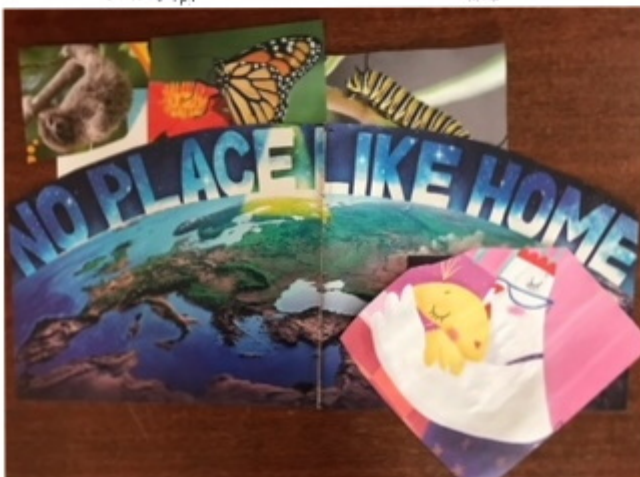
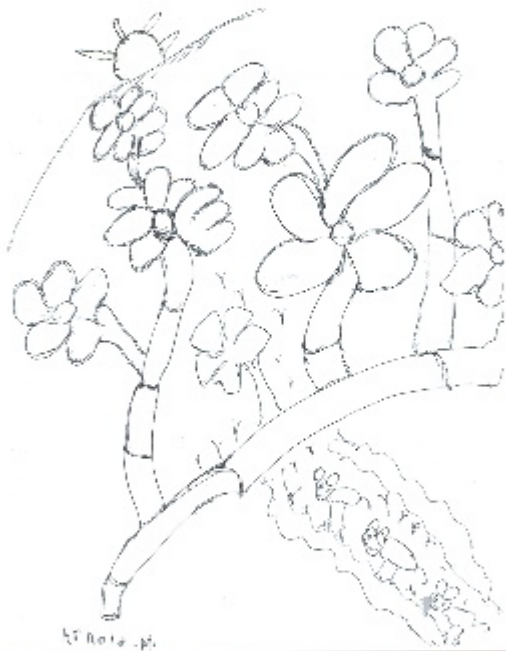


**“Seeking Good News of Christ  
for the Climate ” by Kolya  
Braun-Greiner**



## November 21, 2021

When I was asked to preach for “climate in the pulpit Sunday” a national event sponsored by Interfaith Power & Light, I faithfully took a look at the lectionary scriptures for this

Sunday to see whether there was any relevance a faithful response to climate change and I concluded there was not a strong thread I could hang onto. So I'm going "off the rails" this Sunday and am encouraged that this is not outside of Seekers tradition. Instead I will focus on Seeking Good News in a Time of Great Unraveling and tie it in with the two themes before us – this liturgical season on The Home of God is Among Us along with today's conclusion of that season, the Reign of Christ Sunday. I confess that last week's gospel had more to do with today's climate focus with its references to disastrous upheaval: "There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains." (Mark 13:8) Indeed it seems as though we are amidst the labor pains of something struggling to be born and we may find ourselves asking how long Lord, how long with this labor last?

I'm convinced that a lot of people are feeling a deep despair and angst about our future, which is understandable. During the Active Hope class I taught 2 months ago, some of us shared these feelings vulnerably in community. And so I invited the class to write Lamentations – and here's the one that Sharon Lloyd wrote which I feel is so expressive of our doubts, fears and deep caring:

***Where are you Holy One??***

*The world is baking.*

*Our fields are withering or drowning.*

*Fires devour us.*

*The insects cannot find habitat to survive.*

*The firefly does not light our summer nights anymore.*

*The butterfly dies before it is born.*

*The animals cry out seeking food and shelter.*

*Lion and polar bear are distressed and emaciated.*

*Native Americans strive to retain their tribal ways.*

*So too our brothers and sisters retreat from rising oceans.*

*Our youth are afraid of the future.*

*Your people lack hope.*

***Where are you Holy One??***

*You have given us knowledge and power yet we lack wisdom and will*

*We continue to ignore the destruction we see.*

***Where are you Holy One??***

*Help us reclaim your love of this earth.*

*Help us do the hard work of changing our ways.*

***Where are you Holy One??***

Amen sister Sharon!

In speaking or writing of our lament for the world, we broke a kind of taboo about naming despair and as a result some of us came away feeling less alone and more connected in community with our common root of despair, which is that we care deeply about life not just surviving but thriving, both the human and the more than human world, and that our grief is grounded in our compassion for those suffering the worst of climate impacts along with indicating how much we love this exquisitely intricate Creation of God's with which we are interdependent. And this deep love can fuel our actions to heal and restore the air, land and waters of our dear Mother Earth, as St. Francis and so many indigenous people call this, our common home.

Our common home – Christ in everything, everywhere means that Christ's home or dwelling place is here on earth in this material as well as the spiritual world. They are inseparable. Indeed the Home of God is among us here on earth. The Greek word *Oikos*, or household, is also the root of ecology, economics and the *oikomene*, or the ecumenical world community of the body of Christ where Christ dwells. When I worked on national staff of United Methodist Women we held an Assembly

every 4 years with a huge exhibit area. A colleague of mine and I dreamed up an exhibit of a small house painted on the outside like the earth and inside had all kinds of green living products and environmental justice actions that people could take. Our House of God exhibit posed the question that still burns brightly: How well are we caring for God's home, our common home the earth?

As I prepared for this sermon, I pondered my own doubts and recalled Step 2 of AA and Al-Anon. *I came to believe that a Higher Power greater than ourselves can restore us to sanity.* This feels like facing the insanity of our time of diminishing biodiversity and climate emergency. How can we participate in restoring sanity, living within limits in our relationship with earth? Being "restored to sanity" as Step 2 invites us to do / be? The Active Hope class I taught last month was such a step toward spiritual sanity because we voiced our doubts and despair with honesty and trust that we could be held by the Spirit within community.

It's easy to become overwhelmed and emotionally flooded by the bleak, bad news. It's important to see the world as it is with our eyes wide open and not stick our heads in the sand, protecting ourselves from the pain. At the same time it takes a courageous leap of faith to seek Good News! – To seek examples of the reign of Christ being manifested in healing and just actions for people and all biodiversity of the planet. Unfortunately these actions don't get on the airwaves nearly as much as the stories of disaster. The stories of actions resulting in positive change are not on our view screens unless we actively seek them. I invite you into a spiritual practice, a discipline, of seeking sources of good news. Lord knows, we need them!

How do we keep hope alive in troubling times? One way is to practice seeking good news stories that depict and inspire tangible contributions to what Joanna Macy calls "The Great Turning" toward a life sustaining society – good news or the

“gospel” for our time? Where do we find good news for a hopeful trajectory? Where would Jesus point to show us the reign of Christ manifesting among us even in the midst of a climate crisis? This is not ignoring the stories of devastating damage wrought by climate change, especially upon the poor and vulnerable with few resources to adapt. One thing I deeply appreciate about Seekers community is that we don’t shy away from these sufferings of God’s world. Isn’t this the kind of vulnerability that the suffering and resurrected Christ expressed that throws our kingly stereotypes out the window? So too, the Universal Christ expresses the divine which is not confined to principalities and powers but is found “in everything, everywhere” as Richard Rohr says, which is good news.

I am advocating for a both / and approach: Lament for the losses balanced with good news of restorative actions. I want to encourage practicing balance, in fact even tipping the scales of our exposure more significantly in the direction of good news stories which show evidence of the reign of Christ amidst climate change.

But here’s the rub: God willing, our participation in manifesting the reign of Christ can add up to evidence eventually, but it often doesn’t appear that way.

I share a thread from my own life which illustrates an epiphany I experienced about this. My journey to becoming a Christian was fueled by an experience I had in college: a social justice United Methodist campus minister at the Wesley foundation invited students to join his newly formed group to go protest a proposed nuclear power plant proposed by Dow Chemical in Midland, MI, 30 minutes drive from our campus. If constructed, the plant would be dumping radioactive waste and was located on swampland next to the headwaters of the Saginaw River. We stood out in the sun, rain and snow with our “No Nukes” placards for many months.

Then I moved to CA where I continued my engagement in protesting nuclear power during the 80's of my "roaring 20's" when I was getting arrested or acting as a support person for others in my affinity group protesting nuclear power as part of the Abalone Alliance in California. A similar group on the east coast was the Clamshell Alliance. We dedicated a lot of energy to our vision and hope that the nuclear power industry would die on the vine. But we didn't see any evidence of it happening. Only in retrospect several years later I learned of a book called *Doing Democracy: The MAP (Movement Action Plan) Model for Organizing Social Movements*, by Bill Moyer (not to be confused with the journalist Bill Moyers). The author studied the history and trajectory of social movements and discovered a pattern. Frequently activism surges for a cause and then wanes when it appears that nothing significant has happened. Very shortly after this, there's a shift toward change, but the change may not be apparent to us, rendered invisible by the news media or other means, largely because much of the media is invested in maintaining business as usual. If we became sure that our actions were effective **that** would threaten the status quo or business as usual which is not invested in having us believe that our actions can make a difference. Here in this book I discovered that shortly after all these protests across the county died down, No new Nuclear Power Plants were licensed or built! Our actions that bring the issue to collective consciousness do have a ripple effect but they may be rendered invisible, hidden like yeast in the flour, treasure in a field, And here's the good news, they often yield results which are hidden, but in plain sight.

Where else do we find these stories?

Grist:

In the lead-up to the United Nations climate summit known as COP26, New York state officials made a landmark decision to deny permits for two proposed natural gas power plants after determining they would be inconsistent with the state's

greenhouse gas emissions. New York state's Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act passed in 2019 requires New York to have 100 percent emissions-free electricity by 2040, and to cut emissions across the economy 85 percent by 2050.

Other sources of good news can be found in:

Yes Magazine – full of stories about how communities are becoming life-sustaining, regenerative and just

The Good News Network

Emergence (online magazine) shares stories that aim to shift our ways of thinking and being in relationship to the living world.

Future Crunch

Here are just a few recent stories gathered by Future Crunch from a variety of reputable news sources about responses to our dependence on fossil fuels:

Denmark and Costa Rica are creating an alliance of nations committed to ending both the consumption and production of gas and oil. It's modeled on the Powering Past Coal Alliance, which was formed in 2017 and now boasts 41 members.

The Australian government may be in complete denial about climate change, but investors aren't. Total assets under management by ethical investment funds in Australia leapt by 30% last year, and now account for 40 cents of every professionally managed dollar. Meanwhile, half of the top 100 listed companies have committed to net zero targets, up from a fifth a year ago.

Circling back to COP26 the climate conference, I give thanks to Theresa teeing this up with her wonderful prayer last week about climate change.

In advance of COP26 the UN Conference on Climate Change, GreenFaith International organized more than 500 actions in 43



countries. Together they spoke with one voice: climate justice now! People of many faiths are uniting around the world acting on our hope for the future – as you'll see in the Offertory video I suggested.

Some of you may be expecting to hear me offer a litany of facts about the recent Climate Conference, COP26 which occurred in Glasgow, which concluded last week.

I will offer a some good news outcomes, but I won't gloss over the fact that developing countries need to go much further both in climate financing and in greenhouse gas reductions. We still have no firm collective commitments coming out of the conference which would guarantee that to keep the rise of global temperature at 1.5 degrees. Many scientists from the IPCC (Int'l Panel on Climate Change) have predicted that if nothing changes we could be heading for 2.4 degree increase, which would be devastating for life on this planet. We must reach a goal of zero carbon emissions by 2050, but there were over 500 fossil fuel lobbyists at COP26, merchants for maintaining business as usual.

So here's some of the good news...

- A big push for equity – Climate Finance for Adaptation & Technology
- Because there is recognized need for binding agreements they will meet again in one year to firm up goals and implement accelerated reductions of fossil fuels and Greenhouse Gas emissions

World leaders promised to end deforestation by 2030. The declaration affirms **the empowerment of local communities, including indigenous peoples**, which have been negatively affected by the exploitation and degradation of forests.

Some very big individual country pledges, most noticeably India's. Their commitment to a 2070 net zero target is absolutely massive, and would have been unthinkable a few

years ago. Credible projections [from the IEA](#) (International Energy Agency) now suggest that if all the new pledges are fully funded and met, global warming could be limited to to 1.8° this century. All the climate pledges announced to date, if met in full and on time, would be enough to hold the rise in global temperatures to 1.8 °C by 2100. Implementation is key.

None of it is perfect, but these are improvements!

And what about here at home?

I'm thrilled to report that in Montgomery County, MD last week it was announced the nation's largest community solar farm is coming which will be 100 percent dedicated to low-and moderate-income (LMI) residents .

And also locally I want to lift up the work that you are supporting through your generosity to Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake where I work. We are building a movement of people of faith in this region. Over the past 2 years I have co-facilitated 7 of our Faithful Green Leader Trainings in which Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Muslims, Baha'is, and Hindus have participated from congregations throughout the Maryland as well as Lancaster, PA.

This year alone we trained 54 new green teams— double the number trained in 2019-2020, now 94 teams! We know from experience that congregations with trained green teams are better equipped, connected, and resourced to implement lasting environmental improvements on their properties and in their communities. Through collaboration with our partners, IPC has been successful in developing additional resources for partner congregations, including environmental justice tools and resources for land and water restoration projects.

They are learning about how to restore local habitats and watersheds, why planting native trees and plants makes enriches the wildlife, conserve energy, install solar panels,

remove permeable parking lots so rainwater can soak into God's good earth instead of contributing to polluting runoff.

National and international policies are essential yes, but engaging people in collective action at the local level builds community, hope and resilience. Becoming knowledgeable about, rooted and grounded in our own local ecology informs us how to live in harmony with it.

I'm delighted that Seekers Church is now among the 81 congregations which have signed [IPC's Partner Congregation Pledge](#) to through our words and actions to:

- Celebrate, respect, and revere the Earth's blessings
- Demonstrate good stewardship in how we manage our land and facilities
- Engage members of our community in the work of caring for the environment.

Each of the good news stories of the 81 congregations have their own webpage d on IPC's website and soon Seekers will have one there too and I will share that link with everyone when its posted.

And as the Pledge concludes: May our efforts give inspiration to others, calling them toward a path of respect and reverence for all God's creation.

So too may we cultivate spiritual resilience through the practice of seeking good news stories Christ for the climate alongside our compassionate attention to the wounds of the world exacerbated by climate change. May God guide us to also attend to and participate in those good news stories which demonstrate the kindom of God among us, the Reign of Christ manifested. May we sing a new song in this strange land of climate emergency as something new is being birthed for a life-sustaining society.