



## Sermon Tips

For many clergy of any faith, delivering a sermon on the environment is still a new experience. While more religious leaders than ever are speaking out about care for Creation, the topic can still evoke resistance, or a complex range of reactions, from congregations.

For almost all clergy, preaching on divestment and reinvestment - or on topics related to money - represents a challenge. Few topics evoke more emotion than the link between money and religion.

So - preaching on fossil fuel divestment and reinvestment in a clean energy future represents a challenge. The following are tips and guidelines, with accompanying Biblical and other passages, to offer support to clergy who want to engage these issues. Not all of these tips will be suitable for every setting. Choose the ones that are most helpful for you.

After you've preached on the topic, send us your sermon. We'd love to see it, and to learn from you.

**Tip #1: Unchecked climate change is a grave threat. The religious community must sound the alarm and call for repentance and action. Divestment and reinvestment are ways that religious groups have responded to such grave threats in the past, and are the right response now.**

### Sources:

- *Deuteronomy 11:13-17: Failure to follow God's covenant will bring about the devastation of the land.*
- *Isaiah 24:4-5: Immorality has brought about the destruction of the land.*
- *Habbakuk 2:1-4 - God's prophet is on watch, guarding the well-being of God's people.*
- *Joel 2 - In the face of human wrongdoing, God calls people to repent and to be saved.*
- *Job 38:1-18: A warning about the arrogance of humans who think they understand God's Creation.*
- *Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 38a: Our Rabbis taught: Adam was created [last of all beings] on the eve of Sabbath. And why? ...In order that, if a person's mind becomes [too] proud, they may be reminded that the gnats preceded them in the order of creation.*
- *Moses Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Repentance 2:1 - Repentance is completed when an opportunity to commit one's original transgression again arises but one doesn't and repents instead...*
- *Matthew 18:1-5 - Jesus tells the disciples that they must change and become humble.*

The science and evidence are unequivocally clear. Climate change represents a massive humanitarian and ecological threat. Hundreds of millions of people will suffer severe, life-threatening consequences as the climate progressively warms. Many of the world's poorest people are already suffering from droughts, the impact of violent storms, the growing spread of infectious disease, and more.

Earth's environment is being stretched beyond its capacity to adapt in time to avoid major agricultural failure, crippling damage to coastal areas and the billions who live there, to water supplies that sustain billions, and more. The damage, already considerable, is accelerating.

It is not an understatement to describe our current situation as an emergency. The religious community must sound the alarm for society, and call for repentance on a massive scale. This involves recognizing that the impacts of climate change are on a scale far greater than that which humans can mitigate and control. Repentance means: recognizing the problem, publically admitting the wrong, asking for forgiveness from those we have wronged, doing restitution (Hebrew: *Tikkun*) and not repeating the mistake. Our lack of action on climate change makes this full process of repentance necessary. With repentance must come humility - a recognition that our arrogance has led us to make serious mistakes with impacts beyond our understanding. Humility can help us return to right relationship with God and with the earth from which all humans have come and to which they will return.

**Tip #2: Society has vastly underestimated the danger of climate change. We require a new vision for humanity's presence on the Earth. Divestment and reinvestment represent powerful real and symbolic acts in keeping with the prophetic tradition.**

Sources:

- *Proverbs 29:18 - "Where there is no vision, the people perish."*
- *Deuteronomy 30:19 - "Choose life, so that you and your descendants might live."*
- *Deuteronomy 22:8: When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof, so that you do not bring bloodguilt on your house if anyone should fall from it*
- *Moses Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Murder 11:3 (on Deut. 22:8): Regarding any obstacle which could cause mortal danger, one [not just the owner] has a positive commandment to remove it... if one does not remove it but leaves those obstacles constituting potential danger, one transgresses a positive commandment and negates a negative commandment "You shall not spill blood."*

People of faith must face the uncomfortable, urgent reality that climate change represents. To turn away, to ignore, represents a failure to love our neighbors, and dishonors the Divine Image in which God created us. Unwillingness to face the facts is unacceptable. Inaction is immoral. For hundreds of millions of people, this is a matter of life and death.

We are also responsible to take action even if there is only a potential threat because if we do not then we are held responsible for the eventual damage.

In the face of such a grave threat, we need to accept that we need a new vision for how humanity needs to live in relation to creation. Our current vision is leading to creation's death. God calls us to "choose life."

**Tip #3: The poor and the developing world will be devastated by climate change, and need clean energy to live decently. We need a clean energy revolution – now.**

Sources:

- *Deuteronomy 16:20: "Justice/Equity, justice/equity shall you pursue, so that you may live and take hold of the land that the Lord your God is about to give you."*
- *Psalm 112:5 - "It is well with those who deal generously and lend, who conduct their affairs with justice."*
- *Psalm 146:5-9: God has a particular concern for the downtrodden, poor and powerless.*

- *Jeremiah 9:22-23: God primarily wants people to act justly in life.*
- *Matthew 25:31-45 - Jesus says that those who care for people in need will have eternal life.*

For decades, religious groups have invested enormous effort and resources to address hunger and poverty in the developing world. These investments - in schools, farming, small business development, public health, and more - and the progress they have created are threatened by climate change. It's well documented that the poor suffer climate change's worst impacts. It's morally unarguable that this is wrong. The religious value of justice/equity (Hebrew: *tzedek*) is the claim that the economic and political imbalances in the world are not a nature state of affairs but an aberration from the original plan of God for Creation. We therefore must take whatever actions are necessary to redress this inequity.

Furthermore, the developing world has a massive need for clean energy. In poor, developing countries, access to energy is life-saving. When poor countries gain access to electricity, life expectancy increases, infant mortality drops. Energy creates much good. But pollution from fossil fuels undermines the progress that energy itself creates. In India, air pollution - most of it from various fossil fuels - kills over half a million people annually. For the sake of the world's most vulnerable, we need a clean energy revolution.

Divestment from fossil fuels and reinvestment in a clean energy future is a values-based act of solidarity with the poor. Using profits from fossil fuels to fund our outreach to the poor undermines that outreach because climate change exacerbates conditions that contribute to hunger and poverty. Our investments must support our values.

#### **Tip #4: The Time is Now**

##### *Sources:*

- *Isaiah 58:2-11: God demands that we act with integrity and only then will God come and say to us, "Here I am."*
- *Pirkei Avot 1:14: Hillel used to say: If I am not for myself who will be for me? Yet, if I am for myself only, what am I? And if not now, when?*
- *Pirkei Avot 2:20-21: Rabbi Tarfon taught: The day is short, the task is great, the workers indolent, the reward bountiful, and the Master insistent! He also taught: You are not obligated to finish the task but neither are you free to neglect it.*
- *Avot d'Rabbi Natan 31b: Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai taught, "If you have a sapling in your hand, and someone says to you that the Messiah has come, stay and complete the planting, and then go to greet the Messiah."*
- *Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 54b: All who can protest against [something wrong that] one of their family [is doing] and does not protest, is held accountable for their family.[All who can protest against something wrong that] a citizen of their city [is doing and does not protest], is held accountable for all citizens of the city.[All who can protest against something wrong that is being done] in the whole world, is accountable together with all citizens of the world.*
- *James 4:13-17 - "Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin."*

In certain circumstances, we must act with fierce urgency. When we believe we know God's will for our lives and for the world, we must not procrastinate. Investing in a clean energy future is

an urgent imperative that will save lives, protect future generations, and increase the well-being of the entire human family. We must act now.

For over two decades, scientists, environmental advocates, and political leaders have tried to raise awareness about climate change and to pass legislation to address it. On a national level, these efforts have failed – in significant part because the fossil fuel industry has invested in large-scale lobbying and well-documented misinformation campaigns to resist legislative action on climate change. Divestment from fossil fuels, and reinvestment in a clean energy future, represent an expression of strong resolve in the face of enormous danger. These actions are consistent with our values and beliefs

### **Tip #5: It is Immoral to Profit from Fossil Fuels**

#### *Biblical Passage:*

- *Leviticus 19:14: “putting a stumbling block before the blind” means not intentionally giving bad advice to someone and not to assist someone in a wrongdoing.*
- *Deuteronomy 6:18: If something is legal but immoral we must go beyond the letter of the law and act justly.*
- *Talmud Shabbat 31a: Raba said, When a person is led in for Judgment [in the Next World] they are asked, Did you do business with integrity, did you fix times for learning, did you devote yourself to family, did you hope for redemption...?*
- *Matthew 21:12-13 - Jesus rebukes those who are using the temple as a marketplace for profit rather than a house of prayer.*

Given what we know about fossil fuels and the threat of climate change, it is immoral for religious communities to profit from investments in fossil fuels. Many religious institutions have investment policies that screen out investments in tobacco, alcohol, firearms, and other activities that are destructive to the human community. They need to screen out fossil fuel investments as well.

When religious groups value return on investment over ethics, we lose the heart of our identity. It is not right for the religious community to profit from an industry whose basic business model will cause enormous harm to people and to God’s creation, an industry that has used its considerable power to subvert efforts to address climate change.

### **Tip #6: Faith Communities Must Bear Witness to the Injustice of Climate Change**

#### *Biblical Passages:*

- *Jeremiah 29:11-13 - God promises a future of hope to those living in exile.*
- *Micah 6:8 - “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”*
- *Midrash Leviticus Rabbah 4:6: Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai taught: It is to be compared to people who were in a boat, and one of them took a drill and began to drill a hole beneath him. His companions say, “Why are you doing this?” He replied: What concern is it of yours? Am I not drilling under myself? They replied: But you will flood the boat for us all!*

Prophetic witness has the power to change society. Bearing witness to the injustice of climate change involves self-sacrifice. We must also not think that we can somehow separate ourselves and our actions from their moral consequences or that we will escape the damage of climate change: we are really all in the same boat. One means of self-sacrifice is finding ways to live, work, eat and play that reduce our dependence on fossil fuels. But fossil fuel consumption is

fundamentally intertwined with modern life. It is impossible to live a fossil-free life and still participate in contemporary society. Divestment from fossil fuel stocks creates another way for us to turn away from our dependence on profits from fossil fuels and to bear witness to the damage they create. And, reinvestment in a clean energy future is a commitment to hope, as well as to solid financial returns.