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July 14, 2019

Caring for God's Creation: *A Little Child Shall Lead Them*  
Psalms 104 and 107

With two long braids and a shy countenance, 16 year-old Greta Thurnberg is an unlikely leader for a worldwide movement.

But over the past year, she has become an inspiration for climate activists, students, and young people everywhere.

It all began on August 20 of last year, when she skipped school for a one-person protest in front of the Swedish parliament. She handed out fliers explaining that she was refusing to attend school as long as adults did not care about her future, evidenced by their refusal to take action to confront climate change. What began as a personal protest has continued each Friday since. It's also spread, sparking an international student walkout of more than 1600 schools in 105 countries in March. She scolded world leaders at the UN Climate Conference in Poland, saying: "You are not mature enough to tell it like it is. Even that burden you leave to us children."<sup>1</sup> She's even been nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize.

By now, the science is irrefutable: the climate catastrophe we are facing is the single greatest threat to human existence – more so, even, than the threat of nuclear war. And we are running out of time to change course. According to the latest UN climate report, we have but ten, maybe twelve years to radically shift our economy and energy systems away from fossil fuels to renewable sources. If we can't keep the carbon in the ground, or get it out of the atmosphere, global temperatures will continue to rise and threaten the mass extinction of the human race by 2050. In 2050, Maddie will be 36. Gillian will be 33.

This news is hard to hear.

It's hard to hear, and it's hard to know what to do to stop it. So much of our lives: the goods we buy, the food we eat, the way we travel – is dependent

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<sup>1</sup> Ramzy, Austin, "Students Across the World are Protesting on Friday. Why?" The New York Times, 3/14/19. [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)

on the fossil fuel industry, and comes wrapped in the carbon-based derivative, *plastic*. The nature of systemic sin is that it comes not from individual brokenness but from the entrenched systems that order human society: small, everyday choices most of us make that seem innocent, but perpetuate a system that is harming creation and, if left unchecked, will ultimately destroy us.

Mother Jones just published an article describing the depression, paralyzing despair, and deep grief of climate scientists.<sup>2</sup> They confront the coming catastrophe in their work daily. They see it in devastated coral reefs, depleted aquifers, disappearing penguin populations, and collapsing bee colonies... not to mention warming oceans and shrinking sea ice. The data and the impending disaster are clear: More CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere intensifies the water cycle, leading to more intense storms and more severe droughts. Warmer air and oceans cause glaciers to melt, and sea levels to rise, threatening coastlines and island nations. Not to mention the impact on fragile ecosystems, plant, animal, and human life. The scientists know what's happening. But they can't do enough to stop it. So they are depressed.

I get it. I certainly have felt anxiety and despair when I force myself to read and confront the truth of our changing climate and the coming repercussions. Maybe you have, too. So, what are we to do? As Christians, as people of faith?

Psalm 119 begins: The heavens are telling of the glory of God. The earth proclaims God's handiwork. The psalms are filled with hymns of praise to God for the beauty and wonder of creation. The earth is God's and all that is in it! And as we hear in Psalm 104, God provides life abundant for all of creation: streams gush forth, bringing drink to animals and birds, watering grass and plants which then become food to sustain other life – the whole earth is satisfied with the fruit of God's work!

The Psalms don't just praise God for creation, though. They speak to the whole of the human condition. Joy and praise and thanksgiving are there, with trumpets and cymbals and wine to gladden the human heart. But we also find psalms of lament, and anger, psalms that plead with God for

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<sup>2</sup> Corn, David, "It's the End of the World as They Know It: *The distinct burden of being a climate scientist*" Mother Jones, 7/8/19. [www.motherjones.com](http://www.motherjones.com)

deliverance. The psalmist sees God's hand in famine and destruction in ways that make me uncomfortable: God turns rivers into a desert, springs of water into thirsty ground, fruitful land into a salty waste.

Ugh.

But in the next breath, the psalm proclaims: God turns parched lands into springs of water; God lets the hungry live, plant, harvest, and prosper!

In the psalms, the created world is beautiful, teeming with life, and utterly dependent on God. No matter what happens. No matter present circumstances, the psalmist trusts in God's provision and providence, and always returns to praise.

I believe we can learn something from the psalmist.

At its start, I anticipated our summer series on caring for creation with a bit of dread. Six weeks focused on the environment would surely awaken in me deep despair about environmental degradation, pollution, and the climate catastrophe. And to some extent, it has.

But. Intentional focus on the beauty of the natural world has done something else, too. Coupled with the experience of praying for creation with Sam's book *Earth Gospel*, I've been surprised by a sense of deep gratitude for the created goodness of the world. This gratitude has made me more aware of nature's daily testimony to God's goodness. The psalms don't just tell us of God's care for the world which God both created and loves. They also inspire hope for God's promised renewal in the future. A faithful response to environmental degradation and pollution and the coming climate catastrophe is not despair, not depression, not grief, but hope: deep seated hope rooted in God's love for creation, God's power present in the world. This hope makes it possible for us to do something – anything – to mitigate climate change, to conserve the environment, to advocate for renewable energy, to protect our rivers and oceans, to refuse plastic, to go vegetarian, to walk, run, or ride, and yes, to reduce, reuse, and recycle! There is a long list of possible ways we can praise God through our efforts to care for creation.

The prophet Isaiah had a vision of God's peaceable kingdom. He wrote that when the shoot comes forth from the stump of Jesse, and Israel's rightful,

righteous ruler arrives, the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. And they will not hurt or destroy in all God's holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11:6, 9).

It is no surprise to me that young people are the most vocal activists for climate justice. After all, it is their world, their future that is at stake.

But when people say to Greta Thurnberg, "Oh, you children, you young people are our hope, you will save the world." She finds it annoying. She says, "I think it would be helpful if you could help us just a little bit."<sup>3</sup>

She's right. It's up to all of us to change what we can. Not out of despair, but out of our love for the God of Creation, and our trust in God's promise of renewal and new life. In the spirit of the Psalms, I invite you to join me in a time of prayer for the earth. There will be a station to give thanks, a station for lament and supplication, and a station to confess our sins and commit to a new way of being in the world.

Here, to the right of the pulpit, come to the table, eat some grapes or trail mix, and give thanks for the blessing of abundant life.

At the map, here, come pray for our world by putting a pin on a place of particular concern for you.

And here, to the left of the lectern, come consider the images of our beautiful earth. Pray for God's spirit to bring renewal, and commit to make a change in your life to better care for creation. Then, write a word to symbolize your commitment, and use a paper clip to attach it to the mobile.

You are also welcome to stay in your seat and pray.

Come, let us pray for the world which God so loves...

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<sup>3</sup> Sengupta, Somini, "Becoming Greta: 'Invisible Girl' to Climate Activist, With Bumps Along the Way," The New York Times, 2/18/19, nytimes.com.