

Sunday, January 15
9:00am & 11:00am

A Body of Light



Creation Care
OUR COMMON CALLING



Guest Preacher:
rev. abby mohaupt
GreenFaith

“A Body of Light” January 15, 2023 | 2nd Sunday after Epiphany rev. abby mohaupt | Matthew 6:19-24

Prayer of Illumination: God of our journeys, who calls us to travel with faith, who reminds us that we are topsoil, yet breathes into us the breath of life, hear our prayer and let your Spirit speak and be heard. Amen.

This morning I am going to talk about three groups of *twos*: *two* people, *two* scriptures, and *two* pieces of paper in my wallet.

There are two things that I used to carry in my wallet at all times—besides the expected collection of credit cards and coins and cash.

The first is my clergy card, verifying that I’m officially an ordained minister in the PCUSA. I don’t really know what I’m supposed to do with it, but whenever I see it, I’m reminded of the larger church I belong to, the call that God has placed on my life, and the communities to whom I’m responsible.

The second is a slip of paper covered in my grandmother’s handwriting, a note about the bonds she bought for me.

She meant those bonds to help pay for my undergraduate education, but I didn’t cash them until I started coursework for my PhD in Religion, Culture, and Ecology. I can’t tell you why I didn’t cash them in before then, but using the funds to help me buy books for my first semester of coursework made me feel like she was with me.

She died in 2008, and I missed her fiercely when I started seminary and when I went through the ordination process. My grandmother was the person in my life who first taught me about sociology and helped nurture my love of creation, and I always felt her pride when she and I talked about eventually becoming a pastor.

I think she always dreamed that I'd be a pastor in a church, not a free-range minister working for an international non-profit taking bold action on climate. But she also taught me to be fierce and stubborn and to rise up when systems of oppression are harming people and the planet.

Taking her money with me into my PhD work felt like she was coming with me into this next phase of my life and the next phase of my ministry. I would need a little bit of her ferocity with me. She put a little bit of her treasure in me and my life, and in doing so, she was telling me that her heart would be with me too.

Because where we put our money is a symbol of where we put our hearts. Money and religion are two things that polite people do not talk about, and this is a sermon about both those things.

But it's also about how money and our faith can change things when we have courage to understand that
 how we live out our faith and
 where we put our money
 shape us.

This scripture from Matthew is part of the larger selection of verses that is in the lectionary for Ash Wednesday every year. Ash Wednesday—the day when we repent and remember that our lives will one day end and we will return to the earth. Ash Wednesday—the first day of Lent, those forty days of repentance where we turn around and try again to face the direction God calls us to.

This text is part of the Sermon on the Mount and comes just after the part when Jesus tells his listeners to be quiet about their faith—to not trumpet their good deeds and holiness in the streets and to pray in secret instead. And when you fast, Jesus says, do it not with sadness and publicity... do it in secret and in your hearts. Do not be arrogant in your faith but humble. Make the change not to be showy or to seem holy, but actually change your heart. Do it not for the glory and publicity, but because it is the right thing to do.

This brings me to my work... Did I mention that I work for GreenFaith? We work with and alongside people of faith around the world to boldly respond to climate and environmental justice -- sometimes we do internal spiritual work and sometimes we do *VERY* public and risky actions that are designed to bring attention

-- public and faithful action in the streets.

So these verses -- embedded in a context of private faith -- seem a little strange to reference, perhaps.

But “No one can serve two masters.” Sometimes our faith requires us to root out the parts of us and our community that tempts us to serve something or someone other than God. The big, fancy theological word for this is idolatry -- choosing to serve something other than God -- something that seems big and powerful. like a master of the world.

And sometimes we need to stop the masters that are taking over the world -- not in some black market, conspiracy theory -- but real life systems of oppression, economy and suffering.

One of the ways we see this happening in the world-- is how the fossil fuel industry has put so much money into the destruction of the planet. funding campaigns to say that fossil fuels don't create climate change. doubling down on business plans that require more emissions.

And, what it is important for all of us to name is: despite whatever our good intentions may be, despite our desires, the fossil fuel industry has made us all complicit in the sin of harming the planet.

And maybe this is something that we ought to think about when we sit in worship every Sunday and make our confessions as people trying to be faithful.

A few years ago, I was leading a retreat with a church in California about how ecology and earth care could be incorporated into worship. We spent an hour on each section of worship and when we got to the section on confession, we started a litany of all the ways creation is hurting.

We throw away things that could be recycled.

We leave the lights on in empty rooms.

We drive too much and eat too much meat.

We emit too much carbon and raise the global temperature.

Higher temperatures means melting glaciers.

Increased ocean rising means that there's less fresh water to drink.

You could come up with your own list - and I'm sure you have thought through this list before.

In the retreat I was leading, as we started working on the list of things to confess as our ecological sins, the group wanted to know if we could stop after just a little while... they so desperately wanted to skip on to the part of forgiveness and hope—in a lot of ways, they wanted to move from Ash Wednesday to Easter.

But: I'm an ecotheologian and activist.

So, as you might imagine, I said no. We needed to confess—we needed to stretch out that time of confession when we named the ways we have broken our relationships with God and creation and other people... we needed to name—publicly—the ways we fall short in caring for God's good creation with love.

In one of the defining texts of the Old Testament, we read the second scripture that has been so important to so many who seek to be faithful: Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. (Deuteronomy 6:5).

This is the text that guides/d our Adult Education this morning: **What if we loved God through loving God's creation with our whole selves?**

In the PC(USA), we have tried to love God's good creation with our heart through resources for lessening our carbon footprint. We have tried to love God's good creation with our soul through worship and community resources. We have tried to love God's good creation with our strength by leveraging our collective voices in public witness.

Climate change means we must change how we treat creation and God with all our soul, all our strength and our all our hearts, and because our hearts are where our treasure is, it matters where our money is.

Where we put our money defines us and has great power. That power is why it matters what we buy at the supermarket (buying organic and local food creates greater demand for more organic and local food), why it matters what kinds of cars we buy (buying less gas for a hybrid vehicle creates less demand for fossil fuels), and why it matters what products we fill our lives with (even changing to recycled

toilet paper changes demand for paper!) Where we put our money shows where our hearts are. As a denomination, if we love God and God's creation with everything else but not with our money—we are not yet loving God with our whole selves.

These two texts - Matthew and Deuteronomy - have been two of the grounding texts for the divestment from fossil fuels movement because it reminds us that we put our money where we have our faith. This is not just true about the people in Jesus' day or just for my grandmother —when we give money to an organization or when we buy a product or do **anything with money** we show what companies and industries we believe in. And if we believe too much in that money, we begin to serve that money—and the profits therein—over God.

And so it matters where we put our investments—how we make money is a symbol for who we are as people who follow Jesus, people who are called to love with our whole selves. If we make money from fossil fuel companies, it doesn't matter if we put that money back into local food or hybrid cars or recycled paper—it's money that comes from companies that burn fossil fuels and wreak havoc on the planet. We have to do everything we can-- boldly and faithfully-- everything we can to serve the God that loved all things into creation.

We cannot be faithful Christians if we are not faithful to the planet and all people on it.

And now we live in a world whose climate is already changing. We have passed a tipping point in climate change that climate scientists have said will be irreversible in our lifetimes—that there are 400 parts-per-million carbon dioxide in our atmosphere, more than ever before.¹ The people who are already experiencing the effects of these changes are people who live in the global South and on islands populated by people of color, people who are least responsible for climate change. The people who have emitted the most carbon are people who live in the Global North and West, communities who have yet to experience many of the effects of climate change and who sit at the powerful tables of climate policy making.²

¹ Brian Kahn, "The World Passes 400 PPM Threshold. Permanently." *Climate Central*. Published September 27, 2016, Accessed April 22, 2017, <http://www.climatecentral.org/news/world-passes-400-ppm-threshold-permanently-20738>.

² See more on climate debt in Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs The Climate* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014), 408-410.

Last year, GreenFaith, the nonprofit where I work and serve and teach, hosted (along with 14 other organizations around the world) a global day of action by people of faith. We've organized alongside people in over 40 countries in over 500 actions-- people of faith who went to the places of power in their countries to demand action on climate change. There were few cameras and even fewer congress people.

But there was a lot of faith.

A lot of singing.

A lot of noisemaking-- as people around the world refused to be silent in the face of the groaning of creation.

In the last few hours of preparation before the day of action began, my colleague Oluwatosin got several messages from an organizer in Uganda. These messages got more and more urgent. The organizer was reaching out to make sure that we knew that a group of Sudanese climate refugees were organizing an action in a refugee camp in Uganda.

They were calling on the Uganda government in particular to see climate change as a reality that displaces people and makes them refugees.

Specifically, their campaign sought to bring global attention to how the Darfur crisis in Sudan caused by conflicts around natural resource and driven by unmitigated climate change, which forced them to seek refuge in a neighboring country (Uganda)

They wanted to be seen as people who could organize, not just as people to be brushed aside. They relied on their own strong agency, claiming their space as people to work alongside of. They wanted to be seen as people of faith who were living out their call to love the planet and each other-- they knew, in a place that was not yet their home--- who they were called to be.

They lived into an important truth.

That truth is this: as dire as the situation is, the real crisis is not just what we **do** (which has led to the crisis) but who we **are** (our role in the crisis). They felt called to love God and all creation with all their hearts and with all their souls and with all their strength.

They felt they could not be faithful Christians, could not be people who serve God, if they were not demanding that the powers of the world had to change.

So many of the people and institutions with power also have a lot of money.

Money is a symbol of where our hearts are, what we trust....for where our treasure is, so are our hearts. So, many in the climate justice movement have started moving money out of the fossil fuel industry and the banks and asset managers who support that industry.

But - the climate justice movement is more than just about money. Just as we carry more than just money in our wallets.

The climate justice movement is a total ecological vocation.

At GreenFaith, we talk about reclaiming our ecological vocation in 3 ways of building people power as people of faith in the world: Individual, Institutional, Systemic

Individual power -- what we do on our own to change the world and love it. We talk about this in terms of transportation, energy, and food. → how can you change how you drive/travel? How can you invest in different energy technology or use less energy? How can you eat less meat that's not locally sourced?

Institutional power-- what we do as communities, like churches. Building gardens, getting solar panels, etc → what else? how can we have conversations in the places we congregate/work about moving towards more sustainable ways of being and doing? How can we support one another in our moves toward sustainability?

And **Systemic** power -- demanding changes in culture or financing or policies that protect climate refugees. We do that from a place of supporting refugees, demanding global and national policies that protect and support people who are the most vulnerable in the face of climate change. Who are our local, state, and national elected public servants to contact regarding ecological issues? How can we invest in ecologically responsible ways? How can we join the voices for climate justice across our global family?

These are real tangible ways in which we can live out our ecological vocation.

I haven't said this yet, but my job at GreenFaith is the director of education and training. So I can't help it. You have homework.

So: take a real tangible moment to determine what your reclaimed ecological vocation will look like. **What will your ecological task look like?**

If you want to learn more about the way we organize people of faith around these pathways to power and around a collection of demands, let's talk after worship.

It will look different for different people. And yet: ecological justice is part of working for justice in the world.

This week we remember the life and witness of Rev Dr Martin Luther King, a man who struggled for racial justice and was killed for it. And in the days before his death -- a few years after the Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964, "King traveled to Memphis, Tennessee, to join black sanitation workers in protesting polluted and hazardous work conditions. Environmental justice was a growing topic of concern as people of color suffered extensively from an overburden of toxic substances in their communities." King drew attention to the struggle of black workers calling for ecological justice.

"It was during this special visit to Memphis that King was assassinated in 1968. The strike continued after his death with a march through Memphis that was attended by 42,000 people, including Coretta Scott King, Martin's wife. The strike ultimately succeeded and became one of the first fights against environmental racism."³

I said this was a sermon about two pieces of paper, two scriptures, and two people.

Those two pieces of paper -- my clergy card and a bank note from my grandmother - helped define who I am for years—I carried them in my wallet because I carry my wallet everywhere with me. *One piece of paper* reminds me that I'm accountable to the church and to the Scriptures and to God who loves all things into creation. *One piece of paper* reminds me that I've been loved into this work by the generations before me and I am accountable to the generations to come.

Where your treasure is-- there your heart will be also.

³ Potomac Conservancy, 4 Ways Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Left His Mark On The Environmental Movement, <https://potomac.org/blog/2020/1/1/mlk-environmental-justice>, December 20, 2019.

two people

One: my grandmother who shaped so much of who I am, whose trust I carried **in my wallet** for years.

And, this morning, I carry **in my heart** the treasure of my child Juniper, who already knows what it's like to know and love creation. She will make you stop and look at bugs and doggies and trees and flowers and the lake. She will insist that we wave hello to our neighbors, and she throws tantrums by enacting a "die-in" -- a movement tactic in which she just lies down on the ground and silently stares at me until I either lay down with her or acquiesce to at least some of her demands.

She's 18 months old. She's already as stubborn and fierce as the other women in our family and has already learned that if you ask for something enough times, you will eventually be heard.

She - and all humans to come after us, no matter their race, class, gender, orientation, or country of origin - deserve a world where they can breathe and live and love.

Two scriptures: the gospel that we cannot love both God and money. and the text that says we must love God with all that we are -- and in order to do that we must love all creation and all people.

We must be willing to live out the Gospel of love because the whole world -- the just one world we have -- is at stake.

Amen.