

Whenever someone—especially a teen-ager -- tells me I need to step out of my comfort zone and do something that inconveniences me I become resentful and defensive. You may have the same reaction. It's a challenge to change – to ask me to move away from “business as usual.” So I am anticipating that the message this morning will not be one that leaves you feeling especially comfortable. The message this morning is inspired by young people sounding the alarm about climate change. They are asking us to get people – especially our elected officials – to face what is turning into more than just climate change, but climate collapse, climate disruption, climate chaos.

Collapse. Disruption. Chaos. Emergency.

No. We don't want to hear those words. We don't want to admit that ...well... maybe it's simply too late to turn this ship around. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report issued last fall said we had twelve years to STOP what is going on. Not just slow it down, but to put a stop to the mining and burning of fossil fuels, increasing carbon and methane emissions. To put a stop to the lifestyles in the wealthy, predominately white part of the world. The Tri-UU world. Our world.

The IPCC report giving us 12 years to stop what we were doing came out in the fall of 2018. It's now fall of 2019. Now we have 11 years. That's really not much time.

I don't have to bring on a litany of “bad climate news” reports. I'm sure you're all well aware of melting sea ice, disappearing glaciers, extinction of multitudes of species, rising sea levels, and increasingly chaotic weather. Hurricane Dorian was not a fluke. We were lucky this time. Others have not been so fortunate.

Jamie Margolin, a 17-year-old climate activist, traced our current situation back to colonialism. He said, “Colonialism's mindset of heedless extraction, greed, and human exploitation not only planted the seeds of today's climate crisis, it remains visible in the crisis's central injustice: although the poor are responsible for only a tiny share of humanity's greenhouse gas emissions, they generally suffer first and worst from the heat waves, droughts, storms, rising seas and other effects of those emissions. Extreme weather and other climate impacts strike all over the world, but the rich in North American and Europe are better positioned to withstand those impacts.”

I listen to this statement and I hear the truth of it. I like my car, my central air-conditioning, my hot water on demand, the wide variety and availability of my food, and all my electronic gear. My response to the truth that my easy and convenient life is killing the planet is guilt and resentment. And underneath that, despair. So, like Scarlett O'Hara, I resolve that “Tomorrow I'll think of some way... after all, tomorrow is another day.” Three hundred sixty-five days in a year multiplied by 11 years is four thousand fifteen days. Plenty of other days, right? (pause)

This morning I hope to help us all shift into the reality – the emergency -- of this crisis. I want help us to understand that four thousand fifteen days really isn't a lot of time. And I want to help us to find the fertile gardens of hope and to propel us to action on Friday. And beyond Friday.

“Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well”, wrote Vaclav Havel. “[Hope] is the certainty that something is worth doing no matter how it turns out.” We've changed our lightbulbs, and insulated our homes, and probably we drive a fuel-efficient car. We recycle. Maybe we eat locally, or have reduced our consumption of meat. We sign petitions to ban plastic straws, plastic bags, the Keystone XL pipeline, and ask our representatives to back the “Green New Deal”. But what if we sit with our grief? Our pain? Our sense of loss? Our feelings of inadequacy? Our resentment of change? What if we simply sit still and in the stillness, acknowledge our despair? How then shall we move through the world?

Dahr Jamail, wrote a book called *The End of Ice: Bearing Witness and Finding Meaning in the Path of Climate Disruption*. In it he observed, “By way of the corporate capitalist industrial growth culture within which most of us have been raised and immersed, we have become disconnected from the planet we are so deeply part of. Hence, the first step toward answering the question of ‘how to be’ during this time is to connect ourselves back to the planet.” He goes on to cite Stan Rushworth, Cherokee elder, activist and scholar who reminded him that while Western colonialist culture believes in “rights”, many Indigenous cultures teach of “obligations” that we are born into: obligations to those who came before, to those who will come after, and to the Earth itself.

Both of these activists ask us to orient ourselves around the questions, “What are my obligations”? In other words, from this moment on, knowing that halting the degradation of our environment is an emergency, to what do I devote my life? It's a big question. Rebecca Solnit said, “Inside the word ‘emergency’ is ‘emerge’; from an emergency, new things come forth, the old certainties are crumbling fast, but danger and possibilities are sisters.”

We are certainly in a dangerous time. But I like to think there are possibilities. We aren't powerless. The two greatest technologies of the 20th century are solar panels and civil disobedience. Civil disobedience. Taking action is the best way to live in condition of crisis and violation, for your spirit and your conscience as well as for society. Many governments around the world now understand that this is an emergency, and have declared a climate emergency for their jurisdiction. Ethiopia, for example, is planting 4 billion trees before fall to combat deforestation. Major cities like New York, London and Sydney have declared climate emergencies allowing them to respond appropriately. The UK declared its intention to be carbon neutral by 2050 and all estimations say they'll hit that target before that. Costa Rica will be fossil fuel free by 2021. Germany produced enough renewable energy in the first half of 2019 to power every household in the country for the entire year.

Despite the US pulling out of the Paris Agreement more than 100 cities and counties across the country showed their defiance by pledging to transition to one hundred percent clean energy. Taking action is entirely compatible with grief and horror; you can work to elect people who share your values while being sad. If you are a citizen of this country you have a vote. Use it – not only at the national level, but also at the state and local levels. Vote for people who believe our house is on fire and are going to work to make sure that together we can rescue it.

To quote environmental lawyer, Farhana Yahim, “We can and now must redesign human societies based on love, justice and planetary boundaries so that no person or society is left to face devastating consequences and we learn to restore nature together. Ending domination over nature goes hand in hand with tackling all forms of domination and hierarchy. The struggle for climate justice is also the struggle for racial, gender, sexual and economic equality.”

The climate crisis – catastrophe – affects everything and everyone. Rebecca Solnit noted that “The histories of change that have made me hopeful are often about small groups that seem at the outset unrealistic in their ambition.” In this global crisis context the Unitarian Universalist Association qualifies as a ‘small group.’ The UUA has articulated concern about environmental issues since 1989. The Green Sanctuary program inviting congregations to engage in a series of actions to address environmental issues, was launched in 1999. In 2006 delegates to the UUA General Assembly campaigned for and voted overwhelmingly to adopt a *Statement of Conscience on the Threat of Global Warming/Climate Change*—arguably the clearest and strongest statement by a religious institution to date. Let’s responsively read excerpts from that Statement:

Earth is our home.

We are part of this world and its destiny is our own.

All life will be gravely affected unless we embrace new practices, ethics, and values to guide our lives on a warming planet.

As Unitarian Universalists, how can our faith inform our actions to remedy and mitigate climate change?

We declare by this Statement of Conscience that we will not acquiesce to the ongoing degradation and destruction of life that human actions are leaving to the next generation.

We are called to join with others to halt practices that fuel climate change, and to mitigate impending effects with just and ethical responses.

As a people of faith, we commit to a renewed reverence for life and respect for the interdependent web of all existence.

We envision a world in which all people are assured a secure and meaningful life that is ecologically responsible and sustainable, in which every form of life has intrinsic value.

Unitarian Universalists are called to defer to a balance between our individual needs and those of all other organisms. Entire cultures, nations, and life forms are at risk of extinction while basic human rights to adequate supplies of food, fresh water, and health as well as sustainable livelihoods for humans are being undermined.

HOUSE ON FIRE

September 15, 2019

To live, we must both consume and dispose. Both our consumption and our disposal burden the interdependent web of existence. To sustain the interdependent web, we must burden it less while maintaining the essential of our lives.

Our world is calling us to gather in community and respond from our moral and spiritual wealth; together we can transform our individual and congregational lives into acts of witness, discarding our harmful habits for new behaviors and practices that will sustain life on earth, ever vigilant against injustice.

Affirming that we are of this earth and that humankind has brought about global climate change, we pledge to ground our missions and ministries in reverence for this earth and responsibility to it as we undertake these personal practices, congregational actions, and advocacy goals.

Despite this statement, despite the science warning us of impending disaster, we have continued fiddling while the planet burned. On and off for the past 8 years I've been thinking about Tri-UU's identity. When we are known at all, we're known for our activism. And like most UU congregations, we've found plenty of social causes to address. That's the good news. That's also the not-so-good news. Because we're all over the place the good works by a few individuals are not as impactful as they might be with more participants. Our efforts to claim a congregational identity are thwarted by doing a lot of good, but small things. But there's one issue that encompasses all others. That issue is the climate crisis.

Using some of the actions contained in the Green Sanctuary program, and actions proposed by the UU Ministry of the Earth, Sue Michalson and Margaret Wineman drafted a proposal for Tri-UU taking "Immediate Climate Action." It was reviewed by me, not-yet-rev Joe, and board president Marjorie Rhem and introduced to the Program Council last Wednesday. On Friday a group of volunteers were asked to provide input on the proposal. As early as Monday the Board may receive what I'm thinking of as an action proposal from the Tri-UU Climate Action Team. Tri-UU's participation in the Global Climate Strike on September 20th is the first of many activities designed to identify the Tri-County Unitarian Universalists as the go-to people for environmental education and activism.

This coming Friday, young people around the world are engaging in a Global Climate Strike to demand bold and immediate action by world leaders based on values of compassion, love, and justice. We at the Unitarian Universalist Association and our President, Rev. Dr. Susan Frederick-Gray, are joining with other faith leaders to support this call to action. Joe will be on the steps of the Orlando City Hall at 1pm, and I will be on the steps of the Gainesville City Hall at 5pm. I hope you will join us.

Beloveds, if we destroy the planet, it doesn't matter which side of the fence you're on or how hard you're working to bring justice to the issues of gun control, immigration, health care, mass incarceration, education, gender affiliation, race, income inequality, homelessness, sexuality or any other injustice. If your house is on fire your political affiliation doesn't matter. If our blue boat home is uninhabitable, none of it matters. If we do nothing, nothing else matters. Amen.