

## **Muscles, Levers and Hope – Tools for a Faithful Response to the Climate Crisis**

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Written for Nutana Park Mennonite Church  
Summer 2023

Scriptures: Psalm 16 and Micah 6:8

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Hello Nutana Park Mennonite, and thank you for inviting me to join you this morning. Since I'm not there in person this morning and we can't chat over rollkuchen and watermelon after the service today, please feel free to send me a note with your thoughts about the topic, the sermon, the weather, whatever. I'd be so glad to meet some of you!

My name is Sandy Plett and I'm the Climate Action Coordinator for Mennonite Church Canada.

I live with my family Tinker Creek, Manitoba (just 6 miles south of Morden, if you're familiar with Manitoba cities and geography) and have been spending a lot of time outdoors this summer. Last week we spent 4 nights on the lakes of northern Ontario, near Kenora. Paddling and back woods camping are some of our favourite ways to get into nature as a family. I also spend a lot of time in my vegetable garden – which you can see has gotten to be quite flower full this year! We've had next to no rain in the last two months, so I've been watering a lot. Some of the water comes from our rain barrels and a cistern hooked up to our roof drainage system. Some of it comes from the municipal supply. It's the only way there'd be any garden this year – watering.

I mention this because it's one of those tangible impacts of climate change for us in central Canada. Unpredictable levels of rainfall, and unpredictable temperatures that are leaning towards unpredictably hot, rather than cool. Maybe this resonates for you in Saskatoon.

I spent a bit of time searching for a really simple description of climate change to share with you this morning – to create a foundation for the rest of this sermon. I

grabbed three points from a BBC webpage called “What is climate change? A really simple guide”

1. It’s real

– Global temperatures are rising as a result of human activity, largely due to the widespread use of fossil fuels - coal, oil and gas - in homes factories and transport. (BBC)

2. It’s serious

– People around the world are already experiencing the consequences, from more intense heat waves to rising sea levels (BBC)

3. There is HOPE!

– Things are likely to worsen in the coming decades, but scientists argue that urgent action can still avoid the most dangerous effects of climate change. (BBC)

Before going any further I want to consider with you the impact of these three statements. For some of you this is old news and you’re impatient to get on with it. For some this is old news and you’ve been averting your eyes because it’s way too overwhelming to really face these realities. For some this might sound like fake news or an overreaction to a bit of weather instability. For some this is a new set of truths and you might need a moment to catch your breath.

All of these responses are real and okay and you will likely find others who share your response right here in this room or in your immediate social circles. We’re all over the map on this one, and that’s okay. We move forward from where we’re at right now. Today.

**Today’s launch point for moving forward will be these:**

1. Two Scriptures – Psalm 16 and Micah 6:8

Grab your bible and have it open to Psalm 16 so you can read with me in a few minutes.

2. Three tools that seem to help with the perennial question when people engage the climate crisis seriously – “what’s the best way for me to spend my energy?”

The tools are *Muscles, Levers and Hope!* These three words continue to be useful in my work with Mennonite Church Canada and so I will share about them today.

### **First let me tell you a little about what’s happening in Mennonite Church Canada around Climate Action.**

The Climate Action Coordinator position grew out of a commitment from all five regions of Mennonite Church Canada to put energy and money into supporting the faithful response of the church to the climate crisis. My work is half time and I spend most of my days working from home.

Across Canada there are 5 working groups whose mandate it is to support their regional churches as they pursue climate justice in a wide variety of ways. One of my tasks is to support these groups, to help them to experience how they are connected, and to build the strength of the church by inviting the different groups to support each other, sharing ideas and resources. Another of my tasks is to listen for the common threads across the country, and to lift these up so that we can begin to see ourselves as a whole people, responding faithfully and effectively to the climate crisis.

In each region of the country the working groups have chosen different names. Listen to what these groups have called themselves and consider the perspectives and priorities that they represent in our midst:

Creation Care Resource Group, Climate Action Working Group, Climate Emergency Response Team, Creation Care Task Group! The fifth group, just beginning to form in Mennonite Church Alberta, doesn’t have a name yet. I’m curious what words they’ll chose to emphasize with their name!

And we also have a national committee called the Sustainability Leadership Group.

All these words point at a people acting out faithful responses to the climate crisis.

I've put links for a bunch of references from this sermon in the PDF of the sermon which is posted on the NPMC website. Please check it out after church today! You'll find links to all these groups on the MC Canada Climate Action page.

Now, to our Launch Point!

Scripture is a great place from which to launch into action for people of faith – so let's go there next. I'd like to explain why I chose Psalm 16 for today's reading. This Psalm jumped out at me as a perfect starting point for our conversation about Climate Change and the response of the church. Here's why – read with me if you'd like:

Verses 1-2 paint a picture of simple satisfaction:

*Keep me safe oh God for in you I take refuge.*

*I said to the Lord, "You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing"*

Simplicity.

Verse 3 draws the eye to the created world:

*As for the saints in the land they are the glorious ones in whom is all my delight.*

Who are "the saints in the land?" At first I thought of saints in the traditional sense – humans who have done great things (of course!) but when I read with an ecological lens, a trick I learned from Wendy Janzen, (eco pastor MCEC and former pastor right here at NPMC) I see something different. When I put my ecological glasses on my vision is filled with plants that feed us and filter our air, animals that provide us with warmth and sustenance (for the omnivores among us) and who transfer seeds from place to place and who wriggle in the earth to create soil which feeds those plants that feed us and all the other creatures too. I see fungal networks that keep the trees alive, furry and winged and scaled creatures that are our companions and who keep us humans in line when we forget to feed them. Yes, these are also the saints, the glorious ones in whom we delight.

Verse 4 is a bit sharp and again, with my ecological lens tuned to the state of stress the biosphere is under, I read words that cut to the heart of our predicament today:

*The sorrows of those will increase who run after other gods.  
I will not pour out their libations of blood or take up their names on my lips.*

Other gods. If we zoom out and look at the race for power, wealth, comfort, novelty, ease and security that shapes our history and some might argue that make up our human nature, those other gods are very very enticing. And the pursuit of these gods has definitely increased the sorrows of not only humans but of the Planet and all the biosphere.

Verses 5-6 are an invitation to reimagine contentment:

*Lord, you have assigned me my portion and my cup.  
You have made my lot secure.  
The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places: surely I have a delightful inheritance.*

Back to simplicity. Contentment.

I think this Psalm holds a possibility for us, 21<sup>st</sup> century folk facing a human caused climate crisis. Yes, we see now that chasing other gods (as in verse 4) has caused the climate instability. And so we also might see with new clarity the possibility of contentment within boundaries and restraint. Advertising and consumer culture show us that happiness is More, Bigger, Better, Spare No Expense! What if we allow ourselves to see that boundaries can help us to be more creative. What if we believe that smaller footprints for us may result in the possibility for others to have more pleasant boundary lines? What's that saying again? Live simply so that others can simply live.

Surely I have a delightful inheritance!

The invitation to live simply and with a smaller footprint is one part of the call to creation care/climate action that is echoing through the church and our communities these days. It's a compelling call. It's a welcoming place to begin. What is required is not more information, it is a transformation of the heart and mind that will help us to understand verse 5 in a new way: Lord, you have assigned me my portion and my cup.

Help us, Oh God, to accept an assignment of portion and cup that brings us into back into balance with the ecosystems around us.

So that's why I chose Psalm 16.

The old old story that we find in our Scriptures and that has shaped the church we inhabit is a story of living in harmony with the created world – human and non human alike. The science today reflects this truth indisputably. We cannot live without healthy ecosystems around us. We are part of the interdependent web of creation.

So back to that question: “what’s the best way to spend my energy?” The same question has a simple answer in Micah 6:8

*And what does the Lord require of you?*

*To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*

When I read this and think about our work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as a church, I feel like it’s the best clarity we could hope for! In our time, so much injustice is found when we dig into the causes and effects of the climate crisis.

Maybe you’ve heard this term before: Climate Justice. What does this mean? It’s taking Micah’s call to Act Justly and applying it to the moment that we are in today, 2023. In a crisis caused by a changing climate, working for justice is doing climate justice.

And Climate Justice means so many things. It means working towards racial equality. It’s work that addresses poverty. It’s decolonization and upliftment of the poor and marginalized. It’s work that builds climate resilient homes and schools for girls and boys. It’s researching water and doing wildlife conservation. It is work that tends to specific pieces of land for sake of healing and restoration. This is the work of gathering up food and making blankets to share with displaced people who have fled from climate caused conflict, drought and flood. It’s city planning for a future of net zero. It’s defending land, air and water against extraction and pollution. It’s protesting exploitative practices, even when we are far away from the damage they cause. It’s raising our voices to shape the work and priorities of our leaders. It’s giving money to support organizations doing

climate justice work. It's praying and listening to those who suffer climate anxiety and offering hope by taking action together. Big and small.

You get the picture. There is work for all of us, according to our gifts and skills and place and situation.

Turning our attention and working for climate justice is a critical task of the church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. That's big work. I'm so glad I'm part of the church at this time – we have so much potential in this work!

So, back to Muscles, Levers and Hope." In my mind this is a perfect little collection of tools for us as we consider God's call to work for climate justice..)

Let's start with muscles. Our collective action muscles might be a bit atrophied at this point in the church and in the world, but these are muscles we need to use if we want to be part of broader, bigger change. I'm talking about muscles that we use to get educated about justice issues and invite others join us in the work. This kind of work, the kind we do together with others comes from this question: "How can we be part of the restoration and healing of the world and it's inhabitants?"

We in the Mennonite Church are well suited to do collective work – we do it all the time! I think of old timey barn raising, quilt making, potluck eating, fundraising, funeral planning, summer camp ministries, education initiatives, etc. We tend to do together what we together discern as important. What might happen now that we have together discerned that God is calling us to be part of the great shift demanded by the crisis of our time?

And we all know that building muscles happens by using them. That might mean doing new things, stepping into discomfort zones to support the people in our communities who are already hard at work pursuing climate justice in some way. It might mean gaining confidence in raising climate justice concerns with politicians. Our justice seeking muscles could use some working out!

What's your next workout going to be? Don't be afraid to start small, just start somewhere! There is unlimited work to be done, so just take the next step and see where it leads.

The second tool: A Lever.

Archimedes said “Give me a lever and a place to stand and I will move the world.” We already have the place to stand. We are here. By paying attention to our place we can begin to figure out what is our work, our lever. In the church we can consider our sphere of influence, the gifts and skills among us, and from this vantage point we can discern the work we want to engage in.

What is your lever? What is your work in pursuit of climate justice?

Third, and last, is hope.

I don't mean that as long as we have a chance of fixing this, we can have hope. I mean that hope is a way of living when we can't know the outcome of our efforts. Living in hope is being present in each moment. It is leaning into each other and into God's embrace while doing the work God calls us to do. Living in hope doesn't mean being optimistic. It doesn't require us to ignore our grief or the overwhelming realities of the crisis. Living in hope means being aware of all of this, and still choosing to look towards the light and to engage with love in the work.

We do this work because of who God is and who God calls us to be. When we engage with hope, we find some of the best gifts of all – the gifts of shared life, laughter in the midst of struggle, companionship when the work is hard. There is much joy and hope to be found in facing difficult realities together and then rolling up our sleeves and getting to work, shoulder to shoulder. Together we can face hard realities and do hard things.

And if we do this together, we have a really good chance of rejecting despair. If we walk together there is a good chance that we'll catch more than just a glimpse of the kingdom of God that is at hand, that is here. For the kingdom is not a destination where all is well, but the kingdom is the place where we walk hand in hand in the paths that God shows us.

Let's close with a prayer, taken from Psalm 16;

*Keep us safe oh God for in you we take refuge.*

*We raise our voices to you, saying*

*“You are our Lord; apart from you we have no good thing”*

*Our sorrows will increase if we run after other gods.*



*Lord, you have assigned us our portion and our cup. Help us to see these with new eyes.*

*You have made our lot secure.*

*Open our eyes to the boundary lines*

*As they have fallen for us in pleasant places: Surely we have a delightful inheritance.*

Amen.

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## **A couple of links for the keepers**

### **Climate Change Explainers and Articles**

[BBC's "really simple description"](#)

[United Nations "What is Climate change?"](#)

[Katherine Hayhoe FAQ page](#) – Hayhoe is a Christian Climate Scientist who preemptively answers many questions about being a Christian involved in Climate action – a great starting point for figuring out “what’s next?”

[CBC 5 ways climate change is already affecting Canada](#)

### **Hope and Action Reading:**

[MCUSA article on youth climate summit](#) – an article about a recent event for youth on climate in MC USA

[In Deep Waters: Spiritual Care for Young People in a Climate Crisis by Talitha](#)

[Amadeo Aho](#) – a Review by Jennifer Schrock of Mennonite Creation Care Network

[Saving Us: A Climate Scientist's Case for Hope and Healing in a Divided World](#) -

one of my favourite books for what to do when I'm out of ideas – basically Hayhoe says “TALK ABOUT IT!”

### **From our nationwide church family**

[MC Canada Climate Action](#) – this page is where MC Canada initiatives are launched and updated. Check it out and let me know what you'd like to see here!

[MC Sask Climate Emergency Response Team](#) – your MC Sask Climate working Group! Get to know them today!

[Mennonite Church Canada's Emissions Reduction Grant](#) – check this out even if you're not looking to increase your energy efficiency right now!

[Energy Efficient Faith Buildings Webinar](#) – for an overview of how to approach energy efficiency upgrades, in your church and home!

### **From our Climate Action Partners**

[For the Love of Creation](#) – MC Canada recently endorsed For the Love of Creation formally – FLC is an interfaith Canadian organization for Climate Justice. Many MC Canada folks are involved with FLC initiatives. Watch for a press release about this new endorsement in your MC Canada news feed!

[Mennonite Central Committee's Climate Action For Peace campaign](#) – this recently launched campaign provides accessible information about the impacts of climate change on the vulnerable and very straightforward invitations to Action. Check it out and *start building those Climate Action muscles!*

[Anabaptist Climate Collaborative](#) - an Anabaptist gathering place for programs and resources to help the church address climate justice with Anabaptist principles at the forefront.

[Mennonite World Conference Creation Care Task Force](#) – learn what MWC is up to around climate globally.

### **Experiences/Engagement**

[For the Love of Creation Faithful Climate Conversation and Action Discernment Guides](#) – don't miss these if you're a facilitator or group leader – these guides are step by step and easy to use! *Maybe this is your lever!*

I welcome feedback, ideas, responses, conversations about Climate Action in Mennonite Church Canada. Please be in touch if you'd like to chat! This work is new for us and we have much room to grow.

In hope,

Sandy Plett

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