



*What is the
"matrix of grace"
and where
are we in it?*

Keeping Our Promise

by Mary Minette
ELCA Director of Environmental Education and Advocacy

"[T]he LORD said in his heart, 'I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.

*As long as the earth endures,
seedtime and harvest, cold and heat,
and winter, day and night,
shall not cease."*

-Genesis 8:21-22

God makes this promise to Noah in the aftermath of the worst natural disaster the earth had ever experienced. I encountered this passage from Genesis in two very different places recently.

The first time was during a trip to Nicaragua to learn how people living in poor communities, mostly small farmers, were experiencing changes in their climate.

These farmers and their families may know little about the politics surrounding the issue of climate change here in the United States, but they do understand that rainfall patterns, which used to allow them to plant and harvest two crops each year during the rainy season, have become far less predictable.

Where they once could grow enough to feed and support their families, they now experience droughts and flooding, hunger and hardship. They see that God's promise of enduring "seedtime and harvest" has somehow been disrupted, but the strong faith of these farmers that God promises a better life for them and their children endures.

The second time I heard this passage was in a Congressional hearing room, far from the dusty roads of rural Nicaragua. The hearing was about the need to provide help to people living in poverty, like those farmers in Nicaragua, who are already struggling with the impacts of a changing climate. The panel included scientists, policy experts, an ELCA bishop, and a couple of witnesses who were characterized by one member of the committee as "expert skeptics" on climate change. In other words, the room hosted a microcosm of the political debate

that is ongoing in our country between people who deny that climate change is real or human-caused, and the climate scientists and policy experts who understand that climate change is real and argue that we must define how to approach the future of our country and our planet. The ELCA has listened to both sides of the climate change debate, and as a church we stand with the majority of climate scientists: God's creation is in peril because humanity's use of carbon-based energy sources like oil and coal is causing the earth to grow warmer and changing the climate around the world.

One of the members of the House Energy and Commerce Committee quoted the above passage from Genesis during the hearing. He stated that because God has promised never again to destroy the earth, he believes that nothing humanity can invent or do can destroy creation.

The passage is clear: the earth shall endure, and the seasons, and day and night. God promises not to destroy that cycle. But what about us—where do we fit in? Does God's promise mean that we have no responsibilities?

God pledges that the earth will endure, but earlier on, he also tells us that we are to be stewards of all creation, charged with caring for the earth and our fellow creatures. This would seem to imply that we have some promises to keep as well.

Are we keeping our promise, not only to God but to all of creation—to polar bears in the Arctic, to farmers in Nicaragua, to communities on small islands in the Pacific who are watching their land disappear under rising seas? The mounting evidence presented by climate scientists indicates that we are not.

Take Action

Currently the House Energy and Commerce committee is considering a bill, American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009 (HR 2454), that would require reductions in U.S. emissions of the greenhouse gases that are causing climate change. Find out more about the bill [here](#), and consider making a call or sending a letter to your member of Congress about the bill.

A Prayer for the Journey

Creator God, you have never failed in your promise to us: day follows night; winter's cold yields to the new growth of spring; seeds are planted, sprout and produce food. Grant us the vision and strength to honor our promises to you, to change our ways, to choose a new path, and to tend and keep your garden, the earth. AMEN

Produced by: Advocacy Department, Church in Society Program Unit, ELCA. Theme photo © iStockphotos/ooyoo. Earth photo courtesy of NASA. Road photo © iStockphotos/ATVG. Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA and used by permission. All rights reserved. Web sites linked from this message reflect the positions of the outside organizations and may not necessarily reflect an official position of ELCA. Copyright © 2009 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. All rights reserved.