

Climate Church: Climate World

A Study Guide

Based on the book by Jim Antal

[Climate Church, Climate World – How People of Faith Must Work for Change](#)



Chapter Summaries are largely excerpted from the book
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Introduction

Climate Church, Climate World focuses on why and how the church can address the present climate crisis. It seeks to invite people of faith – together with their faith communities – to accept that God has called us to bear witness in a time such as this – a time when the continuity of God’s creation is in jeopardy. Antal suggests that the enormity of this crisis constitutes a theological emergency. To resolve this emergency, God is calling the church to initiate a moral intervention. As the church engages this calling, it will undergo what Brian McLaren calls a spiritual migration. By repurposing our current social and economic systems, the church will prompt humanity to transition to a new moral era that honors and sustains God’s gift of creation. Our current situation requires us to embrace what for many of us may be new forms of faithfulness, discipleship, worship, preaching, testimony, witness and even hope. These pages show how people of faith and faith communities can embrace new opportunities that will inspire humanity to make the changes science says we must in order to preserve and protect God’s gift of creation. (p. 2)

Three moral imperatives:

1. Let our clergy accept the mantle of moral leadership – “we who follow Jesus will not back away from God’s call to protect our common home.” (p. 6)
2. Let all of us incarnate the changes we long for – Now is the time for congregations and for every person of faith to set a moral example through our own words and actions...and hold our religious, political, corporate and global leaders accountable to do the same. (p. 7)
3. Let us proclaim the truth in the public square – We are now living in a John 18:37 moment (“*For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth...*” – Jesus) We the people – whether in the streets, at the State House, in the halls of power; with our phones, emails, technology, and social media; by committing our time, financial resources, and prayers – let us pour ourselves out to bend the moral arc of justice, with joy in our hearts, beauty in our sights, and hope for the children. (p. 7)

Notes for Group Leaders

This guide is not intended to be a substitute for reading Jim Antal’s book. We cannot stress enough that you as the leader and your group members will get more out of the conversation if they read the relevant chapters of the book in advance of each session. However, it is useful to have a precis of each chapter so you can refresh everyone’s minds and quickly bring on board those who have neglected to prepare!

This study assumes that climate change is 100% real and is human caused.

If you have a congregation with many people who are climate deniers or at least climate sceptics, you may want to consider a Living Room Conversation.

https://www.livingroomconversations.org/topics/climate_change/.

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Session One: The Climate Crisis and a Loving God

Opening Prayer/Meditation

“Glance at the sun.

See the moon and the stars.

Gaze at the beauty of earth’s greening.

Now,

Think.” -Hildegard of Bingen

Video: <https://youtu.be/FeREfZCsx-Q> “Global Weirding: I’m not a tree hugger”

Background Reading

(Based on Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 of Climate Church, Climate World)

I used to think that if we threw enough good science at the environmental problems, we could solve them. I was wrong. The main threats to the environment are not biodiversity loss, pollution, and climate change, as I once thought. They are selfishness and greed and pride.

And for that we need a spiritual and cultural transformation.

- James “Gus” Speth (p.9)

What have we done? Never has the Earth and its climate changed so quickly. The consequences of climate change that we are already seeing include: (p. 11-12):

- Persistent high temperatures are wreaking havoc with forests and greatly extending the fire season
- Acidification of the oceans is leading to die-off of coral reefs and disruption of the entire food chain of the oceans.
- Rising sea levels are leading to serious flooding of coastal communities; nearly 500 US cities and towns could be chronically inundated by 2100.
- Habitat destruction and pollution, which are accelerating the sixth mass extinction of animals
- Droughts and wars affecting primarily the poor, the marginalized, and those in countries already at or near the edge. The people already suffering the most from climate change are those who did the least to cause it and who have the fewest resources to deal with it (p. 21).

We find ourselves born into a time when human activity and aspiration will sentence our children to lives of struggle, not promise; skies of extreme weather not rainbows; and landscapes of deprivation, not abundance. Yet many people cannot take in these truths (p. 21). Denial is a form of self-defense. Rather than subject ourselves to fear and disruption we align ourselves with others who share our position that nothing is wrong (p. 15). However, denial of frightening climate change news and the scientific evidence cannot change the fact that urgent action is needed. Antal summarizes the scientific consensus: climate change is happening, it’s human caused and it’s getting worse (p. 13).

We are all in this together! We are beginning to recognize that just as each of us has agency, which we demonstrate in the choices we make, we also have agency as a collective, all together. On September 1, 2017, Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew cosigned a declaration affirming “that there can be no enduring resolution to climate change unless the response is concerted and collective” (p. 23). Movements for social change are fueled by bottom-up engagement in which people identify with the movement and claim their collective power (p. 25). Antal points out that there is already one good example of a bottom up movement based on scientific evidence producing a lasting reduction in harmful pollutants in the atmosphere. An international treaty – the Montreal Protocol –drastically limited the use of chemicals that deplete the ozone layer and let in harmful UV radiation. As a result the ozone layer has been largely restored (p.24).

We Already Have Everything We Need Walter Brueggemann declares “...The power of the future is not in the hands of those who believe in scarcity and monopolize the world’s resources; it is in the hands of those who trust God’s abundance”. Gospel accounts relate how five thousand people were fed by Jesus with just seven loaves and few small fish. However we interpret what happened, the message of the story becomes clear as each person in the crowd recognizes that his or her personal prospects are bound up with what happens to everybody else. Our challenge is no greater than the challenge of feeding the multitude. The human community already has all the solutions we need to address climate change. None of the roadblocks are scientific restraints but are moral shortcomings that can be healed and transformed (p. 28).

Antal believes that heartbreak for the world we are breaking is an essential part of our generation’s vocation. God calls our generation to hear creation crying, to feel heartbreak and grief for our damaged world. God calls us to be compassionate – to suffer with the world as Jesus did– to share in the pain we are inflicting on creation. If we allow ourselves to feel this pain we can gain strength from knowing that we do not suffer alone. God’s heart is the first to break when harm is done to God’s creation (p. 33).

We must allow ourselves to be increasingly vulnerable as we take in the pain, suffering, and destruction of our breathtakingly wild and beautiful home (p. 34). As we do this, we must also open ourselves to a loving, creator God who is at our side, joining us in our heartbreak. Antal believes that with God at our side, we experience an expanded capacity to absorb the horror of what we have done and are doing to life itself. (p. 34). The church will facilitate this kind of preparation among its members and throughout the community. Inspired by the Spirit, we the people will take action by engaging the principalities and powers, whoever they may be. We will do so not because we expect victory but because–in our deepest places–we are connected to a loving God and can do no other (p. 35).

Questions for Discussion

In the Global Weirding video “I’m Not a Tree-Hugger” Katharine Heyhoe points out that “we have built our cities, our countries, and our socioeconomic systems on the assumption that the

climate is stable and that the conditions we've experienced in the past paint an accurate picture of the future". These assumptions are no longer valid, so what needs to change in our way of life in this new era of rapidly changing climate?

What specific events have led you to "hear creation crying, to feel heartbreak and grief for our damaged world" (p. 33)?

Why have governments been so slow to respond to climate change? Why does climate denial persist?

Jim Antal emphasizes collective action. What role can individual actions have in the response to climate change? [See <http://www.sustainislandhome.org> for a way to calculate your carbon footprint and resources for reducing it.]

Antal encourages us to "open ourselves to a loving creator God who is at our side" (p. 34)? How can the church "facilitate this kind of preparation among its members" (p. 35)?

Alternative Activity

Read this imaginary letter together:

A Letter from a Pastor to Her Congregation on the Occasion of the Closing of the Church on Ash Wednesday 2070

Ash Wednesday, February 12, 2070

Beloved in Christ: Grace and peace to you. It was good to see so many of you at our final service. Thanks for making the effort. After all our tearful hugs, I realized that it was important for me to reach out and offer a final farewell to those of you who were unable to join us.

Today, as I marked each of you with a cross of ashes, I said, "From dust you have come and to dust you shall return." I am so grateful that Ellen suggested Ash Wednesday as the closing date for our church. The liturgy, as we adapted it, seemed so fitting.

After everyone had received ashes, I was caught off guard when Mark respectfully asked me to let him hold the urn of ashes. (For those of you who may not know Mark, he grew up in our congregation, and then spent the past twelve years in the Army. Like millions of other soldiers and members of the National Guard, in 2059 he was reassigned to try to contain the Great Conflagration in Canada, Montana, and the Dakotas. He returned home about three months ago.) As I handed him the urn, it dawned on me that he had spent his whole adult life amidst ashes and fire. If anyone understood Ash Wednesday, it was Mark. He prayed silently for a moment, as if he were summoning all he had learned from his years amidst the fires, and then he reached into the bowl of ashes and used them to "mark" the altar, the pulpit, and the chancel. With each mark, he repeated, "From dust you have come, and to dust you shall return." Stirred

by his profound witness, we all joined him in unison the third time. Truly, this felt like the closing of our church.

Since the Great Flood in 2037, our church and neighborhood have been under water six times. At first, we did all we could for the neighborhood. But the Third Flood in 2051 was such a catastrophe—and our membership had dwindled to so few—that for the past twenty years we've focused on keeping our once-beautiful building open in order to carry out funerals and other liturgical responsibilities. Last year's Category Six hurricane made it clear to the dozen or so members who were still trying to live in the neighborhood that it was time to close the church.

My greatest regret is that over the past few decades—in our time of greatest need—faith in God has become as extinct as the elephant, tiger, panda, and the other thousands of species whose extinction we have mourned each St. Francis Day. Many have suggested that humanity's abandonment of God is due to despair over the widespread increase in war, the persistent killings along the national border barriers, the unforgiving mosquito-borne viruses that have now invaded even Canada, and so on. My own view is that, as God's creation came to be experienced as the destroyer—not the sustainer—of civilized life, people could no longer believe in a loving God.

Thanks be to God that our congregation has resisted this view! Many of you credit one of my predecessors, the Rev. Dr. Jill Smith, for her clear and courageous leadership over her twenty-three years of ministry (2017–2040). More than any voice in America, she urged all who would listen to embrace a new set of values. As our congregation adopted these values, we were both cheered and jeered. I have marveled at the stories of how, in 2022, over half the congregation made an “Acts 2:44 commitment” to hold all things in common. Not long after that the congregation undertook a year-long study of the concept and practice of ownership of land. Recognizing that “The earth is the Lord's” (Psalm 24) the church voted to turn the church property into a land trust—and dozens of members did likewise with their own (previously) “private” property. We still use many of the life-changing liturgies Jill wrote that helped this congregation expand the Golden Rule to include unborn generations of people and creatures as our neighbors.

Thankfully, these changes kept us connected with the compassion that God is always pouring into our hearts (Romans 5:5). As all of you know, a few months after my son was conscripted into the Army, he was killed while protecting our border from climate refugees. Although I had only been your minister for a few months, your caring, compassionate support saved my life, and over the years we have become family for one another.

Not a day goes by that I don't cast my mind back to 2015—the year Pope Francis issued his Encyclical “On Care for Our Common Home” and when 193 nations signed the COP21 Paris Climate Agreement. Although I was only twelve years old at the time, I'll never forget the hope I felt that the grownups were going to own up to having trashed God's creation and were now undertaking the necessary changes to make things right. But at that young age, I didn't realize that the politicians would only make these changes if forced to do so. Throughout history, one of the voices that compelled the end of slavery, the guarantee of civil rights, and LGBTQIA+

rights and the end of apartheid was the voice of the church. But darker forces than I could imagine at the age of twelve had already made certain that the church would mostly stay silent on climate change because climate change was a “political issue.”

What if the leaders of every faith community the world over had done what Jill did? Looking back, I just don’t understand why religious leaders failed to recognize that the conflict over climate change was a moral conflict—a conflict of values. Was it a lack of personal courage? Did they really think that religion had more to do with personal salvation and little if anything to do with collective salvation? Was the uncritical acceptance of personal gain so universal that it was unthinkable for a pastor to insist that everything we have comes from God? Did the blasphemous idea that God gave us the Earth to plunder for our own benefit become so embedded in our economy that our obligation to future generations was forgotten or dismissed?

Jill was a great moral leader because she never lost her moral compass. She knew that God had not called her to embrace an ideology of the status quo. She was not afraid to ask us to become living examples of the values needed to sustain life as it had evolved on this planet. And you responded! Over the past twenty years, every one of you has shared with me your testimony—the more you lived your lives for one another and in service to the dying world, the more satisfied you became with your own life.

But now all of that is past. I’m reminded of the Prophet Jeremiah’s comment: “The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved” (Jeremiah 8:20).

In the coming months, I expect most of you will join the others who have relocated to higher ground. Now that the world population is less than a quarter of what it was thirty years ago, you will likely find a place. Among our many lamentations is the abandonment of the once-elevating conviction that the role of the church is to animate the conscience of the nation. In its place, I hope that each of you will continue to respond to God’s call to be ambassadors of the beloved community. I hope that each of you will make whatever community you join become more resilient. And, as has been the focus of our life together here, I urge you to bring to your new community a new understanding of hope, rooted in the Prophets and the Book of Acts.

The theologian from whom I have learned the most—Walter Brueggemann—introduced me to Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah. Like us, these prophets lived in a period when their “known world” (Jerusalem) was assaulted and finally disbanded¹. They told their people, and they tell us today, that we have two tasks: to let go of the world we once knew, and to receive from God a new world. As Isaiah says, “Do not remember former things; Behold, I am doing a new thing” (Isaiah 43:18–19).

Only by fully grieving all that we have lost can we enter into the new tomorrow that God is preparing. We have so much to mourn: personal grief over loved ones lost and homes destroyed; ubiquitous grief over the long emergency that has straight-jacketed our lives; and anticipatory grief over the catastrophe that we are handing over to our children. I hope that our life together over the past twenty years has allowed you to grieve in the deepest possible way. What I am certain of is that your tears, your outpourings, and your honesty have allowed me to

pour out my grief without reservation. Your love and compassion have given me hope that scripture's promises of forgiveness are true.

Because of this, and thanks to you, I go forth in hope, trusting that you do so as well.

Discussion Questions

How does this letter make you feel?

When have you experienced loss and grief in your life? Is it your experience that “Only by fully grieving all that we have lost can we enter into the new tomorrow that God is preparing.”?

How do you reconcile a loving God with the destructiveness of aspects of Creation (storms, droughts, eruptions, mud slides, fires etc.)?

Do you agree that the disagreements that lead to a failure to act on climate change are a conflict of values? or a lack of courage? or something else altogether?

What strengths does your congregation have which will help to sustain it in times of emergency? What could you be doing to make it even more resilient and a community resource?

Closing Prayer:

Almighty God, in giving us dominion over things on earth,
you made us fellow workers in your creation: Give us wisdom
and reverence so to use the resources of nature, that no one
may suffer from our abuse of them, and that generations yet
to come may continue to praise you for your bounty; through
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

BCP 41. For the Conservation of Natural Resources

Session 2: Care of Creation- The Church's Vocation

Opening Prayer/Meditation

“O God of all, at this time of our gradual awakening to the dangers we are imposing on our beautiful earth, open the hearts and minds of all your children, that we may learn to nurture rather than destroy our planet.
- Lorraine Schultz

Video: https://youtu.be/SpjL_otLq6Y “Global Weirding: The Bible Doesn’t Talk about Climate Change, Right?”

Background reading:

(Based on Chapters 3 and 4 of Climate Church, Climate World)

Leaders and spiritual communities are not needed to comfort people feeling lost in times of change. Instead, spiritual leaders need help to transform [the] fears [of their congregations] into urgency and courage. – Diana Butler Bass

For the past ten generations, humanity has been engaged in a dangerous experiment, testing whether the Earth that is entrusted to our care can sustain a substantial increase in population, consumption, waste and material aspiration. Human beings have always resisted limits, as the biblical stories of Adam and Eve and the ancient tower-builders in Babel teach us. We have lived as if unlimited growth is possible – as if we can drill, mine, drain, burn, excavate, and consume to our hearts content. If problems arise, we have trusted that the market place would magically take care of everything... “At the core of the economy is a mechanism that does not recognize the most fundamental thing of all, the living, evolving, sustaining natural world in which the economy is operating. The source of this failure is what economists call an *externality*... Many of our environmental resources are unprotected by the appropriate prices that would constrain their use... The market system simply doesn’t allocate the use of these resources properly.” (Gus Speth quoted, p. 54)

The church finds itself in a world where “the sacrifice to economic growth... has unquestionably been a feature of economic development since the birth of industrialism.” In church we honor God as Creator, and give thanks for the Earth – our common home – through which our Creator graciously offers humanity hospitality... In response to this perilous situation... the church must reawaken in people the moral clarity and resolve to build our lives – and our lives together – around God’s promises and gifts as we model a way of life and advocate for laws that hold humanity accountable. (p. 55)

God calls communities, not just individuals... A repurposed church will focus as much theological attention on collective salvation as it will on personal salvation... systemic injustice will receive fierce and unflagging attention... will inspire its people to regard salvation in this world and the next as a function of how we live together, building the beloved community for this and all future generations. (p. 56f) A repurposed church will follow the lead of Thomas Berry, Larry Rasmussen, and others ... who recognize the need for humanity to anchor our morality in the recognition of our deep connection with the entire universe. (p. 58)

A final cornerstone for a repurposed church concerns the most basic moral instruction... found at the core of every world religion. We are called to love our neighbors as ourselves...we must recognize that future generations are no less our neighbors than those who live next door today. We can think of this as Golden Rule 2.0. (p. 58)

No matter what a church's distinctive niche may be, no matter how effectively a church may be living out the classic marks of a faithful and healthy community of faith, no matter how innovative and creative a postmodern gathering of Christians may seem, every church faces a daunting new reality: we can no longer depend on the continuity of God's creation...If any segment of the human race were going to face up to what human beings are doing, one might expect that it would be people of faith who realize that humanity is trashing what does not belong to us – *the Earth belongs to God*. It seems to me that when people of faith grasp this truth, the alarm of climate change will finally ring out. . .wherever two or three are gathered in Jesus' name. (p. 66)

As society edges towards breakdown, humanity will need the church more than ever to uphold continuity of such traditional moral values as justice, mercy, nonviolence, human rights, welcoming the stranger...as the continuity of creation breaks down, humanity enters a time of moral discontinuity as well. Upholding the ancient values that protect God's people and the whole of God's creation must become a core mark of the church in a climate crisis world. (p. 68) Jesus did not come with an evacuation plan, but with a building plan, to build the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth. (p. 69)

When engaging in social critique the first place to look is at our own complicity. But it should never be the last. The preponderance of our work should seek to expose and undo systemic injustice. Humanity needs to create a moral climate – rooted in science – that compels the most profitable industry the world has every known to walk away from 80% of its assets. The oil, gas, and coal that nature took hundreds of millions of years to create are not the property of the fossil fuel industry. A repurposed church will attend to God's call to speak truth to power. (p. 71)

Essential marks of the church in a climate crisis world include the following:

- *Embracing spiritual progress in place of material progress* – Imagine if tens of thousands of preachers had helped their congregations recognize that this unfolding reality required us to abandon our understanding of material growth as our most significant measure of progress. (p. 72)

- *Sacrifice and sharing as guiding virtues* – Imagine if churches throughout our land enthusiastically welcomed putting a fair and rising price on carbon. (p. 73)

- *Embracing moral interdependence* – Diana Butler Bass says that “we are in the midst of a ‘Great Turning’ toward a global community based on shared human connection, dedicated to the care of our planet, committed to justice and equality, that seeks to raise hundreds of millions from poverty, violence and oppression.” (p. 74)

- *Sharing our hopes and fears: empowering action* - I believe that one of the reasons the church has not yet responded to creation's cry is that the emotional and moral atmosphere of so many congregations does not invite this level of candor and vulnerability. (p. 76)

- *Truth and reconciliation conversations in every house of worship* - this could be the most important contribution of the church to creating a world able to undergo the great transition we are now beginning. (p. 77)

- *Civil Disobedience: the church acts on its own conscience* – Many of us are aware that after Jesus' death, Peter and Paul spent more time in jail than they did as free men, because they acted in service of the church that was waiting to be born. (p. 78)

Questions for discussion:

View Katherine Hayhoe's video from Global Weirding, "The Bible Doesn't Talk About Climate, Right?" Does the Bible, in your view, speak directly to issues of climate change?

What does it mean to say the Earth belongs to God, not to us?

We might state simply the difference between a *spiritual/theological* and a *secular* sense of relationship to the Earth as one of *Thanksgiving* vs. *Taking for Granted*.

What difference does it make when we give thanks for the planet rather than assuming it's a background or resource for our own use? Can you think of specific examples of the difference?

Bill McKibben has said "*This [global warming] is an opportunity for which the church was born.*" In what ways might this be true? If it is true, to what extent are we living out our potential?

Antal says (p. 78) "*To meet this challenge will require the church to reclaim some ancient understandings of its calling and to understand its calling in some fundamentally new ways.*" How does the challenge of climate change draw on ancient understandings of the church's purpose and how does it call forth new understandings?

Alternative activity:

Share a Bible study on Romans 8 18-25:

¹⁸I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. ¹⁹For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; ²⁰for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; ²³and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Possible questions for reflection

Look at the word “revealed” – what or who is about to be revealed?

If Creation is waiting with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God, and we are the children of God – what is Creation waiting for us to do or be?

Is it possible to have redeemed humanity without a redeemed world?

What difference does it make to view humans as separate from nature or deeply embedded and fully included within nature?

If Creation has been groaning in labor pains, what is being born?

In his book I and Thou Martin Buber wrote “Let us love the actual world that never wishes to be annulled, but love it in all its terror, but dare to embrace it with our spirit’s arms – and our hands encounter the hands that hold it.” How does that relate to this bible passage, if at all?

Notes on the passage

This passage, perhaps the most ecological in Paul’s writings, is set in the midst of Romans 8, the climactic chapter of Paul’s sustained argument for new life in Christ Jesus forever. “Who will separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.”

The word translated here as creation, *ktisis*, used five times here, is thought by some to refer to the non-human creation, but by just as many as referring to all creation, human amid the whole ball of wax. While Paul is not writing in a narrative form here, yet a theological narrative can be seen, with three stages to the story, past, present, and future.

- **Past:** “The creation was subjected to futility, not of his own accord. . . .” Many think that Paul’s point of reference is Genesis 3.17, the ground cursed because of Adam’s sin. But Jeremiah 4.10-27, the earth desolate because of human evil or foolishness may have been as much or more in Paul’s mind.
- **Present:** “The earth groans in labor pains until now. . . .” Creation is “in bondage to decay,” bondage the same word as used in Exodus for Hebrew slaves. Most 21st century persons are surely aware of the creation groaning. But is it a surprise to see that 1st century Jews like Paul also witnessed a suffering, hard-laboring creation?
- **Future:** “The creation will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God”

From N.T. Wright N. T. Wright, The New Interpreter’s Bible, Vol. X, p. 590f

This pericope comes from the section of Romans, 8:12-30, which forms the conclusion of Paul’s argument beginning in ch. 5 about Christian assurance and the moment when the latent

exodus theme comes fully to the open: what God did for Israel at the Red Sea, what God did for Jesus at Easter, God will do not only do for those who are in Christ but for the whole created order. The passage is the completion of the basic statement about God's righteousness, God's saving justice, God's covenant faithfulness. The covenant was established in order to put the world to rights; now we see, on the large scale, how this is to happen. God has been faithful not just to the Abrahamic promises but to the whole creation. God is unalterably purposed to bring all those in Christ to their glorious Christ shaped inheritance. (

The reason why present suffering cannot compare with the coming glory is because the whole creation is on tiptoe with excitement, waiting for God's children to be revealed as who they really are. Up to now it might have been possible to think that Paul was simply talking about God's salvation in relation to human beings, from here on it is clear that the entire cosmos is in view. This is not just a bit of undigested Jewish apocalyptic speculations thrown in here for good measure. It is part of the revelation of God's righteousness, that covenant faithfulness that always aimed at putting the whole world to rights. As Paul declared in 4:13, God's promise to Abraham had the whole world in view (Wright, *ibid.*, p. 596).

The basis of Paul's belief here must be a combination of two things: the biblical promise of new heavens and new earth (Isa. 65:17; 66:22), and the creation story in which human beings, made in God's image, are appointed as God's steward over creation. Paul, in company with many other Jews saw the created order as out of joint and that this was related to the experiential belief that the human race as a whole was in rebellion against God. After the fall, humans continued to abuse their environment. One of the reasons why God sent Israel into exile was so the land at last could enjoy its Sabbaths (Lev 26:34-43, 2 Chr 36:21). The answer to the problem was not to remove humans from the planet altogether but for humans to be redeemed, to take their place at last as God's image bearers, the wise steward they were always meant to be. Paul sees this as already accomplished in principle in the resurrection of Jesus, and that it will be accomplished fully when all those who are in Christ are raised and together set in saving authority over the world (see 1 Cor. 15:20-28). The creation will have freedom because God's children will have glory. Their glory will consist specifically in this, that they will be God's agents in bringing wise, healing, restorative divine justice to the whole created order (Wright, *ibid.*, p. 596f).

For more background, check out:

An Environmental Mantra? Ecological Interest in Romans 8.19-23, by Hunt, Southgate, and Herrill.

[*The Whole Creation has been Groaning, Harry Allan Hahne*](#)

Closing Prayer:

O God our heavenly Father, you have blessed us and given us dominion over all the earth: Increase our reverence before the mystery of life; and give us new insight into your purposes for the human race, and new wisdom and determination in making provision for its future in accordance with your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Session Three: The Moral Imperative - How Do We Respond to the Climate Crisis?

Opening Prayer/Meditation

*Since the whole world
cannot buy
a single spring day,
Of what avail
to seek yellow gold?* - Hsi Pei Lan

Video: <https://youtu.be/W53uRqITk2I> Global Weirding - Religion has Nothing to Say about Climate Change, Right?

Background reading:

(Based on Chapter 5 of “Climate Church, Climate World)

“It is not enough to balance, in the medium term, the protection of nature with financial gain, or the preservation of the world with progress. Halfway measures simply delay the inevitable disaster. Put simply, it is a matter of redefining our notion of progress.” – Pope Francis

Jim Antal asks “what does it mean to follow Jesus in a climate crisis world? What values and virtues is God calling our generation to affirm and live out as a faithful response to what we’ve done to God’s creation? If Jesus’ supreme work is to reconcile us to God, to each other, and to all of creation, how do we follow Jesus today in the context of the climate crisis?” (p 81). Antal calls to re-orient our thinking and actions in these ways:

1. Resilience in place of growth. Economic growth and the aspiration to material prosperity, our “growth fetish,” have become a religion in themselves regardless of what kind of political system is in power. We’ve already exceeded the carrying capacity of the planet. Yet moral leadership – much of it from pulpits – has motivated people to embrace economic sacrifice for the sake of greater commitments to equality and justice. Prepare to be resilient. (p 83-84).

2. Collaboration in place of consumption. What if churches engaged in an “Acts 2.44 movement” consisting of a myriad of local experiments in democratized ownership and pooling resources to leverage community engagement and economic revitalization? (p.85-87). Think of time banks, hour exchanges, community gardens, barn raisings, Transition Towns, and many more.

3. Wisdom in place of progress. Pope Francis says, “It is not enough to balance. . . the protection of nature with financial gain. . . .Put simply, it is a matter of redefining our notion of progress.” (p. 87-88) In her book, Blessed are the Consumers: Climate Change and the Practice of Restraint, Sally McFague says, “The religions of the world, countercultural in their assumption that to find one’s life, one must lose it, are key

players in understanding and promoting a movement (away from). . .the self focused on individualistic, market-oriented accumulation by a few, to a model that sees self and planetary flourishing as interdependent.” (p.87-88).

4. Balance in Place of Addiction. To be diagnosed with a substance-related disorder according to the DSM-V), one must have 6 or more of eleven criteria. Antal substitutes the word “fossil fuels” for alcohol or other substances, and invites us to examine ourselves. (p. 89-90)

Do we find ourselves

- Taking fossil fuels in larger amounts or over longer period than intended?
- Wanting to cut down or regulate use of fossil fuel, with multiple unsuccessful attempts to do so?
- Spending a good deal of time obtaining and using fossil fuels?
- Craving fossil fuels?
- Using fossil fuels so much that it interferes with. . .work, home, or school?
- Continuing to use fossil fuels even when it causes social or interpersonal problems?
- Giving up or important . . .activities in order to use fossil fuels?
- Continuing to use fossil fuels even when it is physically hazardous to do so?
- Continuing to use fossil fuels despite already having a physical or psychological problem likely to have been caused by fossil fuels?
- Requiring markedly increased amounts of fossil fuels as time goes on?
- Developing withdrawal symptoms, such as agitation and irritability, when trying to quit?

5 Moderation in place of excess. Thirteenth century Richard Chartres, Bishop of London said, “We move toward God by subtraction, rather than accumulation.” (p.91)

6. Vision in place of convenience. Climate communication expert George Marshall suggests that we would do well to frame our response to the challenge of climate change as a heroic quest in which the enemy may be our internal weaknesses rather than an outside group. For this task, convenience is not our ally.” Among the universal qualities of heroes are vision and imagination (p. 92-93).

7. Accountability in place of disregard. Each of us is personally responsible for our own habits which lead to carbon and methane emissions, and we must hold corporations and policymakers equally responsible. (p. 94-96)

8. Self-giving love in place of self-centered fear. Psychology professor Daniel Gilbert points out that “climate change is a threat that our evolved brains are uniquely unsuited

to do a damn thing about,” because it is a long emergency not an immediate and obvious danger. However, people of faith know how to act based on conviction which allows us to set aside fear for self-giving love. (p. 96-97)

9. Civil disobedience and discipleship. Antal believes it is time for the church to publically recognize civil disobedience as an expression of faithfulness to God. When we face the horror of what we have done and are doing to God’s creation, many of us will embrace the call of conscience to join in nonviolent direct actions of civil disobedience. (p. 97-99)

Questions for Discussion

View Katherine Hayhoe’s video from Global Weirding, “Religion Has Nothing to Say About Climate Change, Right?” What do both science and religion have to contribute to climate change issues? How might they work better together?

What real-life examples can you share in neighborhood, church, or community, of each of the nine practices that Antal advocates (above)? What has had success, and borne fruit?

Pope Francis has called for a redefinition of progress. How would you define progress? And wish it were re-defined?

Review the justice work done by your congregation (some congregations call this mission or outreach.) Discuss the extent to which these focus on changing an unjust system.

Does your congregation participate in hour-sharing, food banks, community gardens, shared rides, shared goods? How do such things contribute to well-being?

Does your congregation have an endowment? How do its investments contribute to community well-being? (Or to climate degradation? Consider researching the divestment movement.)

Alternative Activity

I As a group, go through the 11 signs of fossil fuel addiction and call out a ranking 1-5, one being the highest, to our own or our culture’s level of addiction. What would it take to change these behaviors? Is the 12 Step model helpful here?

II Each take a walk around the place you are meeting for five minutes, especially if it’s a place of worship. Note which furnishings, works of art, displays, etc, evoke God’s love and creative care for the environment? Upon returning, choose one to share particularly with the group. What does it say to us?

If you don’t find many, what, if anything, does that say about your congregation?

Closing Prayer:

Almighty and merciful God, you made the earth fair and plenteous with all things good for the life of your creatures: Deliver us from every waste and abuse of its manifold resources; that we may use them wisely for our own needs and conserve them responsibly for those who will come after us, to your honor and praise; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

(Massey H. Shepherd, A Companion of Prayer for Daily Living, ed. by M.H. Shepherd, 1978, p. 44)

Session Four: Giving Voice to Every Creature under Heaven – Creation in Worship

Opening Prayer/Meditation

*“Praise the Lord from the earth, you creatures of the ocean depths,
Fire and hail, snow and clouds, wind and weather than obey God,
Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars,
Wild animals and all livestock, small scurrying animals and all livestock,
Kings of the earth and all people, leaders and judges of the earth,
Young men and young women, old men and children.
Let them praise the name of the Lord, for God’s glory is very great.
God’s glory tower over earth and heaven.” - Psalm 148, verses 7-12, Common English Bible*

Video: Giving Voice to Every Creature under Heaven

Background reading:

(Based on Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 of Climate Church, Climate World)

*What happens in worship shapes how participants inhabit time. – Willis Jenkins
[The early church had] the spirit of an anticipatory community that could give present form to
a hoped-for future through a range of adaptable practices. - Larry Rasmussen*

In African American churches in the early 1960s, how frequently do you think worship or prayers or singing focused on civil rights? While each congregation and pastor had to discern what was appropriate—there were some who were early adapters while others followed later—by 1963, civil rights and the movement that bore that name were central to the worship experience of most African American churches. Looking back, this seems natural, appropriate, and obvious. (p. 103-104)

When people of faith led the civil rights movement in the 60s, it wasn’t the case that every churchgoer in America was supportive of the cause. In fact, many clergy who spoke their conscience from their pulpit quickly learned that not all their parishioners agreed. But they also found that by speaking out, they were able to awaken the conscience of many. Our pews are filled with churchgoers who still need to be convinced that God’s creation—our common home—is in jeopardy. When church is faithful, it is speaking truth and awakening conscience. If we believe that God is the giver, the Source, of all life, and if it is true – for now and for the indefinite future – that the foundation of life as we know it is in jeopardy, then wouldn’t it be appropriate every time we connect with God to focus considerable attention on this crisis?

Environmental racism, the sixth extinction, the war in Syria, “one-hundred-year floods” every five years, food shortages and starvation, sea level rise, the contamination of aquifers due to fracking, ocean acidification, ecocide, biocide—none of these injustices are part of the natural order. Because God calls the church to address injustice, God calls the church to address the

injustice of climate change. And like apartheid in South Africa and the denial of civil rights and voting rights to African Americans in the United States, the church can and must transform its familiar liturgies to name these injustices, and to inspire people to take action together. (p. 107)

A relatively undeveloped theological resource from the Christian tradition is our understanding of the communion of saints or “cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1). What if every worship service acknowledged that the story that gives meaning to our lives was passed on to us by the saints and martyrs who rejected the temptations of power and dominion and testified instead to Christ’s Lordship over all creation? In this way, worship might heighten our consciousness of intergenerational interdependence and inspire us to take action. (p. 107)

If Earth were a sacrament, how would we treat it? The vision of a sacramental universe may be found in the teachings of Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, and the Orthodox Church—reminding us of a tradition more universal than most of us imagine. In this tradition the drama of the liturgy is the ritual enactment or re-enactment of cosmic community and the drama of creation’s redemption. Anglican Archbishop William Temple shared this view and that the First Peoples have long recognized and have never forgotten the sacredness of the natural world. (p. 110-111)

Antal says, “I believe that love and truth are the most powerful forces on Earth. I believe that religion—at its best—shows up in the world as people of faith acting together to manifest love by testifying to truth in service of creating a just world at peace. If we limit our experience of worship to a particular building at a specific hour or two each week, we cannot fulfill our vocation... I worry that we are in danger of domesticating worship and thereby constraining its transformative power. I also believe that God has given us everything we need to overcome the climate crisis—but in order to do so, we need to undomesticate worship.” (p. 112)

Most people recognize that something is terribly wrong with the world, that human activity is primarily responsible for the catastrophe that is upon us and that human beings have a responsibility to tackle it. If the work of the church is to make God’s love and justice real then it falls to the church to create the conditions in which people can face the reality of climate change and respond to God’s call to take action to protect the gift of God’s creation. By preaching regularly on climate change, pastors give permission to the congregation to share with each other their fears, grief, dread and feelings of impotence...and can begin to offer each other the kind of solidarity that leads to courage and the capacity to act. (p.123)

Preaching on climate change matters for two primary reasons that are in tension with one another. First, preaching on climate change matters because people don’t want to hear about it. Second, preaching on climate change matters because people know they need to take action to address it. (p. 122)

There are many reasons people give for not wanting to hear about climate change, especially in church. Here are a few: Living day to day is already hard enough. Church is supposed to give me rest and refreshment and to recharge me for the next week. Climate change is not going to affect me; it’s someone else’s problem. The challenge is too enormous; there’s nothing I can do

about it, so why should I think about it? I come to church to be inspired, not to be depressed. Climate change is a political issue; politics doesn't belong in church. (p. 123)

When we break open God's word for us today, it breaks open our hearts and invites us to engage new possibilities with wonder and courage. Given that every day it becomes more clear that life as we know it cannot be sustained, ordinary people need a new frame through which to understand the meaning of their own lives and the lives of their children and grandchildren. If all we do is continue to behave normally, carrying out our everyday actions without making a change, life as humans have always known it on this planet will come to an end. We are the first generation to foresee, and the final generation with an opportunity to forestall, the most devastating effects of climate change. This is precisely why NOW is the time for the church to declare that a new moral era has begun, and that our generation has a moral obligation to protect God's creation. Truly, as Bill McKibben first said in 2007, this is an opportunity for which the church was born. (p.126)

Questions for Discussion

If Earth were a sacrament how would we treat it? What does sacrament mean? and how can we consider the Earth to be a sacrament? Would it make a difference if you thought of it that way?

Do your Sunday services make you feel connected with the planet and with all of creation? How might they do that more? and is that something you would want?

Jim Antal says "the drama of the liturgy is the ritual enactment or re-enactment of cosmic community and the drama of creation's redemption. " What do you think he means and to what extent is that true in your experience?

What is the best sermon you have heard about climate change? If you can't think of the best one, what would be included in such a "best" sermon? What do you need to hear?

Do you think that preachers should be talking more about global warming? What would you say to someone who says it's just too depressing, or that its bringing politics into church?

Antal compares the civil rights movement with the climate crisis and sees the church as having a pivotal role in both. Does that comparison make sense to you? What do you see as the church's role today?

Alternative Activity

Create an Earth Day liturgy for your congregation using resources from the [Anglican Communion](#), [Let All Creation Praise](#), the original [Season of Creation](#) website and [Creation](#)

Justice. Ahead of time the leader might assemble possible component parts for the different sections of the service:

Collects

Readings

Hymns

Eucharistic Prayers (if it is to be a Eucharistic service)

Prayers

What theme would you have? How do the different parts of the service reflect that theme?
How will God be served and worshipped through your liturgy?

Closing Prayer:

O God, who has called us to worship you and to offer our prayers to you at all times, send your Holy Spirit into our hearts and minds so that we may know how to fully include the joys and challenges of our planet and the wonders of your wider Creation into our worship and proclamation of the Gospel. This we ask in the name of the one who incarnated for love of the world, your son Jesus Christ. Amen

Session Five: Witness- Climate Action in the Community

Opening Prayer/Meditation

*“The things, good Lord, that we pray for,
Give us the grace to labor for.” – St Thomas More*

Video: <https://youtu.be/SoyTDMFqWio> Bill McKibben on Faith and Fossil Fuel Divestment

Background reading:

(Based on Chapter 8 of Climate Church, Climate World)

*“Witnesses tell the truth in a public setting about what they have seen and heard.”
“We cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard.” – Acts 4.20 (p.140)*

In 2013, Joe O’Hara and Ken Ward piloted a lobster boat out near the Brayton Point Power Point in Fall River, Massachusetts, and anchored just in the right spot to block a freighter carrying in 40,000 tons of coal. For a day or so, they blocked the tanker from reaching the coal-burning plant. Eventually, they were arrested and insisted on a jury trial. Their defense: the risk posed by climate change constitutes greater harm than their criminal non-violent action in blocking the path of the freighter. Their plea was not guilty by reason of necessity to draw attention to the failure of the law to protect the citizenry. The outcome? They prevailed, charges against them were dropped. Their case was the first (successful) use of the “necessity defense” in a civil disobedience case centered on climate change (p.137-138).

In July, 2017, the 700 delegates to the United Church of Christ national synod voted, by a 97% majority, to adopt a resolution calling for UCC congregations and members, among other things, “to resist all expansion of fossil fuel infrastructure,” During a “speak out” time Jim Antal took the microphone and asked for any person who had engaged in any act of non-violent disobedience since the last general synod to stand. He was pleasantly surprised – “shocked” – to see about 30% of the delegates and guests in attendance stand, and many remain standing.” Antal references Martin Luther’s words at 1521 Diet of Worms. “Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me.” (p. 137-140)

On April 22, 2017, tens of thousands of scientists used their words, bodies, time, and expertise to bear witness to the truth. To protest the corruption of science and the promotion of climate denial, scientists gathered in over 600 public marches across the world. They used their freedom to witness for the truth as they called for “Data – not dogma.” Watch for Naomi Oreskes book arguing that, in a climate crisis world, scientists have a moral obligation to speak out publicly – to bear witness – to their values (p. 145).

What about us and our communities of faith? Witnessing includes not only the truths we convey with our words, but the truth that we bear with our bodies, and financial assets. In contemporary parlance, “showing up” is a form of witness (p. 141). What do we do already and what shall we do as witnesses for God’s blessed earth?

Antal encourages Christians to make public witness in several ways, notably:

1. Make Civil Disobedience a Normative Expression of Christian Discipleship.
“Throughout history, significant social change has only happened when the conscience of America has been awakened and focused. In every case – ending slavery, women’s suffrage, civil rights, voting rights, LGBTQIA+ rights – civil disobedience has played an essential role. Remember and learn from Thoreau, Gandhi, Dorothy Day, Rabbi Abraham Heschel, Martin Luther King Jr., John Lewis, Father Dan Berrigan, and . . .our earliest Christians as described in the book of Acts (p. 142-144).
2. Divest: Revoke the Social License to Destroy Creation. “In August, 2012, Bill McKibben opened up a new front in the fight to combat climate change. Until then, the environmental movement was largely focused on input from the consumer side. . . (McKibben) began focusing the world’s attention on the supply side of climate change.” Many denominational and educational bodies have voted to divest from fossil fuel and other companies which profit by damaging the environment. In 2018 the New York Time reported that investment funds worth over \$5 trillion had dropped their fossil fuel stocks. Other fund managers, and denominations, have created new Beyond Fossil Fuel Funds (p.146-147).
3. A Global Commons: End the Ownership of Nature. Some pioneering churches have already turned much of their land into community gardens, or public parks or land trusts. Walter Brueggemann’s essay, “To Whom Does the Land Belong?” raises the questions of ownership, control, and governance of land which is deeply rooted in Enlightenment philosophy but not in the Torah, prophets, and Psalms. Antal notes that one recognition “that the earth is the Lord’ would be for churches to initiate a moment whereby the land currently owned by a church would be turned over into a land trust.” (p 150-52)

Those are large and world-hanging proposals, “BIG JOBS!” They do not negate the need for smaller actions, but instead may point out the reality that big changes happen through many smaller changes. Each congregation probably already knows some other forms of environmental witness, including:

- Letter writing to representatives and news outlets
- Witness at public hearings in our local city and county governments
- Knocking on doors, standing on street corners, tabling for issues of environmental protection
- Enlisting in carbon reduction programs, notably the Episcopal Church’s Sustain Island Home.
- Energy audits, and follow-up changes, for congregations and member households
- Planting trees and community gardens, sponsoring or joining in community clean-ups
- Animal and wild-life rescue
- Ongoing and increasing giving for environmental justice organizations
- And many more, of which each community of faith already has some skills.

Antal, in several chapters, calls us to keep and follow a new and expanded Golden Rule, and Great Commandment. “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Love your neighbor as yourself.” “Recognize that future generations are no less our neighbors than those who live next door today.” (p. 59, 149, etc.)

Questions for Discussion

View the video of, “Bill McKibben on Faith and Fossil Fuel Divestment.” Respond to this quote: “If it’s wrong to wreck the planet, it’s wrong to profit from that wreckage.” Discuss Antal’s assertion that what we do with our (personal and congregational) financial assets matters.

Share a time when you responded to a call to bear witness – not in a courtroom before a jury, but rather when you told the truth in a public setting about what you had seen and heard.

Bearing witness is a public action to a community. What public witness is your congregation making in regard our stewardship of God’s world, the environment?

Ask each to remember one act of non-violent civil disobedience which had a positive outcome. Does it nudge or pull us toward our own productive future action?

What public witness for the environment has worked thus far in our congregation or in other communities? What might be wise to do next?

Alternative activity:

Pastors have long asked congregations to consider when we die and meet St Peter, as he invites us to pull up both our checkbook and appointment ap, will there be enough evidence to convict us of being a Christian? Change the final word. **Will there be sufficient evidence to convict us of being a good steward of creation?** Have one person in a pair be Peter asking the question, the other answering. Or one or two volunteers may model this for the group.

Practical actions to consider

1. Start or join a regularly meeting earth care team in your congregation, or between your congregation and one or two others.
2. Introduce and promote the Episcopal Church’s app, sustainislandhome.org, for tracking and reducing our carbon footprints.
3. Review the work of the Office of Government Relations and decide how your congregation might get involved.
4. Eat more of what is better for your health, your pocket, and the long run. Unplug your phantom load electronics that increase demand on the grid even when turned off. Save and budget for the long term, considering solar, fossil-fuel-free transportation, home sustainable goods, Check out thrift stores. Start a church thrift store!

Session Six: Moving from Fear to Hope

Opening Prayer/Meditation

*God of all creation,
Grant us this day
Some meeting with bird or moon,
Sheep or star, insect or the sun itself,
That we might marvel and know our place
And praise you for ever and ever.” - Gabe Huck*

Video: Rising as Fire, Margaret Bullitt-Jonas <https://revivingcreation.org/category/multimedia/> (scroll down). Start at minute 7:56

Background reading

(Based on Chapter 9 of Climate Church, Climate World p.155)

The most important contribution people of faith can and must make as humanity confronts the climate crisis is to proclaim hope.

An October 2015 report from the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication found that two in three Americans (67 percent) think global warming is happening—yet most Americans rarely or never discuss it (65 percent). Antal thinks there are two reasons for this.

First, people care deeply about many of the things threatened by climate change. Because they care deeply about these things, they are unwilling to enter into what will inevitably become a politicized conversation that is likely to dismiss their deeply held concern.

Second, many people believe that sharing these deeply held concerns will do nothing more than amplify their own fear and depression and bring other people down. To put it another way, they believe that communicating these deeply held concerns—saying them out loud to another person—will erode their hope.

These fears are based on a thin and misguided understanding of hope. However grim, reality cannot undermine or cancel the hope God offers us. Indeed, Dr. Jerome Groopman says it well, “Hope, unlike optimism, is rooted in unalloyed reality.”ⁱⁱ He says later, “To hope under the most extreme circumstances is an act of defiance.”ⁱⁱⁱ Jesus said it even more clearly, “The truth will set you free.” To become people of hope we must be willing to stare reality in the face.

If we are to embrace a hope that can sustain us, we need to acknowledge that global climate change presents us with more than “just” political, economic, and technological challenges. Climate change threatens us on many levels. It gives rise to a well-founded, gnawing fear that we can’t protect ourselves, we can’t protect our family and community, and we can’t protect our world. The existential dread we experience can serve as a precondition of hope. When we have a safe context in which we can share our dread with trusted friends, by the grace of God, the Holy Spirit will ignite in us a tenacious and defiant hope.

For Antal, faith and hope are rooted in the conviction that, regardless of how bad things may be, a new story is waiting to take hold—something we have not yet seen or felt or experienced. We are not called to sustain or extend our current way of life. Rather, we must ask God and the Earth itself to teach us what projects and activism we are called to engage—new possibilities for loving neighbors, doing justice, and walking humbly with God. God is calling us—as individuals and congregations—to work with God and others to champion that new story. For the vast majority in our society, that new story remains unseen.

Hope is connected with a new story that has not yet been made clear. For Christians, Advent reminds us of this when we anticipate the birth of the One who will bring a New Story of redemption and reconciliation. The story of Jesus' life and death portray a courageous testimony to a new understanding of truth. The story of Christ's resurrection reveals that death is not victorious. The Book of Acts continues the new story by describing how the power of the Holy Spirit overturns the expectations of the disciples and empowers them to live into a new story. Years later, sharing the Good News with the troubled believers in the pagan city of Corinth, Paul tells the Corinthians that they themselves are his letter of recommendation; they are the best evidence that his ministry has not been in vain (2 Corinthians 3:1–6). This is Paul's way of trusting that even the Corinthians can live into a new story. Living into a new story requires a departure from the old story—a break with business as usual. Such a radical shift needs to be fueled by courage. In challenging Caesar, Pontius Pilate, and the Empire they represented, Jesus showed extraordinary courage.

Antal says, “I don't know how to live into a new story without practicing both trust and gratitude. It takes trust to believe that God is calling humanity to relinquish the old story. That's not easy for a third-generation coal miner or for someone commuting 100 miles a day in a ten-year-old car to work two jobs to make ends meet. If making God's love and justice real is the work of the church, then local churches are just the place where this transition can begin.”

To relinquish our dependence on fossil fuel requires deep trust that there is another way – trust that technology is indeed available and trust that humanity can actually make such a transition happen. Gratitude is just as important as trust. Creation is a gift. Life is a gift. The opposite of gratitude is taking life for granted—living our lives oblivious to the reality that we did nothing to deserve to be here. Cultivating a life of gratitude leads to adopting a particular set of attitudes, values, and behaviors. Anton says, “I find that gratitude and wonder are almost inseparable. My gratitude for the gift of life readies me to respond with wonder to the intricacies and mysteries of life. Gratitude leads to generosity and sharing.”

When we are full of gratitude, our focus is on God the creator—God the giver of life. When we root our lives in God, the creator and giver of life, it becomes easier to set aside our own needs, agendas, even our own lives, for God, God's children, and for creation itself.

The life that awaits us in the new story we are called to champion is very different from the life most of us have been conditioned to value and prize. For most of us in the developed nations, the immediate effects of climate change are incremental. Since we are not directly experiencing the discontinuity and havoc climate change is already causing, we continue our business-as-usual approach to life. This will remain true—at least for a while—even once we have ended

the denial of climate change. To cross the abyss between our current story and the story that God calls us to champion requires nurturing moral imagination. That is how we can preserve integrity during this time of discontinuity. When churchgoers and pastors ask what they can do, I invite them to cultivate their moral imaginations. We need to believe that the transition to a world free of fossil fuel is possible, and that our generation is called to lead that transition.

God is calling all of us to unleash our imaginations, unmuzzle our mouths, unbind our hands, unshackle our feet, and open our wallets. Each of us must use our unique God-given gifts to hasten the day when each human heart is governed not by grief but by hope, not by constraint but by generosity, not by selfishness but by sharing.

Yes—God still has a dream. As broken-hearted as God must be over what we have done to the gift of creation, God still has a dream. However much we rebel, however much we ignore God's instructions, however much we abuse God's gift of creation, we cannot diminish the power of God's dream. It is a dream anchored in love, not exploitation. It is a dream in which every living thing is a reflection of God, vibrantly alive with grateful, joyful hearts. In God's dream, everyone has enough and all are beneficiaries of God's abundance. God dreams that humans seek spiritual rather than material progress. God's dream envisions a just world at peace because gratitude has dissolved anxiety and generosity has eclipsed greed. God dreams of a time when love and mutual respect will bind humanity together, and the profound beauty of creation will be treasured. Let us embrace God's dream as our own. Suddenly, the horizon of our hope comes nearer. As we live into God's dream, we will rediscover who we truly are and all of creation will be singing.

Discussion Questions

“God still has a dream” – what do you imagine God's dream to be for the planet and for the church?

Do you have a practice of gratitude? What is it, and how does it help you to have hope?

What is the hope that Christians can proclaim at this time? What is the hope that you personally hold?

At the end of this course, are there next steps for you – things that God is prompting you to do, to be or to change?

Alternative Activity

Sit in pairs opposite each other. One of the pair is the ancestor, one the future descendant. Imagine that we are a hundred years in the future, looking back at how God's new story began to happen. The descendant asks “What happened back then... how did you start to see God's new story and what did you do?”

After 2 minutes, the descendants move to a new ancestor and ask the same question.

Repeat and then debrief.

Are there common themes? What happened – how did the ancestors say they saw God’s new story? Does that have implications for us today?

Closing Prayer:

Almighty and merciful God, you made the earth fair and plenteous with all things good for the life of your creatures: Deliver us from every waste and abuse of its manifold resources; that we may use them wisely for our own needs and conserve them responsibly for those who will come after us, to your honor and praise; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

(Massey H. Shepherd, A Companion of Prayer for Daily Living, ed. by M.H. Shepherd, 1978, p. 44)

Resource List

Books

Jim Antal, *Climate Church, Climate World*, Rowman and Littlefield, 2018

Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone, *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in Without Going Crazy*, New World Library, 2012

Leah Schade and Margaret Bullitt-Jonas, Eds., *Rooted and Rising: Voices of Courage in a Time of Climate Crisis*, Rowman and Littlefield, 2019

A collection of essays on spiritual viewpoints that support climate activism

Pope Francis, *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home*, Encyclical Letter, 2015

Paul Hawken and Tom Steyer, *Drawdown*, “The hundred most substantive solutions to reverse global warming, based on meticulous research by leading scientists and policymakers around the world”. A summary of the solutions can be found at the Project Drawdown website www.drawdown.org.

Episcopal Church Resources

Episcopal Church website on creation care www.episcopalchurch.org/creation-care Particularly helpful are the formation resources at <https://episcopalchurch.org/creation-care/formation-resources>.

www.sustainislandhome.org This app calculates your carbon footprint and provides many actions you can take to reduce it.

A video demonstration of the Sustain Island Home app can be found on the website of the Diocese of California, www.diocal.org/climate.

Website of Rev. Margaret Bullitt-Jonas, www.RevivingCreation.org

Rev. Margaret Bullitt-Jonas, Missioner for Creation Care at the Dioceses of Western Massachusetts, was one of the speakers at Earthcare’s conference on climate change in September.

There is a Google group EpEN Province 8. To join the list contact EpENNews@gmail.com and provide your home diocese.

Organizations Working On Climate Change

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, www.ipcc.ch

The IPCC is an international organization for assessing the science related to climate change. IPCC reports are written by hundreds of volunteer scientists and other experts recruited to address specific topics. A good summary of the latest (2018) IPCC special report can be found at the coolearth website www.coolearth.org.

Interfaith Power and Light www.interfaithpowerandlight.org

Oakland based Interfaith Power and Light “inspires and mobilizes people of faith and conscience to take bold and just action on climate change”

Citizens Climate Lobby, www.citizensclimatelobby.org,

Citizens Climate Lobby is building support in Congress for a national bipartisan solution to climate change.

350.org

350.org is “ a grassroots global movement working to unite the world around solutions to the climate crisis”. It is named after 350 parts per million—the safe concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Their website provides many resources, including training tools, graphics and visuals and videos.

Climate Change Newsletters

www.INSIDEclimateNEWS.org, a free weekly newsletter on climate change and the environment

www.ClimateNexus.org a free daily summary of climate news

Other Resources

Global Weirding PBS video series can be viewed on You Tube with search words “Global Weirding”

More resources can be found on the Environmental Science Degree Program website www.environmentalsciencedegree.com, which provides a comprehensive list of 101 climate science web resources.

<https://earthministry.org/for-congregations/> has a host of resources for congregations

ⁱ Walter Brueggemann “Only Grief Permits Newness” *Hopeful Imagination: Prophetic Voices in Exile* (Philadelphia, Fortress 1986)

ⁱⁱ Jerome Groopman *The Anatomy of Hope* (New York: Random House, 2004), p.xiii

ⁱⁱⁱ Groopman, *The Anatomy of Hope* p.81