

"When We fail to pray, God's hands are effectively tied" (Walter Wink)

From despair to prayer

by Ruth Jarman

*we can despair
together and we can also
pray together and pray an
alternative future into being*



Ruth with Tom, now (July 2005) 9 months old

As I write this, my 7 month old son Thomas is sitting on my lap, happiness and innocence embodied in a baby-shaped bundle of joy. His trusting blue eyes search mine and he smiles with his toes as much as with his face. The world that he knows is warm and comforting and full of songs and colours and kisses. He is close to the kingdom of heaven. I admire his living in the moment, his freedom from past regrets and future fears. One day I will tell him that his future world will not be as beautiful as it was meant to be, not as kind, not as safe, maybe terrifying. But I will put that day off as long as I can, allowing him to bask in the present while I weep for his future.

For Thomas's future is dire. If you look at the spiralling carbon dioxide emissions and compare the paltry efforts to contain them against what the scientists are saying needs to be done, the situation is hopeless. Carbon emissions are increasing year on year – a few wind farms will not turn things around, a few nuclear power plants will not be enough, technology changes will take too long, Kyoto achieves next to nothing. And the scientists say that to save the earth from immense hardship and possible calamity we need to slow the escalation in emissions to the point where they start dropping within the next 10-15 years. They have got to be kidding. It is just not going to happen. We need God's help here. We need a miracle.

The lag time between emitting carbon dioxide into the atmosphere and the temperature rise that it causes is about 30 years. It is our children who will reap what our generation have sown, and Thomas and his mates will be powerless to do anything about it. I want to scream at the injustice of it. The Bible is teeming with reasons for caring for Creation; our duty under God is to protect the Earth, but since Thomas's birth my motivation has been pure mother bear and I am desperate in my inability to protect my cubs.

I went to my CEL friends with my despair, wanting to be told it was all going to be OK, but I didn't get the platitudes I was hoping for. I got something better: honesty, understanding and a path through the mire. One friend, with tears in her eyes said "yes, this is why I do what I do". I was recommended some books and articles to read which did not dispel the despair, but gave me hope in its midst. I realised that CEL is performing a prophetic role in our time and so we can look to the Old Testament prophets for help. Brueggemann's Bible study on Jeremiah 'Is there no balm in Gilead' shows how prophets were always acutely aware of the current situation "but they never confused present possibility with divine impossibility". It would be quite easy to push the reality of climate change to the back of my mind, to focus on school runs and washing and bed

time stories, to just not think about it. And to some extent we all do that. But to fulfil our prophetic role we need to look at the world and ache. We need to face the truth about the world and give voice to our despair. For it is in utter hopelessness that our hope must come from the Lord, as there is no where else it can come from. It is in pouring out our despair to God, in expressing our anguish, when it is also God's anguish, which keeps us close to God and allows the possibility of hope.

Walter Wink's mind-blowing 'The powers that be' makes sense of the world to me. It explains how evil has such a grip on our world, why the whole Created order is threatened. It is because a spiritual reality is at the heart of everything, and the institutions that are causing such harm to the world and its people have fallen powers at their core. So we are fighting a spiritual battle as well as a material one. The battle is even bigger than we thought. And we will never win our struggle without also backing-up our activism at a spiritual level because we are not just up against entrenched culture, money and powerful organisations, but also the dark spiritual forces behind them. In the last chapter Wink talks about how prayer is an essential part of any campaign to change the world. It is "the interior battlefield where the decisive victory is won before any engagement in the outer world is even possible." This chapter gave me such hope! Is this not something we could do more of? Are we, as CEL, a Christian community working to protect Creation, using this string of our bow enough? Could we make more use of Philip Clarkson-Webb's prayer guide? This is surely a dimension of our activism that we could expand upon.

In response to this, a friend suggested that I wrote some prayers. Never having done anything like this before, my first thought was "that's not the sort of thing I do!" However, I was reading the Psalms for Lent and it struck me that the author of many of them seemed to be facing a similar situation to us. The future is bleak; the writer is in great despair and is turning to God as his only hope in a hostile world. I started reading through the Psalms, seeing the enemy as climate change, or the "powers that be" that lie behind it, and soon found I was able to write some prayers that expressed my fears and longing for the transformation of the world. One of these prayers is printed below; the others are on the web page www.christian-ecology.org.uk/noah/prayers-for-hope.htm.

Walter Wink says that "History belongs to the intercessors, who believe the future into being." Could this be CEL's calling, to tackle the spiritual dimension of the culture and institutions that are threatening the whole Earth community? CEL does not have the numbers or funding of Greenpeace or Friends of the Earth, but look at what we do have! We are a community of Christians who care for the future of the Earth. We can complain to each other, we can despair together, grieve together for our children's future, and we can also pray together, haggle with God for a different outcome to the one we are hurtling towards and pray an alternative future into being.

The Powers that be – Theology for a New Millenium, Walter Wink, Doubleday 1998, ISBN 0-385-48752-5.

Is there no balm in Gilead? - The Hope and Despair of Jeremiah, Walter Bruegemann (Copies of this study, first published in Sojourners Magazine and reprinted in Wildfire Magazine is available from the Editor.)

A prayer for hope in the face of climate change

After Psalm 43

"Why are you so downcast, O my soul?
Why so disturbed within me?"
Lord, the enemy is near, stalking our children.
Vindicate us, O God,
and plead our cause against an ungodly world system;
rescue us from deceitful and wicked powers.
You are God our stronghold.
Why have you rejected us?
Why must we go about mourning,
oppressed by the enemy that lies in wait for our sons and daughters?
Send forth your light and your truth,
let them guide us;
Let your light and your truth guide how we deal with our hopelessness,
Let your light and your truth guide us to live
in a way that fights instead of feeding the enemy.
Let your light and your truth reveal the foolishness of greed and rampant
consumerism and lead the nations to repentance and the path of life.
"Why are you so downcast, O my soul?
Why so disturbed within me?"
Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Saviour and my God."

CEL is starting a community of prayer to call on God to transform our world. Join now, the details are on the next page. We have a few prayers on the web site at www.christian-ecology.org.uk/prayer-for-hope. Could you write some more? Send them by e-mail to community-of-prayer@christian-ecology.org.uk and they will be placed on the website.



A CALL TO PRAY

The Call

To pray is to resist the despair by which the power that tells us that genuine personal and political transformation is impossible summons us to prayer

Binding the Strong man: A political reading of the parable

CEL's new Community of Prayer

is an e-mail community, together not in space but in time, and hope and purpose

Do you sometimes feel helpless, maybe even hopeless about the state of the earth? Are you anxious about your children's future. Would you like spiritual energy for planet-friendly living and action for ecological justice? Then join the Community of Prayer.

Joining means that you are dedicating yourself to:

- Pray for the creation and action for ecological justice some time between 9pm and 11pm every Wednesday evening
- Share prayers, poems and thoughts with others in the community
- Using the CEL Prayer Guide put together by Philip Clarkson-Webb.

You can join this community to pray an alternative future into being by e-mailing community-of-prayer@christian-ecology.ork.uk (or writing to The Editor) to tell us that you are joining. You can use the same addresses to send prayers poems and thoughts which you have written yourself, or which you have found helpful (please give the reference) and they will be posted up on the prayers-for-hope page on the CEL website www.christian-ecology.org.uk/prayers-for-hope.

The beginning of CEL's Prayer Guide for the Care of Creation for July:

"Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life." (Deuteronomy 30.19-20).

Saturday 2nd July

The Make Poverty History coalition called on the G8 leaders to stop forcing poor countries to follow imposed policies (such as privatisation of essential services in return for debt relief), to agree to fairer terms of trade and to raise levels of aid to the UN-recommended ratio of 0.7% of national GDP. On 2nd July there was a minute's silence at 11 a.m. to remember the world's poor, and a giant rally in Edinburgh to focus the attention of world leaders on these problems. For details, visit: www.makepovertyhistory.org

Sunday 3rd July

"Your kingdom is founded on righteousness and justice." (Psalm 89.14)
O God, whose Son Jesus Christ cared for the welfare of all and went about doing good to the needy; grant us the imagination and resolution to create in this country and throughout the world a just social order for the human family. Make us agents of your compassion to the suffering, the persecuted and the oppressed, through the Spirit of your Son, who shared the suffering of humankind, our pattern and redeemer, Jesus Christ.

From the new One Bread Service

The grace of God has dawned upon the world
with healing for all.

God our Father,
we have been ungrateful for
and disobedient to your will
We have sinned:
All: forgive us and heal us.

Minister: You have called us to serve
(*the name of the town or village*)
yet we have blinded ourselves
in this locality.

We buy and eat out of season
want and from wherever we
the damage this may do.
We create excessive greenhouse
through wasteful transport
especially by air.

We have sinned:
All: forgive us and heal us.

Minister: We have harmed the land
Through our abuse of chemicals
we have polluted its soil,
drained its goodness
and needlessly destroyed the
We have sinned:

All: forgive us and heal us.

Minister: We have inflicted upon farm
cruel and unnecessary suffering
We have subjected them to
and overcrowded conditions
excessively long journeys,
and undignified, inhumane
We have sinned:

All: forgive us and heal us.

Minister: We have traded unfairly to
We have pursued our own
to the detriment of the poor
and selfishly exploited the weak
within the world community
We have sinned:

All: forgive us and heal us.

**All: Gracious Lord,
in our sin we have avoided
to further your kingdom
Our love for you is like the dew
like the dew that goes away
Have mercy on us;
deliver us from judgement
bind up our wounds and
in Jesus Christ our Lord.**

(cf Hosea 6:3)

Minister: May the God of love bring us
forgive us our sins,
and assure us of his eternal love
our Lord. Amen.

to Pray

ns rule in our hearts and in the world. The despair
nsformation is impossible. Against the deep sleep
ns the strength to stay awake.

f Mark's story of Jesus', *Ched Myers, Paulist Press, 1988*

(Titus 2:11)

your love

you here in N.
(may be mentioned),
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animals
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rosperity
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Amen.

6)
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ove in Jesus Christ

From a speech in the Lords made by Rt. Rev. James Jones, Bishop of Liverpool

"The planet is facing a crisis of global proportions. Unfortunately, the people with the power to act are the most protected from feeling its impact; and those who do feel the devastating winds of climate change are the poor and are powerless to do anything about it."

He ended the speech with:

There is an African proverb which eloquently and succinctly points up our responsibility to future generations:

"We have borrowed the present from our children".

From the prayers-of-hope web page After Psalm 46

by Ruth Jarman

"God is our refuge and strength,
an ever present help in trouble.

Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way
and the mountains fall into the sea,
though its waters roar and foam
and the mountains quake with their surging.

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God ,"
a source of blessing to refresh us as we fight the enemy.
Pour on us your spirit, O Lord, and equip us for battle.

Do not fail us now when we need your sustaining power.

Give us the time, Lord, to defeat climate change before it takes your
world to wrack and ruin,

Give us the energy and hope we need to keep going when all seems
lost,

Give us the funding to do battle against rich vested interests,

Give us the people with the necessary talent

and wisdom that comes from you.

Be our ever present help in these troubled times.

Dispel the night of danger by your dawn of deliverance.

Where leaders stoop to feed our ever growing hunger
for more and more, open their eyes to the wisdom of simplicity,

Where governments buy our votes with cheap flights

and petrol, open their ears to the laws of nature that are screaming
at us to stop pushing their limits.

Lord, make our thirst for fossil fuels cease to the ends of the earth,

break our addiction to dirty energy,

shatter the clutch of consumerism,

quench our desire for more and more material things.

"Be still and know that I am God;

I will be exalted among the nations,

I will be exalted in the earth.

The Lord Almighty is with us;

the God of Jacob is our fortress."

