete. The best way to register is through St. Giles' own website at [stgilesottawa.org](http://stgilesottawa.org) Right at the welcome page, simply click on the page titled "Online Conference: Climate Change — What Can I Do?" you will be taken to the Synod's page with schedule of various workshop, town hall, and registration process.

I find myself riding bicycle to work more often now. I find myself eating less, particularly less red meat. Partly due to age, partly due to the high prices of beef, and more so because of what I am reading about the impact of cattle and dairy farming on the climate change. Daisy and I used to dream of owning a house with nice backyard. But we are content now to live in a condo with a shared backyard with other residents. We count our blessings not by what God has given us, but by answering God's call to serve, to give.

In today's Scripture passages, both the prophet and the psalmist speak of God restoring the fortune of the people of God. That restoration hinges on a total trust in God, who has already done so in the past—it was like a dream, we laughed and danced. The psalmist then urges God to do so again.

I particularly like the Message version of Psalm 126, in verse 4, "*And now, God, do it again—bring rains to our drought-stricken lives.*" As farmers who have plowed the field, we await patiently for the Lord to bring that early and later rains, whether to parched land or to parched lives. O God, do it again!

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