

EARTH SUNDAY: Hard Truths, Holy Truths

1 John 3:16-18

Delivered April 26, 2015

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This eight-minute reflection was given as part of an Earth Day Sunday service at Church of the Covenant in Boston (PCUSA/UCC), "Shepherding Divestment," celebrating their full divestment from fossil fuels. Three reflections took the place of a conventional sermon, all by speakers who bring together faith with climate work.

1 John 3:16-18

¹⁶"We know love by this, that Christ laid down his life for us – and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. ¹⁷How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? ¹⁸Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action."

Two weeks ago today, I and a handful of others completed the Pipeline Pilgrimage, a twelve day, one hundred fifty mile walk along the proposed Kinder Morgan pipeline route. Because of the abundant hospitality from our hosts and the storybook hills, the exuberant community we wove together, the grief of affected landowners and our collective fears, because of these I am spiritually awake again. I walk out of this Easter Pilgrimage filled with a hope molten and gold, and the words I share with you today come from this newfound aliveness.

There are so many words I could share. But these words are about hard truths.

There are many hard truths to tell with climate change.

For churches, one of these is to name climate change as the moral issue of our era. With all their exhaustive work in different ministries, from food pantries to youth groups to racial justice organizing, I do not savor adding another injustice. I do not take pleasure in explaining that climate change is slated to become the humanitarian crisis that carves the existential topography of this millennium.

I do not like bearing the bad news that our political climate is stagnant while our global climate grows ever more humid, that the tides of justice are drowned out by those rising ever higher along the coasts of Manila and New York City.

I do not enjoy the task of opening eyes to see how many hundreds of millions of lives ride on that line between 2 degrees C warming by 2100 – where scientists have determined we need to be – and 5 degrees C – the path we are barreling towards, while the fossil fuel industry has an iron grip on the wheel and the doors locked.

And yet the truth as embodied by Jesus, who laid down his life in love, requires that the hard truths of climate crisis must be told.

For there is Good News, and it is in crisis that we find the Good News. Because the burdens of these truths are bearable when we are open to the warmth of the Holy Spirit.

If we set our eyes on hard truths, and quiet our hearts to that still small voice, empty ourselves of both unreasonable deafening despair and unjustified blind optimism, then God will knock, holding our salvation wobbling like a welcome-to-the-neighborhood Jello. If we make space for guidance, then the Spirit will take us on a Pilgrimage into the Kingdom that is as life-affirming as crocuses blazing in Spring sunshine, as life-transforming as when we first felt our faith overpower us, as meaningful a florescence of aliveness as Jesus awakening from the tomb to step out into the garden and breathe in the fresh air of a Jerusalem sunrise.

This is an easy church to speak to, because as a congregation, you live into the Good News through divestment. Not just going through the motions of morality, you are you are joining a movement – a movement of hearts and minds for the social transformation that today’s children need if they are to inherit fields and not deserts.

So what next? I make one simple suggestion. Amidst climate crisis, you hold the Good News in your fingers. It sits in the back of your throats. Now go proclaim the Good News from the spire of this church! You have claimed your moral voice as the church – now you need only to amplify it!

The scripture Christine read speaks of “abiding in God’s love,” of “truth and action,” of “laying down our lives for one another,” just as students lay down through cold nights over Harvard Heat Week, as so many lay down their futures to resist unjust pipelines and coal ships.

Because it isn’t just for expected results that we live into “truth and action.” It isn’t for political consequences that we “lay down our lives.” As people of faith we live into hard truths and take action because God’s love abides within us, because the Spirit so revs us up that nothing else makes sense. When we love so thoroughly that we are willing to lay down our lives, we spill out the Spirit on others – who need our faithfulness, who need to see the life and love and light that is the Word, laid down in “truth and action.”

So I invite you – right now, take the hand of your neighbor beside you. Look them in the eye. Imagine what it would be like to lay down your life for that person. Imagine what it would be like if they were to lay down their life for you. Would you do it? Would you do it for your children? Your grandchildren? For theirs? Would

you do it for those across the world whose homes already wash away, whose fields are already baked dry? I ask you to consider: what matters? What will you lay down? What is the truth and action that overflows from abiding always in God's love?

I invite you to be brave and ask yourselves ask these questions. I invite you to be brave, and let the Holy Spirit take you by the hand!

Amen.