

## **Lent: A Call to System Change; Not Climate Change**

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Deuteronomy 26, Luke 4:1-13

We are entering the season of lent. Lent is observed by all mainstream churches as a period of penitence and fasting. As a mark of penitence, during this season, people stop doing things that they enjoy. “What will I give up for lent?” is the question that we ask ourselves during the season of lent. Methodist churches all over the world observe the season of lent in the true spirit of Methodist beliefs. For Methodists, faith is not a deposit of doctrines nor a set of rituals. Rather faith is praxis where we live out our faith in our everyday life experiences. In the Wesleyan tradition, lent is therefore, more than a call to abstain from something. Lent is the invitation to engage in the vocation of flourishing life; “To have life and to have it abundantly.”

Deuteronomy 26, our text from the Hebrew Bible, does not speak about the spiritual significance of giving up anything; but the text reminds us about the moral imperative of doing something. This text contains an alternate creed (5-10). Creeds are the affirmation of the doctrinal faith of the community. However, the alternate creed that we find here is not a mechanical recitation of generalized, abstract and exclusive doctrinal truths and claims of the community. Rather, it is the recitation of the pain and pathos of their ancestors, and how they experienced God as Immanuel in their lived experiences, and how God instilled in them the hope for a new world and liberated them. An alternate creed, therefore, starts from locations of imposed marginality, proclaims the gospel of a new eon, and challenges and inspires us to partner with God in witnessing the inbreaking of a redeemed earth.

Deuteronomic Creed narrates the liberation of their colonized ancestors from the shackles of imperial exploitation, ethnic profiling and xenophobia. YHWH is affirmed here as antithetical to Empire. The mighty hands of YHWH awakened the consciousness of the enslaved tribes of YHWA and enabled their agency to believe in the possibility of a world beyond the master’s house. Exodus thus became a pilgrimage of the liberated slaves contesting the sovereignty and legitimacy of the Empire.

Deuteronomic Creed did not end with the remembrance of the exodus event. Affirmation of the creed was a communal practice where the community engaged in the practices of discernment, repentance, reparation, inclusion, community building and celebration. In the creed they identified their ancestors as environmental refugees and migrant workers, the victims of the colonization of the commons and their bodies. In the communal practices that followed the recitation of the creed they identified with the communities who were forced to bear the weight of the world thanks to the imperial politics of occupation and colonization – They shared their tithe with the aliens, widows and orphans. Inspired by the Jubilee ethics of the Hebrew Bible, they also practiced triennial tithe. Every third year they set apart a tenth of their produce for the impoverished in their midst. Thanksgiving means justice for all.

The second text for our meditation is the Lukan narrative of the temptation of Jesus (Luke 4:1-13). We tend to think that lent is the time for us to overcome worldly temptations, and hence, we abstain from “worldly” things during the season of lent. But for Jesus, the wilderness experience was a time for discernment – discerning his vocation. We also need to re-imagine

lent as a time for vocational discernment than giving up something. In the Hebrew tradition, wilderness is the site of epiphany – a sacred space where people discerned God’s purpose and plan for them. In Jesus’ discernment process he rejected the leadership model of the Empire, and embraced a counter-cultural vocation of flourishing life by emptying himself. He became the bread of life and created an open table for all, dismantling hierarchy and walls of alienation and exclusion. Jesus’ temptation narrative challenges us to engage in the vocation of denouncing the Empire. Our vocation of flourishing life requires from us the courage to confront the demonic forces that destroy and diminish the movement of life. Vocation is the practice of resistance in the midst of death and destruction, and lent is the time for our vocational discernment.

This year, we observe lent in the context of climate injustice. Climate change is more than the changes in the mercury level. It is the consequence of the colonization of the commons. Communities with almost zero carbon footprint are forced to bear the brunt of the problem. Tuvalu and Kiribati are the best examples for that. The alternate creed identified the ancestors of our faith as wandering Arameans. They were environmental refugees and migrant workers under despotic regimes. We live in a similar context where people flee from their homeland due to climate induced scarcity of resources and violent conflicts. It is in this context that we need to practice lent to discern our vocation.

Discernment in the time of climate change should challenge us to critically evaluate our mainstream climate change campaigns and to identify climate change as justice issue. It should help us to understand climate-induced migration and refugee crisis as the consequence of the systemic sins of global economic injustice, patriarchy and racism. The Jubilee ethics of the Hebrew Bible and the practice of tithing are Lenten practices to radically restructure our sinful economic and social relations. Lent is the practice of resistance to the imperial forces that commodify our land, water and forest. Lent is the time to commit ourselves to partner with God in God’s mission to redeem the earth. “System Change Not Climate Change,” the slogan of the Ecosocialist Movement offers us the perspective to engage in this mission.

### **Prayer (Cries and Hopes from the Pacific)<sup>1</sup>**

Atua! Your Pacific people call out to you, even as the waters continue to rise...

Hear our prayer, we who trust in your love!

Atua! Your Pacific people call out to you, even as our land disappears before our eyes...

Hear our prayer, we who hope in your love!

Atua! Our strength! Our life! Our love!

Hymns

All creatures of our God and King

For the beauty of the Earth

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/justice-diakonia-and-responsibility-for-creation/climate-change-water/prayer-service-for-climate-justice>

