

Apocalyptic Hope – August 20, 2023 – Immanuel Presb., MKE

Genesis 2; Revelation 22 – John Helt

When climate scientist Katherine Hayhoe is asked what we can do about the climate apocalypse, she says, “Talk about it.” When activist Bill McKibben is asked the question, he says, “Stop being an individual; join something.”

A few weeks ago here during VBS, a nice group of you met to talk about creation care, not as individuals, but as members of the IPC community. Perhaps small steps for a couple of dozen women and men, but a giant leap for the movement I will call “apocalyptic hope.”

No one needs to be told that July was the hottest on record, not just for Wisconsin or North America, but for the southern hemisphere in their winter, and for the planet. We have wildfires in Hawaii and Canada and many other places, and floods, crazy storms, melting sea ice, and triple digit temperatures in the rising ocean. **The recent Maui “urban firestorm” shows how our built environment is at risk, even in the midst of what we see as a natural paradise.**

Climate scientists and meteorologists are no longer reluctant to make connections between weird weather and global warming. Weather is an at bat at the plate. Climate is your career batting average. With a .300 batting average, your chances of a hit at any given at bat are double what they were when you were hitting only .150. And the batting averages of climate change are going up!

Last month, Cindy and I spent a week at the majestic million-acre Montana mountainscape known as Glacier National Park. Seeing that segment of the Rockies before its namesake glaciers are all gone was on my bucket list. There were 150 glaciers in 1850. Now there are 26. It was a bittersweet blessing to get a glimpse of that remainder, and to see where some of the former glaciers once were.

But I am not taking up space and time in this pulpit this morning merely to rehearse all of this. You know very well why some are saying that the climate crisis is best described in apocalyptic terms, even as Armageddon. There is no shortage of shocking reports about today and dire predictions for tomorrow.

Recently, David Brooks wrote of an “epidemic of hopelessness” among us and reported that some are saying that the word “trauma” is the word of our decade. I am loathe to cave into trauma and hopelessness. Thus, my purpose this morning, as with our three-evening conversation during VBS earlier this month, is to insist on a gospel of hope. During this timely decade of renewed creation care we are called to proclaim hope instead of trauma. Let’s call this apocalyptic hope.

In my United Church of Christ circles, here in Wisconsin, we are now three years into a decade of apocalyptic hope we have called the Kairos Call to Action. It is a list of ten things we can do to be faithful responders to climate change during this decade when we may still have a chance to keep the planet from warming beyond a point of no return. The word Kairos is one of two New

Testament Greek words for “time.” The other word is “**chronos**,” a root for our English word chronology. This kind of time is just clock ticking time, time passing without any intrinsic worth. Kairos time, however, is prime time, urgent time, the right time, as when Jesus proclaims that the Kairos has come and the kingdom of God is upon us. In the words of MLK, our Kairos Call to Action invokes “the fierce urgency of now.” Even though the chronos alarm clock, like the sand in an hour glass, is running out, the Kairos hope clock chimes “NOW, NOW NOW!”

We are not called to be alarmist prophets of doom. “Doomism is a self-fulfilling prophecy if it prevents the action that can shift us away from the worse-case scenarios. Despair is the opposite of complacency, but both can lead to inaction. If you don’t believe there is a fire or if you don’t believe the fire can be put out, you don’t join the fire department.” (Rebeccas Solnit, *Not Too Late*) Like the angels who appear in the Bible, our first words need to be “Fear not.” “Be not afraid.” “I bring you good tidings of a great joy.” We are called to be fiercely urgent prophets of hope. What does this mean in relation to the climate crisis?

I think it means that churches must talk about it and then walk the talk of apocalyptic hope. We need to reduce our carbon footprint as congregations and as households and we must work toward more sustainable ways of life, as individuals and as world citizens: consuming and throwing away less; eating lower on the food chain; reducing, reusing, recycling; divesting from fossil fuels and investing in clean energy; resisting the lawn culture, mowing less, not only in the month of May; establishing green spaces with indigenous grasses and wildflowers and trees; tapping into the wisdom of native wisdom, looked ahead for seven generations to drive how we care for the earth today. We need to firmly establish as pillars of the church’s mission: caring for creation, standing for environmental justice, and embracing our membership in the community of nature. These planks will define the platform of who we are.

The Presbyterian Church USA’s certified Earth Care program lists four categories to the Earth Care Pledge: worship, education, facilities and outreach. Consider taking this pledge and joining other congregations in the presbytery and wider church to do so as well. As you study this possible step, I think you will find that you are already on the way.

I have to share what was a good news surprise for me during VBS. We had a combined meal before worship and before dividing into two generational groups. That meal was down in the Peaceable Kingdom rooms, where we ate off real china plates with real silverware, and we drank from real glass glasses, even though that meant transporting this dinnerware down two flights and then carrying the dirty stuff back up two flights to the kitchen. Many churches still use all disposable plastic and paper for their events, and the big plastic bags full of this single use dirty stuff goes to the landfill. Is it a wild pipe dream that this and every congregation in this presbytery would swear off the use of single use plastics and call on the stores we frequent and the municipalities to which we belong to do the same? What if we all took our re-usable bags with us to the grocery and said “no thanks” to the dozens of plastic bags offered? What if we carried reusable straws in our pockets and purses and kindly requested our drinks without the plastic straws that litter our beaches, rivers and streets?

Is it possible to talk to one another about ride sharing, not only to church, but to other routine destinations? Take a Sunday, not just Earth Day Sunday in April, but perhaps monthly, to find

creative ways to get to church in twenty cars rather than forty or walk when possible? What if the liturgies in our churches lifted up the fragile beauties of the earth, not just on Earth Day or when the lectionary gives us such a cue, but every Sunday?

I am pleased to learn that you have already made sure that your investments as a congregation are in socially responsible funds and divested from fossil fuels, but what if all your households did the same? Divesting from fossil fuels and investing in sustainable, renewable energy?

What if we all voted with creation care at the top of our lists of concerns and our elected representatives knew that we would back them up to do the right thing by the earth, and if they don't, they will hear from us.

I have been inspired lately by the Bible bookends that have been read this morning. Trees and rivers play important parts in the drama of creation in Genesis and the New Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation, otherwise known as the Apocalypse of John. The tree in the middle of the Garden of Eden symbolizes the fall from grace and the start of the mess we are in; and I read recently that the Tigris and Euphrates that flowed out of Eden and once made the Mesopotamian cradle of civilization a fertile crescent, now are drying up. That's the Genesis bookend.

At the other end, the Apocalypse of John promises that the river of life will run through the New Jerusalem, and the tree of life will bless the nations with plentiful fruit. This is the last word. Promise. Blessing. New Creation. Worth holding on to. Hope. Apocalyptic Hope.

With Thoreau we say, "We are eager to report the glory of the universe. May we be worthy to do it."