

Today humanity faces a new planetary occasion. Climate scientists, in their peer reviewed reports, are virtually unanimous in warning we are changing the earth's atmosphere in a way likely to lead to catastrophic climate change – with widespread suffering and the mass extinction of many forms of life.

Scientists tell us that our planet is about 4.5 billion years old and has been through radical climate change before resulting in several mass extinctions of life. They tell us that carbon dioxide (CO₂) is one of the greenhouse gases acting as a thermostat for the earth's climate. During the last 10,000 years its level has hovered around 275 parts per million (ppm), encouraging a relatively stable climate in which life flourished as never before.

But then during the last couple centuries we humans have changed that by burning fossil fuels with growing CO₂ emissions. Now its level is at 390 ppm and steadily rising. That's a significant 41% increase! NASA climate scientist, James Hansen and other researchers are warning - that is already too much!! He has said that **anything over 350 parts per million is not compatible with the planet on which "human civilization developed and to which life on Earth is adapted."** (see his "Storms of my Grandchildren: The Truth About the Coming Climate Catastrophe and Our Last Chance to Save Humanity")

As a result, today scientific measurements show that average global air and water temperatures are rising, as are sea levels. Sea ice is thinning. Permafrost is melting. Glaciers are in worldwide retreat. Oceans are becoming acidified. Habitats are shifting. Precipitation patterns are moving. Floods, droughts, fires, tornados, hurricanes and other weather related events are becoming more extreme. Low level island nations are becoming swamped. Native villages in the Arctic are being washed away making refugees of inhabitants. Such human suffering from climate change has already begun, not to mention the suffering of polar bears and many other species. But future generations will be the main recipients of this suffering resulting from our carelessness.

As followers of Jesus we are called to care. Jesus said we are to care about those who suffer from unmet needs. In our second reading (According to Matt. 25:31f) he said that in as much as we have done it or failed to do it to the least of these, we have done it or failed to do it to our Creator! We are to actively care about suffering - I suggest, even the suffering we may be causing future generations, by degrading our planet's ability to sustain life.

I have noticed that several environmental writers use a very compelling analogy along these lines. James Garvey writes this: **"You would have some explaining to do if you saw a child drowning in a river and just walked past without doing anything to help. You would have a lot more explaining to do if you were a healthy lifeguard with a free afternoon...."** Then he points to the inaction on climate change by the developed wealthier nations who have the ability to do something about it, and adds this comment, **"If walking past a drowning child is wrong, particularly when one is well placed to help, then the West is doing something wrong by carrying on with business as usual or by taking only limited action on climate change....it amounts to letting people suffer and die when one has the capacity to help. It is a kind of moral outrage."** (see Moral Ground: Ethical Action for a Planet in Peril" by Kathleen Dean Moore)

Well, as caring persons caught in this fossil fuel addicted civilization what are we to do?

I will suggest that this new occasion is teaching new duties, but for each of us our new duties may be somewhat different depending on our differing situations. I share now how I see my new duties. I see them as threefold: a new kind of careful listening, a new kind of careful living, and a new kind of careful witnessing.

THE FIRST NEW DUTY IS CAREFUL LISTENING. - listening to the truths about the earth, being uncovered by those who carefully study it.

When I became aware of the climate crisis about 12 years ago, I decided I wanted to know more about it. So I began reading books and articles about climate change – things written by leading scientists, journalists, theologians, politicians, economists, and poets. I've found that the internet is also another vehicle for these learnings.

I continue to seek this daily input of information. I see it as part of my devotional life to help me better understand what it means to care about God's good creation. For me it is way of praying, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth..."

I believe the new occasion of climate change is teaching the new duty of careful listening – including listening to those who study the earth and its needs.

THE SECOND NEW DUTY IS CAREFUL LIVING - learning to walk lightly on the earth in ways that reduce our carbon foot print and encourage its healing.

Through no fault of our own we were born into a civilization addicted to fossil fuels. By participating in it we use significant amounts of energy derived from burning fossil fuels.. For many decades no one realized this would actually change the earth's atmosphere and move us toward climate catastrophe. This realization is just now beginning to dawn on people around the world.

In response, Betty and I have cut back about 3/4th of our electrical consumption for lighting, by changing to energy efficient bulbs. I suspect most of you have too. We've also put in solar tubes in the darker portions of our house so as to make more use of natural light. We've installed more energy efficient windows and insulation. Also we try to drive less and slower in a more fuel efficient car. We are increasingly try to use local foods as much as possible. We often use light rail to go downtown Portland, when we are not in a hurry.

There's a new law in China which forbids anyone to set their heating-cooling thermostats higher than 68 degrees in the winter, or lower than 78 degrees in the summer. Betty and I try to do that, which means wearing long johns in the winter and as little as possible in summer heat. I suspect most of you are also finding ways to walk more gently on the earth. This new occasion of climate change is teaching the new duty of careful living.

But having people like us using slightly less dirty energy is not going to solve the climate crisis. Only deliberate shifting our global civilization as a matter of policy to clean energy can do that. The good news is that the clean technology is available. What is lacking now is the political will, which brings me to my third point.

THE THIRD NEW DUTY IS CAREFUL WITNESSING – I'm talking about deliberately letting our caring for the earth send out ripples of influence to others, to political leaders, and to helping shape the future.

You see, everything we do sends out ripples of influence. If we buy a tomato at the farmer's market we encourage a local farmer to grow more tomatoes. If we choose to pay extra for green energy from our power company we signal our support of ending reliance on dirty energy. If we vote for leaders who care deeply about climate change, we thereby give a push toward salvaging a livable planet.

Everyone is in a different situation and will have different opportunities for directing their ripples of influence. I enjoy participating in a committee in my church with this focus. Also Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon provides similar opportunities. In both settings I have found opportunities for organizing and/or attending citizen forums, signing petitions at strategic moments, and lobbying political leaders.

I also enjoy using the internet to extend my influence on these matters. Hardly a day goes by without my firing off some emails usually to political leaders about environmental concerns. There are many organizations on the internet that help one do this.

I suspect that each of us can find appropriate ways in our own networks of relationships to send out ripples of caring to others and thus to help in shaping the future – what I am calling careful witnessing.

To summarize, I believe this looming climate crisis is a new occasion teaching important new duties. For me they include careful listening, careful living, and careful witnessing - and **then** trusting that God will use my caring to help with salvaging a livable planet.

You see,

**“New occasions teach new duties;
Time makes ancient good uncouth;
They must upward still, and onward,
who would keep abreast of Truth.”**

James Russell Lowell

So be it, Amen!

(Action resources are available on the internet: www.emoregon.org/environmental_ministries ; www.populationmedia.org ; www.nccecojustice.org ; www.interfaithpowerandlight.org ; and www.earth-policy.org theheatisonline.org)

My following suggestions were included in their order of worship bulletin:

SERMON TITLE: "New Occasions Teach New Duties"

SCRIPTURE SELECTIONS: Excerpts from Psalm 8; Matthew 25:31-46

HYMNS: "Praise to the Lord, The Almighty King of Creation" UMC Hymnal # 139
"Fairest Lord Jesus" UMC Hymnal # 189
"Once to Every Man (sic) and Nation" not in new UMC Hymnal

CALL TO WORSHIP:

LEADER: The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it,
PEOPLE: THE WORLD, AND THOSE WHO LIVE IN IT;
LEADER: We praise the earth!
PEOPLE: WE PRAISE ITS CREATOR GOD!

UNISON PRAYER:

HOLY GOD, WE ACKNOWLEDGE THAT EVERY PART OF YOUR EARTH IS SACRED. EVERY SHINING PINE NEEDLE, EVERY SANDY SHORE, EVERY MIST IN THE DARK WOODS, EVERY CLEARING AND HUMMING INSECT. WE ARE THE EARTH'S CHILDREN WHILE THE EARTH IS OUR MOTHER. WHATEVER BEFALLS THE EARTH, BEFALLS THE CHILDREN OF THE EARTH. THE RIVERS ARE OUR BROTHERS, THEY QUENCH OUR THIRST. THE PERFUMED FLOWERS ARE OUR SISTERS, THEY SWEETEN OUR LIVES. THE AIR IS PRECIOUS, FOR WE ALL SHARE THE SAME BREATH. THE WIND THAT GAVE US BREATH ALSO RECEIVES OUR LAST SIGH. THIS WE KNOW, THE EARTH DOES NOT BELONG TO US. WE BELONG TO THE EARTH. THIS WE KNOW, ALL THINGS ARE CONNECTED. LIKE THE BLOOD WHICH UNITES ONE FAMILY, ALL THINGS ARE CONNECTED. WE DID NOT WEAVE THE WEB OF LIFE. WE ARE MERELY A STRAND IN IT. WHATEVER WE DO TO THE WEB WE DO TO OURSELVES. WE GIVE THANKS FOR THIS CIRCLE OF CREATION THAT SUPPORTS AND CONNECTS US ALL. WE GIVE PRAISE TO THE HOLY CREATOR. AMEN. (Inspired by Oration of Chief Seattle)