



Evangelisch-lutherisches  
Missionswerk in Niedersachsen  
Stiftung privaten Rechts

**Zentrale:**

Georg-Haccius-Straße 9  
29320 Hermannsburg

Telefon +49 (0)5052 69-0  
Fax +49 (0)5052 69-222  
E-Mail [mail@elm-mission.net](mailto:mail@elm-mission.net)  
Internet [www.elm-mission.net](http://www.elm-mission.net)  
[www.kollekten.elm-mission.net](http://www.kollekten.elm-mission.net)

**Zweigstelle:**

Büro für internationale  
kirchliche Zusammenarbeit  
Otto-Brenner-Str. 9  
30159 Hannover

Telefon +49(0)511 1215-293  
Fax +49(0)511 1215-296

**ELM-Ansprechpartner**

**Pastor Wolf von Kilian-Philipp**

Telefon +49 (0)5052 69-205  
E-Mail:  
[w.vonkilian-philipp@elm-mission.net](mailto:w.vonkilian-philipp@elm-mission.net)

## Gottesdienstangebote aus dem ELM

### Predigt zum Schöpfungstag 2015 20. September 2015

**Predigttext:** Psalm 104, 30

Die Predigt wurde von dem indischen Professor Dr. George Zachariah verfasst. Er arbeitet am „United Theological College“ in Bangalore, Indien, und unterrichtet als Dozent im Fachbereich „Theologie und Ethik“.

Das ELM hat Prof. Dr. George Zachariah aus Indien zu einer Vortragsreihe zum Thema Schöpfung und ihre Bewahrung eingeladen. In diesem Rahmen wird er diese Predigt am 20.09.2015 in der Marktkirche in Hannover halten. Er ist ein international gefragter Redner, der aufgrund seiner wissenschaftlichen Veröffentlichungen durch eine große Sachkompetenz besticht.

Geprägt durch seine Erfahrungen in Indien tritt er für die Armen und Ausgeschlossenen ein und die Entwicklung einer glaubwürdigen Spiritualität, die sich sowohl mit der Politik als auch mit dem öffentlichen Engagement der Kirche beschäftigt.

Das Anliegen seiner theologischen Reflexionen gilt dem Thema Gottes Schöpfung und ihrer Bewahrung. Diese Welt sei kein Ersatzteillager, aus dem man rücksichtslos Rohstoffe entwenden könne, ohne einen Preis dafür zu zahlen. Diese Welt sei fein abgestimmt und ein übermäßiger Raubbau der Ressourcen bringe sie aus der Balance. Entwicklung um jeden Preis und Gewinnmaximierung würden letztlich die Welt zerstören, wenn dem nicht Einhalt geboten werde.

**Spendenkonto**

Sparkasse Celle (BIC: NOLADE21CEL)  
IBAN: DE54 2575 0001 0000 9191 91

## Sermon

*"When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground." (Psalm 104:30)*

It was a winter night in December 1984. The city of Bhopal, India, froze with the cold wind. Sometime during the night that cold wind became a silent embrace of death. The poisonous gas that leaked from the Union Carbide plant enveloped the city. It was India's Hiroshima. For thousands, it was their last night. Those who survived the gas became the living dead. The environment was yet another casualty. Union Carbide, the American Multinational Corporation, built the Bhopal plant in 1979 to manufacture an extremely hazardous compound, an essential ingredient to make a pesticide used on cotton, corn and vegetables. People tried to protest against establishing the plant in the densely populated city. But the American capitalists insisted to set up the factory in the city because less populated locations were more expensive. Safety requirements, which were the usual standard in the company's plants in the US, were sidelined to maximize the profit. The rest is history.

Even after thirty years, Union Carbide is reluctant to reveal the nature of the chemical releases or their toxicity making medical treatment of the survivors difficult. According to conservative statistics, at least 100,000 people have sustained injuries and disability from gas inhalation, including birth defects and diseases of lungs and eyes, and 3,700 people lost their lives. Today, the groundwater, in areas even 2 miles away from the factory site, contains almost 40 times more pesticides than normal Indian standards. "Bhopal was a spring without voices. On the mornings that had once throbbed with the dawn chorus of robins, catbirds, doves, and scores of other bird voices, there was no sound. Only silence lay over the fields and woods and marsh."

We see the same lament echoed in *Laudato Si*, the recent encyclical of Pope Francis: "Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with coloured flowers and herbs. This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she "groans in travail."

Creation Sunday is a time to thank God for the beautiful blue planet and the community of creation that God created. It is also a time to be self-reflexive and examine how we continue to destroy and disfigure God's beautiful creation. It is a time to be inspired by the vision of a redeemed earth and to commit ourselves to ministries of earth-healing and eco-justice in our respective contexts.

Psalm 104 is a beautiful hymn articulating our faith in God, who created the cosmos celebrating life in abundance through mutual interdependency. The Psalm also recognizes the presence of sin and evil which can distort the beauty and harmony of life that is shared in community. Nevertheless the Psalm affirms the faith in God's commitment to renew the face of the earth.

God created the world by sharing God's life-giving breath. It is the entire community of creation – not just human beings – that share the divine breath. Sharing the Divine breath means sharing the being of God. Creation is hence God's cosmic embodiment, and in a metaphorical sense, world is the body of God. This is echoed in Martin Luther as he calls the earth, the God indwelling creation. Pope Francis also reiterates such a God-indwelling creation theology in his encyclical. "The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person's face. The ideal is not only to pass from the exterior to the interior to discover the action of God in the soul, but also to discover God in all things."

Psalm 104 reminds us that creation is the microcosm of the Godhead. The theologians of the early church, in their interpretation of Trinity, using the term Perichoresis, affirms the relationship of mutuality within the Godhead. Trinitarian faith presents God as the one who refuses to be alone. God who finds meaning of life in communion and community. God who is longing for the joy of friendship and fellowship. We see the same experience of mutuality and interdependency in the community of creation. Psalm 104 challenges the anthropocentric understanding of creation where human beings are privileged with intrinsic worth over against other creatures. For the psalmist, each creature has its own intrinsic worth, and each creature celebrates its life by being at the service of other members of the community of creation. Interdependence and mutuality practiced among the creatures make life in community a joyous celebration. We see a qualitative difference in the creation theology and the vocation of human beings in this text compared to the creation narratives in the book of Genesis. The vocation of human beings, according to Genesis 1 is "to subdue the earth and have dominion" over the rest of the creation. Genesis 2 proposes human vocation as "to till and to keep." But when it comes to Psalm 104, the psalmist talks about the vocation of all creatures, and it is mutual dependency and cross-fertilization.

The Psalm which portrays the integrity of creation in romantic language, however, recognizes the presence of sin and destruction that curtails the flourishing of life on earth. The psalmist laments: "Let sinners be consumed from the earth, and let the wicked be no more." The epistle reading observes this lament as the groaning of the entire creation. The psalmist's engagement with Leviathan in the text is of profound significance in our contemporary context of ecological crisis. Here the Psalm categorically observes that the ecological crisis is not caused by non-human beings. Even the Leviathan – the primordial symbol of chaos and destruction – is God's friend and companion. References to Leviathan in other biblical books tend to project God's mighty power over the forces of chaos.



But in our text, Leviathan is simply another creature that delights in the world that God has made. Leviathan's purpose in the created order is "to sport" in the sea. It does not appear here as a frightening creature, but one that "frolics" and plays. Perhaps, God created Leviathan "to play with it." To put it differently, for the psalmist, Leviathan is not a creature God sees as an enemy; rather it is God's friend and partner in making the celebration of joy in the community of creation a reality. This interpretation of Leviathan calls for an alternate problematization of the ecological crisis. Ecological crisis is not a natural calamity that is caused by God. Ecological crisis is the consequence of systemic sin and structural evil. The psalmist helps us to realize the tragic reality that systemic sin co-exists with the celebration of life on earth.

As Isaiah reminds us, "The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers; the heavens languish together with the earth. The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws, violated statutes, broken the everlasting covenant." For the community of creation in Bhopal, Isaiah's diagnosis of the ecological crisis is still relevant. It is the profit mongering corporate greed which privileged profit over life that caused genocide and ecocide in Bhopal. Desecration of the earth is the desecration of the body of God. From today's Bhopals, God too is groaning, with sighs too deep for words."

The groaning of creation is not a cry in despair; it is a public protest, exposing the sins of corporate greed and imperial invasion. The groaning of creation is not a death vigil; rather it is the groaning in labor pain. It is the announcement of new life in the midst of death. As Isaiah prophesized, "God is going to do a new thing on earth" (Isaiah 43). The psalmist reaffirms the same hope in God; "God is going to renew the face of the earth." Alternatives are possible. A redeemed earth is God's promise for the community of creation.

From the beginning of creation, the Spirit of God has been present and active in the life of God's creation as the life giver. The same Spirit works through the whole of history and has come to rest on the followers of Christ in Jerusalem. Church came into being on the Pentecost day, with the sending of the breath of God. Creation is a Pentecost experience. When creatures with diverse nature, temperament, and outlook were filled with the life-giving breath of God, in spite of the differences and diversity, a community of creation became a reality. If creation is a Pentecost experience, earth is the sanctuary, and all of us are members of this cosmic body of Christ. In the midst of the ecological crisis we are called to be God's partners in renewing the face of the earth. The church is called to become the divine breath in the valleys of dry bones, and to celebrate the joy of life in community.

Bhopal is not just an isolated event. The recent explosion at the hazardous chemical storage facility at the Tianjin port in China which killed 139 people and injured 800 people is the latest example of the destruction of life for profit. Hundreds of tons of hazardous chemicals were stored at this facility which was more than 70

times of the legally permissible limit. Along with human beings, the land, the river, the water bodies, and the living creatures of the region are also affected by the toxic contamination. In the context of corporate plunder of God's beautiful world and the subaltern communities, we are called to be a disturbing presence so that through our ministries of earth-healing, the face of the earth will be renewed. We witness this commitment in the words of Rashida Bee, a Bhopal survivor and activist: "We are not expendable. We are not flowers offered at the altar of profit and power. We are dancing flames committed to conquering darkness and to challenging those who threaten the planet and the magic and mystery of life."

Inspired by the living witness of all who work for the healing of your creation, we affirm our faith in you oh God, and pray for your blessing even as we rededicate ourselves on this Creation Sunday to continue to engage in ministries of earth-healing.

"When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the earth," Amen.