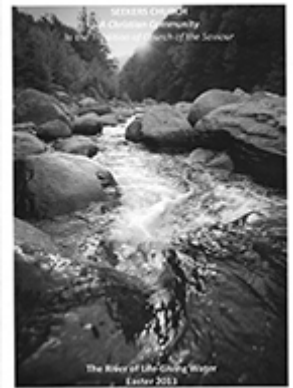


“Let’s Dive Into the River of Life-Giving Water Together” by Josef Lorentz

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The Second Sunday of Easter

Josef Lorentz is a participant in [Discipleship Year](#), a year-long residential experience that actively engages volunteers with issues of social justice and servant leadership. Seekers Church supports Discipleship Year, which is a program of the Festival Center, another of the offshoots of the Church of the Saviour.

This year – 2013 – I’m officially an adult. Sure, I said the same thing six years ago when I was *legally* recognized as an adult... but let’s face it; between then and now I was nothing more than what you might call a “kidult”. I was on my parent’s health insurance. I was a student. Just last year I was carded for an R rated movie.

But this year *surely* it is true. College is a distant memory. I’m attending friends’ weddings. I’m giving my first sermon! And, most incredibly, I’ve become an uncle and a godfather.

Well, I have a confession to make. Last week, this brand new adult threw a bit of a temper tantrum..

Here's the scene: I was home for my niece's Christening on Easter Sunday. I had just purchased my first suit – and my first bowtie – and so I am feeling pretty mature as I get into the car with my family. We are about to pull out of the driveway, my parents in the front seats, my sister and me in the back. And then: my sister pulls out an Aquafina. Environmentalist me does *not* like that.

Parents, siblings, you know how it goes from there. I grab for the bottle before she can open the seal, there's a bit of tug-of-war, I'm yelling at her to go fill a reusable bottle in the house, my mom is yelling at me to leave my sister alone, I chuck the bottle into the trunk. I storm into the house to get her some tap water.

Okay, so I promise this isn't how I usually react when people pull out their disposable plastic water bottles. I *do* know how to be respectful and professional. But this was my own family! I slipped back into "kidult" (or maybe even just kid) and let my emotions take control. How many times have I explained the impact of a water bottle to them? How can I ask for change from others if I can't even expect my own family to change into more sustainable citizens of this planet?

But when I get back into the car, they don't want to hear my rationale. "You can't get so upset when other people don't agree with you," they say. "You can't get so emotional."

So was I just being melodramatic? Are emotions *really* so inappropriate in the climate conversation?

In my work with Interfaith Power & Light, we help congregations learn about and respond to climate change.

In the United States, we have a huge spectrum of belief and disbelief when it comes to climate change. There are those who outright refuse to accept the scientific proof that our world is warming up. There are those who recognize

that our climate is changing, but believe it is a natural cycle, that humans are not the cause. And there is even a spectrum of those who accept that we as humans are causing our planet to heat up. There are those who see this as a far-off problem for our grandkids. There are those who think humans are adaptable, that this is really just a problem for the polar bears. And there are those who recognize the effects of climate change on people right now, in places near and far.

At every point on the spectrum, there are a lot of really strong emotions that a person might have. And so we ask people, wherever they are at on that spectrum, to take a moment to consider their emotions.

We often blame politics for the amount of climate change denial in this nation. Could emotions be another big factor?

Today in our scripture readings we heard the infamous words of Thomas, who has just been told that Jesus is no longer dead:

“Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

Thomas does not completely dismiss the strange news his friends bring him, but he does establish clear and absolute conditions: he needs to verify their claims for himself – their words are not enough. Once he sees his old friend, once he touches the marks from the crucifixion, then *maybe* he will accept the Resurrection.

Last Easter my pastor at All Souls Church made a case for Thomas’ resistance to accepting Jesus’ Resurrection. Thomas was not just sticking to some Enlightenment principles of critical thinking, and it was not a matter of lack of trust of his friends. Thomas had been a dear companion to Jesus, and Jesus as well to Thomas, and so love and grief prevented him from believing: after days of trying to accept his loss and begin the mourning process, he could not set himself up to feel so much hurt again. Thomas was avoiding the emotional hardships that would come with believing.

In my work in the environmental world, I have seen much of the same behavior. I often ask myself: *why* are people so stubborn? *Why* can't they accept climate change, when so many scientists say it is here, it is happening! And those who do accept it, *why* aren't they trying harder to make a change?

Still, science comes with emotional baggage. Think of Thomas. He soon got that scientific, tangible proof he needed, but then how did he feel? It was surely not a moment of 'okay, you guys were right, now let's get on with our day.' No. I am sure he felt *joy* and *relief* that his loved one had returned, and what else? Probably some *guilt* that he had not believed sooner. Probably *fear* in the face of this inexplicable and powerful occurrence of someone returning from the dead. Probably hope. Probably some discomfort about how his life would now change.

And what emotions do we have to feel, if we come to fully accept climate change? I want to look beyond the two feelings I often hear people list first: fear for the future of our planet, and a sense of helplessness as an individual to change our current trajectory.

I want to examine our feelings of guilt, of shame, of anger. Because: 'Wait, if climate change is real, then look at all *I* have done to contribute to the problem!' And at the same time: 'Hey! I did not choose this lifestyle! I was born into this place in time, and I did not know until here and now what that meant for the planet!' Maybe we will want to blame our parents, or our teachers, or our politicians. (Okay fine, we will DEFINITELY want to blame our politicians...)

We are all going to feel some sort of emotion when we think about climate change, but what emotions do we *want* to start feeling? And why are my emotions different from my family's? They certainly believe in climate change, but why are they at a different point on the spectrum?

Like the women who found the empty tomb, like the friends who spoke the Good News to Thomas, I have a story to tell that might be too emotionally taxing

for us to want to believe. And it is about people, not polar bears. I have visited communities in coal country, where mountaintops are being blown to smithereens in order to reach the coal down below. The debris from the explosions pollutes the air, and the unwanted rock and dirt is pushed into the valleys, burying streams and poisoning drinking water... and so beyond transforming life-filled green mountains into a landscape that looks like the moon, the communities at the bottom of the mountain are being inflicted with unthinkable amounts of cancer, respiratory problems, and birth defects. That coal goes on to be burned into electricity, most often burned in coal plants that have been built in communities of color, causing extreme rates of asthma and mercury exposure in children who have already been born into poverty. Whether or not we accept climate change, our Christian values teach us that this whole process is just plain *wrong*.

But I did not experience any fervent emotions for victims of dirty energy until I, like Thomas, finally got to see and *touch* the wounds in coal country for myself. Before that, I believed in climate change, sure, but it was simply academic. On my college campus, being an environmentalist was cool. I felt hip – I felt superior to the climate deniers. I didn't know then that what I *should* be feeling was *heartache* for those who were already suffering. I should have felt *passion* to take on the corporations who got us here.

And then I took a shortcut on the climate awareness spectrum when I visited coal country. So what can I ask of others, who won't have the opportunity to see and *touch* for themselves? Gordon Cosby often addressed this very issue:

"A deep inner sickness has taken over when we can't feel the suffering of those who are enduring structural violence every hour. We are in the psychological and spiritual condition of Dives who couldn't see Lazarus on his doorstep, with his wounds and sores being licked by the dogs. He went through his whole life, never seeing this person at his doorstep.

"How do we awaken? First, by claiming our sickness. 'God, I'm sick. I can't feel the pain of another human being created in the image of the same ultimate reality that brought me into being.' Something is very wrong with a mother who can't hear the crying of her baby in the night.

And something is very wrong with me when I can't hear the crying of the babies and their parents in Iraq and in the Sudan, and when I can't hear the cries of the babies in my city when 49% of them are living in poverty . . . Claiming my sickness is the first part of awakening."

I'm happy that I stood witness to the streams being buried by coal companies in the Appalachian Mountains, that I've gotten to know the people who have to drink that poisoned water. But this is just the first step. I need to claim my sickness, in hopes that one day I will hear the cries of those *invisible* to me. And get emotional and passionate for them. To change something in my life for their sake. In so many parts of my life, I need to awaken from my sickness. As Jesus said to Thomas in today's reading, "*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*"

And still, if I awaken, if I feel their pain, if I believe, what will I be able to do for these victims of coal mining, for victims of oil wars, victims of rising oceans, of hurricanes, of drought?

On our own, we cannot do much to take on climate change. Our place in life or our budgets will most likely not allow us to escape the use of dirty energy. We might want to retreat from the hard emotions and let the invisible go back to being invisible. So how do we stay faithful to the mission we know is right, though it often seems futile? What does faith even look like in our mission to care for creation?

I think that the type of faith that the community of Church of the Savior already practices is a transferable skill that can apply to staying faithful in the climate movement. A quarter century ago, Gordon described faith as:

"...trusting the flow and reveling in the view and being carried beyond all existing boundaries. Faith is being excited about the final destination, even when the destination is mystery. When Jesus says, 'Believe in God, believe also in me,' he is saying, Get into the stream with us. It is a stream of pure grace and mercy. Go into its depths and find us there.' "

We have to have faith that we are not alone in caring for creation. We have to dive in, to trust the flow. And we can even revel in the view. When we faithfully join together, we can dive into the flow of that stream of grace and mercy. In the stream we can embrace our fear, and our guilt, and all those hard emotions. We can feel those emotions together, and who knows, we might just make new rivers with all our tears, but I think it's okay for us to start to feel good emotions in that stream of grace and mercy. Because even though we don't know where we're headed, we have faith that we will get there as a movement. And we can practice this faith and travel this journey, just as we have practiced other forms of faith and traveled other journeys, in the community of our congregations.

Let's dive into the River of Life-Giving Water together. The view from the River is bittersweet with suffering and with hope, and just to warn you, we even risk getting buried in the toxic waste of coal companies, one of us might just go and throw a temper tantrum, we know it will be emotional. But let's dive in – after all, the water is heating up...