

Good morning! I imagine some of you are bracing for some really bad news about the nasty fix we find ourselves in here at the tail end of the fossil fuel era. Intergenerational Injustice? That doesn't sound good. :) But for the first time in history, one generation's material comfort threatens the well-being and even existence of future generations. Leave it to Steven Colbert to come up with some black humor even on this topic. He said in a recent riff: "We don't want to **spoil the grandchildren** by leaving them with a habitable planet."

We are already seeing the grim impact of climate change predicted by scientists... the polar bears in the arctic, the drought conditions now affecting 60% of arable farm land in the US, the rise of the oceans expected to move massive numbers of people from coastal cities, the dramatic increase of weather related damages from intense storms, tornadoes, etc. Scientists are reporting that if we stay anywhere close to current CO2 emissions the seas will rise 1 foot by 2050 and then 4-6 feet by 2100. Loss of biodiversity could result in 50% loss of all species on earth. The poorest people who contribute the least CO2 emissions are the ones who suffer the most from the effects of climate change.

This is a problem that can no longer be ignored or shrugged off as inevitable. As Colbert points out, an attitude that "we just have to get used to it" means resigning ourselves to each day getting worse ("crappy diem") with "city-swallowing storms, mass extinctions, deadly heat waves..." In a TEDx talk to the students at Evergreen State College, David Roberts concluded: "If we don't do the impossible, we will be faced with the unthinkable. Your job is to make the impossible possible every day."

We propose to frame the issue of "intergenerational injustice" as a problem that we can all address. Together we can co-create policies and make lifestyle changes that will leave a genuinely habitable planet for our children and grandchildren. We all thought it

was TINA - an acronym for There Is No Alternative! We thought that the evolution of globalization was inevitable, and more or less impossible to challenge because multinational corporations influence most national governments related to the economy. As Senator Elizabeth Warren put it, "the system is rigged." She meant that it was rigged to benefit the 1% and we of the 99% are pretty much locked out of a system that has created an unprecedented number of billionaires and millionaires. Fortunately, there are many alternatives and they are already emerging to challenge the status quo. The problem is that the alternatives are not emerging fast enough to keep pace with the increasing effects of climate change. So this sermon is devoted to strategies that will help us all quicken the pace of change - wake us up to what we need to do or change to get to the joyful, sustainable communities that we envision.

Many of us once believed we could simply raise awareness and provide information that will move us forward. We have learned that it just doesn't work that way. Polls show that CEOs from the world's largest polluting corporations are well aware of the problem. Unfortunately, they are hired to increase their bottom line, every quarter! The fossil fuel industry lobbyists, like the Tobacco lobbyists before them, have had great success with deliberate campaigns to misinform the public by appealing to our fears and by assuring us that all is well. We in Ohio know all too well the impact of money on politics and the "Pay to Play" strategy of politicians and lobbyists. Even when the vast majority of Americans favor ending subsidies for big oil and agribusiness, better gun control laws, breaking up banking and media monopolies, etc. business as usual prevails.

However, after Superstorm Sandy, more Americans now realize that the problem is real, and we're finally beginning to wake up. But the majority of us are still sitting on the sidelines, waiting for others to act. Few people, including President Obama, have proposed a bold agenda to address the reality of climate change, a problem so complex and pervasive that it is affecting the future of human civilization.

Put it this way: we ARE aware of the problem, we KNOW that bold action is required, so then why are so many of us still sitting on the sidelines? Why aren't we working together at this critical time to unleash the creative innovative entrepreneurial and pragmatic genius that is in the very DNA of the USA?

So here we go...

First, as you heard in the reading, there is the **bystander effect**, well documented by psychologists and sociologists. The bystander effect was first observed in 1964 when 38 people in Queens, New York, witnessed the murder of one of their neighbors, a young woman named Kitty Genovese. Not one of 38 witnesses in the nearby apartment building who heard her cries called for help until it was too late. Recently, many people have suggested that **we are experiencing a kind of society-wide bystander effect when faced with climate change**. The research tells us that the main effect at play here is Diffusion of Responsibility – that is, the tendency for people in large groups to NOT act – either because they believe someone else will, or because they think their inaction won't reflect poorly on them because they're just one person in a crowd.

As you heard in the reading, just being AWARE of the Bystander Effect helps to **inoculate** you from the human tendency to NOT act when it appears that other people are or should be dealing with climate change. Now you are aware of the bystander effect PLUS you know that the people who should be working on the solutions are NOT acting as they should. Business as usual continues.

So Yes, we're waking up but not fast enough, so we have to ask what other factors are inhibiting the need to take action on climate change?

How about the **consumer bubble** we are all experiencing? Let's be honest. It's those

evil fossil fuels that have made this amazing consumer paradise of convenience and abundance seem perfectly natural, even inevitable - remember TINA - There Is No Alternative, right? Advertisers and the media have convinced us that we need their products to be happy and to feel good about ourselves. **So we spend money we don't have on things we don't need to impress people we don't know.** We have been duped into believing that we can fill the “**hole in our soul**” with material things. But instead of making us happy, we have created a stressful lifestyle that leaves little room for the things that give our lives meaning. The research shows that every year since 1956 - the year we Americans expressed the most satisfaction with our lifestyle - **our satisfaction level has gone DOWN every year!** Not only does our excessive consumption fail to make us happy, we are destroying the planet we no longer have time to enjoy. When we "buy into" convenience, disposable items, and the lure of stuff that turns us all into at least “borderline” shopaholics, we must begin to see the dark side of our lifestyle... the **sheer quantity of waste** in our homes and in our landfills, the number of short, fossil fuelish trips in our vehicles to get almost anywhere beyond 2-3 blocks, and the ever increasing stress levels that drive us to overeat, take mood altering drugs, and struggle with stress-related illnesses.

Perhaps most telling as we reflect on our consumption focused lifestyle is the loss of a sense of belonging to a community. There is a kind of narcissism associated with making constant decisions about all the STUFF designed to make us happy. **Books have been written about the consumer culture being "me-focused" rather than "we focused."** We feel isolated and alienated because we have forgotten our common humanity, which in turn can lead to prejudice and even violence. The excessive emphasis on the individual not only entices us away from community but it also strains our intimate relationships and makes us more vulnerable to family conflict and divorce.

As we delve more deeply into the impacts of consumerism we begin to see that the challenge we face is **essentially spiritual**: Why are we here? and how do we find or create meaning in our life? Our own faith tradition, like all the great religions, values simplicity, authentic relationships, strong bonds with family and community, and caring for the earth. As each of us pops our own consumer bubble, collectively we begin to see and experience a very different way of living. Those of us in Simply Living have been "living local" for 20 years now, trying on new ways of living in community, paying attention to our ecological footprint, eating local organic food, and reconnecting with the natural world. These practices reflect our UU commitment to the interconnected web of life and our covenant to take care of the Earth, each other and future generations.

Yes, future generations - and here we confront what Thomas Berry calls the Great Work, the work we must all do to "make the impossible possible, every day." Because if we don't do the impossible, we will leave an unthinkable future for our children and grandchildren. It is "intergenerational injustice" that forces us to confront the central moral and ethical crisis of our time. We cannot afford to continue to wait for the government or big business to fix the problem. **As we leave the bystander effect of the crowd and begin to act in ways that challenge the consumer culture, we become empowered**. We discover energy that has been dormant while living on the sidelines. We find community and meaning. There is strength in numbers, and the trend lines are leading us to a tipping point that will begin to shift the culture. As Arundhati Roy put it so memorably: *"Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing."*

The challenge of Intergenerational injustice is **unprecedented**. We may not succeed. We may not be able to make the impossible possible. But here in our own church community, we are waking up to the challenge. We can act... and your energetic Social Action Committee is prepared to offer you a variety of ways to contribute to the **Great**

Work. Future generations are counting on us. We still have a choice – we can be their greatest threat or their salvation. As Colbert quips, we can “**give up and just crawl into bed with a cheesecake and wait for death**” or we can make the impossible possible.” Remember – everything you do matters. We each have the ability to change the world!

Here are some ways you can participate -

1) National Level - Next Sunday, some of us will be taking a bus with the Sierra Club and 350.org to demand that President Obama reject the permit to construct the Tar Sands Keystone XL Pipeline. Can't go? You might be able to subsidize a student by contributing \$45 for their bus fare. Can't do either? Join 350.org, stay up to date, and inform your friends and family about climate change. Pam and Sheila and I are going on the bus.

2) State Level - become informed about the rush to extract natural gas from shale rock using hydraulic fracturing technology. This is a major initiative that **postpones our best hope for a future economy based on renewable energy sources.** Our loose change collection today will be donated to the Buckeye Forest Council, the leading statewide organization that provides unbiased information about fracking. They support local communities attempting to exercise their right to negotiate leasing terms with the oil and gas industry.

3) Local Level - the Social Action Committee provides information about opportunities to engage with local organizations and environmental groups. Examples include Simply Living, Sustainable Delaware, Stratford Ecological Center, Friends of the Sawmill Wetlands, Sierra Club Central Ohio, Friends of Alum Creek Tributaries, et al.

4) Congregational Level – A Book discussion, potluck dinner, and viewing of the film **"No Impact Man"** will take place here at the church on Sunday evening, March 10. This activity offers information about taking personal responsibility for one's ecological footprint, as well as background on the larger environmental issues affected by our lifestyle choices. In the spirit of reduce, reuse, recycle, Pam will have some used copies of the book after the service for \$6. Look for sign up for the potluck in Fellowship Hall. Invite others that might be interested. The SAC will also be offering a 4 week course called **Global Warming: Changing C02urse**. This is a self-organizing group experience based on readings intended to **encourage discussion about climate change and what we can do about it**. Right now you can sign the postcard to Obama in your Order of Service and put it in the collection plate. Look for more information on the bulletin board and our NUUC Facebook page.

5) Individual Level - The SAC will be posting pictures of individuals in our congregation who are involved in various causes and issues related to the environment and social justice. We hope this will help us to recognize and then connect with those who share common interests. Networking is a process that can lead to a wide variety of projects and initiatives. You can take an hour sometime soon and watch the video on our Facebook page or use the link listed in the Order of Service. And we can ALL pause and take time to enjoy nature. We can ALL redouble our efforts to Reduce, reuse, recycle - and reduce our carbon footprint. Look for a 1-2-3 Pledge on Feb 24 to reduce your carbon footprint.

Thank you all for coming today and we hope you will feel free to join us after the service in Fellowship Hall with your own questions and comments about climate change and intergenerational injustice.