AT HOME ON EARTH—Christian Spirituality in a Time of Climate Change

On becoming an apocalyptic evangelical prophetic church

Part 1: Apocalyptic: owning the anguish that is ours

March 5, 2017 – David R. Weiss

I want to begin today with a bit about my personal journey toward concern for climate change. I come with as many questions as answers, but company is always welcome, especially when the journey leads into uncertain territory. So it seems helpful to say something about how I found myself on *this* path.

My journey begins on the southernmost shores of Lake Michigan, home to the singing sands of the Dunes National Lakeshore and the Indiana Dunes State Park. Yes, there was the small woods right across the street from my home where I frequently went exploring, but it was in the dunes where I met Nature as vast and expansive, as mystery and beauty, as peril and power. Nature as creation, worthy of awe.

Although I had plenty of childhood of curiosity about the natural world, my real love has *always* been words; I spent as much time in books as in my backyard, and for most of my life, from childhood to present, nature has been a welcome backdrop to my more immediate passions of writing, teaching, and theology. Today nature collides with those passions—and I can only hope the collision is coming soon enough.

Through high school and college I took my required courses in science, but I steeped myself in social sciences and the humanities. I attended Wartburg Seminary for three years, departing with an M.A. rather than an M.Div. Despite my family's hopes, my own discernment was that the Holy Spirit seemed less interested a collar around my neck that putting a burr up my butt. Which is to say, I was led to a vocation characterized more by the gift of holy agitation than that of pastoral care. During my seminary years I worked with others on anti-apartheid issues, and I played a central role in Wartburg Seminary declaring itself a nuclear free zone, pledging hospitality and aid in any event of emergency, but no longer pretending it could promise shelter against nuclear fallout.

My singular—but significant—encounter with ecology in seminary was a course I took on "Theology of the Land." We read three texts in the class, and they all left their mark on me, but without question it was Wendell Berry's *Unsettling of America* that marked me most. Not least because I envied the poetic beauty of his prose, but just as much because in his prose Nature *came alive*. Those sand dunes of my youth, the farm fields that quilt the Midwest landscape, the great forests, the mountains, the only seemingly barren desserts: each habitat became its own Other, with whom we live *in relationship*—justly or unjustly. The seeds planted in that class, in 1986, took nearly a decade to germinate—and nearly three decades to mature—but in the writings of the poet-farmer Wendell Berry I first heard the invitation to listen for the holy within the wild places of Earth.

I left seminary intentionally un-ordained and but optimistic that my education in theology, my love of words, and my passion for justice were the perfect set of skills to position me for rewarding work changing the world.

Instead, I spent the next six years working in a hotel kitchen making banquet salads, mailing out educational filmstrips to schools, managing shipping-receiving-and-inventory for a recycled paper company, and (please forgive me) running machines that stuffed and stamped junk mail. I might call this my second graduate degree, this one in humility. I certainly learned in each job I held, not least about the lives—the anxieties and aspirations—of the people I worked with. Many of them less educated, all of them just as human as me. They become the audience for whom I aimed my work as a *public* theologian a few years later.

In 1992 I began a graduate program in Christian Ethics at the University of Notre Dame, and in 1995, during a year-long independent study on Christian Theology and the Environment, the seeds planted back in seminary broke ground. The following year, spring 1996, I taught my first course at Notre Dame: Contemporary Christian Thinking on the Environment.

That fall, drawing on insights from my study and teaching, I delivered my first academic paper at a conference in Wisconsin. It was titled: "Beyond Ecological Security: Intimacy and Risk. *Imago Dei* as a Theological Resource for a More Creative Encounter with the Earth."

Although neither the phrase "climate change" nor "global warming" appear in that paper, I was addressing the ecological crisis and trying to articulate Christian theological insights to help us live in a more harmonious relationship with Earth. In particular I argued that, especially as we look at the ministry of Jesus, but really throughout the arc of the biblical narrative, we see God's willingness to *be intimate* and to *risk*. And I suggested that these qualities are *central* to what it means to be in the image of God—and that developing them more intentionally would set us in a much better relationship with creation. I think that wisdom is worth revisiting twenty years later—and I'll do so next week.

In spring 1998, my last year at Notre Dame, I was the keynote speaker for the campus Earth Day celebration. In that talk, titled "Consuming the Earth in Search of Our Worth," the phrase "global warming" entered my vocabulary for the first time. And I declared that our unbridled patterns of consumption were largely to blame for the threat we posed, both to the earth beneath our feet and to the atmosphere above our heads.

I proposed that our consumption—all out of proportion with our actual need—could be seen as an attempt to assert our worth over against the seeming indifference of the world around us. Our primal insecurity, mostly unacknowledged, was driving us to consume the planet to death because we'd been convinced—largely under the tutelage of modern advertising—that if anything bestows worth, *stuff* does. Then I added

theological insight that, as Christian, *we do indeed consume our worth—but we do so at the altar in the bread and wine*. And that wisdom may be the greatest gift that Lutherans bring to the climate crisis. I'll talk more about that in two weeks.

After that talk in 1998 I went largely silent on ecological issues. For seventeen years.

You see, during my years at Notre Dame I was also developing a strong theological voice around welcoming LGBTQ persons. When I joined the faculty of Luther College for four years, from 1998-2002, that was the driving issue in our Church and on our campus. So my vocational path veered off almost exclusively into public theology seeking to create welcoming and affirming space in faith communities, both Lutheran and beyond. For seventeen years, I wrote essays, taught classes, preached sermons, led workshops, wrote hymns, and gave public lectures. In general—alongside the multitude of odd jobs I've held since moving to the Cities in 2002—I made working for LGBTQ affirmation and welcome my own personal cottage industry.

That work continues to be central to my vocation. But *something has changed*.

During those years, I also recycled—religiously. I went largely vegetarian (technically pescatarian as I still eat responsibly-sourced fish). I shopped at co-ops when possible. I opted to buy only cage-free eggs. I began to participate in community supported agriculture, buying a share in produce delivered right from farm to my neighborhood each week over the summer. So in a variety of ways I cultivated a closer, more responsible relationship with Earth, but that was not the focus of my work as a public theologian. So what changed?

I suppose, in some very real way, *the weather did*. Not simply the evidence for climate change, but the mounting evidence of *impending climate change now upon us*. I am not a scientist myself, but as an educated layperson, the best science available to me, the type found in UN reports covered by the New York Times, that science is alarming to say the least. I will claim in a few minutes that it's actually *apocalyptic*, and it's our task as the church to say *that*.

But something else changed, too. I started to grow old. I know, most of you look at me and want to say, "Why, you're just a young'un yet." Well, I do hope I have plenty of years left to me. And age is all about perspective. But this also brings perspective: *I'm a grandpa now—nine times over*. And while "feeling old" may be subjective, damn near running out of fingers to count up grandkids is a pretty objective sign that I'm on the far side of ripe, however you wish to measure it.

And what being a grandpa has done for me, is not so much make me see my own mortality as it has *pressed me to imagine their future*. That's why, beginning with Advent 2015, I've spent the past fifteen months redirecting my primary energy to asking this question: *What does "Christian Spirituality in a Time of Climate Change" look like?* And that's the question I want to explore with you over the next three weeks.

It may well be the *defining question of Christian faith* for the generation to come. And because it's an eminently *human* question—it is *entirely tangled up in our lives*—it seems useful to have sketched out for you some of the tangles in my life that led me here today.

So this is where we *begin*.

I'm a theologian. It's "in my blood," I like to say. The same heart that pushes and pulls this life-force through my body seems, and with equal regularity, to push and pull an awareness of God through my life.

I'm also—and no less—son, husband, father, grandfather. Add to that planetary citizen and child of God, both since my conception, the latter being publically confirmed by water a few weeks after my own arrival in the wee hours of a Christmas morning some five decades ago.

Born into a thick web of relationships both more complex in their promise and more complicated in their "baggage" than I have ever been able to fully grasp, I dwell at the ecological intersection of faith, creation, and chaos. The iron in the blood that gives me life was seeded in the stars. The water that christened me was distilled on a planet billions of years in the making.

And I worry.

About the world my kids, and especially my grandkids (and yours) are going to inherit. The world they're going have to *weather*, if you will.

There are, of course, real reasons why we have been so slow to address climate change. Though "real" is not the same as "good"—and claiming uncertainty about its factual basis counts as neither a real nor a good reason today. The enormity of the threat, the inertia of lifestyles now thoroughly embedded in systems beyond any individual control, the impulse to preserve what is familiar, the short term addictive rush of stuff, and the sheer corporate and political power of those who profit from plundering the planet—these are among the real reasons. But none of them come close to being *good* reasons.

So when I imagine my grandchildren fifty years out, and they face the world we've bequeathed to them, none of those real reasons offer much comfort. I want to do better than merely excuse my failure to act. I want the tools necessary to fashion a legacy of *unconditional (and sometimes costly) care* for the planet and *resolute (and sometimes risky) resistance* to the forces that threaten Earth's otherwise eager desire to host life.

I'm busily trying to find—or fashion—those tools. But there's something else I want. Something else I *need*: *company*. This challenge is so all-encompassing that even our best aspirations, our most principled actions will be ineffective (although not thereby worthless)—unless we learn to act in concert. So I'm looking for communities willing to say *with me*, from our star-seeded blood to our water-crossed brows, "*This is our crisis to face, our moment to be church, our season to journey together in holy conversation with one another*."

What *does* "Christian Spirituality in a Time of Climate Change" look like? I think it's going to need to be *apocalyptic … evangelical … and prophetic*. Ironically, few mainstream Christian churches wear *any* of those phrases very comfortably. But the world needs us to be each of these things today.

And, really, this is *one* response with *multiple* dimensions to it. An *apocalyptic(dash)evangelical(dash)prophetic* spirituality all-at-once. It's a bit like origami, the Japanese art of paper-folding. We need to discuss the folds individually, but only as they move together does the spirituality truly take shape.

There's also fourth dimension: a matter of "scope." Christian spirituality in a time of climate change will also be *individual, communal, and public*. It will engage us *individually* (speaking to each of our minds, moving each of our hearts, affecting our personal choices), and *communally* (as people of faith gathered together for worship, prayer, fellowship, or action), and *publically* (as participants in politics, as shapers of public policy, as citizens willing to speak truth to those who place profits before the planet's wellbeing).

So, APOCALYPTIC.

It's not my parents' world anymore. They're still alive. Dad turned 80 last fall; Mom's two years ahead of him. But this is *no longer* the world they grew up in. It's barely my world anymore, for that matter. People my age and older, we live *on a different planet today than the one we were born on*.

My daughter, Susanna, for instance, was *born* into a world altogether different than the one my parents knew. She turns 21 this month, and within Susanna's lifetime—in fact, just since she was a toddler in 1998, she's lived through *all seventeen* of the hottest years on this planet since 1880.

Why "since 1880"? Because that's the year we finally had enough accurate temperature reports from around the world to calculate a true "average global temperature." Since then we've kept *very precise* records.

And according to those records, out of the past 137 years, *every one of the hottest seventeen years has happened during Susanna's lifetime*. I'll read them off, so you can FEEL the weight of this heat. Susanna was born in 1996. The hottest 17 years since we began measuring them in 1880 have been 1998, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, and 2016.

It's possible, in fact, it's *likely* that for the rest of her life, she'll *only ever add* to that collection, year by year. You see, all told, it's been 385 months—32 years—since we had a single month where the global temperature was cooler than average in that 137-year span.

So, it IS a *different planet* that we dwell on today. Same Earth, but now seemingly governed by a whole new set of temperature dynamics, a whole new range of weather extremes, a whole new series of changes in ecosystems and economies moving toward us with increasing speed. And before the worst of it hits, we'll be handing the keys over to Susanna's generation.

I'm going to be almost mercilessly blunt because climate change needs your full attention. *Starting yesterday*. (Actually, starting last century.) And the wellbeing of those who come after us hinges—*perhaps more than at any point in this planet's four billion years*—on the choices made by those of us alive today.

We're facing *an apocalypse*, not the once-and-for-all "end of the world," but, true to its *biblical meaning*, the ending of *one* world—and the beginning of another. The world that we will bequeath to our children is *not* the world we were born into. *That world … is no more*.

Climate scientists reference global temperatures against a standard baseline, which is the average global temperature over a 30-year period from 1961-1990 (about 14°C, 57°F.). After coming out of the last ice age, around 12-14,000 years ago, global surface temperatures have leveled off and been quite stable. *In fact, for the past 10,000 years we've been within half-a-degree Celsius on either side of that baseline*. And even when it *has* fluctuated a bit, it's always taken at least 500 years to move even half a degree cooler or warmer. Except over the last century. In just the past 100 years, we've warmed the planet by 1 whole degree Celsius, with most of that increase coming in the last 50 years.

Did you catch that? *Primarily because of the cumulative impact of industrialized human society, in just the last 50 years, we've moved the temperature needle more than in any 1000-year period since the end of the last ice age.*

By most scientific accounts, an increase over that baseline of more than 2 degrees Celsius would begin to pose significant challenges to human society. So the Paris Agreement, reached by 195 nations in December 2015 and put in force in November 2016, aims to reduce greenhouses gasses to a level that will *stop* global warming at that 2-degree mark. But … there are some problems even with this.

First, the 2-degree limit is often referred to as a "guardrail," because *were* we to move past it, the consequences *could* be catastrophic. As one climate scientist puts it, if we approach a 3-degree (Celsius) increase we enter a realm of global warming that is likely "incompatible with an organized global community." So we *want* a guardrail. Now, I've driven on some winding mountain highways with pretty sheer drop-offs. I was very grateful to see a guardrail—but the last thing I wanted to do was bump up against it.

So virtually every climate scientist agrees that limiting temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius is a far safer bet—like the rumble strips at the edge of a highway, to jerk you wide awake before you even bump the guardrail.

But here's the *real* problem. If we stopped burning coal tomorrow—I mean *literally*: *tomorrow*— And if we stopped any further oil or gas exploration— If we didn't even tap into the oil fields we know are there, but haven't drilled in yet— If we *only* used the oil and gas coming from *currently operating* oil and fields—*and NO MORE COAL at all*—well, that oil and gas alone—in the fields where we *already* have wells operating—will push us right the past 1.5 degree rumble strip. Add in burning

the coal coming out of mines *already operating*, and we'll plow right through that 2-degree guardrail.

This is with no new drilling. No new coal mines. And it isn't based on idle speculation. It uses the type of numbers that come from nonpartisan sources. Like math.

But it's actually *even bleaker* than this. Not only are all the pledged reductions under the Paris Agreement *voluntary*, but right now, even if *every one* of the 195 nations ratifies their commitment *and* meets their respective pledge, the simple math still works out to an increase of about 2.7 degrees by the end of this century. We'll bang into the 2-degree guardrail right after mid-century, just as Susanna reaches my age. And by 2100 we'll have banged it hard enough and long enough that we'll quite possibly be careening over the cliff.

We measure the threat in degrees, but it isn't just the temperature. It's the whole set of cascading consequences. This is just a small sampling:

As polar ice melts, sea levels rise, permanently flooding many coastlines, displacing tens of millions of people, as well as the industries and economies that are there.

Increasing carbon dioxide in the air drives ocean acidification, which, in turn, harms coral, shellfish, and plankton—the very infrastructure of the ocean ecosystem.

Warming oceans feed the volatility in weather playing out in stronger hurricanes, but evident as well in greater storm intensity and flooding in some areas and increased drought and wildfires elsewhere.

The ripple effects will run further through human societies and biotic communities. Some regions will see gains in agriculture, but overall crop yields will drop—even as population continues to rise. Whole ecosystems will shift … and sometimes shatter. By the time my grandchildren reach my age *up to one third of all plant and animals species alive today will face extinction.*

It's like the whole planet is running a fever, complete with body aches and vomiting. And nearly all the consequences of climate change will fall first and hardest on those least able to adapt: the poor. Well, animals, plants, ecosystems—and the poor.

The more I venture into this, the more I want to say to my own daughter, to all six children and nine grandchildren, *I AM SO SORRY.*

Because *we did this.* Not me, personally. And not this generation by itself. But *we humans*, mostly in the West (although Russia, China and the rest of the developing world are trying to emulate us … with a vengeance)—we humans, *addicted to material stuff, indifferent to the needs of a finite planet, and burning fossil fuels at an obscene rate—we did this. And we're going to leave this simmering planet to our children and grandchildren.*

So, *"What now?"* How *do* we think—feel—act—as individuals and as communities of faith—in a time of climate change … *in a time of apocalypse?*

This is *tough*: because first, **WE NEED TO JUST STOP AND WEEP**. We'd rather *do* something. When we finally realize the extent to which climate change is going to *rewrite the options* for our grandchildren's future on this planet, we want to *do something.* And we want to do it right now.

Even the science experts who speak with sobering clarity about the crisis we face are often quick to add, "*But there's hope*, there's technology just around the corner that can help us …" There *may* be technological breakthroughs that can aid us in the decades ahead, but if we do not *first* come to terms with the insatiable and idolatrous pursuit of stuff that has crept into the entirety of our lives—that has irreparably … *apocalyptically* … altered our planet—then no amount of technology can safeguard for the planet … or our souls for very long.

What the world does least well these days is repent: admit the folly of its ways and the damage caused, and then change course. The church isn't much better at this, if we're honest. But we *do* have language for it. We *do* have rituals for it. We have psalms and songs and prayers and liturgies for it. We have the capacity to do for ourselves and to model for the world the first things that need to be done today: *See. Grieve. Repent.*

I *will* talk about how we find hope and what we might do—*over the next two weeks.* Not today. Because I'm convinced—*absolutely*—that what the church brings to the challenge, *the crisis* of climate change, *begins* with *repentance and tears.* We can only *act*, only *do*, *after* that grief, that *soul deep* lament, has washed over us. Indeed, sustained lament may be the only thing that can truly stir us to repentance. We'll need to be creative, determined, frantic, and persistent, in how we lament. *But we cannot despair.* Not for ourselves. Not for our children or grandchildren. Not for the companion creatures on this planet whose fate is now thoroughly bound up with our own. As a church, both for ourselves and for our world, we must help midwife the largest act of communal repentance the world has ever seen.

But how do we *endure* such anguish without being swallowed by the grief itself? Honestly, *I can't promise* that we're up to this. A century ago, even a few decades ago, we still were. But today, having inflicted *such* wounds on this planet—on God's creation—*can we now bear the grief that is ours to own?* I don't know. It is unquestionably OUR grief. The result of OUR sin. But the sobering depth of this climate crisis is such that we dare not assume we can endure this grief. Until we feel *that* level of trepidation we have not sensed the peril we're in.

This will take … *years.* It is not all that we can or should do. There *is* evangelical hope to announce. There *is* prophetic resistance to embrace. And we'll need to start those works right away as well. But the great temptation is to hurry past anguish, to rush through repentance, but THIS *is where our work begins.* In a bitter, but *absolutely essential first step* of grief and repentance.

That's where we pause today. Thank you.

Part 2 – Evangelical Hope / Part 3 – Prophetic Resistance

David R. Weiss | drw59mn@gmail.com | 651-492-1776

AT HOME ON EARTH—Christian Spirituality in a Time of Climate Change

On becoming an apocalyptic evangelical prophetic church

Part 2: Evangelical: good news and hope

March 12, 2017 – David R. Weiss

I'm glad you came back. Last week I offered the first of three talks on "Christian Spirituality in a Time of Climate Change," and I left you all in a pretty bleak place:

> A planet warming faster than at any point since the last ice age. With the threat of rising oceans levels, combined with steep loss in ocean life. Coastlands being redrawn by rising waters, with people, cities, industries, and animals becoming refugees in the process. Driving rains, furious winds, and unrelenting droughts marking our lives unlike anything in recent memory. With only a very small window of opportunity to avert or lessen these consequences—and that window gets smaller with each passing day ... and each new environmental initiative of the current administration.

Indeed, to say I left you all "in a pretty bleak place" in an understatement. I welcomed you onboard a train, and proceeded to announce, "Next step, *the outer edges of hell*." So, *I'm truly glad you came back*.

Here's my message again in a nutshell. What *does* "Christian Spirituality in a Time of Climate Change" look like? It's *apocalyptic ... evangelical ... and prophetic.*

By "apocalyptic" I don't mean announcing the end of the world. *Not quite*. I mean apocalyptic in a truer biblical sense—and in *two* distinct ways. First, we *do* need to announce the ending of *one world*. To recognize that the planet we were born on is NOT the one we'll leave to our children. Second, like biblical apocalyptic literature, we'll need to seek out powerful imagery and symbolism to capture the hearts and minds in our midst, to prepare them for the journey ahead.

By "evangelical," I don't mean "saving souls for Jesus." I mean something closer to what the ELCA meant when it reclaimed "evangelical" in its name in 1988: that the message we have, as a church, *is genuinely good news*—worth sharing. And in a time of climate change that will be especially important because news that is good will be harder and harder to come by.

And by "prophetic," I don't mean we'll make predictions about the future. I mean (again, more biblically), we need to discern the stakes of the present moment and then speak truth boldly—even and especially to power. And we need to engage in action that dares to live toward a different world. That's the "resistance" and "renewal" dimension of this spirituality, and I'll say more about it next week.

Two other quick reminders. There's also fourth dimension to this spirituality: "scope." It will be *individual, communal, and public*, playing out a bit differently in each realm. And, although I'm describing each dimension separately for sake of clarity, we won't finish one dimension and then move on to the next. This is one *whole* spirituality, in which each theme reinforces the other and takes its turn at the forefront again and again. Climate Change may well be THE *defining question of Christian faith* … for generations to come. So there's time to work out the rhythm of moving between these dimensions, but the urgency of the issue says we should start immediately and work out the rhythm as we go.

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Last week I made the case that the changes coming our way courtesy climate change—which itself is coming our way courtesy *human industrial activity*—merit the term *apocalyptic*. Scientifically, biologically, ecologically, the world we grew up knowing … *is ending right now*. And just as Adam and Eve found no way back to Eden, neither will we nor our children find a way back to the planet we once knew.

But what does it mean, not simply to assert that *this moment in history* is apocalyptic, but that our *Christian spirituality should be apocalyptic, too*?

This is *tough*, because as much as we want to *do* something, the first piece of our witness to the world *as a church* in a time of climate change *begins* with *repentance and tears.*

In one sense, we don't "have" to do this just yet. The worst of climate change won't hit for a decade or more. And we'll incur our share of derision if we start our lament before full-blown catastrophe strikes. Indeed, the church has a habit—almost a "legacy"—of keeping safely behind the curve in its response to social issues. Around slavery, women's equality, civil rights, and LGBT rights mainstream Christianity came to the game late … and after providing support or cover for the other side for far too long. We could play it safe here, too; bite our tongue until lament becomes the song of our culture, and only then take our place in the choir.

But recall Jesus' words (Luke 13:35), exasperated that the crowds who flocked to hear him were so oblivious to the *weight* of choices in front of them: *"How can you read the weather so well, but miss the signs of the times?"* In *our* case, "reading the signs of the times" *means* reading the weather—heeding the growing body of data about the climate—and feeling the weight of choices in front of us. If we wish to look our children and grandchildren in the eye with dignity, to be remembered by the next generations as those who *led the way* as the crisis became clear, then *we will risk derision now* and lead the way into lament for a world soon to be undone.

The exact shape of our lament will be as varied as we are, according to our diverse gifts and contexts. And because it's *our* lament, not mine alone, it will be up to churches, congregation by congregation, and across regions and denominations, to discern what shape lament takes in their midst. But I have a few thoughts. This journey will not be for the faint of heart—except

that this journey *will include* all of us before its over, so what matters most is that we find ways to make it *together*.

It will involve learning about the *need* for our lament. There are plenty of articles, books, speakers, and films that can offer a beginning point in this journey—preferably as shared experiences so that conversation can follow. One opportunity, Elizabeth Kolbert's lecture at the U of M on "The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History" (Carlson Family Stage, Northrup Auditorium, April 13, 7:30PM), falls on Maundy Thursday. It's an inconvenient date, but a provocative one to learn more about another great betrayal: that of creation. There are plenty of excellent films that put visceral visual images on climate change and its consequences such as Leonardo DiCaprio's documentary *Before the Flood*.

We'll also need to process this grief *using the tools of our faith*. Our biblical, liturgical, and historical traditions offer a host of imagery related to lament, grief, and repentance. We should revisit the stories and psalms of lament in the Bible as well as the seasons of the church year, perhaps hearing them with fresh ears as we listen to *their* words now set against *our own* anguish. Ultimately we may *re-imagine them* with a suffering planet—and all its inhabitants—in mind. Reverently and soberly, creating new prayers, psalms, hymns, and rituals that can guide us through this grieving.

Each year we recall the slaughter of the holy innocents by Herod. We hear Matthew (2:18) echo Jeremiah's image (31:15) of Rachel, weeping for her children. Dare we imagine the poor threatened by climate change, the many creatures and plants likely to disappear forever—dare we allow *these imperiled ones* to be the focus of Rachel's tears today?

Jesus wept for Jerusalem (Luke 19:41), because her people ignored prophet after prophet, never learning the things that make for peace. Dare we hear Jesus weeping today *for us*, that we have ignored prophets like Rachel Carson and Bill McKibben, that *we* have not learned the things that make for peace with creation?

I wonder how our baptismal prayers—or the art around our baptismal fonts—might reflect the undeniable and ancient kinship—between this "holy" water and the melting glaciers, dying oceans, and rising floodwaters around the globe. *Somehow* the wetness of gracious promise traced on our foreheads, connects us just as truly to the profound grief of water across the world.

Or how might we recognize that our Communion bread and wine—symbols of God's grace and Jesus' suffering—come from wheat and grapes often grown and harvested in ways so at odds with the planet's health? The very elements of our Eucharist have imprinted on them agricultural habits that, in effect, crucify land, water, and air.

How would we be changed simply by posing these questions with liturgical deliberateness? I don't know exactly *how* we do these things, but this *is* part of our work now—to take images that already hold power in our imagination and bring them to bear on the needs of this moment.

Perhaps church potlucks have a place in this work, times when, like a funeral luncheon, we come together to name, honor, and grieve the loss of habitats and creatures. If the monarch butterfly goes extinct, it may be important to create memory boards in churches across the country, and invite people to come and share a memory of a monarch—and then grieve that we did not act sooner on its behalf. I'm quite serious. If we truly own our kinship with the created world, we *will* be pressed to respond to this grief, too.

Much of this work will be felt personally, but it *is fundamentally communal work* done as congregations or as small groups within congregations. It's simply too daunting to take on by ourselves, least of all by our pastors. It's too much for anyone alone. This is *shared* ministry, and we'll need to read and write and weep and pray and create these pieces of an apocalyptic, lament-centered spirituality *together*. If ever there was a need for a priesthood of *all* believers, it's today.

On occasion, we'll venture out into public spaces with our grief, because everyone on the planet is going to be impacted by climate change. Not just Christians, not just believers. And we'll show others that eco-grief *is* possible, perhaps at City Hall or in the Capital Rotunda, maybe at the riverbank, on farmland, or in a threatened wilderness. And we'll bear witness to our recognition that grief is the *only* first step forward.

Still, the question looms, and it's *real*: how do we *endure* such anguish without being swallowed by the grief itself? Because this grieving will take … *years*. It's not all that we can or should do. But it's *where our work begins*, and it will be with us *for a long time*.

So HOPE. A Christian spirituality in a time of climate change will be … *evangelical*. If only in a still quiet voice, it will nonetheless whisper good news that can anchor the hope that can hold us steady as we endure soul deep lament and as we reach forward toward resistance and renewal.

We have multiple resources for this in our tradition. I'm going to identify two of them: *Remembering who God is*—and *Remembering who we are*.

First, God. Consider Adam and Eve's mythic banishment from Eden, Joseph being sold into slavery, the entire generations the Hebrews later enslaved in Egypt, and Israel's shattering experience of Exile. Each of these is an apocalyptic world-ending-moment in the Biblical tale. But in each case, the biblical story—and the lived experience of the people—revealed that God was with them.

We've known this all our lives. And it's been comforting to recall God's presence to other people and other communities in moments of devastation and despair. To realize that God was there, even then … *for them*. It may be less comforting but more important right now to recognize that suddenly *this story is about us*. We're the ones facing an apocalypse today. It's *our turn* to remember that God will be with *us* even in THIS apocalyptic moment.

It's this persistent solidarity of God that leads Isaiah to name God *Emmanuel*, "God-With-Us." From the time of Matthew's Gospel onward we Christians have dared to see in Jesus' life the embodiment of that name, Emmanuel.

Besides this, and in both biblical testaments, we discover that *the manner* in which God is Emmanuel—*with-us*—is *primarily by way of vulnerability*. This vulnerability is perhaps both the most overlooked and *most important* aspect of God today. It would be fair to say that the vast majority of our climate crisis is the result of our centuries-long quest for control *over* nature rather than for harmony *with* nature. Having imaged God as *absolute power*, we've tried to echo that ourselves—with devastating consequences for the whole web of life.

Yet, in the biblical story, God chooses vulnerability again and again. Look at the company God keeps: second-born sons, enslaved people, slow-tongued leaders, women, Gentiles, and awkwardly outcast prophets. These are not choices made by someone betting on the conventional wisdom for success, not the companions you choose if you want to make sure the odds are always on your side. Instead, the path of presence that God chooses is *to pursue wholeness not by avoiding vulnerability but by embracing it*.

Jesus continues that pattern. He *incarnates* it. Yes, it culminates on the cross, where the vulnerability of both Jesus and God reaches a startling crescendo, but it's *also* at the very heart of his ministry. In daring to touch lepers and others whose illness has set them apart, Jesus' heals by stepping into the vulnerability of others. In choosing to eat with outcasts in a society where your table companions were carefully monitored and could cost you your reputation, Jesus unmistakably—*scandalously*—chooses to be vulnerable. In calling us to love our enemies, to meet them with creative nonviolence rather than outright force, Jesus commends the transformative power of vulnerability.

Remembering that God is not only persistently *present to us* but also deliberately *vulnerable with us* is important because it anchor the hope necessary for enduring lament and for nurturing the seeds of resistance and renewal.

Moreover, in *remembering who God is*, we also begin to *remember who we are*: **imago Dei**—creatures called to *image a God who pursues wholeness through vulnerable solidarity with others*. And it is past time for our humanity to reflect this.

We might begin by deepening the sense of who we are and where we fit in creation. The Genesis 2 creation account says God fashioned "Adam" from the dust of the ground. That's what the *English* tells us, anyway. The *Hebrew* is more evocative. There God forms an ***adam*** from the ***adamah***: literally, God fashions an *earthling* from the *earth*, or, as I like to say, a *HUMUS BEING* from the *HUMUS*.

It's a small wordplay, but it carries a powerful etymological—*and ecological*—truth about our profound kinship to the ground. It reminds us that, from Eden onward, we were *intended for intimacy*: *humus beings*, commissioned by God to tend the *humus*, to be caretakers of a Garden to which we are *indelibly linked*.

We have a *kinship with creation* that we have not yet fully acknowledged, but it has been true for as long as long human beings have been. We know now, that far from being set clean apart from our companion creatures, we live thanks to countless ones with whom we share an unimaginable intimacy. My relatively healthy human body is home to about *100 trillion microbes*. These tiny critters are NOT ME, yet they live in and on me, assisting my digestion, immune system, and carrying out other duties essential to keeping me alive. Some neither help nor hinder me; they simply call me "home." *100 trillion of them*.

And because microbial cells are a lot smaller than human cells, the total number of *their* cells actually *outnumber* my own human cells by *at least seven to one*. So right here, standing in front of you, *there are seven to ten times as many cells that are not "David" as cells that* are *David*. If we could separate them all out, these microbes would weigh somewhere around *seven pounds*. That's a lot of "not me" that's fully interwoven with me.

Listen, because this is *good news*: there are a multitude of ecosystems that we need to find our *deep* connection with, but we begin right here: *I am my own ecosystem*. And so are you. *Both theologically and scientifically we are intended for intimacy*. Our path forward, as people of faith, as inhabitants of a finite and fragile planet, *is by way of intimacy*: with each other, with our companion creatures, and with our planet. Remembering *who are*—that we are already deeply interwoven with creation in multiple ways—can renew in us a *felt* kinship that allows us to grieve for the rest creation, now imperiled by our own folly, *as for our own kin*.

One small one habit we might adopt as part of our newfound intimacy with all things created, would be to *go on a first name basis* with our home planet. We needn't declare her a living being (though even some scientists say she acts like one in certain respects), but let's drop the "the," that we so casually add to Earth. I don't say of my wife, "I love 'the' Margaret." No, "I love Margaret." To insert a "the" sets up an impersonal distance that is immediately obvious when we're talking about a person, but slips through unnoticed when we're talking about our own planet.

We don't say "*the* Mars," or "*the* Saturn," but we too easily say, "*the* Earth." Listen to the difference it makes when I say, "I live *on* Earth. I care *for* Earth. I hope my children get to *know* Earth as I did. I *want* Earth and all her companion creatures to thrive." There is an undeniable personal character to this speech, an intimacy born in this simple use of words. A recognition, so eloquently phrased by Martin Buber, that *we are most human when we meet Earth as Thou*.

Lastly, what would it mean to think about *incarnation on an ecological level?* We say that in Jesus God "took on flesh." That means that like me, like you, *God took on flesh with the assistance of 100 trillion microbes*. Suddenly "incarnation" isn't about God becoming "human," but about God dwelling in the midst of all creation. No less than any of us, *Jesus' humanity is interwoven with the cosmos*. The iron that reddened *his* blood was first formed in the stars. The water that comprised over half *his* body weight had been here on Earth for some four billion years. When John

3:16 says, "God so loved *the world*," it uses the Greek word *cosmos*, meaning "the whole of creation." We've tended, perhaps selfishly, to presume that, of course, God loves us, humans, best of all. But just maybe a *vulnerable* God, a God more intimate with creation than we can fathom, loves stardust and iron, water and microbes, *just as much as us*.

Perhaps it's time for our psalms and songs, our art and ethics to recognize it's neither scientifically accurate nor theologically wise to narrow down incarnation to humanity. But, like our task of lament, the church's ministry of evangelical hope in a time of climate change, is not *mine* to map out, it's *ours*. And we'll map it as we walk it: *together*.

This dance between apocalyptic grief and evangelical hope will last for decades … likely for the rest of our lives. Even if *in this very moment* we altered all the Earth-damaging behaviors we engage in, her wounds run so deep, and the inertia of our wounding is so great, that it would be generations before we actually reversed course. But this is the *best choice before us*—to live in this uncomfortable tension … for the sake of tomorrow. The only other option is to resign ourselves and our children and our children's children to a planet too wounded to ever again truly welcome them home.

Moses called heaven and earth as witnesses, to see whether the Hebrews would choose life or death. Those same witnesses—and the same choice—are before us today.

So hope is essential. We should be clear, however, that we aren't "hopeful" as an end in itself, as a sort of abstract optimism. In the face of the truly apocalyptic moment that looms before us, hope serves two critical roles. It keeps the grief over what we have done from overwhelming us; it sustains us in our lament. And—it makes possible, against all outward signs that we cannot make a difference, the conviction that *prophetic resistance and renewal is the forward form our faith takes today*.

I'll be the first to admit: this is a *daunting picture*, starkly drawn but truthfully spoken, I believe.

So let me add: we'll *need* moments of joy and laughter, rest and relaxation. And they will come. In fact, I believe that once we turn *faithfully* toward lament, we'll discover a new depth to our moments of joy, a new richness to the ring of our laughter. Because it will become the counterpoint to our honesty. But the longer we delay, the more quickly what we count as happiness today will become regret tomorrow. Those probably don't sound like upbeat words, but if you could see the coming storm, you would realize they are actually filled with hope.

What *does* "Christian Spirituality in a Time of Climate Change" look like? It's *apocalyptic, evangelical, and prophetic*.

Apocalyptic: because we live *already*—and *irrevocably*—on the far side of a warming planet. We need to own the anguish that is ours—and find ways from personal devotion to Sunday worship and beyond that allow us to plumb the depth of almost unfathomable lament.

Evangelical: because we are loved by a God who—according to the tales we hold sacred—will be with us no matter what, a God who has shown vulnerability as the path to wholeness, and a God who intended us for intimacy with all creation, and who yearns to accompany us as we take up that call.

And Prophetic: because when we, who have felt full the anguish of the ecosystems all around us while being held fast by hope, *THEN* we will be empowered in spirit for resistance and renewal. To alter our own lives, to speak truth to power, and to reshape our culture in a way that finally affirms that we *are* AT HOME ON EARTH. That's next week.

Thank you.

For Reflection:
How has this talk impacted you emotionally, intellectually, or spiritually? Where do *you* see opportunities for the church to manifest grief or to offer hope?

Part 3 – Prophetic Resistance – March 19
David R. Weiss | drw59mn@gmail.com | 651-492-1776

AT HOME ON EARTH—Christian Spirituality in a Time of Climate Change

On becoming an apocalyptic evangelical prophetic church

Part 3: Prophetic: Resistance

March 19, 2017 – David R. Weiss

I'm betting that most of you have been to either or both of the first two talks I've given, so I'll keep my opening remarks to a minimum today.

I've been exploring the question, What does Christian spirituality in a time of climate change look like? And I've responded: it's *apocalyptic, evangelical, and prophetic*.

Apocalyptic: because we live *already*—and *irrevocably*—on the far side of a warming planet. That was my first talk. "Mercilessly blunt," I called it. Because we need to face *both* the scientific data and *also* our moral-spiritual responsibility for this crisis. We need to own the anguish that is ours—and find ways from personal devotion to Sunday worship and the public arena that allow us to plumb the depth of almost unfathomable lament.

Evangelical: because we are loved by a God who—according to the tales we hold sacred—will be with us no matter what, a God who has shown vulnerability as the path to wholeness, and a God who intended us for intimacy with all creation. That was my second talk. In it I suggested that such hope, grounded in a profound remembering of who God is—and who we are—will be essential to hold us steady as we lament and as we move toward resistance.

And Prophetic: because as we find ourselves more and more aware of the swirling anguish of ecosystems all around us—while being held fast by hope—*from that place* we will be empowered in spirit for resistance and renewal. We will begin to alter our lives, speak truth to power, and reshape our culture in ways that finally affirm that we *are* AT HOME ON EARTH. That's today.

* * *

In popular culture "prophetic" often has to do with predicting the future, but in the Bible the prophetic task is primarily about *truth-telling*: It's about *naming the present* with dramatic clarity that creates opportunities for us to make choices that carry us toward a life-giving future—and sometimes it's about *enacting that clarity of vision in deeds*.

When the prophets call for repentance, *that's* what they're doing. When they go toe-to-toe with the powers in their day—whether kings, the wealthy, false prophets, or the Temple priests—*that's* what they're doing. During the Exile, when they declare a message of near-impossible hope—*that's* what they're doing. And when Jesus cleanses the Temple, symbolically dismantling the religious economy of his day, which claimed to sell access to God and played people against one another—*that's* what he's doing. In each instance they're engaged in truth-telling to call people away from choices leading toward death and instead to walk in the direction of life.

So, in one sense, this *entire* spirituality is prophetic; each dimension of it represents a powerful manifestation of *truth-telling*.

The apocalyptic declaration that our world, as we have known it, is ending … *has* ended—*that's* prophetic truth-telling. The related call to grief and lament in response to creation's plight, that's *also* prophetic truth-telling. And the evangelical declarations of God's steadfast love and daring vulnerability, and of our deep identity as *humus* beings, commissioned to tend the Garden to which we are indelibly and intimately bound, these are *also* occasions of truth-telling in which the prophetic task is to *summon hope*. Here, truth-telling echoes the spirit of Ezekiel, who saw dry bones take on sinew and flesh and come to life, and Isaiah, who declared that out of no apparent future God would do a new thing (43:13).

But there is a particular dimension of this spirituality that is prophetic … in a more active way. You might say this is point where words grow legs and walk. I'm tempted to say we'll need this prophetic dimension most of all, because it "gets things done," but that's just my own impatience to *do* speaking up. And that's important to acknowledge. *Emphatically*. Because, like me, *you'll also be tempted* to move quickly past lament and focus here. But the truth is that, separated from lament or hope, even the prophetic responses I describe here would end up being little more than busy noise.

Broadly speaking, I call this response "resistance," because it's largely oppositional in nature. It's where we challenge, both personally and politically, the forces that drive climate change. I place *repentance* here (rather than simply as an offshoot of lament) because, in a culture with interlocking forces that are hell-bent on destroying the ecosystem, acts of *repentance* are *indeed* acts of *resistance*. And as we attempt to repent of choices we no longer want to make, we'll discover just how hard our contemporary world can make repentance.

I think of Paul's declaration in Ephesians (6:12) that in our struggle to be faithful, we contend not merely with flesh and blood—not merely with the frailties and temptations of our own humanity, nor merely with the malice of others—but against "powers and principalities."

His words were originally read as a reflection an unscientific worldview that saw human activity beset by demonic influences, but in the twentieth century a number of respected scholars (Jaques Ellul, William Stringfellow, John Howard Yoder, and Walter Wink, among others) suggested Paul was making a much more sophisticated, insightful observation. They saw him calling attention to the human capacity to set up empires, societies, cultures, and the like, which establish *whole systems* with an inertia greater than any individual person—an inertia that *seemingly takes on a life of its own*. Not that it becomes conscious *per se*, but that it takes on an *institutionalized energy* that can *will* forward a set of assumptions that have powerful and dehumanizing consequences.

This dynamic appears in multiple arenas in our lives today. Consider white privilege and structural racism; gender discrimination; cycles of poverty driven by systemic forces; chemically-dependent agribusiness; global supply chains linked to sweatshops. Today we name it systemic injustice, structural sin, or even structural evil, because it's so embedded in the way our world works that it's impossible to point to any single person who's morally to blame. The system itself promotes sin and makes it nearly impossible to makes choices outside the system's bounds.

In particular, for us, the "powers and principalities" are the constellation of market forces that drive the insatiable and idolatrous pursuit of stuff that has crept into the entirety of our lives. This is where we most directly and consistently give our blessing to consumption on a scale that consumes the health of the planet. We must find ways to repent—to resist these forces, actively and decisively.

While material desire certainly has a long history in the human psyche, only in the last century has industry harnessed it for profit. You see, it's only been in the last 100 years that advertisers have stopped trying to sell us things based on their material qualities. Modern advertising appeared in the early 1900's with an agenda to strategically pair products with desired social values in order to sell them. So we buy cars or beer or jeans or perfume in order to acquire the images of happiness, sexiness, friendship, success that advertisers pair with it. Of course, you can't actually buy any of those values. But advertising has so colonized our social world, that it now intentionally shapes how we process our desires. It creates in us a seamless sense of reason-and-feeling that tells us *stuff brings meaning*.

And it's done that for a century now. Not all that long, really, but long enough that *it's all we've known it our entire lives*. Which means that while advertisers have been telling us we need to consume more and more in order to find meaning, *that lesson was often mediated to us through the habits of our parent*s. This is insidious. Because it means *we learned the habits that are so hurtful to the planet from people we loved and trusted, from people convinced they were making good consumer choices*. And this will make it all the harder to unlearn them. My parents never taught me to destroy the planet, and they were far from excessive or wasteful in their consumption. Nonetheless, they modeled an innocent disregard for the way that stuff exacts a toll on Earth, and they did so because of the powers and principalities at work in the marketplace.

Now we absolutely must break our addiction to consumption, because it's killing Earth. But we won't be able to resist the powers and principalities that drive this addiction on our own. We'll need, church by church, to establish support groups—I don't know what else you'd call them—where we can examine the patterns in our lives that are manipulated by forces that could care less about a livable planet. There *are* resources that can help us do this, but we need to be very clear: this type of awkward, uncomfortable engagement with one another around the role of stuff in our lives is *simply non-negotiable*. Either we do it—or by our *lack* of doing we tell our children and our grandchildren that the stuff we love simply means more to us than their future. *We cannot have both*.

As we approach the 500th anniversary of the Reformation it's worth noting that one crucial act of prophetic resistance is to proclaim a "real-as-Reformation" word of *radical grace*—a word that just might be our last best hope for survival as a species. I say that because of *this* challenge, this systemic temptation to chase after meaning through material consumption. Over against this nonstop lure to shop, hearing from the church, from our pastors and the rest of our faith companions, the gracious word of God's claim on each of us as *beloved child—exactly as we are, without need of any "stuff" at all*—that word alone, *should it become dramatically and existentially real in our lives*, is perhaps the only power sufficient to break the spell of stuff over our lives. This is likely among the most important things you'll hear across all three talks: *the Lutheran-Christian declaration of radical grace may be the only power sufficient to unbind us from our addiction to stuff*.

Alongside this, we need to prophetically resist the other lifestyle choices that drive exorbitant fossil fuel use. These range from diet to transportation to residential and office building to city planning and more. They're less about the stuff we accumulate than about the conveniences and preferences that we've been taught have no cost greater than our own wallet. They *do*. They *have*—for generations. And these choices, too, are foreclosing the future for our grandchildren, not to mention for others species and habitats. So we need to come together—this is communal, confessional, repentant work—to ask hard questions about the ecological cost of the meat we eat, the fertilizer we spread, the cars we drive, the roads we build, and more. And to ask these questions, framed by lament, steadied by hope, and steeled by a resolve to be faithful in our resistance to the powers that abide in cultural and corporate systems, *powers that pull us into choices directly counter to God's love for this world*.

We need to change MUCH more than just our personal consumer choices, but we cannot change less than them. And as difficult as these changes will be, the *real* work—that is OUR work, our CHRISTIAN work because it means joining God in loving this world—this *real* work is to resist and then alter *the very systems* that hold so much power and wreak so much havoc on the health of creation. Compared to personal change, making systemic change can seem impossible.

But the clarity of vision that lets us see how entangled … how complicit … our ordinary lives have become in patterns that imperil the survivability of so many, *that vision falls short of truth if it does not also bequeath the power to act*.

And *that* power to act—to face down and challenge the systemic forces, the powers and principalities, that threaten us and all life today—comes from two sources.

First and foremost, it comes from the *Love of God*. We meet this foremost in the gospel message, but even Luther—amid

his *sola Scriptura* commitment—admitted that God's *other* book of revelation was nature. And nature—in its sheer abundance, its breathtaking beauty, its fierce determination to grow and recover and heal—*nature, too, reveals the Love of God*. Which is to say that, while we in the church will use God-language to announce the Love that sparks the power rising up within us, *that same power*—because it is born of the Spirit, who blows wherever She chooses—is available in other religious traditions and even to those with no religious tradition at all. Far from rendering our faith redundant, this means that our Christian faith becomes one soaring harmony amid a chorus of voices that swell on Earth's behalf.

The second source of power necessary to our efforts to undo, bit by bit, the merciless mosaic of structures and systems that compel destructive choices, is *the power of collective action*. So many movies invite us to cheer on a hero or superhero, lulling us into the false belief that only such a phenomenally heroic person—someone who is, of course, far more heroic than we dare imagine ourselves—could actually face the villainous forces at work against us. That cultural myth, working in complement to our rampant individualism, *keeps us cut off from our own power*, which, in order to stand any chance against structural evil, cannot hinge on individual will, no matter how heroic.

Rather, our real power lies in arms joined, lives linked, hearts sewn together, imaginations devoted to another way of being. And, see, *we already know this power*, though we rarely have truly exercised it. Our theology, from Moses and the prophets to Jesus and Paul, is *profoundly communal*. God liberated *an entire people* from Egypt and then fashioned them into a community commissioned to do justice. Jesus' parables, healings, and table fellowship didn't save people simply for themselves—*but for each other, for community*. And Paul's theology of baptism and Eucharist makes clear: these sacraments do not promise personal encounters with God, they are *eschatological events in which a whole church is born*.

We were made by God, redeemed by God, and claimed by God *for collective action on behalf of the world*. That is *the biblical story*, from the first humus beings in the Garden and the promise made to Abraham and Sarah back in the Book of Genesis, to the persons scrambling for faith in the face of chaos in the Book of Revelation. From first to last—the biblical story is a tale of *people called to be*, for the sake of God's world. Now, *that story is ours*.

Practically speaking, this means very concretely that the prophetic task of the church today is to *become a living laboratory of transformative love in the midst of climate change*. Gandhi saw himself engaging in "experiments with truth." *We must do no less*.

This is the nitty-gritty. Where we roll up our sleeves and get dirty, covered with the humus we care for and come from. Again, this is not merely MY work to do, it's OUR work to do *together*. I offer a few first thoughts.

If prophetic resistance aims to be a force of transformative love, what will that look like? I note four things.

First, as persons called to love our neighbors, we must recognize that in the global economy *neighbor-love necessarily includes all persons anywhere whose land, water, air, or labor we are connected to*. If the global economy, through the reach of corporate powers that we may detest, is capable of harming others, *then we are duty-bound and faith-driven to love them instead*. And not simply as a passive tragic attitude, but through pragmatic opposition to the forces that threaten their wellbeing.

Second, as *humus* beings commissioned to tend *all* that shares this humus-covered planet with us, *neighbor-love includes active care for our non-human neighbors*. It means resisting the forces that reduce both creature and habitat to mere objects for our use.

Third, *transformative love is not content with charity*. It pursues *mutuality*, it seeks after relationships in which all can flourish—in which all can reflect the glory of God in their own way and to the highest degree. *Transformative love aims for justice*.

Fourth (and audaciously so) *transformative love aims for history*. It is *not* a utopian dream. It may not be perfectly realized in this life, but the witness of the prophets and the call of Jesus are *unmistakable*: love in the form of justice IS seen by God as an historical possibility. *So it is our aim*.

If these four features help show the nature, the scope, the aim of the transformative love we're called to seek, how do we *guide and measure* our efforts? I can offer a couple objective measures to help frame our communal and public actions toward justice for a livable planet.

First, we need simply and directly to make ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE the measure of our lives. We are *far* from it today, but this is minimally a *directional measure*: can we say of each new choice that we are at least moving *toward* it? It means, in our households and congregations—and ultimately in our culture, our corporations, and our public policy—that we renounce a bottom line demarcated only by dollar signs. That we say out loud—and I'm only using WalMart as one glaring example, but it's time for us to say *clearly* that slogans like, "Always low prices. Always." *cannot be described as anything other than Christian heresy*. It is a shopping sentiment that damns our neighbors to poverty and death—and the planet along with them. *And in our baptismal vows we renounced all such empty promises as this*. It's time to say that.

We'll want to become conversant, at least casually in our households and quite meticulously in public policy, with notions like the "triple bottom line" that requires an accounting of social and environmental costs alongside the cost of materials and labor. Commitments to shop "Fair Trade" and to support for local and small-to-medium businesses will become hallmarks of a Christian lifestyle, *because such economic practices reflect neighbor-love on a fragile planet*.

We'll need to admit that the way of life we "take for granted," in truth was mostly *taken by force and taken by thievery* from others. Our ecological debt—the extent to which we've used resources *needed for life by others*—people and creatures … past, present, and future … is by now a yawning chasm of injustice. It's also

a rising threat since the consequences of climate change will hit first and hardest on those places and peoples who have contributed to it the least and whose capacity to respond is much less than ours. This admission begins as personal and communal confession, but it takes life in transformative love when it pursues policies that work to lessen global inequity and treaties that share freely the green technology we're developing with the very nations whose wealth we have too often plundered and whose people are now most exposed to peril.

One last hint. Because our final goal is to reclaim human community as an arena where life-sustaining choices are possible, we'll need—in the practice of transformative love—to create *conditions for true corporate and government accountability*. We cannot hope to address climate change over the long-term if we do not undo the claims of corporate personhood and the unlimited role of money in politics. We don't like to view things like these as "religious" issues, *but they are, in fact, structures that shackle our faith, systems that require us to betray our neighbors and to despoil creation with nearly every commercial transaction we make*.

As we imagine ways that we might personally, communally, publically, politically embody a prophetic response to climate change, these three concrete measures can help us assess ideas. Will this proposal increase the ecological justice of our choices—and policies? Will that one increase the economic justice of our choices—and policies? And how do we increase the level of corporate and political accountability to a livable future for all of us?

These aims can be rooted directly, deeply, and creatively in our Christian tradition, but here is the genius in them—*they are also aims that are echoed directly, deeply, and creatively in other human traditions, religious and otherwise*. They allow us to draw inspiration from the sacred sources that are life-giving to us AND to form common cause with our neighbors in the wider world.

The prophetic task of resistance, the daring attempt to bring transformative love to bear on the systems around us, is, without question, daunting. *But it is absolutely doable.*

So, a few closing words.

It seems like we have so much to do. And as though it is so late in the day, and we've missed years and decades and generations of opportunities to start sooner. That's all true. But the moment that we *have* is *right now*.

Climate change *is* upon us, and if we intend to be faithful to God, to one another, and to Earth and all her creatures, *we'll seize this moment without delay*. We'll fashion a spirituality that is *apocalyptic* and enables us to truly lament. We'll fashion a spirituality that is *evangelical* and anchors us in hope. We'll fashion a spirituality that is *prophetic* and empowers us to repent and to resist. We'll commit to these things as individuals and as communities, and we'll carry them over into the public sphere as well. And as we embrace each dimension of this spirituality we'll find ourselves drawn more deeply into the other dimensions as well.

Start as soon as you can. Go together. Pace yourself for the long haul. Listen for places where the liturgical seasons connect to concern for our climate. You'll find plenty. Move through the three dimensions again and again so that each can deepen the others. Trust that every step forward—even the small ones—has value.

And don't hold back on happiness. In this undeniably hard work, relishing community and wonder, savoring laughter and joy, will also become prophetic acts of resistance and renewal.

We have *always been* AT HOME ON EARTH. In the face of climate change, it's time to embrace both the scientific and the spiritual *truth* of this affirmation with more fervor than ever before. *The whole world is waiting.* Not for us to lead the way. Simply for us to take our place in the chorus.

I can already hear the music. I hope you can, too.

Thank you.

David R. Weiss | drw59mn@gmail.com | 651-492-1776