



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

June 28, 2010

Sisters and brothers in Christ,

The oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico is both heartbreaking and infuriating. It causes deep sorrow, both for the initial loss of human life and for the deep and lasting damage to an ecology that provides life and livelihoods for so many of God's creatures. At the same time we grieve that the natural beauty of this region, a sign of God's marvelous creativity, has been defiled.

Moving to indignation and anger over the neglect and carelessness that led to this disaster, both in private industry and in government regulation, is understandable. However, to do so without recognizing the responsibility we all share -- as consumers of petroleum products, as investors in an economy that makes intensive and insistent energy demands, and as citizens responsible for the care of creation -- lacks credibility and integrity. An honest accounting of what happened (and what failed to happen) must include our own repentance.

Nonetheless, God remains faithful in restoring the creation and human community. Among the voices that despair and condemn, we have a witness of hope to proclaim.

First, God, who made the creation and made it good, has not abandoned it. Day after day God sustains life in this world, and the powerful vitality of God's creation, though defiled, is not destroyed. The life-giving power of God's creative goodness remains at work, even in the Gulf of Mexico. The Spirit will continue to renew the face of the earth (Psalm 104:30, as we just sang at Pentecost). All who care for the earth and work for the restoration of its vitality can be confident that they are not pursuing a lost cause. They serve in concert with God's own creative and renewing power.

Moreover, the human family need not drown in a flood of suspicion and recrimination that is more toxic and more lasting than the oil that floods the Gulf can ever be. The cleansing waters of baptism in Christ -- who died not for the righteous, but for the unrighteous -- bring forgiveness and reconciliation with God. In this reconciled life with God we have the freedom to move beyond mutual condemnations and hostility to give a powerful witness of a reconciled community that lives in service of the creation and the neighbor. By refusing to surrender to the toxicity of recrimination, we can convince others that they can join us safely in the life and service of this community.

Responding to a challenge of this size and complexity will call upon countless insights and skills, embodied in hundreds of occupations and trades, and upon the collective strength and will of us all. God's Holy Spirit has abundantly blessed the human community with the gifts needed to do this work. We can do it with sober confidence, good will and even joy.

There are times for mourning and for repentance, as well as for reconciliation and commitment to the creation's care. They come at different moments for different people. As you serve in your communities, I commend to you resources for [worship](#), [study](#) and [action](#) that express the hope of Christians who see God's creative goodness, Jesus' forgiving reconciliation and the Spirit's abundant gifts for service. This is a moment when the human community needs to hear a word of true hope, and we have one to speak.

*The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.*

*The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.*

- Psalm 145:8-9

In God's grace,

The Rev. Mark S. Hanson

Presiding Bishop

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America