

Youth Sunday Sermon / Reflection

Our world is a wonderful and majestic place with something beautifully unique that most other places in the universe do not have -- life. We, humans, are responsible for the caretaking of our planet, as we, with our large and complex cerebral cortices, are the prevailing species with the power to decide the fate of this cherished Earth. However, we humans have not done as we should. We have greedily consumed more and more global resources as the other animals suffer and the environment withers away like paper on fire. Global carbon emission levels have been skyrocketing since the late part of the 20th century and continue to increase as the need for energy continuously rises. This has become a global crisis where now all are affected, and we need to act now if we want to change the course of our planet before it is too late. There is little time left to fix climate change, and the first through the third verses talk about the restrictions of time we know all too well. As verse 3 says, “‘There is peace and security,’ then sudden destruction will

come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape!” According to recent studies from U.N. scientists and researchers, the deadline for correcting this fatal course is 2030. That’s only a decade away. After that, a chain reaction will kick-start, one that it is irreversible and beyond our control. This is an issue that won’t just shape our world, but will also shape us. It will stretch our minds as we continue to hurtle towards the future, asking ourselves how much we are truly willing to sacrifice, are we doing everything we really need to do and are the goals we have set realistic to make the deadlines.

Despite the negative connotation surrounding this message, there is still some hope if we work rigorously and set ambitious goals. Then maybe we will have a chance. There are many things being done to help set us on the right track. For example, the Green New Deal. This is a collection of bills that will help to shape our future and set realistic goals for the 2030 deadline. It also faces the fear driving people away from climate change and supporting clean energy, which is the fear that blue-collar

workers will lose their jobs if fossil fuel companies are driven away. The Green New Deal talks not solely about climate change and solutions for it but also talks about creating new job opportunities to cushion the economic impact that removing government funding for fossil fuel companies would have. Many new jobs that would be created by supporting clean energy would be putting solar panels on roofs or setting up offshore wind farms similar to the ones that countries such as France and the Netherlands already have. If we get the message across effectively to enough people that the Green New Deal has a solid plan for minimizing the economic impact of the switch to renewable and clean energy, then we can also greatly increase the chance that it will have a future. We need to understand that this is extremely important. Even if the legislation does not pass, there are some states that are already taking the initiative to do what they can. Illinois and California are already working on comprehensive plans that are very similar to the Green New Deal. There is also a newly proposed bill here in

Massachusetts, called S2005, “An Act To Secure a Clean Energy Future.” If passed, this bill will completely change the systems in place to adapt to even the worst possible outcomes of climate change, while also putting in place goals to hopefully prevent them from happening in the first place. Not only do we have human-made incentives for the future consequences of climate change to contend with, but also God, who wants us to fix this issue. We are the caretakers of this world with all the preeminence of our human intellect, and therefore it would be entirely shameful if we then could not be able to handle something so simple as taking care of the very place we live. Verse 11 says, “Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.” This is key to our success in the fight against climate change. If we can not work collaboratively, then we also can not coordinate, and the efficiency and effectiveness of our actions will consequentially decrease. However, if we are able to work together and support each other, then we should be able to find success in this battle against

ourselves. Even with less than a decade left before it's too late, if we work hard collaboratively and efficiently, we should be able to fix this issue.

If you've turned on the news lately, or listened to a radio, you may have heard a reporter grimly announcing something like this: in 12 years planet Earth will reach a state so polluted there's no returning. And you also may have heard from another grim reporter: the US is no longer part of the Paris accords to fight climate change. And then your brain may have put those two things together and conjured up an image of imminent death.

And it seems pretty reasonable to think that in a world slowly decaying at our hands, hope for the future would be scarce and unfounded. But the Bible gives us reason to think otherwise. It writes about sudden destruction coming inevitably, undeniably (check!). And it may appear that there is no escape (check!). But in this catastrophic situation God also gives us a way out. The scripture doesn't suggest anything easy, but does have faith in God's people to turn around the mess they've made.

Only recently have humans started to focus on the devastation they have wrought for the past few generations, and we can not go fast enough, as coal and natural gas companies continue to pump inconceivable amounts of greenhouse gases into our environment.

As youth, we have a unique position in this struggle to save the earth. We may not have all that much power or money, but we do all have skin in the game. Because at the point when the damage we will have done to the earth is said to be irreversible, I will only be in my 20s and most of the rest of our youth group will still be in college. Our lives will have barely started, and yet the life of our home, planet Earth, will be coming to a premature end.

And even though God calls on us, as Christians, to take action against this destruction, it will likely take more than a few angry worshippers to turn around what all of the world has done, which is why at the end of our passage, God also gives one last piece of advice. God says to encourage one another to build up our strength against this seemingly invincible opponent. As much as we may like to be the ones responsible for saving the world from utter destruction, we have to look to each other and form a united front to have a chance.

But even with all those grim reporters and scenes of imminent death spinning around in your mind, you may have also turned on the radio or the news to hear that:

- Some of the largest cities in the country—including New York, Chicago, Atlanta, and 34 others—have already set emission reduction goals of 80% or higher by 2050.
- In Paris, in spite of the US withdrawing its support, every other country has maintained its commitment to the climate goals.
- In Myanmar, a tech company is applying drone technology to plant millions of trees.
- And in Reykjavik, Iceland, a project called CarbFix is capturing greenhouse gas emissions, then processing them into water, and pumping it one mile underground to

react with the basaltic rock foundations and turn into minerals. So turning pollution into stone.

But on a smaller scale, we are all part of the fight, armed with our breastplates of faith and love, and our helmets of hope of salvation and don't each need big tech companies or national projects to do our part. As the scripture says, God didn't put us here to be destroyed. We have all the tools we need to reach salvation, if we just put them to use.

A few weeks ago I saw the poster out in coffee hour with the updated motto for recycling, that was to:

Refuse, reduce, repair, reuse, rot.... And if all else fails, then recycle.

If we all encourage each other to do things like this together, I think then we'll be following God's instructions and living in the light.