

## **Sermon for October 28, 2018**

### **Be the Church: Protect the Environment**

#### **Psalm 24:1-2 & Mark 10:46-52**

#### **The Reverend Roger Pancost**

During last Sunday's Youth Group meeting we had a discussion about fear. At one point in our discussion we asked the young people to anonymously write down some of the things that they are afraid of. In solidarity with our young people, Jenn and I also wrote down some of the things that we are afraid of. The first thing that I wrote down is, "Global Warming."

While I have been concerned about the health of the planet my entire life, recent information has caused me to be even more fearful. A report that came out earlier this month from the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warns that "there are only a dozen years for global warming to be kept to a maximum of 1.5 Celsius, beyond which even a half degree will significantly worsen the risks of drought, floods, and extreme heat and poverty for millions of people." One of the co-chairs of that panel, Debra Roberts, states, "It's a line in the sand and what it says to our species is that this is the moment, and we must act now...This is the largest clarion bell from the science community and I hope it mobilizes people and dents the mood of complacency." My fear is not limited to concerns about my personal health and well-being. I am fearful for the future of the children of today, and the generations that follow them.

(Quotes from The Guardian, October 8, 2018, "We have 12 years to limit climate change catastrophe, warns UN" and "We must reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero or face more floods" by Nicholas Stern)

I will admit that every time I think about the environmental crises I feel a pang of guilt. I know that some of the lifestyle choices that I make contribute to the misuse of our planet. Perhaps some of you have similar feelings. While it is important to recognize the ways in which we harm the planet, it does no good to wallow in guilt or self-pity. As Debra Roberts points out, it is time to take action.

In this morning's reading from Mark we find an individual who serves as a role model for what it means to do just that. Bartimaeus has been an outcast of his society for a number of years because of his physical disability. With no means of supporting himself, Bartimaeus is forced to sit beside the road and beg for handouts. And then one day Bartimaeus learns that Jesus of Nazareth is nearby.

When Bartimaeus calls out to Jesus for help, the people try to silence him. Despite the fact that Bartimaeus lives in a society that keeps him on the outside, he refuses to remain silent. It is because of his courage to speak out, that Bartimaeus receives the gift of healing. Bartimaeus demonstrates that if you want change, you sometimes have to boldly speak up.

This past week I learned about a group of twenty-one young Americans who are refusing to keep silent about the environmental crises. These young people are suing the United States government in an effort to help heal the planet. They contend that their Constitutional rights to live in a safe environment have been violated. The case, Juliana vs. the United States, is scheduled for trial in Oregon at the end of this month. The government has repeatedly tried to put a halt to the case, which has been making its way through the courts for three years. Regardless of the outcome of this trial, it is helping to raise awareness of the issues facing the planet.

These young people understand that the degradation of the environment causes health issues for millions of people throughout the world. We can help to bring healing to the earth by supporting these young people, and others, who are boldly speaking on behalf of the planet.

The United Church of Christ Environmental Justice ministry is currently urging clergy across the country, and young people of all faith traditions, to preach a sermon on their behalf. Since I was already scheduled to preach today on the topic of “Protect the Environment,” I was able to add my name to a list of people who will be offering such sermons. The goal of this campaign, which is called Justice for #Each Generation, is 1000 sermons.

One of the supporters of these young people states, “As people of faith, we recognize that ‘the earth is the Lord’s’ and not ours to wreck. Let churches, synagogues and mosques amplify the voices of these young people. America must hear and embrace their urgent cry for climate justice.

Directly connected to our support of those speaking on behalf of the planet is our ability to vote for elected officials who we believe make protecting the earth a priority in their economic and industrial policies. We can also encourage those who are already elected to support such initiatives. Jim Skea, a co-chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, speaks about the important role that governments play in helping to heal the earth. He states, “We have pointed out the enormous benefits of keeping to 1.5 Celsius, and also the unprecedented shift of energy systems and transport that would be needed to achieve that. We show it can

be done within laws of physics and chemistry. Then the final tick-box is political will. We cannot answer that. Only our audience can – and that is the governments that receive it.”

(The Guardian, October 8, 2018, “We have 12 years to limit climate change catastrophe, warns UN”)

After Bartimaeus receives healing for his eyes he immediately begins to follow Jesus. Perhaps he wanted to learn how to help bring healing to others. As we follow in the way of Jesus in the 21<sup>st</sup> century we can help to bring healing to other people and to this planet that we call home. I know that I am preaching to the choir when I remind you that there are many practical things that we can do as individuals, and as a church, that help to bring healing to the earth.

If we are not vegetarian, or vegan, we can make the decision to eat less meat. A report that came out earlier this year states that avoiding meat and dairy products is the single biggest way to reduce your environmental impact on the planet.

Another simple measure involves insulating our homes, our church, our schools, and the places where we work. Weather proofing doors and windows on a large scale would lead to a large drop in energy consumption.

We can encourage the development of renewable energy, and find ways to use these energies in our homes, our church, and our forms of transportation.

We can make the decision to purchase fewer things and demand a low carbon option in everything we consume. We can recycle and reuse as much as possible.

The story of Bartimaeus reminds me that I can wallow in my guilt and self-pity, or I can commit to doing something to bring healing to the earth. We can't fix all of the earth's problems, but there are things we can do, as individuals, and as a church that help heal the earth.

UCC Pastor, Melanie Oommen, a mother of one of the young people suing the government, asks, “What does it look like to live hope when the very fate of our planet is at stake?” She answers her own question stating, “In the enduring hope of those young plaintiffs, our God abides.”



## We have 12 years to limit climate change catastrophe, warns UN

The Guardian October 8, 2018

Urgent changes needed to cut risk of extreme heat, drought, floods and poverty, says IPC

□ A firefighter battles a fire in California. The world is currently 1C warmer than preindustrial levels.  
Photograph: Ringo HW Chiu/AP

The world's leading climate scientists have warned there is only a dozen years for global warming to be kept to a maximum of 1.5C, beyond which even half a degree will significantly worsen the risks of drought, floods, extreme heat and poverty for hundreds of millions of people.

The authors of the landmark report by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released on Monday say urgent and unprecedented changes are needed to reach the target, which they say is affordable and feasible although it lies at the most ambitious end of the [Paris agreement](#) pledge to keep temperatures between 1.5C and 2C.

The half-degree difference could also prevent corals from being completely eradicated and ease pressure on the Arctic, according to the 1.5C study, which was launched after approval at a final plenary of all 195 countries in Incheon in South Korea that saw delegates hugging one another, with some in tears.

### Quick guide

#### *What difference would restricting warming to 1.5C make?*

Show Hide

A key finding of the new IPCC report is the dramatic difference that restricting warming to 1.5C above pre industrial levels would have on the global environment.

The scientists found:

- By 2100, global sea level rise would be 10cm lower with global warming of 1.5C compared with 2C.
- Extreme heatwaves will be experienced by 14% of the world's population at least once every five years at 1.5C. But that figure rises to more than a third of the planet if temperatures rise to 2C
- Arctic sea ice would remain during most summers if warming is kept to 1.5C. But at 2C, ice free summers are 10 times more likely, leading to greater habitat losses for polar bears, whales, seals and sea birds.
- If warming is kept to 1.5C, coral reefs will still decline by 70-90% but if temperatures rise to 2C virtually all of the world's reefs would be lost

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Thank you for your feedback.

## **We must reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero or face more floods**

Nicholas Stern

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“It’s a line in the sand and what it says to our species is that this is the moment and we must act now,” said Debra Roberts, a co-chair of the working group on impacts. “This is the largest clarion bell from the science community and I hope it mobilizes people and dents the mood of complacency.”

Policymakers commissioned the report at the Paris climate talks in 2016, but since then the gap between science and politics has widened. Donald Trump has promised to withdraw the US – the world’s biggest source of historical emissions – from the accord. The first round of Brazil’s presidential election on Sunday put [Jair Bolsonaro](#) into a strong position to carry out his threat to do the same and also open the Amazon rainforest to agribusiness.

The world is currently 1C warmer than preindustrial levels. Following devastating [hurricanes](#) in the US, record droughts in [Cape Town](#) and forest [fires in the Arctic](#), the IPCC makes clear that climate change is already happening, upgraded its risk warning from previous reports, and warned that every fraction of additional warming would worsen the impact.

Scientists who reviewed the 6,000 works referenced in the report, said the change caused by just half a degree came as a revelation. “We can see there is a difference and it’s substantial,” Roberts said.

At 1.5C the proportion of the global population exposed to water stress could be 50% lower than at 2C, it notes. Food scarcity would be less of a problem and hundreds of millions fewer people, particularly in poor countries, would be at risk of climate-related poverty.