

# SEASON OF CREATION 2021

## SERMON SERIES

The NCCUMC Creation Care Team encourages pastors to preach on the care of creation during the month of September. As an incentive, we have developed some resources to support you in your sermon-writing. The prompts below are based on the **Revised Common Lectionary epistle readings** for September from the Letter of James. As always, let the Spirit lead you in your preaching, and feel free to follow the prompts as written or just use them to spark your own imagination. Additional resources will be posted throughout August. If you have any questions or need more resources, please contact Jane Almon ([jalmon@nccumc.org](mailto:jalmon@nccumc.org)) Jarrod Davis ([jdavis@nccumc.org](mailto:jdavis@nccumc.org)), Jacob Dye ([jdye@nccumc.org](mailto:jdye@nccumc.org)), or Jim Galloway ([jgalloway@nccumc.org](mailto:jgalloway@nccumc.org)). We'd love to help!

### **SERIES 2**

#### **Christian Identity and Care of Creation: How do followers of Jesus put their faith into action for the good of creation?**

The Letter of James emphasizes Christian identity, presenting faith as a specific set of practices that leads disciples to walk in a different direction than the world's way (*Wesley Study Bible*, p. 1500). Whereas Martin Luther dismissed James as "an epistle of straw," John Wesley valued its emphasis on good works as inseparable from a life of faith. Use this series to call your people to act on their faith!

**Sermon 1--** September 05 15th Sunday after Pentecost  
James 2:1-10 (11-13), 14-17

Although Jesus is not mentioned in the epistle, Jesus's words are used. This passage has echoes of the Beatitudes (v. 5) and of Jesus quoting Leviticus 19:18 in Luke 10:27 (v. 8). The preacher may talk about lifestyle choices that disproportionately affect the poor. Our insatiable appetite for cheap goods leads to unsustainable consumption of natural resources and the exploitation of laborers to produce the goods. Our ever-expanding built environment disrupts ecosystems, and causes fires, floods, and loss of species. As followers of Jesus, are we not called to be good neighbors to plants and animals as well

as to people? There is ample evidence of environmental racism as well, as people of color have historically been pushed off of productive or scenic lands.

What does it mean in the face of climate change that “God has chosen the poor in the world... to be heirs of the kingdom? To work this angle in a more rural church, see Wendell Berry’s essay in the *New Yorker* about how rural communities function as colonies of urban areas.

<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/the-new-yorker-interview/going-home-with-wendell-berry>

What good is it to have faith but not works? Perhaps you’ve come to see that climate change is happening, but what action are you taking? This approach might be more suited for a congregation where many have mentally assented to the idea of climate change, but need to be pushed to take action.

## **Sermon 2--** September 12 16th Sunday after Pentecost

James 3:1-12

We can’t say we love God while defiling God’s creation and mistreating God’s creatures. The preacher can go in a couple of directions here. One is to acknowledge the damage that unbridled speech can do in relation to the care of creation (*e.g.*, discrediting the science of climate change, promoting a theology of dominion rather than stewardship), then to give examples of environmentalists whose speech has advocated for healing the broken places in the created order (*e.g.*, Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*), or people who are currently calling people to action for the good of creation (*e.g.*, Greta Thunberg, Jane Goodall). Praise the importance of grassroots movements and ordinary citizens who are willing to advocate for vulnerable ecosystems and communities.

Another way is to point to the belief in the time of James that silence was a sign of wisdom, and discuss the wisdom of listening over speaking. God discloses God’s self in the lives of others. Listen to the voices that are crying for justice, take seriously their pleas for clean water and air, for relief from flooding caused by development, and discuss ways to be in solidarity with those voices.

The preacher may also wish to tie this passage to Psalm 19 and the “speech” of creation. Reflect on what it means for creation to reveal the glory of God and how that might affect how we treat creation. Tying in to Genesis 1, how would acknowledging the image of God in a person affect our speech about them?

**Sermon 3--** September 19 17th Sunday after Pentecost  
James 3:13-4:3, 7-8a

This reading requires little prompting for the preacher to make the connection between environmental problems and our disordered desires. “You want something and do not have it, so you commit murder.” What parts of creation are we killing in order to get things we want and do not have?” James calls his readers to “submit to God, cleanse your hands, purify your hearts.” For us today, submitting to God looks like human creatures playing the role in creation God intended for us to, and that is to be servants and caretakers of creation. See Series 1, Sermon 2 for resources on discussing “dominion over creation.” Stepping into this role of steward or caretaker is how we begin to cleanse our hands from the ways we’ve abused creation.

The preacher may wish to look to the gospel passage for this Sunday (Mark 9:30-37) to bring in themes of hubris, competition, and ostentation as factors in environmental destruction.

**Sermon 4--** September 26 18th Sunday after Pentecost  
James 5:13-20

For the preacher who wrestles with this passage, they will have to contend with the obvious references of God directly controlling the weather. One angle to approach this from, in the desperate state of climate crisis that we’re in, could be to also reference Joel 2:12-14, which speaks of repentance and ends, “Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him?”

Verse 16 perhaps offers the clearest message in terms of climate change and creation care. We must confess our sins and name the ways we have damaged the earth before we can turn towards healing of both ourselves and the land. The call to put faith into action should be deafening by now. It is not too late to get off the wrong path and save many from death because of our sins.

The preacher may wish to bring in the gospel passage this week as well (Mark 9:38-50). We will have to join alongside a wide range of people from various backgrounds in order to truly care for creation and combat the climate change “demon.” Also, Jesus talks of sacrificing things we think we couldn’t live without in order to secure something far greater. What are things we think are necessary (20 minute showers, plastic grocery bags, driving without a

second thought, running the A/C constantly) that could be sacrificed for something so great as healing, restoring, and protecting creation?