

April 16, 2023
“Believing Is Doing”
Psalm 16 / John 20:19-31
Pastor Tim Emmett-Rardin

Three weeks ago the United Nations General Secretary, António Guterres, delivered this message in launching the UN's Synthesis Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change:

Dear friends,

Humanity is on thin ice – and that ice is melting fast. As today's report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) details, humans are responsible for virtually all global heating over the last 200 years. The rate of temperature rise in the last half century is the highest in 2,000 years. Concentrations of carbon dioxide are at their highest in at least two million years. The climate time-bomb is ticking.

But today's IPCC report is a how-to guide to defuse the climate time-bomb. It is a survival guide for humanity.

As it shows, the 1.5-degree limit is achievable. But it will take a quantum leap in climate action. This report is a clarion call to massively fast-track climate efforts by every country and every sector and on every timeframe.

In short, our world needs climate action on all fronts – everything, everywhere, all at once.

In that spirit, Bill McKibben, longtime climate activist and co-founder of the international organization, 350.org, and as it happens, fellow United Methodist, has often said – as noted in this week's Words to Live and Love By: “Climate change is the single biggest thing that humans have ever done on this planet. The one thing that needs to be bigger is our movement to stop it.”

In observation of international Earth Month in April, and Interfaith Power & Light's annual Faith Climate Action Week, April 14-23, our focus this morning is both the ongoing human responsibility for global warming and climate chaos, and the beyond-urgent human responsibility to repair what we have broken.

We have sung and celebrated the beauty of Creation, its inherent, life-giving, life-sustaining goodness. From the beginning. And we have prayed and lamented the

brokenness of Creation, its increasing, life-threatening, life-altering destruction. Getting worse by the day, in spite of decades of international gatherings with bold proclamations and agreements. Getting worse by the day, even though we know better.

We have forgotten who we are as co-creators with God in the unfolding of Creation, as those entrusted with its care. We have lived and worked and produced and exploited our way beyond the restorative rhythms of Creation, and so have forsaken our responsibility to care for it.

When I was in college, I went with a group of students to Dade County, Florida after Hurricane Andrew – at the time the most destructive and costly hurricane in U.S. history. We were there to help rebuild one woman's house, but one afternoon we took a break to volunteer at a local elementary school.

We were playing with some kids in the field behind the school, and I remember – like it was yesterday and not 30 years ago – one kid grabbing an inflatable ball, an inflatable globe, in fact. And before he kicked it, saying to his classmates, “Look at me! I'm God.”

Theologically speaking, let's be clear, God had nothing to do with it. There have always been hurricanes within the natural order of life. And contrary to popular perception, they are not actually more frequent now than they have ever been; they're just far more likely to be dangerous and devastating because of climate change and rising water temperatures.

It is we, collectively, who have drop-kicked the planet.

And so we rightly pray for the gift of remembering who we are, of reclaiming the gift of Creation and our responsibility as co-creators and caretakers, and for the strength to make the changes we need to make.

We know that change will only come with a massive response, a massive movement. Everything, everywhere, all at once.

As politicians and power-brokers continue to see what they want to see, to see what allows them to continue to justify climate destruction at the expense of our collective future, willfully conceding policy to the fortunes and fancies of the fossil-fuel industry, it is we – like the disciples in our gospel reading this morning – who remain huddled together behind closed doors in fear and grief.

Largely overwhelmed by the enormity of the problem, paralyzed by the perception that there's nothing we can do about it. That change is not possible.

But it is. Of course it is.

As the young climate activist Greta Thunberg has said, "Some people say that I should study to become a climate scientist so that I can 'solve the climate crisis.' But the climate crisis has already been solved. We already have all the facts and solutions. All we have to do is wake up and change." People power.

In our gospel reading this morning, Jesus – the now risen, resurrected, transformed Christ – appears to those fearful, overwhelmed, paralyzed disciples. He offers them peace. He shows them the wounds on his hands and in his side.

"Peace be with you all, just as the God of Peace has sent me, so I send you all."

And then he breathes on them, literally breathes God's Spirit on them. To wake them up. To remind them who and whose they are as those now sent out to share the good news.

Like Jesus, the planet is showing us her wounds. Day after day, storm after storm, flood after flood, drought after drought, extinction after extinction. That in seeing, we might wake up and believe. Wake up and change. Believe in the Easter possibility of change, resurrection, transformation, new life. Wake up and change!

It is Thomas, unfairly labeled the "doubting disciple," who somehow misses out on this visit from Jesus. His fellow disciples witness to the reality of Resurrection they have seen for themselves, but Thomas doesn't believe it. Not without proof.

“Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hand, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

Seeing is believing. Isn't that so often how we roll?

We know how the rest of this story goes. Jesus returns again eight days later, this time showing Thomas his wounds. And lamenting that Thomas refused to believe WITHOUT seeing, and blessing those who “have not seen and yet believe.”

The planet has showed us her wounds, though many in power and otherwise refuse to see, much less believe that the wounds are real. And serious.

But Jesus' showing the disciples his wounds is not about helping them see and believe in the Crucifixion. They already get that. They are huddled together in fear and grief, behind locked doors, because they already feel the weight of that in their hearts and in their bones.

It IS about helping them understand that change, resurrection, transformation, new life – the ongoing NEED for change, resurrection, transformation, new life – requires belief without seeing.

Jesus' invitation, Jesus' challenge really, is to believe our way into seeing. Believing is seeing.

In our context this morning, if seeing the planet's wounds ultimately does nothing but confirm its woundedness, nothing will change. If it does nothing but overwhelm and paralyze us, nothing will change. We will remain huddled together in fear and grief. Jesus reminds the disciples – and us – that they – and we – can't stay there.

As the theologian and Biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann suggests,

“Because we care for and love the earth, we can't but cry out in lament and despair for the earth. Because we care for our families, our children, and children everywhere, we can't help but despair over the state of the earth and the future of the world we are passing on to them. Unless that kind of grief and lament and anger is put to

speech, it can never become energy. Laments are all an expression of grief, but they are also an expression of hope. Hope is an insistence that things cannot remain this way and they must be changed."

Nothing will change with climate change unless we believe that it can. And unless we take seriously our individual and collective responsibility as co-creators and caretakers of Creation ongoing.

As my dad always often said to me and my sister, and as I have shared at Calvary many times before, "If you believe that you CAN'T, you will always be right." 100 percent.

The good news of Easter ongoing is that believing is seeing. Change, resurrection, transformation, new life, requires us to believe a new reality into being. Believing IS seeing.

That's what hope is, but it's not only that.

As Greta Thunberg has also said, and as we heard in naming climate change and global warming as one of so many ongoing crucifixions a couple of weeks ago:

"I don't want your hope. I don't want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. I want you to act. I want you to act as you would in a crisis. I want you to act as if the house is on fire, because it is."

I get it, but I believe that's a misunderstanding of hope. Hope IS an action word. Believing is seeing, but there can be no seeing without doing.

Faith plants the seed, but hope waters it. Makes sure it has plenty of sunlight. Nurtures it into existence. We have to own our responsibility. Believing is also doing.

Jesus shows the disciples his wounded side and hands to invite them beyond the paralysis of their fear and grief, and to remind them that it is now their hands that are needed to heal the wounds of the world. To repair the brokenness that maintains crucified realities. *Tikkun olam* in Hebrew.

Understandable as our fear and grief may be, it is OUR hands that are needed to heal the wounds of climate chaos and global warming.

Hope is an action word, a verb. Believing is DOING!

“Hope,” writes Rebecca Solnit, “means another world might be possible, not promised, not guaranteed. Hope calls for action; action is impossible without hope. To hope is to give yourself to the future, and that commitment to the future makes the present inhabitable. Anything could happen, and whether we act or not has everything to do with it.”

Believing is seeing a new reality into existence, but not without action. Faith plants the seed, hope waters and suns and nurtures it into existence. And love, LOVE, grows it. Brings it into the fullness and abundance of life.

Today is not about guilt. It's not about grief. It's not about fear. It's about our divine call to hope in the midst of all that. To faith-fueled hope that is the only thing that will repair what we have broken. Move us toward a new reality where this beautiful, life-giving, life-sustaining planet is no longer in crisis. Free to do what it was created to do. As it was in the beginning, or as close as we can now get to that.

May it be so.

And with that, friends, I invite you – as I invite myself – to take some time now to reflect on the potency, the viability, of your hope when it comes to confronting climate change and healing the planet.

What can you do, what will you commit to do, in your corner of the world, to participate in the massive movement needed to stop it? What more can you do, will you commit to do, individually and in your households, in the choices you make?

What more can you do, will you commit to do, to advocate and organize for change within your schools and workplaces and congregations and communities and halls of political power? And to support organizations already doing that work?

What more can you do, will you commit to do, to support the global movement? What more can we do, what might we commit to do, as a congregation?

Be specific. Don't let yourself off the hook. Make tangible commitments, consider practical next steps.