

Worship Resources: Reflecting on Mountaintop Removal

Call to worship and invocation:

L: Just as the Israelites gathered at the foot of Mt. Sinai to hear your word

A: So we too are gathered here today to ask for your presence

L: Just as the crowds gathered to see and hear the word fulfilled in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount

A: So we too are gathered here today to ask for your presence

L: Be with us Lord as we gather together. We begin this worship in the name of the Creating God, the Redeeming Christ, and the Life-giving Holy Spirit

A: Amen

Confession:

Merciful God,

We confess that too often we find ourselves in the service of money rather than God. Out of a desire for cheap energy we have destroyed what you have created. We have put our own needs ahead of those of our neighbors and children by using the creation you have blessed us with in ways that steal both its beauty and usefulness from future generations. We have sinned in what we have done, and in what we have left undone. It is easy for us to go through the day and not realize how many people are affected by our daily energy use. Forgive us our sins, and guide us as we struggle to live in a way that is pleasing to you.

[Appropriate words of absolution may follow]



Mountaintop Removal Mining in Perry County, KY (Photo courtesy of the Mountaintop Removal Road Show):

Prayer of the Day:

Life-giving God,

You care for all people and desire that everyone be able to live the abundant life that you intend for them. You want us to have lives that are whole and healthy, centered on love of God and love of neighbor. We pray for the people of Appalachia, that they may not be stuck with the unacceptable choice between clean air and water for their children or living wage jobs from coal mining. We ask for the transformation and renewal of a region whose people are being sacrificed for cheap energy. Pour out your grace upon the people of Appalachia and upon us all as we work towards your vision of a just society. Amen.

You can find more prayers at: <http://www.ilovemountains.org/prayers>

Sermon Starter: Justice for the Poor and for Creation

Isaiah 5:8, Amos 5:10-15, Luke 4:16-19, Matthew 23:23, John 1

The Hebrew prophets repeatedly condemn the large land-owners and politicians who take advantage of the poor and needy. Isaiah proclaims woe to those who add house to house, warning them that they will be left to dwell alone in the middle of the land. Today, mining companies are acquiring land throughout Appalachia.

Mountaintop removal has already destroyed over 1,160,000 acres of forest and polluted nearly 2,000 miles of mountain streams. The areas near mountaintop removal sites are uninhabitable

Amos condemns those that “push aside the needy at the gate.” The city gate was the site of legal proceedings, and here Amos is delivering a stinging condemnation of those who pervert justice in pursuit of economic gain. Today, the same corruption of justice that Amos condemns is occurring in Appalachia. Mining companies use their tremendous power to influence legal proceedings so that they can get around the requirements of the Clean Water Act and continue to extract coal as cheaply as possible without regard to the impact on human beings and the rest of Creation.

Jesus takes up this prophetic ministry. In Luke he reads from Isaiah (58:6 and 61:1,2) and proclaims “good news to the poor.” In Matthew he tells the Pharisees that justice and mercy are the most important parts of the law. Biblical tradition, the law (gleaning, Sabbath debt release, Jubilee), the prophets, Jesus, and Paul (Galatians 2:10) all place themselves squarely on the side of those in poverty. As the body of Christ, we too are called to place ourselves on the side of those in poverty. Mountaintop removal is impoverishing an entire region of the United States and victimizing people that have no power to stop it.

The Gospel of John reminds us that all things were created through the *logos* of God, and that *logos*, that wisdom/logic/idea is **life**. The life is the light of all people and is made flesh in the person of Jesus the Christ. This understanding of Creation is absolutely incompatible with the destructive nature of mountaintop removal, a practice that denies the goodness, and the beauty of what God has brought into being. Mountaintop removal also is destructive of human life and leads to the premature death of thousands of people each year while trapping entire communities in poverty. This is not the abundant life that God intends for us (John 10:10).