

## The Fierce Urgency of Now

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### Luke 9:28-43

<sup>28</sup>Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to [pray](#). <sup>29</sup>And while he was [praying](#), the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. <sup>30</sup>Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. <sup>31</sup>They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. <sup>32</sup>Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. <sup>33</sup>Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah” —not knowing what he said. <sup>34</sup>While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered [the cloud](#). <sup>35</sup>Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” <sup>36</sup>When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

<sup>37</sup>On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. <sup>38</sup>Just then a man from the crowd shouted, “Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. <sup>39</sup>Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. <sup>40</sup>I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.” <sup>41</sup>Jesus answered, “You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here.” <sup>42</sup>While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father.

<sup>43</sup>And all were astounded at the greatness of God.

If I were to give a title to this sermon it would be “The Fierce Urgency of Now!” after the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in his 1965 sermon in Selma, Alabama.

Let me begin by telling you that I believe that climate change is one of the most vexing and serious human rights and justice issues facing the world today. It is time that we stop making “either/or” excuses that in order to have a strong economy we have to accept the devastation of God’s creation. As a Christian I believe that God is speaking to us right now, saying pay attention, wake up and see what is happening to your neighbor, to the most vulnerable of populations who have done nothing to cause their plight. Through extreme weather events which are being experienced all over the globe, we are clearly seeing the devastation of hunger and disease of people that can no longer grow their own food nor have access to clean water, because their land is dry and barren. As well, today entire countries are losing their

homelands to rising tides that cannot be held back. As human beings we were chosen to tend the Garden and we have failed to do this.

Here in the United States we represent less than 5% of the world's population and yet we consume more than 20% of the world's resources. As privileged people we have become blind, deaf and dumb and we are experiencing a "poverty of spirit" unparalleled in human history through our own unknowing. We are experiencing the rapid extinction of species at a rate never before recorded in human history. Our hubris has forever changed the balance of nature. These are the consequences of our choices to waste, abuse and spoil God's gift of all of creation.

In our gospel reading today Peter, James and John had been chosen. They were given a sacred gift. These three disciples were chosen to follow him up the mountain, where they witnessed the Transfiguration of Jesus, the kingdom of God! Can you imagine what it must have been like to follow Jesus and experience the power and light of this transformation? They didn't know what was going to happen up on that mountain. I'm guessing they figured it was just Jesus doing what he so often did, going to pray in the wilderness, to connect with His source of power and light, and this time it would be on the mountain top.

So what happened? While the three of them were fighting sleep, fortunately they "stayed awake", for if they had not been awake and present for this moment, they would have missed it all. Peter was so moved he wanted to make camp and stay longer, offering to build shelter for the three that were standing before them. Peter didn't want this "mountain top" experience to end. Then it happened and the three became engulfed in "the cloud", and they heard the voice from the cloud that said "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"

The disciples were so caught up in the mountain top experience that they couldn't understand what was happening around them. The cloud had to engulf them, take away all the distractions and excitement, ground them in place so that nothing else could break in other than God's voice telling them, this is it, this is all that matters, right here, right now, stay awake, pay attention!

How often do we find ourselves caught up in seeking the mountain top experiences? Or maybe we're constantly caught up in the distractions of our busy lives, wanting our lives to be "the way they used to be", more "fun", more "freedom", more "control" over the situation? Sometimes we find ourselves so caught up in dwelling on the past and how things used to be, or living for the future of what we wish could happen that we lose touch with the gift of what is real, the gift of life we have been given right now. We are so distracted by the past or focused on the future that we don't hear God's voice trying to break in and speak to us here and now.

I know this is true for me. Since my retirement I have been on a journey to discover and follow a new purpose in this second half of my life. I want to make a difference and I want so much to be a part of changing how we as Americans and in particular as Christians relate to this breathtaking planet Earth which we call home, and to all of God's creation. I find myself lost in the fog of information, exasperated by the political posturing and inertia. For this country, as powerful as we seem to be, has been unable and unwilling to step up and take leadership in responding to the devastation we are seeing all around the globe. I believe it is time for the community of faith to wake up, to take a stand and to speak up for our

most vulnerable populations. It is time that we make good on our call to love our neighbor and value future generations.

In December I went to see the movie, “Chasing Ice”. The documentary began with the usual anti-global warming/climate change deniers’ news clips which continue to undermine meaningful dialogue on these issues. It then featured scientist/photographer James Balog, working for National Geographic, and who became fascinated with the movement of glaciers and what they can teach us about our changing planet. In 2007 he set up the Extreme Ice Survey (EIS) to monitor glaciers in Greenland, Iceland, Montana, the Alps, Canada and Bolivia. The results – photographed using state-of-the-art time-lapse cameras – are sensational in their beauty and the terror of the irrefutable evidence they provide of the rapid pace with which age-old ice packs are melting away. It's like watching our world disappear.

Toward the end of the film his team camped out in one location for a number of days hoping to capture on time-lapse film the largest glacier calving ever documented on camera. They stayed put for days and then it happened, a section the size of Manhattan, and the entire calving event took less than 90 minutes. It was stunning in every sense of the word.

More recently I saw the film “Hungry Tides” which portrayed the plight of the people of the Republic of Kiribati, a chain of low lying islands in the central Pacific where over 105,000 native people call home. Just eight years ago, Bob and I spent a day on the Island of Kiribas while enjoying a Pacific cruise. It was unbelievably beautiful, an island paradise, and the native people were fascinating in their simplicity, expressing their gratitude with dance and song. In watching this film I was quickly confronted with the reality of what is happening to an entire country of indigenous people, as their home is being consumed by rising tides from melting glaciers. Scientists now predict this entire Nation will be one of the first displaced from their native land through absolutely no fault of their own. How will they adapt? Who will come to their aid? Where will they call home? What will happen to their culture?

I was struck by something I have been struggling with for the past several years. As a participant in the Green Faith Fellowship program over this past 18 months, I have engaged in a process of uncovering the personal, spiritual origins of my passion for eco-theological work. Part of what I have noticed within me during this time, is a deep underlying anxiety about the reality of the changes I am noticing in my own backyard garden, as well as those which I read about all over the state, our country and our world. Then there are the extreme weather events like Superstorm Sandy, and did you know that 86 out of Ohio’s 88 counties experienced extreme drought conditions during the summer of 2012? The evidence of permanent climate degradation goes on and on. I admit that at times, I can become almost paralyzed by the overwhelming sense of hopelessness.

Recently I was reading some of the teachings of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., where he was talking about the “fierce urgency of now”. In my mind his words make clear our need to wake up and pay attention, as he said, *“We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history there is such a thing as being too late. ...*

*We may cry out desperately for time to pause in her passage, but time is deaf to every plea and rushes on. Over the bleached bones and jumbled residues of numerous civilizations are written the pathetic words 'too late.'* - Martin Luther King, Jr. - Selma, AL 1965

If we continue to dwell on what is past or try to live in the future, it will be too late for us. How often do we get lost in the fog or shake our heads and say, climate change, it's too big for me to deal with, I don't know where to begin, I want to make a difference I just don't know how. Mercifully, I have come to realize that we are not without the power to make a difference by making better choices as consumers. We can reuse our own shopping bags or opt for reusing products, or choose products with less packaging. We can choose locally grown foods in season rather than factory grown trucked in from long distances, or turn down bottled water when we can just as easily bring our own. We in this country still have these options and choices, so many of our fellow human beings around the globe are suffering now, and don't have these choices, and they are praying that we wake up and pay attention!

I am so grateful for the stewardship of so many of you here at First English. Your faithfulness and openness to thinking about ways to reduce our Carbon Footprint gives me hope for future generations, and we can do more. We can find ways to reduce our dependence on using so much Styrofoam; we can teach each other and celebrate our successes in reducing our carbon impact in our homes and businesses. Make no mistake, our lives in relation to the changing climate will be different, eventually we'll all have to learn to adapt, and change.

This weekend, Ohio Interfaith Power and Light, an organization that I am involved in and have spoken to you about in the past, is celebrating a National Preach-In on Global Warming. It began on Friday and continues on through worshipping communities all over the country today. People of all denominations, all faith communities be they Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus or Bahias are taking part in taking a stand to be engaged in the solutions so badly needed to protect future generations. I am inviting you to join me in taking new actions individually and as a worshipping community to do our part, to do what we can, as faithful stewards of God's creation.

These words of Dr. King bear repeating, "tomorrow is today, and today we are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. There is nothing more tragic in all this world than to know right and not do it. Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."

Genesis 2:15 reminds us that God placed us in the Garden of Eden, choosing human beings over all that had been created, to till and keep the garden. As Christians and people of all faiths and denominations around the globe, we must do our part, by every decision we make as consumers each day, to make choices which are life giving to our world. You can begin by signing a post card asking our President to step up, or by planting a tree on Kilimanjaro. You can take a Carbon Fast during Lent and I have a calendar that I can email to you to help guide that journey.

Like the disciples in our gospel today, we are called to stay awake and listen to God's voice, to love our neighbor, to value our children and future generations above all else. God's voice is calling out to us to fulfill our call to be stewards of all the gifts of His creation that we have been given in this world.

We are reminded by scripture in Romans 8:19 "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God". All of creation is counting on us. As we celebrate this coming Valentine's Day, may we all remember that we are called to care for and tend the Garden, to stay awake and alert and to listen to God's voice, and most of all by our actions, to love our neighbor. Amen