

Seas May Get Rough: What Your Church Can Do about Climate Change



By David R. Bushnell

(Cover image credit) Special thanks to Nelson Dodson, a good friend, who is also a great photographer and artist.

week Adult Elective for Congregational Use

by David R. Bushnell

The Long Emergency

In the Preface to his book, Climate Church, Climate World, Jim Antal writes “we need to make God’s hope our own as we respond to ‘the long emergency’ known as the climate crisis.”¹

In a time when so many congregations, especially in the western world, are experiencing decline, it may be misguided to focus primarily on institutional survival. Antal believes the need is first and foremost to repurpose the church. This means that congregations need an outward focus more than an inward one. The real crisis is what has, and is happening to our world.

The effort here, in providing a congregational based discipleship elective is to offer a way into ‘the long emergency.’ The hope is to encourage local congregations to stop their inward, anxious laments around congregational decline, in exchange for a greater lament that leads to outward, hopeful actions for all creation. The hope is that this elective might begin to repurpose the church!

Bill McKibben, one of the prominent activists of the climate change movement, is often asked “What can an individual do for the climate?” McKibben is quick to reply, “Stop being an individual!”²

“Stop being an individual!” That can be easier said than done. “Stop being an individual” invites us to think of the ‘we’ instead of just ‘me.’ In the context of a social movement, like the climate change movement, one obvious suggestion is to take part in collective action. Opportunities for collective action may even take the form of civil disobedience, indeed, they already do. (As was the pattern of the civil rights movement, the women’s movement, the gay rights movement...any significant social movement.)

This elective’s starting point, however, is the church. The church is one very real place to help us enter “the long emergency” by enabling us to see ourselves as a part of something greater than a collection of individual selves. In Africa there is a word that speaks to a collective

¹Jim Antal Climate Church, Climate World (Rowman & Littlefield, 2018) p. xvii

²Ibid, p. 25

identity. The word is Ubuntu. It means ‘I am because we are.’ The Apostle Paul used other words to describe the corporate experience of the church. Paul speaks of the church as the body

of Christ.

The Seas May Get Rough elective seeks to invite your church to experience being the body of Christ in our own time, and place. This corporate identity, this ‘we,’ can open us up to others, even to all creation. It invites us to experience others as I/Thou relationships (to use the Jewish scholar Martin Buber’s language).

UCC Pastor Martie McMane wrote a song that invites us on a journey as the body of Christ. It is the theme song of elective. Here are the lyrics:

*Chorus: Come follow me and take the risk to be free and I will make you fishers of people.
Come follow me.*

*Where are you heading and where are you bound? I am your being and I am your ground.
And I’ll be revealed wherever you’re found daring to reach out for me. (Chorus)*

*Roads may get dirty and seas may get rough,³ You may get weary, the way may get tough. But
I will be there and I am enough, put all your trust in me. (Chorus)*

*I will be in you and they will know me, You are my body and blood, don’t you see? So come
take the chance, be all you can be. Come follow me. (Chorus)*

The Body of Christ (The Church’s Corporate Identity)

The body of Christ is one of many images to describe the church. Since the Seas May Get Rough elective seeks to give participants an experience of being the body of Christ, we want to look briefly at the image.

Many New Testament scholars agree that Paul’s use of the image of the body of Christ has great flexibility. Paul Minear writes that the phrase “is not a single expression with an unchanging meaning.”⁴ He cautions “against seeking to produce a single inclusive definition of the image.”⁵

Ernest Best looks at the image as a metaphor which matures in meaning throughout the Pauline

³ The title of the elective comes from this phrase in the Come Follow Me song.

⁴ Paul S. Minear, Images of the Church of the New Testament (Philadelphia; The Westminster Press, 1960) p.173

⁵ Ibid, p.174

image more seriously than most. He claims it is actually the cornerstone of Paul's theology.

“It is from the body of sin and death that we are delivered; it is through the body of Christ on the Cross that we are saved; it is into his body the Church that we are incorporated; it is by His Body in the Eucharist that this Community is sustained; it is in our body that its new life has to be manifested; it is to a resurrection of this body to the likeness of His glorious body that we are destined.”⁷

Robinson maintains that the image of the body of Christ includes all the main tenets of the Christian Faith. Although this elective is not about teaching doctrine, it is worth noting that the body of Christ image is linked to a doctrine of Man/Woman, a doctrine of Sin, of Incarnation and Atonement, a doctrine of the Church and the Sacraments, a doctrine of Sanctification, and finally, Eschatology.⁸

In studying early Christian worship, Oscar Cullman discovered that the primary aim of worship was for the building up of the community as the body of Christ, the spiritual body of the risen Lord.⁹ Cullman suggests that only those elements which build up the body belong to Christian worship. The rich diversity and varied themes in the Pauline image of the body of Christ connect in specific ways to the various elements of many mainline Protestant liturgies. This is not at all unusual. Worship is the church's way of telling the story of God's saving acts. Worship proclaims the doctrines of the Christian faith, not in academic ways, but by offering visions and images of how God has sought to offer reconciliation and redemption from the past, in the present, and for the future. One of these images is the image of the body of Christ. Not every worship service should be preoccupied with having people understand what it means to be Christ's body. Every service does however, anticipate that we experience being the body of Christ. This image is so basic to the church's identity that it could be considered the basic skeleton upon which the ongoing life of the church is supported.

A Worship Paradigm for the Elective

In order to best experience being the body of Christ today, the Seas May Get Rough Elective

⁶Ernest Best, One Body in Christ (London; S.P.C.K, 1955) p. 83 - 159 Best devotes three chapters of his book to the development of Paul's metaphor in the earlier epistles, Colossians, and Ephesians. More recent scholarship suggests that Colossians and Ephesians may have been written by an early follower of Paul.

⁷John A.T. Robinson, The Body (London: SCM Press, 1952) p.9

⁸Ibid, p.9

⁹Oscar Cullman, Early Christian Worship (London: SCM Press, 1953) p. 33

uses worship as its basic paradigm. The elective sessions follow the essential elements of worship¹⁰ from being called, to confession, then moving on to a unique experience of Jesus Christ, exploring how Jesus' spirituality can help shape our own. The elective includes a time of sharing deeply with one another remembering the waters of baptism. Then, after seeing the church as a community of abundant Christian practices, you will work to envision what your congregation's incarnational ministry will be like. Finally, you will be sent out into the world, into "the long emergency" with solid "next steps" to follow.

Ten different talks are shared in this elective (one talk for each session). Each talk is followed by a small group sharing session. The talks provide important content for being disciples of Christ in our time. The small group sharing times¹¹ following each talk helps form strong bonds of fellowship and trust.

By saying that the Seas May Get Rough Elective will enable your congregation to enter the long emergency of climate change, we are suggesting that loving and being an advocate for all creation is an essential part of desiring the Kingdom of God.

The Talks

As worship usually begins with a Call to Worship, so too, the first two sessions of the elective can be considered 'call talks.' We begin "On the Road to Emmaus" (Session 1) with a sense of wonder (even surprise) that the risen Christ can be found in our midst. "A Larger Lament" (Session 2) challenges us to give up our fear that the church is a vestige of the past and, more like a remnant, is out into the world with a song of joy "for the troubled, the broken, the hungry, the poor." (Words from another song by Rev. Martie McMane used at the end of Session 2.)

It should be noted, that each talk of the elective includes a scripture passage. Most all of the talks include one of the parables of Jesus. With the study's emphasis on being the body of Christ today, we believe having a parable as told by Jesus, would be akin to having Jesus' voice accompanying us along the way. In his book, The Power of Parable, John Dominic Crossan suggests most of Jesus' parables function as challenge parables and as such, "challenge listeners to think long and hard about social prejudices, their cultural assumptions, and, yes, even their most sacred religious traditions."¹² There is no doubt in our minds that the long emergency of climate change will require challenging changes and paradigm shifts. Certainly to repurpose the church, we will need to allow Jesus' stories to speak to our own times. Crossan writes this

¹⁰ The Book of Worship United Church of Christ (1986) p.34

¹¹ A Small Group Sharing time is part of each session of the elective. The larger group divides into smaller groups (4-5 people) for these sharing times. There is a suggested question for each sharing time (see Appendix B for the list of talks, scriptures, and questions). A roster of elective participants can be handed out at the beginning of the first session. People are encouraged to keep a record of who they have been with in each subsequent sharing time so that the small groups sharing times change from session to session.

¹² John Dominic Crossan The Power of Parables (HarperOne 2012) p. 62 It is interesting that the text for Talk 1 – The Road to Emmaus while not a parable of Jesus, is according to Crossan, a parable about Jesus. He calls it parabolic history. (see p. 3)

about the challenge parable, “here is its basic challenge. If tradition is changed, it *may* be destroyed. If tradition is not changed, it *will* be destroyed.”¹³

The next three sessions of the study encourage us to take a hard look at ourselves. Think of the next three talks as an extended time of confession. “The Two Mountains” (Session 3) suggests that the “cultural ideal of the Western industrialized world to be a self-made, self-sufficient, an autonomous individuals” threatens life as we know it.¹⁴ “Individualism and separation have led us, in the words of Robert Bellah, to the brink of disaster.”¹⁵

The next talk, “The Ins and Outs of Forgiveness” (Session 4) faces the hard truth that people have been hurt by their church involvement, hurt by pastors and church leaders. We must find a way to allow people to share their painful stories. Only then can there be a letting go of the past and living into a new future. How we offer and receive forgiveness may be the most significant way we restore wholeness in our world today.

The final confession talk is “The Long Emergency” (Session 5). We are all complicit in making a mess of creation. As Walt Kelly’s Pogo cartoon suggested on the first Earth Day in 1970, “we have met the enemy and he is us.” If ever the church needed to be repurposed, now is that time! Some would call it a “Kairos moment” i.e. a favorable moment for decisive action. Since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution an “organic, ever-renewing, land-based economy (has become) an extractive, non-renewing, industrial economy. This economic shift has allowed a tiny percentage of the human population to grow unimaginably rich at the expense of the balance of creation itself.”¹⁶ “For the sake of humanity, the world, the ecosphere, and countless generations of unborn children and creatures, our present social and economic system needs a moral intervention. And so does the church.”¹⁷

It’s good to end this confessional time of the study with a prayer. This prayer adapted creatively from The Lord’s Prayer was written by Liz Fulmer (Lancaster Theological Seminary ’20).

“Steadfast God, You are ever-holy, ever-loving, ever-with us. Overcome the powers of this world with Your reign; make Your way our way. Sustain us and use us to create provisions beyond ourselves. Forgive us so that we may no longer be hindered by guilt and shame, and give us courage to forgive those who have wronged us. May Your Spirit, not our selfishness,

¹³ Ibid p. 47

¹⁴ Albert Nolan Jesus Today: A spirituality of Radical Freedom (Orbis Books, 2006 p. 15

¹⁵ Ibid p. 19

¹⁶ Jim Antal Climate Church, Climate World (Rowman & Littlefield, 2018) p. 62

guide us. May we always be in pursuit of goodness. All that we are and all that we have is Yours, almighty God, now and forever. Amen.”¹⁸

We come to a time in the elective to meet Jesus in a new way, not in a set of beliefs about him, but as a model for our own being incarnate love in the world. “The Spirituality of Jesus” (Session 6) gives new meaning to the question, “What Would Jesus Do?”¹⁹ The Apostle Paul writes “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5). Richard Rohr helps reorient our thinking when he writes, “we need to look at Jesus until we look out at the world with his kind of eyes. The world no longer trusts Christians who ‘love Jesus’ but do not seem to love anything else.”²⁰ Albert Nolan in his book, Jesus Today, suggests that Jesus was both a prophet and a mystic. “Any attempt to practice the same spirituality as Jesus would entail learning to speak out boldly as he did – facing the consequences.”²¹ The mystic side of Jesus’ spirituality would explore his intimacy with God. It is a spirituality that equips us to enter “the long emergency” and to be about incarnational ministry.

There comes the time in the worship life of the church to *respond* to God’s call and to be empowered and encouraged to take up and be sent out, as our incarnational ministry to the world. Just as the baptism of Jesus is often seen as the time for Jesus’ public ministry to begin, we can remember our own baptism and seek to experience ways that it gives us both a calling and a hope for the living of each new day.

“Remember Who You Are” (Session 7) encourages us to explore the meaning of our baptism. Martin Marty in his book, Baptism: A User’s Guide²² describes the dangerous grace of baptizing. The sacrament has always been considered the means by which someone becomes part of the body of Christ and joins in God’s mission for the life of the world. Martin Luther suggested that we remember our baptism daily. Each day can begin with the promise of rising to new life. “We have been buried with him (Jesus) by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we, too, might walk in newness of life.” (Romans 6:3-4) Anyone searching for ways to enter into “the long emergency” of climate change must know that the changes necessary will include changes to our own lifestyle. Baptism can sustain us for this journey. But how can we seek to have others change without also changing ourselves. We remember Jesus’ words about judging. “How can you say to your neighbor, ‘Friend, let me take out the speck in your eye’, when you yourself do not see the log

¹⁸ Liz Fulmer wrote the prayer for a chapel service.

¹⁹ In reading the material for the elective Dr. Darrel Woomer suggested that a much better question for Talk 6 would be “What Did Jesus Do?” And so the change has been made in Talk 6.

²⁰ Richard Rohr The Universal Christ Convergent Books 2019 p. 32

²¹ Albert Nolan Jesus Today: A spirituality of Radical Freedom (Orbis Books, 2006 p. 64

in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye." (Luke 6:42)

What would it look like to have people helping each other with specks in their eyes? Here's one suggestion which may require a longer time for Session 7. ²³

The small group sharing session after this talk is extended over a longer period of time, so that each person can share ways in which his/her life is incomplete and needs grace for a new beginning, or a sustaining grace to keep on keeping on. This sharing time becomes a time to renew our baptism.

"Incarnational Ministry" (Session 8) suggests "that if we take the reign of God seriously, we would be committed to equipping Christians to live out their faith incarnationally in every sphere of life." ²⁴ The talk provides an introduction to Christian practices while highlighting a few that are enhanced because of corporate involvement. The group is invited to think how these practices might be found in the life and mission of their own congregation.

At the end of this session there will have an opportunity to view an "Ode to Joy" Flashmob experience. ²⁵ This visual parable demonstrates the power of taking a group of musicians (an entire orchestra) beyond the walls of a symphony hall and into a busy pedestrian walkway. You could call it incarnational music.

The Seas May Get Rough Elective will be a way for members of a congregation to enter "the long emergency" of climate change. It would be helpful if the pastor of the church would preach a "climate message" some Sunday while the elective is being offered. This worship service can be a way for other members of the congregation to have a "glimpse" of what is happening on the elective. Jim Antal writes... "Given that every day it becomes more clear that life as we know it cannot be sustained, ordinary people need a new frame through which to understand the meaning of their own lives and the lives of their progeny. This reality represents both an existential threat and a call to social action. Preachers must be able to offer their congregations new perspectives that allow them to reframe how God might be calling them to redirect their individual lives, as well as their lives together as a congregation and as a community." ²⁶ Another UCC climate change advocate, Brooks Berndt counsels what Fred

²³ Having the Small Group Sharing time be at least 45 minutes for Session 7 is an important part of the elective experience. The group will have been meeting for seven sessions and a level of trust will be forming among the members. Elective participants should be told at the end of Session 6 that the next meeting time will be as long as two hours.

²⁴ Michael Frost Incarinate: The Body of Christ in an Age of Disengagement (IVP Books 2014) p. 133 ²⁵ See the

Craddock would say about preaching effectively. “The goal is not to get something said but to get something heard.”²⁷

It is time for the church to get out of the house. We must see that the church’s primary mission is incarnational witness out in the world. The evangelist Charles Finney (1792-1875) is often thought to be among the first preachers to employ an “alter call” in worship (inviting people to come forward leaving behind sinful ways of life). What some people may not have known about Finney, is how immediately after those life changing decisions were made, he had people sign on to the abolitionist movement of his day, and to join in the cause of women’s suffrage.²⁸

The revival needed today is for church people to take the hard look at their own lifestyle, often unexamined, and to change their ways. Jim Antal reminds us that “we find ourselves born into a time when human activity and aspiration – if they simply continual without profound repurposing – will sentence our children to lives of struggle, not promise; skies of extreme weather, not rainbows; and landscapes of deprivation, not abundance.”²⁹ Something more than a change of heart is needed. As the body of Christ, we must embody a mature faith for the living of these days. “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11:1)

Vocational Training

As we move toward the ending of the Seas May Get Rough Elective, we ask ourselves, “Where do we go from here?” “Mature Faith and the Long Emergency” (Session 9) seeks to answer that question first, by exploring the dimensions of a mature faith and then, in exploring options where each dimension of faith can lead us to both new understanding and action to address the climate crisis. Antal suggests this is “the great work” of the church in these times.

In 1990 the Search Institute published the findings of a comprehensive study of several mainline denominations. The study sought to determine the faith maturity of adults and youth in those congregations. That study provides a list of core dimensions to mature faith. These dimensions suggest eight words: Values, Order, Community, Advocacy, Trust, Integration, Outreach, Nurture. As you can see at closer examination, these words form the acrostic, VOCATION.³⁰

²⁷ Brooks Berndt [Cathedral on Fire: A Church Handbook for the Climate Crisis](#) (United Church of Christ 2020) p.27 ²⁸ Michael Frost [Incarnate: the Body of Christ in an Age of Disengagement](#) IVP Books 2014 pg.145

²⁹ Jim Antal Climate Church, Climate World (Rowman & Littlefield, 2018) p. 21

³⁰ These eight key words are not found in the study of mature faith. They are words that we suggest represent the eight core dimensions of the study.

Since we will be suggesting that these eight core dimensions of faith will be like ramps on a road for people to enter the long emergency of climate change, we offer the details that describe each core dimension (in the order they appear in the study report):

The Nature of Mature Faith

What are the characteristics of a person with mature faith?we posited that a person of mature faith integrates eight core dimensions of faith. They are:

- 1. Trusts in God’s saving grace and believes firmly in the humanity and divinity of Jesus. (TRUST)**
- 2. Experiences a sense of personal well-being, security, and peace. (ORDER)**
- 3. Integrates faith and life, seeing work, family, social relationships, and political choices as part of one’s religious life. (INTEGRATION)**
- 4. Seeks spiritual growth through study, reflection, prayer, and discussion with others. (NURTURE)**
- 5. Seeks to be part of a community of believers in which people give witness to their faith and support and nourish one another. (COMMUNITY)**
- 6. Holds life-affirming values, including commitment to racial and gender equality, affirmation of cultural and religious diversity, and a personal sense of responsibility for the welfare of others. (VALUES)**
- 7. Advocates social and global change to bring about social justice. (ADVOCACY) 8. Serves humanity, consistently and passionately, through acts of love and justice. (OUTREACH)**

These eight dimensions can also be collapsed into two overall themes. A person of mature faith experiences both a life –transforming relationship to a loving God – the vertical theme – and a consistent devotion to serving others – the horizontal theme.³¹

At each elective at Session 9, participants will be given a list of “Next Steps”³² with the various opportunities that are available as next steps after the elective is over. The opportunities will be noted under each of the core dimensions of faith. **This list has multiple resources from which any congregation could choose to use in a climate action plan.**

The final session of the elective “Songs by the Seaside” (Talk 10) ends much as the elective began, with a post resurrection encounter with Jesus and some of his disciples at the seashore. (John 21:1-19). Some original scripture related songs are shared including a song of Peter that admits both his denial and seeks a new beginning “Lord, you know that I love you”. It’s good to be reminded that we all need second chances as we live our lives as disciples of Jesus Christ. There is always opportunities for us to be recalled if we get off the path.

The elective ends with a final time of sharing communion and with the singing of the theme song, “Come Follow Me.”

³¹ Peter L Benson and Carolyn H. Eklin Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations (Search Institute 1990) p. 10

³² The “Next Step” list will always be an ever changing document as opportunities and resources change over time. In this elective material the list is placed between the material for Session 9 and Session 10.

A Good Theory

We have discussed the worship paradigm of the Seas May Get Rough Elective. It is also important to see how the natural stages of a group’s development contribute to the overall impact of the elective.

William Schutz identifies three stages of a healthy group: inclusion, control, and affection.³³ This “I.C.A. theory” suggests that when people first come together in a group, the initial concern is with the level of acceptance or inclusion that the group offers each member. According to Schutz, typical questions asked in the inclusion stage of a group include:

Who else is here?

How can I be in relation to them?

How much am I willing to contribute to become a member?

Can I trust my real self to them?

Will they support me if the going gets rough?

How can I get acquainted with them?³⁴

The important connection between I.C.A. theory and the worship paradigm of the elective is that both liturgy and the development of a healthy group follow similar lines. At the very beginning of worship there is an implicit answer offered to the inclusion questions. People are gathered because a living God, through a risen Christ, has called them to be together. The image of a people as the body of Christ suggests a way of belonging as members of Christ’s body.

The design of the Seas May Get Rough Elective is careful to let the trust within the group develop at its own pace. The first sessions of the elective lay a foundation of acceptance which allows for the other stages of group development to unfold. The confession sessions (Session 3-5) could be viewed as part of the inclusion process. An overlapping of stages occurs with the advent of control issues. The control stage of group development has another set of questions:

Who is calling the shots here?

How much can I push for what I want?

Will I have to be direct or indirect to influence others?

What do others require of me?

Can I say what I really think and feel?

Can I take it if they say what they really think?

³³ See Chapter 4 of William C. Schutz, Joy: Expanding Human Awareness (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1986), quotes by Nathan W. Turner, Effective Leadership in Small Groups (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1977) p. 18

³⁴ Ibid

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There comes a time in the Seas May Get Rough Elective when control issues may surface. It is predictable that the group will test the leadership of the pastor (or any other person leading the elective session), especially in light of the highly structured nature of the elective. Sometimes the testing is done in a humorous way. Small group sharing sessions may tease the leader by not responding to calls to reconvene as a larger group. If, as it has been our experience, a bell is used to reconvene the group, the clapper of the bell may suddenly disappear. On the surface, it is fun, but beneath the surface of things a fundamental shift is taking place. Participants in the elective want more influence over what is happening to them. Gradually basic responsibilities are shifted. No one person will be the primary force in the elective experience that is unfolding. Everyone is contributing in important ways.

On another level, the control issue of the elective is a theological one. Beginning as early as the Confession talks on Saturday morning and continuing throughout the day, a larger concern for the group begins to be considered. That question “What Would Jesus Do?” isn't something that God imposes on the church; rather, it is a question shared by all and all the elective participants are beginning to take significant action together...this body of Christ is starting to flex its muscles. Part of that action includes the next stage in the group's life, affection. Remembering our Baptism invites the group to a time of baptismal renewal. A time of bathing in God's grace. Questions at this third stage suggest the potential for sharing deeply together.

Am I willing to care?

Can I show my caring?

What will happen if I show I care for one person before I show caring for others?

What if no one cares for me?

What if they do show caring for me?

What if I don't really ever care for someone in the group?

Will the group be able to bear it?

Is showing affection acceptable in this group? How do I know this?³⁵

The following pages will describe how the Seas May Get Rough Elective becomes an experience of affection encouraging the expression of deep feelings. The elective seeks to affirm the basic goodness of each person by structuring times of personal and group

affirmation.

A Good END

As the elective group assembles in the church sanctuary (usually in the chancel area) they begin to sing the elective theme song again. During this song, alumni/ae from previous electives

³⁵ Ibid

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begin to enter the sanctuary from every possible doorway and literally surround the elective group. It is not uncommon that this is a time of great joy and some tears. It is a holy surprise. The elective group has sensed that there was support from others throughout the weekend...but now those others are here face to face. Together a final communion service is held. Before the group communes the Peace of Christ is shared and passed round to each other. The “In His Image” picture (on this cover) is given to each person (one per family) as a kind of diploma for the experience. More songs and finally.....another Seas May Get Rough Elective has come to a close.

A good end for each Seas May Get Rough Elective is the promise that participants are willing and able to begin climate action work. As powerful as the elective can be, no real change within a congregation or within the life of Christian discipleship occurs overnight. David Mace, in one of his marriage enrichment books, Close Companions, includes a diagram entitled , “Learning for knowing - and for Living.” The diagram suggests that of all the information that people absorb, only a little becomes knowledge. And of that knowledge, only a little becomes insight, that is, knowledge which seems most relevant to life situations. Of those insights, only a few things are taken and used in experimental action. Mace would suggest that an elective of any kind will hopefully take people to a level of experimental action. However, in order for behavioral changes to occur, the action must be sustained over a period of time.³⁶

One of the major goals of the Seas May Get Rough Elective has been to mobilize members of the body of Christ, to engage in life giving and hope giving plans and actions to address the long emergency of climate change. The elective has provided information, knowledge, insight, and experimental action centered around the corporate image of the church as the body of Christ. But the elective has reached its limits. Whether or not deeper behavior change will occur for members or for the church as a whole will depend upon members taking or making opportunities to continue experienced learning around the themes and issues raised throughout the weekend. Since the liturgy has been the paradigm for the weekend, the themes and issues are numerous.

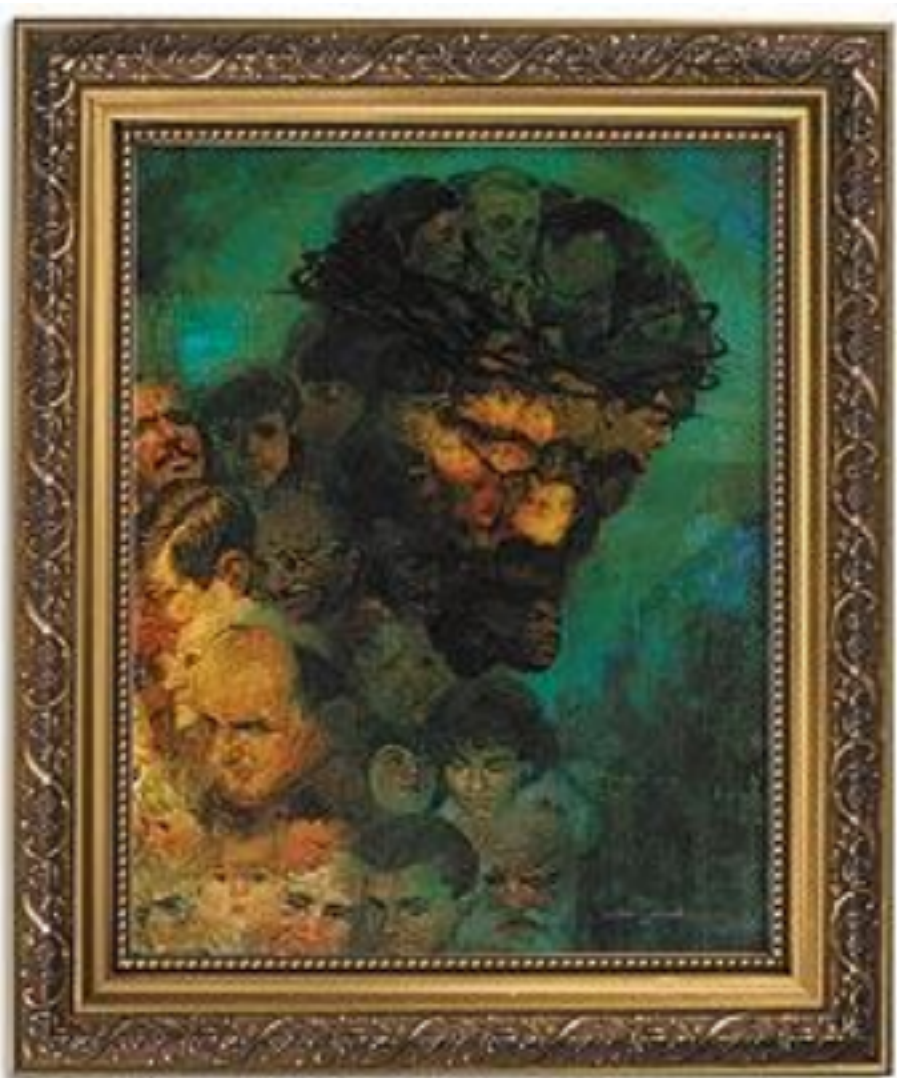
Let us end this practical narrative of the Seas May Get Rough Elective with words from Jim Antal.

“God is calling all of us to unleash our imaginations, unmuzzle our mouths, unbind our hands, unshackle our feet, and open our wallets. Each of us must use our unique God-given gifts to hasten the day when each human heart is governed not by grief but by hope, not by constraint but by generosity, not by selfishness but by sharing.

³⁶ David R. Mace, Close Companions: The Marriage Enrichment Handbook (New York: Continuum, 1982) p. 65

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Yes – God still has a dream.”³⁷



³⁷ Jim Antal Climate Church,

Climate World (Rowman & Littlefield 2018) p.169

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Seas May Get Rough: What Your Church Can Do about Climate

Change - A 10 Session Adult Elective

The Seas May Get Rough elective material can be easily adapted as a 10 week Christian Education adult elective. It is recommended that each session be 60-90 minutes. .

The challenge of using the material as an elective is that some participants may miss a session or two along the way. Since the material is available in a PDF format, it is strongly recommended that folks “keep up” with the group by 1) reading any talk that has been missed and 2) taking the time to journal a response to the sharing question of the session.

The advantage of an adult elective is that a group can spend more time to explore a session topic. Also, as you will discover with these notes, there is more time for additional on-line video presentations available for the group to experience. (Ted Talks etc.)

Advance Preparations

There are some useful handouts to have available for the first session. Appendix B (the Talks, Scriptures, and Sharing Questions) is a useful sheet that can be left behind and reused at future sessions....the same with Appendix C (Songs of the Elective). The list of the elective participants is also important, not only for keeping attendance, but also for allowing each participant keep a record of who they were with in each small group sharing time.

A framed picture of William Zdinak’s In His Image should also be available as an “icon” to be visible throughout the elective. (available for purchase at Catholic-Collectables.com) A candle to have burning for each session is also important.

Audio visual equipment and Wifi availability will be essential most sessions.

Any questions about the following material can be directed to Rev. Dr. Dave Bushnell (abushnell@aol.com)

Session 1

Session 1 – Suggested Plans

Begin the session by passing around the lighted candle with each person sharing why they are glad to be part of your faith community. If possible share the theme song of the elective... “Come Follow Me”. Talk 1: The Road to Emmaus is presented which at the end explains the small group sharing sessions. Have one of the participants ready to share the scripture lesson of the talk. (You will want to carry on this practice for each session and each talk.) One option is to bring the large group back together after the first sharing session and have a simple holy communion sharing time. The song “Let Us Stay Together” is a beautiful way to begin the communion time.

Collect the handouts to keep for the next elective session.

TALK 1: The Road to Emmaus

Let us stay together for a time. Let us stay together for awhile:

when the evening is approaching and the day is almost spent,

let us stay with one another for a time.

All we have in common is a road; all we have in common is a journey:

We are simply fellow travelers who are passing in the night

Let us stay with one another on the road for a time

Words and music by Brian Woodcock³⁸

You never know when you might meet Jesus. You never know when he might unexpectedly appear.

Let me tell you a true story about an artist named William Zdinak. The telephone rang one day, and the woman on the line asked about a painting that Zdinak had promised to provide for an art show at a Congregational Church in Bridgeport, CT. A promise to create a painting had been made months before, but truth be known, Bill had forgot all about it. He shared a little white lie when he told the woman the painting wasn't yet finished. She asked just how much more time was needed. “At least a whole day,” the artist answered. He'd hoped that

this second lie would solve the problem, seeing as how a preview dinner was scheduled for the very next day.

The lady was undaunted. She asked for the dimensions of the painting. Zdinak suggested the dimensions of a large painting in hopes that it might be too big for the show. The lady assured him that she'd save a place for it. Apparently his work was intended to be the centerpiece for the art show since he was, after all, a local artist with some reputation.

This is how William Zdinak describes what happened next.

“Angry at myself and the world, I grabbed the only stretched canvas in the studio. It fit the frame in which I kept a favorite portrait of my wife, Mary. (It happened to be the same size I mentioned on the phone) Since I was accustomed to working all night in order to meet deadlines, I decided to get started on a simple abstract and, as I said to myself, ‘get the whole thing done and out of my hair.’ It was two in the afternoon as I started on one idea after another only to face failure after failure – not one idea worked.... (after hours passed)....I looked at my watch. It was 2:00 a.m. In utter desperation I cried out: ‘that’s what I get for lying, GOD, I’ll never lie again!’ Grabbing my brushes I jumped up and flung them to the floor. At that instant a flash of light filled the room and for a split-second His face appeared on the canvas.

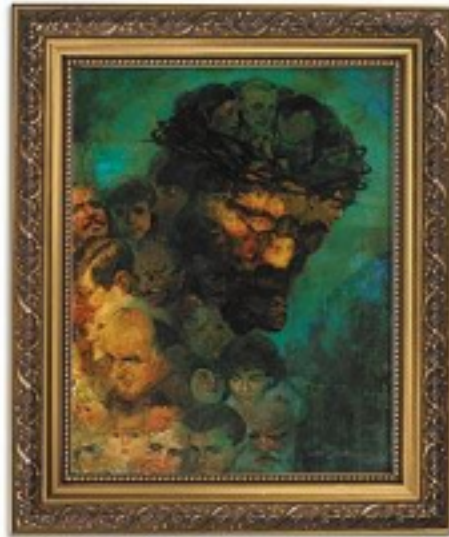
A tremendous surge of energy filled me – it was incredible- it was wonderful. ‘That’s it!’ I cried out. Picking up a brush I followed the oval of the face I had seen – I painted a ‘T’ for the eyes and nose – then I rushed around the studio gathering up pictures of people’s faces – men, women, children, anybody, without rhyme or reason. There was no preliminary sketch, no blocking or planning at all. I started with the face that formed the end of the nose, then the face next to it, finishing each face as I moved along. Never before had I experienced such an ecstatic sensation. It was as though every atom of mind and body flowed as one in a fast moving river of energy.

Fifteen hours later I stepped back from the canvas for my first overall look. I was overwhelmed – all I could exclaim was: ‘My God, did I do that ?’” ³⁹

You never know when you might meet Jesus. You never know when he might unexpectedly appear.

³⁹ The story is taken from the narrative account written by William Zdinak in 1973. The story accompanied the print of the painting which Zdinak named "In His Image"

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Our elective this weekend will be a time of journeying. We are on a certain road together. We are on a road of discipleship. A road of discovering that God is calling each one of us to be part of the body of Christ. I don't think I have ever seen a painting that captured the idea so well. Together as the church, we are Christ's body. This is a powerful icon for our elective.

The theme song of the elective, 'Come Follow Me' by Martie McMane suggests our journey together may not always be an easy one. 'Roads may get dirty and seas may get rough, You may get weary, the way may get tough. But I will be there and I am enough, put all your trust in me.' Part of our journey this weekend is to meet the risen Christ in surprising ways and to experience God's grace again and again. Part of our journey is finding our unique identity as God's people and as Christ's body. "I will be in you and they will know me. You are my body and blood, don't you see? So come take the chance, be all you can be. Come follow me."

Setting the Scene

Think for a moment of two frightened and confused men, going along a road to a place called Emmaus. They are not sure where the road is taking them. These are not just ordinary people, however. Somewhere we've learned that they were disciples of a rabbi called Jesus. They were special to Jesus and he was very special to them.

Do you ever feel uneasy about the fact that Jesus chose special people for developing intimacy with himself. He loved all...surely the scriptures tell us that...and he died "to save all people from aimlessness and sin." But he has chosen some people to be His church, His body, and he has established a greater depth of intimacy with them.

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Jesus' teaching and preaching are not addressed equally to everybody. Some parts are addressed to the multitudes...to the multitude of Jews, the chosen people. Jesus brought salvation to all but he came to the Jews. And then there are the parts of Jesus' words meant basically for his followers...to establish greater understanding and a greater intimacy between them and within them. When Jesus said, "Come Follow Me" he had the preparation of a people in mind.

That is what this elective is all about. It's our journey with Jesus today. It's a time to find out WHO HE IS IN HIS BODY - not who he appears to be in history, in a book, in a sermon, or in a movie. Jesus is on the road with us, ready to open the scriptures to us...to be with us at the table, the great welcome table of life...to establish his identity with us, equipping us with a special ministry in His name.

Read Luke 24:13-35

That's the way it was on that road called Emmaus. But the Emmaus road is not just a past event. Jesus is constantly present in his risen body. We recognize him in the breaking of the bread, in the scriptures, and in each other.

We are the disciples of Jesus today. This elective is a time to be on the road with him, away from the distractions, to listen to the parables of Jesus as if he were in our midst sharing his wisdom and vision of the kingdom of God.

So often we are in the presence of the body of Christ and we don't recognize it. We have to take time to help each other, gently and in prayer, realize that we are SOME BODY....SOME BODY of CHRIST. It is a great and beautiful mystery.

Are you ready for the journey? I'm always excited at a time like this, at the beginning of a elective. But truth be told, I am also a little apprehensive. Maybe you are too. Let me tell you a few things that you don't need to fear.

First, do not be afraid that you don't have everything about the faith and your own beliefs figured out. You may find some answers to faith questions this weekend. But we also hope that you find the importance of living with the right questions, especially ones like, what are we as Christ's body today called to be doing in our world and for this world of ours?

Second, don't be afraid that we will be talking church or arguing religion all day long. The elective isn't about learning proper church doctrine. It's not even about developing plans to get people to come to church or attracting more members. I saw a most interesting sign on an office building some years ago. The sign read...PLEASE GO AWAY. What kind of a business would advertise like that? Can you imagine if a church had that message for the public to

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see? Well, it turns out it was a pretty good sign after all because... the business that had that sign posted was a travel agency. Since our elective this weekend is about our going on a journey....it may be that we will want to think about our destinations. Remember the prayer that Jesus has taught us. "Our father who art in heaven. Hallowed by your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done...ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN". We may discover this weekend that our calling to be the body of Christ today will send us out desiring the kingdom of God (On earth as it is in heaven).

Finally, in case you haven't already heard, we hope this elective will challenge us all and equip us to enter the long emergency of climate change. UCC pastor Jim Antal has written a very important book titled, Climate Church, Climate World. Antal believes that there is an urgent need to repurpose the church. The crisis facing our generation is even more serious than the crisis we have recently experienced with the Covid-19 virus. One of the essential things in handling Covid-19 is in actually testing as many people as possible to determine just how many have been exposed to the virus and may therefore have antibodies to help them combat the illness.

Would that there was a test, or a way, for us to discover just how urgent climate change is for people. How urgent a matter is it for you? Some people I know already think it may be too late to make a difference; some would argue that it isn't even a problem; some might live in a state of denial. We intend to take it very seriously this weekend in the hope that there are ways that together we can make a difference in working to heal our world. Don't be afraid that our elective will be about gloom and doom. We will be honest about the problems facing our generation and our children's and grandchildren's generation. Brooks Berndt (UCC national staff person) has written that "while the truth must be told, it matters how we tell it, and how we tell it changes depending upon the audience....Fred Craddock, a legendary sage on how to preach effectively once said something that could just as well apply to talking about the climate crisis. "The goal," according to Craddock, "is not to get something said but to get something heard".⁴⁰

Let me end by asking a very important question. Why are you here? Why are we all here together? Is it only a matter of our motives and our plans? Is it only a matter of our self

determinations? Why are we here?

The scriptures seem determined to have us hear the call of God in our own time. The scriptures and that parade of patriarchs and matriarchs...kings and slaves...haves and have nots...saints and sinners....all seem to travel on the same path. A road called GOD'S OWN

⁴⁰ Brooks Berndt Cathedral on Fire. United Church of Christ 2020 p. 27

CHOOSING. This elective is for us and for the experience of the body of Christ right here, right now. God promises to offer us a renewed experience, a deeper understanding of Christ's identity through us.

We are on the Road to Emmaus.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR SMALL GROUP SHARING: The format of our elective includes talks like this one, to be followed with small group sharing sessions. The group will have an opportunity to divide into smaller groups of 4-5 persons and to share responses to a QUESTION. It's important to stress that this sharing time is intended to be something more than a discussion group. Discussions sometimes become arguments or debates. Discussions sometimes seem like 'head trips.' So while ideas are important to share in the smaller groups what is especially appropriate is sharing about ways that a talk 'strikes a chord' in a person's life. The group will be asked to keep track of the names of persons with whom they have shared small group sharing times. Each person is encouraged to try to be with different people in different sharing sessions. The attendance sheet in each participant's elective booklet can be used for keeping record.

Small group sharing sessions are really the heart of the Seas May Get Rough Elective.

Question for the first Sharing Session

"What times in your life have you felt the presence of God in a special way?"

Invite people to take a few minutes to record some thoughts in their booklets before dismissing the larger group to smaller group settings. Have someone or have the group share the prayer for Sharing Session 1 found in your elective handouts.

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Session 2 – Suggested Plans

Session

Begin the session singing the Come Follow Me theme song. After the song, share the brief video “The Great Acceleration” <https://youtu.be/1JAOXTowjdY> as the group’s first introduction to the long emergency of climate change. Two other av resources are included in Talk 2: A Larger Lament . “The Rabbi’s Gift” narrated by Scott Peck is available on line at <https://youtu.be/3z1pIrV2F6c> The scene baptismal scene from the film “Same Kind of Different as Me” would best be used with a purchased DVD. After sharing the talk, the group can sing “A Song of Joy”. Before breaking into small groups for sharing remind participants to keep a record of who they are with at each session so the groups can change week to week.

TALK 2: A Larger Lament

“When I meet people leading lives of deep commitment, this fact hits me: Joy is real.”⁴¹

David Brooks

We began our elective from an Easter perspective. Jesus is alive. Just what does that mean for us, even now in our own time and place. The apostle Paul has written: “Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?...No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8: 35, 37-39)

There’s this amazing thing about our resurrected Lord. Remember our song...”I will be in you and they will know me. You are my body and blood don’t you see? So come take a chance, be all you can be. Come follow me.” Let’s not forget! We are the body of Christ. This is one way

⁴¹ David Brooks [The Second Mountain](#) (Random House 2019) p. xxiii

the resurrected Lord lives on.

There’s a story I’d like to share with you. It’s called “The Rabbi’s Gift” narrated by M. Scott Peck.

View video, “The Rabbi’s Gift”

There’s two things that seem worthwhile talking about for a moment. The story obviously has a rather upbeat ending. What is the Rabbi’s gift? What was the Rabbi’s strange cryptic saying.... “One of you is the Messiah.” It got the monks thinking, thinking about each other in a new way. The story suggests that it had a profound impact on them. They began treating each other with extraordinary respect, even treating themselves with extraordinary respect.

I want to say that thinking of ourselves as the body of Christ can have an enormous impact on our corporate life together. It really is a calling that we can’t ignore, that no church can ignore. It’s not that we have Christ just for ourselves. Jesus Christ can be in lots of places, embodied in many ways, throughout human history. But our identity as the body of Christ is worthy of extraordinary respect.

There’s an old Capital One credit card commercial that is really enjoyable. It’s been around for awhile but perhaps you’ll remember it. It illustrates an important point. Samuel Jackson gets

in the back seat of a car and starts praising a guy named Gary for his wise choices in using his credit card. Soon you hear Gary whispering that he really is special. Jackson interrupts him.... "Don't let it go to your head, Gary." And then, of course, "What's in your wallet?"

Being the body of Christ really should be something to be proud of...BUT we can't let it go to our heads. We may be the body of Christ but the Apostle Paul is right there, to remind us that Jesus Christ is the head. If you want to do things right by Christ.... "let the same mind be in you as was in Christ Jesus." (I think we will have lots more to say about this as the elective unfolds).

The Rabbi's Gift might help us remember that we are called to be something special for God. There is, however, another thing to remember about the story. It begins with both the Abbot of the monastery and the Rabbi lamenting that their fellowships are both experiencing declines. That's the reason the Abbot seeks the counsel of the Rabbi in the first place. To find a hope for the future.

A Lesser Lament

We do live in a time when so many congregations, all sizes, all denominations (especially in the western world) are in decline. We could spend lots of time and effort inwardly focused, doing whatever we can to turn things around...to explore ways to attract more members.

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Our effort here and now, in providing a congregational based discipleship elective is to offer a way into doing something about an even greater emergency. We want to suggest that local congregations stop their inward, anxious laments about congregational decline, in exchange for a larger lament that leads to outward, hopeful actions for all creation.

Let's be clear about the meaning of the word, 'lament.' As a noun it is a passionate expression of grief or sorrow. As a verb, it can mean to mourn for something. In our scriptures, we find the book of Lamentations, mournful poems of grief over the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian Exile. Laments can be hard work, painful work. But like grief work in general, lamenting can be as a mid-wife birthing a new future. The book of Lamentations contains these mournful poems but listen to the last two verses of the book. "Restore us to yourself, O Lord, that we may be restored: renew our days as of old- unless you have utterly rejected us, and are angry with us beyond measure." (Lamentations 5: 21-22)

The question to be asking is which lament do we carry as the body of Christ today? Is it the lament we find when we turn inward and grieve the decline of congregations; or is it the larger lament that we share as we look outward and see the destruction of life throughout creation?

Introduction to the Parable of the Lost Sheep

One of the ways that we will invite Christ's presence throughout this weekend is to have him speak to us in ways that he spoke to people during his earthly ministry. We will be hearing the parables of Jesus along the way, to see how they might open our understanding about our own calling in these days.

The parable of the Lost Sheep is found both in Matthew's gospel and in Luke's gospel. The gospel settings use the parable in quite different ways. We will be sharing the parable from Luke's gospel. The difference between Matthew's setting and Luke's setting could be compared to the inward focus and concern for the church (Matthew's use) as compared to a more outward focus with a totally different audience, including tax collectors and sinners (Luke's use).

Matthew uses the parable as part of a warning, in a section of describing new believers as 'little ones.' He suggests that if one of these new believers wanders off like a lost lamb, any good shepherd would leave the flock behind and go looking for the lamb. There's really no mention of joy in Matthew's parable. It's more like a warning. It has its place and its purpose.

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Luke's parable of the lost sheep however, has joy written all over it. But listen for yourself.

Read Luke 15: 1-7

Did you hear the introduction to the parable. "Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to Jesus. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." So what did Jesus do....he tells them about God's search and rescue efforts with sinners...maybe like those tax collectors and sinners that had just heard his words. Luke remembers something about Jesus' parable that doesn't appear in Matthew's telling. After finding the lost sheep, Luke's shepherd is pictured as carrying the lost lamb on his shoulders and going home to tell his friends and neighbors..."rejoice with me, look what I've found. I have found my sheep that was lost."

We think Jesus is telling us today that we are being called to be serious and urgent in addressing the larger lament of the brokenness in our world today. We will need to take our message beyond the walls of the church to the broken places. We have to start somewhere, even if what we do seems to be a small step.

In the film, Same Kind of Different as Me, (based on a true story) a very successful art dealer, Ron Hall, at the urging of his wife Debbie gets involved in a local soup kitchen. Debbie has the notion that a homeless man at the soup kitchen, named Denver is somehow and someway special. She urges Ron to befriend Denver.

Denver, in his early 60s, has spent most of his life behind bars. The initial encounter of the two men does not look promising. Hall persists and finally, one day as the two were sharing a meal together, Denver asked “You want to be my friend?” “Yes,” Hall replied. Denver asked “Is this a catch and release?” and then seeing the confusion on Hall’s face, Denver continues. “When white folks go fishing they throw the fish back (catch and release). When black folks fish we eat what we catch. Is this catch and release?”

Denver and Ron become friends, unlikely at first but a lasting relationship that not only saves Denver but provides a deep hope for Ron as things change dramatically in his life. It is an amazing story of how a simple act of kindness can change everything.⁴²

It may be that we aren’t called to carry the full burden of the larger lament for creation on our shoulders. We can start by carrying a single sheep. The smallest difference we can make, like going after a single lost lamb, can change a song of lament into a song of joy.

Martie McMane has another song for the body of Christ to sing along our journey. Listen to

⁴² Same Kind of Different As Me (Paramount Films 2017)

the words...and then we will sing it.

A Song of Joy by Martie McMane

*We need a song of joy today. We need a song of joy,
For the troubled, the broken, the hungry, the poor,
We need a song of joy.*

Who will sing this song today? Who will sing this song?

We will sing it, the body of Christ, we will sing this song.

*What will we sing in this song today? What will we sing in this song?
That Christ is alive, His Spirit is moving,
That's what we'll sing in this song.*

*How will we sing this song today? How will we sing this song?
With our hearts and our voices, our hands and our lives,
That's how we'll sing this song.*

*For we are the body of Christ today, we are the people of
God. We're troubled we're broken, we're hungry, we're poor,
But we are the people of God.*

*And God is working a purpose out, God is healing our
world. And God does it through me, God does it through
me, That's how God heals the world.*

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*So let's sing a song of joy today, let's sing a song of joy,
For the Spirit is moving, in us and through us,
Let's sing a song of joy!
Let's sing a song.....a song of joy!*

Question for Sharing Session 2

“What gives you joy and what does your joy give?”

Invite people to take a few minutes to record some thoughts in their booklets before dismissing the larger group to smaller group settings.

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Session 3 – Suggested Plans

Session

This session will have two av presentations both available on-line. Begin the David Brook's interview <https://youtu.be/SWqIn4JeLDo> then share Talk 3: The Two Mountains. After the talk show Nic Marks' talk "The Happy Planet Index" (a Ted Talk) <https://youtu.be/M1o3FS0awtk> break into the small group sharing session. Bring the large group back together for reflection and then sing the song "One Step at a Time".

Talk 3: The Two Mountains

Community itself seems to be a witness worth making in a society

gone mad with competitive individualism.

Parker J. Palmer

Bill McKibben, one of the prominent activists of the climate change movement, is often asked "What can an individual do for the climate?" McKibben is quick to reply, "Stop being an individual!"⁴³ Stop being an individual! That can be easier said than done. It invites us to think of the 'we' instead of just 'me.'

In recent sessions we talked about our calling to be the body of Christ today. We even sang about it in the song "Come Follow Me." "I will be in you and they will know me. You are my body and blood, don't you see. So come take the chance, be all you can be. Come follow me." And then, as we pictured the good shepherd going out looking for and finding the lost sheep, we sang "We need a song of joy today. We need a song of joy, for the troubled, the broken, the hungry, the poor, we need a song of joy. Who will sing this song today? Who will sing this song. We will sing it, the body of Christ, we will sing this song."

The question we need to ask this morning is simply this. What gets in the way of our being the body of Christ today? Some would suggest that we don't really know how to be in community.

⁴³ Jim Antal Climate Church, Climate World (Rowman & Littlefield, 2018) p. 25

Have you ever heard this song. It has to be one of the saddest songs ever written.

"And now, the end is near And so I face the final curtain

My friends , I'll say it clear I'll state my case of which I'm certain

I've lived a life that's full I travelled each and every highway

But more, much more than this I did it my way.”⁴⁴

Why do we think it's so sad? Because to many, there is virtue in “making it” on our own. Even one of the most important leaders in modern times, Nelson Mandela shared how important the poem, *Invictus* (William Ernest Henly) was for him in his prison years. That poem from one perspective, glorifies individualism, The poem ends... “I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul.”

The columnist David Brooks published a book entitled “The Second Mountain: The Quest for a Moral Life”. Brooks thinks there are two mountains before us as we live our lives. The first mountain is really a self-centered climb with the best word to describe it being the word – individualism. A second mountain beyond the first is a very different path. Listen to a few of the ways he describes the difference between the mountains.

“Individualism says, shoot for personal happiness, but the person on the second mountain says, No, I shoot for meaning and moral joy. Individualism says, Celebrate independence, but the second mountain celebrates interdependence. Individualism celebrates autonomy, the second mountain celebrates relation. (Are you getting the idea? A few more contrasts.) Individualism says, the main activities of life are buying and selling. But you say, No, the main activity of life is giving....on the first mountain, a person makes individual choices and keeps their options open. The second mountain is about promise making, making commitments, tying oneself down, and giving oneself away.”⁴⁵

There are some who characterize the western world as if it were exclusively on a one mountain climb. Albert Nolan is a Dominican priest from South Africa. He writes about the crisis of individualism that has shaped everything about our lives including creating a privatized spirituality. He writes, “the cultural ideal of the Western industrialized world is the self-made, self-sufficient, autonomous individual who stands by himself or herself, not needing anyone else and not beholden to anyone for anything....freedom and happiness are

⁴⁴ The song “My Way” was written by Claude Francois and Jacques Revaux. The English lyrics were written by Paul Anka. Frank Sinatra is the artist best known for singing the song.

⁴⁵ David Brooks The Second Mountain (Random House 2019) p.52-53

equated with independence and self-sufficiency.”⁴⁶ Nolan worries that this western individualism may be spreading worldwide, threatening more communitarian cultures. In

Africa, for example the idea of *Ubuntu* means that we become who we are through other people (I am because we are.) Western individualism, on the other hand, suggests we become a person by being as independent as possible from others.

Even David Brooks believes that when a culture of individualism is the only mountain that people seem willing to climb, our social organizations change and it drives people further and further apart. As a result, he identifies four social crises of our time.

First, there is a loneliness crisis. Did you know that back in 2018 the Center for Disease Control announced that for the third year in a row, the average life span of an American declined. American lives are shorter because there is an increase in deaths of despair – suicide, drug overdose, liver problems and so on.

A second crisis is distrust. This hyper-individualism has eroded a sense of trust in our culture. More and more it is every person for him or herself. We don't trust our institutions...we don't trust our leaders....we don't trust the media...we even don't trust our neighbors.

A third crisis Brooks identifies is a crisis of meaning. More and more, people do not feel they are part of some larger story they can believe in and dedicate their lives to.

The fourth crisis Brooks sees is perhaps the most unnerving. Brooks suggests "Individualism, taken too far, leads to tribalism." You might think... "well, tribalism suggests relationships does it not. Tribalism suggests we are finding a need for a group after all." But he isn't talking about tribalism like an African tribe or Native American tribe. Listen to Brooks' profound analysis. "Tribalism seems like a way to restore the bonds of community. It certainly does bind people together. But it is actually the dark twin of community. Community is connection based on mutual affection. Tribalism, is connection based on mutual hatred. Community is based on common humanity; tribalism on common foe. Tribalism is always erecting boundaries and creating friend/enemy distinctions. The tribal mentality is a warrior mentality based on scarcity; Life is a battle for scarce resources and it's always us versus them, zero-sum. The ends justify the means. Politics is war. Ideas are combat. It's kill or be killed. Mistrust is the tribalist world-view. Tribalism is community for lonely narcissists." ⁴⁷

Let's turn to one of the parables that Jesus told, as a way of having him weigh in on this choice

⁴⁶ Albert Nolan Jesus Today (Orbis Books 2009) p. 15

⁴⁷ David Brooks The Second Mountain Random House 2019 p. 35

of mountains before us.

Read Luke 12: 13-21

This Parable is called the parable of the rich fool. It began with someone in the crowd shouting out to Jesus... “Hey Jesus, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” Now Jesus may never have used words like “individualism or self-interest or tribalism or narcissists” but you have to believe he had his own version of living life primarily as a consumer, as one who only takes and doesn’t know how to give. Part of his answer to the man was “ Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” Jesus’ bumper sticker would read “Sorry, but the one with the most toys doesn’t win.”

Jesus was then, and is now, calling us to climb a second mountain....a mountain that calls us....that calls us to be one body....a mountain that gives our life a purpose and a meaning.

According to Luke’s gospel, Jesus shared the parable of the rich fool but then he turned to his disciples. This is what he said. I wonder if he would be saying the same thing to us.

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.”

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Luke 12:22-34)

Question for Sharing Session 3

In what ways have you been living your life on the first mountain of individualism? What experiences have you had in living on the second mountain?

Invite people to take a few minutes to record some thoughts in their booklets before dismissing the larger group to smaller group settings

A few reminders as you go forward in the elective

Have you been asking different participants of the group to read the scriptures during the talks. Has the group been keeping a record of the people they have been with in the small group sharing sessions? Hopefully by the time the elective is completed participants will have been with everyone at least once or twice. Remember to share the brief prayer prior to the small groups sharing sessions. When returning to the larger group at the end of each Session ask if there are any comments for the larger group to share. Appropriate songs/hymns (even just a single verse) can be sung before taking leave.

4

Session 4 – Suggested Plans

Session

The session begins with listening (or singing) the song “Sometimes Peter”. This leads into

Talk 4: the Ins and Outs of Forgiveness. After the talk show the video of Millard Fuller https://youtu.be/jq8_Y4fP6pI describing his faith journey and the beginning of Habitat for Humanity. Then we come to a time of presenting a really BIG IDEA...our Carbon Footprint and Carbon Offsets (see the handout at the end of these notes.) You can show an example of how to calculate your carbon footprint at the RegenAll -Lancaster website. Don't expect folks to rush out to embrace this big idea BUT what if people really took seriously Carbon Offsets. It might start a movement as significant as Millard's Habitat for Humanity.

Talk 4: The Ins and Outs of Forgiveness

My social circle was shocked when I first shyly broached the subject of church. An activist lawyer I knew sputtered. "Are you kidding?" he said. He launched a litany of complaints about the church that I'd come to hear over and over.

Sara Miles⁴⁸

We begin this talk with the song – "Sometimes Peter"⁴⁹ because Peter was truly a disciple that learned about forgiveness the hard way. As this song suggests, like most of us, Peter had his up and down moments in following Jesus. He could be a good example one minute, and then turn around and come up short, by saying or doing something dumb. He did, according to Matthew's gospel, ask Jesus once "If my brother sins against me, how often should I forgive?" And then he added..."as many as seven times?" Remember Jesus' reply? "Not seven times, but, I tell you seventy-seven times" (and another source reads even higher... seventy times seven times) (Matthew 18:21-22). It's rather clear not just in Jesus' words, but more in the actions of his own ministry, that offering forgiveness is the most important thing that God's love can give. (A few examples – the woman caught in adultery; the paralytic carried to Jesus by his friends; Zacchaeus; Peter's denial; the repentant thief next to him on the cross; and

⁴⁸ Sara Miles Take This Bread (Ballantine Books 2007) p. 67

⁴⁹ See Appendix C – Songs for the Elective

then there is forgiveness in the stories Jesus told like – the prodigal son and the lost sheep).

There is a parable in Luke's gospel that begins "Jesus also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt!"

Read Luke 18:10-14

How about this scene. The self-righteous Pharisee giving thanks to God that he wasn't like "some people he knew" casting an eye toward the tax-collector in the corner of the temple. The tax-collector beating his chest and praying "God, be merciful to me a sinner." (It might not be such a coincident that Zacchaeus' encounter with Jesus comes along in Chapter 19 of Luke's gospel).

My question to you is this. If you were an outsider to the temple (or in our case, the church today) which character in the parable would you think, most represents church folk?

Here's the choices in contrast. Somebody that believes they have the answers and the truth. *Somebody who is sorry for what they've done.* Somebody who has been righteous all their lives. *Somebody who is sorry for what they've done.* Somebody who knows what the Bible says about drinking, adultery, homosexuality, things like that. *Somebody who is sorry for what they've done.* (Now listen carefully). Someone who isn't sorry for what they've done even if it has been an abuse of power, even if it has been sexual abuse. *Someone who is sorry for what they have done.*

Do you get my point? Here we are as church, called to be the body of Christ today with Jesus' power of forgiveness...an amazing power that can really change things. But there are people on the outside of the church unwilling to step inside our doors because of what they might find there. If they did come inside to worship, chances are *somebody who is sorry for what they have done*, won't be handing out the bulletins.

What I am suggesting here is that we have to take care of our own sinfulness before inviting others to be vulnerable enough to share their own. This doesn't mean we offer a course on Perfection 101. We need, however, to understand just how important forgiveness is in freeing us from the past and giving us a new future. In The Book of Forgiving, Desmond Tutu and his daughter, Mpho write: "Ultimately, forgiveness is a choice we make, and the ability to forgive others comes from the recognition that we are all flawed and all human. We have made mistakes and harmed others."⁵⁰ Lily Tomlin (and this is nothing to laugh about) has said – "Forgiveness means giving up all hope for a better past."⁵¹

⁵⁰ Desmond and Mpho Tutu The Book of Forgiving (HarperOne 2014) p. 22

⁵¹ Ibid p.88

Molly Phinney Baskette describes how lay leadership in the congregation she once served handled the prayer of confession and assurance of pardon in a worship service. Prior to the congregation sharing a unison prayer of confession, lay liturgists (a different one each week) tell their stories about their own sin and struggle. "The wounded healer (as in Henri Nouwen's

Wounded Healer) puts their stories into the service of others rather than eliciting so much anxiety and concern for themselves that the congregation is no longer ministered to but becomes the ministering.”⁵² As a regular feature of worship, this kind of testimony invites a level of honesty and hope for dealing with the broken parts of life. You could call it a congregation’s vulnerability. It’s a way to share that God isn’t done with us yet!

What if the *someone who is sorry for what they have done* never finds the way to church? What if the church goes out looking for him or her. I mentioned earlier that Luke’s story of Jesus and Zacchaeus is found shortly after Jesus tells the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector. Zacchaeus isn’t hanging out in the temple...he’s hanging on a branch in a tree. The man was so small he couldn’t see past the crowd that had assembled to listen to Jesus. So he climbed a sycamore tree.

Jesus didn’t try to get Zacchaeus to go to the temple. Instead Jesus figured the best way to get his foot in the door of this little man’s life, was to go to where he lived. We don’t know what Jesus said to Zacchaeus that day over lunch but WOW, consider the results. “Look, half of my possessions, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much” (Luke 19:8) I wonder if the tax collector ‘s coming down out of that tree was like coming down that first mountain of life and being called up that second mountain.

It can even happen today!

In the early days of Fred Craddock’s ministry, he served a Christian Church in Custer City, OK. Back when Fred served there the population was 450. In the 2010 census it was down to 375. There were 4 churches in town back then, so, as you might imagine 450 divided by 4 or however the population divided out...there weren’t loads of people in any of the churches on Sunday morning. Lots of the men in town, never made it to worship, but instead, gathered at the local café. They were regulars there not only on Sunday but on Wednesday and other days as well...gathered to discuss important things like the weather and crops. They weren’t bad men...good men actually, family men, hard-working men.

⁵² Molly Phinney Baskette Real Good Church (Pilgrim Press 2014) p. 131

One of the regulars (Craddock calls him a patron saint of the group) was a fellow named Frank. He had a reputation that if you asked someone about Frank and church.... “Ha! Ol’ Frank will never go to church.” Craddock met the man on the street soon after his arrival as

the new preacher in town. Fred didn't say a word about church but Ol' Frank went on the offensive. "I work hard (reverend), I take care of my family, and I mind my own business. Far as I'm concerned everything else is fluff." Which Craddock interpreted to mean.... "Leave me alone, I'm no prospect".

Well, everyone was shocked especially the men at the café, when seventy-seven year old Frank presented himself one Sunday morning for baptism. It was the talk of the town..."Frank must be sick. Guess he's scared to meet his maker. They say he's got heart issues. All kinds of rumors."

But this is how Frank explained it to Fred the day after his baptism. Fred had asked... "Uh, Frank, you remember that little saying you used to give me so much: 'I work hard, I take care of my family, and I mind my own business?' Frank said... "Yeah, I remember. I said it a lot." "Do you still say that?" "Yeah." "Then what's the difference?" Frank said... "I didn't know then what my business was." Frank discovered what his business was – to serve human need. And so Craddock baptized him.⁵³ Not everything about God's calling happens in church.

Question for Sharing Session 4

How have you seen forgiveness change lives?

Invite people to take a few minutes to record some thoughts in their booklets before dismissing the larger group to smaller group settings.

⁵³ Fred B. Craddock Craddock Stories (Chalice Press 2001) p. 68-69

5

Session 5 – Suggested Plans

Session

This session seeks to focus on the long emergency of climate change. Such a big problem needs as big of a response for a local congregation as we can imagine, even “repurposing the church”, as Jim Antal suggests in his book “Climate Church, Climate World”. After Talk 5: The Long Emergency, show the Ted Talk by Katharine Heyhoe – The Most Important Thing You Can Do to Fight Climate Change. (link below) In this talk Heyhoe says “There is no silver bullet for fixing the problems of climate change BUT there are lots of silver buckshot.” This session begins to suggest solutions.

https://www.ted.com/talks/katharine_hayhoe_the_most_important_thing_you_can_do_to_fight_climate_change_talk_about_it?utm_campaign=tedsread&utm_medium=referral&utm_source=tedcomshare

End the session singing of Mary Lu Walker’s song “The Good Samaritan” .

<https://youtu.be/ya4UnyQgTWs>

Talk 5: The Long Emergency

Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change. A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we all set out on the long path of renewal.

Pope Francis⁵⁴

(A personal story like the following one offered by Dave Bushnell is a good way to begin this talk.)

I lived in the Susquehanna Valley almost ten years before I ever fished in the Susquehanna River. My first outing with a friend was amazing. I caught two walleyes (of a legal size to keep) and my first muskellunge (also a legal size). For the next fifteen years, (1990-2004) my fishing on the river was mostly for smallmouth bass. The area of the river that we

⁵⁴ Pope Francis Laudato Si' (Vatican City 2015) p. 133

fished allowed us to wade in shallow areas and catch and release, one bass after another. In those days, no matter how many of us fished together (2 or 3 or even 4) we almost always caught and released 100 bass each.

In the summer of 2005, Anne, Nathan, and I spent most all of my sabbatical time in Namibia. No fishing that summer. It was with eager anticipation, however, that Nathan and I first went fishing in the summer of 2006. After a day of wading and fishing our total catch was two fish.

Now without detailing what had gone wrong with the bass population, I can report that the fishing has improved a little. But from those earlier days until the present the sad reality is that the bass population has declined by 80%.

Everyone that's been alive in more than a few recent decades, has got to have seen firsthand that something has changed with this natural world of ours. In spite of environmental advocates and scientific warnings, things seem to be deteriorating more and more throughout what, Pope Francis calls, 'Our Common Home'. The first Earth Day was in April 1970. A Pogo cartoon created by Walt Kelly and posted that very day said it all. "We have met the enemy and he is us."

Our Seas May Get Rough Elective has the Long Emergency of climate change as a primary focus for two very important reasons. First, and most importantly because it is an urgent matter of life or death but second, because it will require a common effort found not just in science, or economics, or technology, or politics, but *grounded in hope*. That hope is the contribution of religious communities.

Jim Antal and his friend, Bill McKibbin (both long time climate advocates and persons of deep faith) believe that this long emergency is what the church is being called to enter. This must be a time to repurpose the church. "In a repurposed church, the first question people will ask about climate change will not be: How will it affect me? Instead, it will be something like: How can I help my neighbors to thrive? How can I build a more resilient community? What changes can I make in my life so that generations to come are more likely to inherit a habitable world?"

Let's invite Jesus into this conversation. The Parable of the Good Samaritan is introduced in the following way. "Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?' He said to him, 'What is written in the law? What do you read there?' He answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.' And

⁵⁵ Jim Antal Climate Church, Climate World (Rowand & Littlefield 2018) p.57

he said to him, 'You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.'" (Luke 10:25-28)

"But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'" (Luke 10:29)

Read Luke 10:30-37

You can probably guess why we want to share this parable with this talk. When faced with the long emergency of climate change we need to mobilize as many good Samaritans as we can find.

If there is a community hard hit with a hurricane, we can go and help them rebuild. Of course, if the community is in a low lying coastal region, we probably won't suggest that they move more inland since it's likely, only a matter of time before someone will need to come back and help them again. It's the immediate need that counts. Send in the good Samaritans.

Or we can have a special offering in the church because a drought in a small African country has a large group of people there threatened with starvation. Good Samaritans will give generously because they can sacrifice going out to dinner for a while to help out a greater need.

These are both significant acts of outreach. Lancaster Seminary professor Greg Carey suggests that examples like we have shared, can have us quickly identify with the good guy in the parable and the one doing the good thing. It's a perspective of privilege.⁵⁶ But is this parable just about being like the good Sam or is it about something more, something to challenge the very way we look at life? Remember, Jesus parable isn't just about one man doing a good deed (or even going the extra mile). It's about a man being beaten and robbed (it could be any one of us.) It's about good people not willing to get involved (it could be any one of us.) It's about someone thought to be the bad guy (it could be any one of us) doing something for the one beaten up.

John Dominic Crossan contends that most all of Jesus' parables function as challenge parables.

As such, “the story challenges listeners to think long and hard about their social prejudices, their cultural presumptions, and, yes, even their most sacred religious traditions.”⁵⁷

Did you ever identify with the man who was robbed, beaten, and left for dead? You might have to use your imagination. What is it like to be so vulnerable? What do you think of this scenario?

⁵⁶ Greg Carey Stories Jesus Told: How to Read a Parable Abingdon Press 2019 p. 57

⁵⁷ John Dominic Crossan The Power of Parables (HarperOne 2012) p .62

A middle manager, near retirement, in a big oil company is let go suddenly from his job due to a huge drop in oil prices resulting from a worldwide pandemic. The company suggests it owes it to shareholders to keep up profit margins which means, letting some employees go. On his drive home through a poor Houston neighborhood he gets a flat tire. Since he had to turn in his company cell phone when he cleaned out his desk, and since nobody passing through the area is eager to stop to see if he needed help, he had to walk a couple blocks to the nearest strip mall to call for help. When he came back to his car, he discovered the car had been stolen. A young Hispanic man coming home from classes at a local community college sees the man, stops his car, rolls down his window and asks “Are you lost? You look lost. Do you need a ride somewhere?”

Granted, it’s not the Good Samaritan parable that Jesus told, but this imaginary story gives us lots to think about. When we approach some of the problems as they relate to climate change, anyone of us can be identified as part of the problem. Anyone of us can be passers by going about business as usual, denying that any problem exists. And yes, we might find the ones who can help most, are those persons or groups from whom we would least expect help.

The long emergency is something that we are all in together. It will take all of us to examine our way of life and to know we are all in this together, young and old, rich and poor, neighbors near and far, perhaps even friends and foes. Pope Francis laments that “the earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth.”⁵⁸

It will take all of us together to clean up the mess.

Jim Antal suggests that when you start talking about climate change in a congregation, that you don’t overwhelm people with doomsday facts. He suggests that you start with what you know and ways that you see things happening that worry you. The air we are breathing. The water issues in our own region. Windy days that seem to never end and more violent storms.

Some just worry as they imagine the quality of life for children and grandchildren.

It's our hope that this elective will give each one of us, and this congregation, a ramp onto this road of a long emergency. We have to start somewhere and trust that it will take us places that will really make a difference.

One final story. After a long day and having tucked her young daughter into bed, the mother sat down in the living room and started to read a book. Above her head there was a loud thump and then the sound of crying. The mother ran upstairs, entered the girl's bedroom, and saw her daughter crying in a heap on the floor. Cradling her daughter in her arms she gently

⁵⁸ Pope Francis Laudato Si' (Vatican City 2015) paragraph 21

put her back in her bed. The mother asked, "What happened?" Between sobs the little girl replied, "I got too close to where I got in!"

We need to get into this long emergency, my friends. But we can't afford to stay too close to where we get in. The future is in all of our hands.

Question for Sharing Session 5

Can you think of something you value (even love) that is vanishing as a result of climate change?

Invited people to take a few minutes to record some thoughts in their booklet before dismissing the larger group to smaller group settings.

6

Session 6 -Suggested Plans

Session

This session includes Talk 6: The Spirituality of Jesus which provides a way of looking at the spiritual options of Jesus' time (The Zealots, The Essenes, The Pharisees, and the Sadducees). Jesus' spirituality was uniquely his own. A wisdom teacher and prophet, Jesus

also modelled an intimate relationship with God. The parable for this session is the story of the prodigal son. Instead of reading the scripture text, share Mary Lu Walker's song – "The Runaway Song" <https://youtu.be/P6dAUkqN2tQ> After breaking into the small group sharing session, watch Pope Francis' TED talk on the climate crisis.

https://www.ted.com/talks/his_holiness_pope_francis_our_moral_imperative_to_act_on_climate_change_and_3_steps_we_can_take?utm_campaign=tedspread&utm_medium=referral&utm_source=tedcomshare

Talk 6: The Spirituality of Jesus

Jesus lived at a time when the Jewish people were on "high alert" awaiting the imminent arrival of the Messiah who would restore the long-awaited kingdom or reign of God.

Albert Nolan⁵⁹

What Would Jesus Do? (WWJD) It's a catchy phrase that looks good on t-shirts or wristbands, maybe even on key holders or coffee cups. But there's an even better question. Just what DID Jesus do? How did Jesus respond to the critical issues of his time? What would he say and do about the enormous gap between the rich and poor in our time? How would he respond to the plight of the homeless and refugees? Then, of course, as we, here today, think about the long emergency, what would Jesus have us do and say in response to the crisis of climate change? The primary purpose in raising these kinds of questions is a simple one. Would understanding Jesus better, in the context of his own time and place, and would seeing how he acted throughout his ministry suggest to us a similar way of being in the world, especially as the body of Christ today.

⁵⁹ Albert Nolan Jesus Today: A Spirituality of Radical Freedom (Orbis Books 2009) p. 56

Would the spirituality of Jesus help us develop our own personal and corporate spirituality? We need to make an important distinction here. There is a difference between talking about religious experience and talking about religious dogma or doctrine. Our concern to understand the spirituality of Jesus is to better understand his own religious experience.

We are intentionally giving space in our elective talks for the parables of Jesus. It's a way for us to invite Jesus into our journey. One of the things that we have said about Jesus' parables is

that they are so often *challenge* stories, stories intended to transform our hearts and minds. This is the kind of teaching that opens us up to wisdom. Wisdom is not the accumulation of facts and figures, it's not even what you know, so much as how you know it. It is a combination of experience, knowledge, and good judgement. Jesus was a wisdom teacher. Cynthia Bourgeault describes him as a *moshel moshelim* or teacher of wisdom.⁶⁰

We don't know much about Jesus' formative years. He was a grown man by the time he launched his own ministry. But he obviously had been doing something more than just carpentry work. Whatever kind of schooling he'd experienced, he had significant experiences that formed him into a unique leader.

To understand his uniqueness as a leader, it helps to look at the Jewish religious options of his day. It's especially useful to understand these religious options as they related to the Roman Occupation of the time. You might call Rome, "the elephant in the room." It was the major problem that was always present, but just as often ignored.

Option one – Zealots...the Zealots refused to ignore the Roman Occupation. Not having any chance of defeating such a powerful military presence, the Zealots became a cloak and dagger group of terrorists. They resisted with a religious fervor. As Jesus was growing up, he likely had seen Zealots crucified along the roadways.

Option two – the Essene community. We often say that there are two options facing a common enemy, fight or flight. The Essenes were a Jewish group that tried to separate themselves from ordinary life (and the day to day hassles of living under an occupying force) by establishing an alternate desert community waiting for God to do a great new thing. Many experts believe that John the Baptist spent time with the Essene community. They had unique spiritual bathing rituals.

Option three – the Pharisees. This was a group who basically ignored the Roman presence. Call it an attitude of indifference. The Pharisees weren't happy with the occupation but they weren't going to either fight or run away. They had enough to do just trying to live life in

⁶⁰ Cynthia Bourgeault [The Wisdom Jesus](#) (Shambhala Publicationbs) p.23

observance of Jewish Law. It was as if the Pharisees had a sense of life running alongside this foreign history. Unless Rome did something way out of line, they would just bear the occupation and go about trying to live a life faithful to their traditions.

The final group (Option four), the Sadducees, were the ones who tried to get along with Rome. They accommodated their way of life to the power of Rome because it was to their advantage.

This was the priestly class that was often a cut above the rest, with a vested interest in political stability.

Those were the spiritual options that Jesus had available in his growing up years. The fact is, Jesus had five options to choose from: 1) Zealots, 2) Essenes, 3) Pharisees, 4) Sadducees, and 5) None of the above. Jesus chose “none of the above.” He was marching to the sounds of a different drummer...but he was marching right into the middle of everything. Near the end of his life, when Pilate asked him “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world.” Jesus was marching to a truth that would change everything and everyone....every Sadducee’s vested self-interest, every Zealot’s hateful impulse, every Essene’s self-righteous or “holier than thou” arrogance, every Pharisee’s indifferent and apathetic attitude to the way things are and of course, oppressors in any shape and form. Jesus wasn’t just a Roman problem that day he stood before Pilate. He was a problem for everyone that thought being religious meant change for everyone else, excepting us.

Think for a moment of the biggest elephant in the room of our time. What are the religious options as we face the problem of climate change. Think of Pogo’s cartoon... “We have met the enemy and it is us.” What will be the religious options as climate change causes more disruption and disillusionment in the future? Will there be Zealot like groups striking out in anger; will there be Essene like groups running away waiting for a second coming, will there be Pharisees like people living in denial that anything in their lives needs to change, will there be Sadducee like folks trying to secure their own prosperity? What did Jesus do?

Theologian Langdon Gilkey in his younger years, having spent years in a WW2 Japanese Prison Camp in China wrote this.... “The question of human life is not whether a person, or a society, is religious or not, for no human can escape some ultimate commitment. The question is....to what sort of deity are we ultimately loyal, and what kind of god claims our deepest love and devotion? The center of loyalty beyond themselves cannot be a human creation, greater than an individual but still finite, such as family, the nation, tradition, race, or the church. Only the God who created all people (and I would add, all of life) and so represents none of them exclusively; only the God who rules all history and so is the instrument of no historical

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movement; only the God who judges His faithful as well as their enemies, and loves and cares for all, can be the center of human existence.”⁶¹

We have said a great deal about the context that may have influenced the spirituality of Jesus. Now let us say a few things that characterized it. Much of the spirituality of Jesus was quite

different than the expectations of the people. For Jesus, the kingdom of God was already here. That is to say, he experienced the holy all around him, especially in the ordinary. “That does not mean we should give up hoping for a better world. But it is important to realize that the seed or embryo of that future is already in our midst.”⁶²

Another thing that would have seemed strange to his contemporaries was his intention to be a servant leader, as powerfully displayed in the washing of his disciples’ feet. Jesus’ spirituality has been termed kenotic i.e. self-emptying. One of the earliest Christian hymns as found in Philippians reads.... “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality as something to be exploited, but emptied himself taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.” (Philippians 2: 1-8)

Albert Nolan suggests that the one thing that both Jesus and his contemporaries believed was that Jesus was a prophetic voice. “He does not seem to have ever contradicted anyone who referred to him as a prophet. In its basic inspiration, therefore, Jesus’ spirituality was like that of the Hebrew prophets.”⁶³ As a prophetic voice Jesus would “tell it like it is,” not afraid of the consequences of telling the truth to power.

Finally however, the most defining characteristic of Jesus’ spirituality was his experience of God, especially his experience of God as a loving Father. Jesus referred to God (in Aramaic) as “*Abba*”. The word even appears in Aramaic in Mark’s gospel as Jesus is praying in the garden of Gethsemane. It is the word that is noted when Jesus is teaching the disciples how to pray. He began by saying *Abba* (Father) in heaven hallowed by your name. The thing that is significant of his use of the word “is not that it is masculine or that it is a word a child might use, but that it expresses *intimacy*.”⁶⁴

You may be wondering, where is the parable to accompany this talk. I trust you all know the story of the parable of the prodigal son. (The text of the parable is in the back of your elective notebook.) Jesus’ description of the actions of the loving father in this parable was his way of

⁶¹ Langdon Gilkey Shantung Compound (HarperSanFrancisco) p. 233-234

⁶² Albert Nolan Jesus Today (Orbis Books 2009) p. 59

⁶³ Ibid p.63

⁶⁴ Ibid p.71

describing the unconditional love that God has to share with us all, especially when we turn around and make the journey back home. “Jesus saw himself as the son who learned by imitating his Father. He learned to forgive unconditionally as God does. He learned to be

compassionate as his Father was compassionate. Because his Father makes the sun shine and the rain fall on the just and the unjust, Jesus learned to love the just and the unjust, including his enemies and those who persecuted him.”⁶⁵

There is a song that interprets the prodigal son parable in simple images...images of running away...images of experiencing hard times...but finally images of returning home and finding the embrace of love has been watching and waiting. It's called:

The Runaway Song.⁶⁶

If I ran away today, if I made you cry. If I travelled far and wide, and never told you why. But if I found the times were hard, and I was all alone could I still come home to you, Could I still come home. Could I knock upon your door and would you let me in? Would you be glad to see me even though I'd been so long, so long away from home So long, so long away from home.

If you ran away today if you made me cry. If you traveled far and wide and never told me why. But if you found the times were hard and you were all alone, I'd hope that you'd come home, my child, I'd hope that you'd come home. You could knock upon my door I'd run to let you in I'd be so glad to see you no matter where you'd been. So glad, so glad to have you home. So glad, so glad to have you home

You know the parable don't you. "While he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him." (Luke 15:20)

Question for Sharing Session 6

What do you believe (Abba) God is watching for and waiting for today?

Invite people to take a few minutes to record some thoughts in their booklet before dismissing the larger group to smaller group settings.

⁶⁵ Ibid p.71

⁶⁶ Mary Lu Walker Dandelions (Paulist Press 1975) p. 55

7

Session 7 - Suggested Plans

Session

This session provides an opportunity for the group to offer each other an experience of grace. The Talk: Remember Who You Are describes in three ways how Baptism is important in the life of the church. Baptism can be a daily reminder of God's grace in the life of the believer. Before breaking into the small group sharing session watch the video – “Baptism: Sacrament of Belonging”. <https://youtu.be/tkugGYFzLkQ> The song “Special People” is appropriate before or after the sharing. Distribute the sheet describing “In Depth Sharing and Renewal of Baptism”. This Sharing Session needs to be longer than most...even as much as 45 minutes because each person is asked to share “In what ways do you feel incomplete in your life?”

Talk 7: Remember Who You Are

I believe that many baptized believers sell the sacrament short when they neglect their baptism and all but forget about it. They are missing some of the delight that comes with this 'means of grace', and missing a deeper understanding of what grace means."

Martin E. Marty⁶⁷

In the 1983 film, *Tender Mercies*, Robert Duvall portrays a down-and-out country singer named Mac Sledge. He meets and makes a new start with Rosa (Tess Harper) and her boy Sonny (Allan Hubbard). Let's watch a scene from the film in which Mac and Sonny are baptized. On the way home from church, Sonny asks Mac if he feels any different having been baptized. Mac says... “Not Yet.” But we will watch on into the next scene where Mac is singing at a local bar. This is his first public appearance since he hit bottom. But see for yourself...and listen carefully to the words of the song that Mac is singing.

Film clip – *Tender Mercies* Scene 16 (Baptism)

It's a beautiful film of how people move past sorrow and start a new life. There is a scene, however, that we'd like to describe before we get into this talk. It's a scene that never made it into the movie because it happened in real life, after the film was released.

Allan Hubbard (Sonny) was hardly a child actor. The film was staged in West Texas, so the director wanted to find an ordinary kid from the area to play the part. In the film Sonny had recently lost his father in the Vietnam War. Allan Hubbard in real life had in fact, recently lost his own father, so Robert Duvall became a sort of father-figure for the boy during the filming. Allan especially enjoyed some simple guitar lessons that Duvall gave him as the filming was taking place. The year after the film's release, on the day of Allan's birthday, his mom suggested he hurry home from school because there would be a surprise waiting for him. When Allan arrived home, there were some friends gathered around their apartment. Suddenly, Robert Duvall walked into the room with a surprise birthday gift for the boy. It was a guitar. It ended up not just being a special gift for Allan BUT it became part of who he is today...a guitar teacher. Tender mercies can be found all around us.

We've covered lots of ground in this elective. We've explored how we are called to be the body of Christ today, knowing that Christ will meet us on any road of our lives. We saw that our calling invites us to stop focusing so much on the internal problems of the church (or institutional religion) and look outward to the brokenness of the world. We need to be a joyful people who seek the lost not as moments for "catch and release" but so true relationships can be formed.

We took a hard look at ourselves and the cultural realities that surround us. The first mountain that we climb in our lives is so egocentric, supplied by ideas of individualism and making it on our own; the second mountain is the mountain that calls us to a life of deep meaning, service, and community. We considered that while the church has many things for which we need forgiveness, we can see the act of forgiveness as our primary business.

And then, of course, we started to look at “the long emergency” of climate change. It’s such a big problem that we sometimes don’t know how to begin doing something about it. But of course, we have to start somewhere...just as long as we don’t stay too close to where we get in.

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Our last session began by asking “What would Jesus do?” Richard Rohr in his book The Universal Christ writes, “we need to look at Jesus until we look out at the world with his kind of eyes. The world no longer trusts Christians who ‘love Jesus’ but do not seem to love anything else.”⁶⁸

Now the time has come to remember who we are. If ever there was a time for us to embrace the meaning of our baptism, it is now. Listen to the Apostle Paul’s words.... “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” (Romans 6:3-4)

The sacrament of Baptism has deep meaning and significance for those who hope to be part of the incarnational ministry of the body of Christ in the world today. There are three important reasons to consider; first, that baptism is the way we are made members of the body of Christ; second, that there is the promise of the old self dying and the new self rising; and third, that baptism marked the beginning of Jesus’ ministry and can be the same for us. Let’s look at each reason.

First reason - By Baptism we become members of the body of Christ. The Apostle Paul wrote... “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” (1 Corinthians 12: 12-13) Bishop John A.T. Robinson talked about Baptism being a beginning. “By Baptism we were, so to speak, signed on (and at Confirmation we were put in the cast) as actors in a great company, whose very *raison d’être* is to present to the world – or rather let Christ present through it – the drama, the finished act, of its redemption.”⁶⁹

Second reason – Listen to what Dorothy Bass says about the practice of Baptism. “For all Christians, baptism embodies release from yesterday’s sin and receipt of tomorrow’s promise; going under the water, the old self is buried in the death of Christ; rising from the water the self is new, joined to the resurrected Christ.”⁷⁰ Can we begin to imagine, how important this

dying and rising will be, as we enter into the long emergency. It will provide us with the courage to have things about our lives pass away, literally die, so that we, and others can find

⁶⁸ Richard Rohr The Universal Christ (Convergent Books 2019) p. 32

⁶⁹ John A.T. Robinson Liturgy Coming to Life (Mowbray & Co 1960) p.60

⁷⁰ Dorothy Bass Receiving the Day: Christian Practices for Opening the Gift of Time (Jossey-Bass 2000) p.20

new life. It may in fact be the best sign for us all, and especially for our children and our grandchildren, that our lives can be safe and our futures secure.

We want to share a profoundly moving story recorded by Sara Miles in her memoir, Take This Bread. Sara's journey of faith and finding a faith community is an amazing story, BUT this story is about a young child who showed up often at the food pantry Sara started at St. Gregory's Episcopal Church. Sara Miles experience of providing food on a regular basis to poor folks, is a holy enterprise, not unlike a sacrament of Holy Communion. In fact, the food pantry is set up once a week right in the middle of the chancel area of the church. Food is placed on the altar and on other tables in the sanctuary.

One day this 6 or 7 year-old girl named Sasha had come to the church looking for more than just food. She was standing in the back of the sanctuary by the baptismal font. She had come often to the pantry with her teenage aunt. Sara had never met Sasha's mother. The girl's hair wasn't always combed. On this particular day she had a split lip. "Sweetheart!" Sara said, glad to see the girl. "Want a snack? There's some chips inside." This is how Sara describes what happened next.

Sasha looked at Sara, not smiling. "Is this water the water God puts on you to make you safe?" Sara wondered if Sasha was wanting to be baptized. (It has only been a couple years since Sara herself had been baptized.)

She writes... "Nothing about that water had made me safe. It had pushed me further from the certainties and habits of my former life, taken me away from my (atheistic) family, and launched me on this mad and frustrating mission to feed multitudes. It had eroded my identity as an objective journalist and given me an unsettling glimpse of how very little I knew. I was no less flawed or frightened or capable of being hurt than I'd been before my conversion, and now, in addition, I was adrift in this water, yoked together with all kinds of other Christians, many of whom I didn't like or trust.

How could I tell this child that a drop of water could make her safe? I had no idea what Sasha was going through at home, but I suspected it was rough. And baptism, if it signified anything, signified the unavoidable reality of the cross at the heart of Christian faith. It

wasn't a magic charm but a reminder of God's presence in the midst of unresolved pain.

Sara asked the girl. "Do you want it?" Sasha locked her eyes on me. "Yes" she said, "Yes I want that water." There was something so serious in her face that it stopped me cold. I dipped my fingers into the font, and Sasha turned her face up to me, concentrating. I made the sign of the cross on her forehead.

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Sara took Sasha over to one of the priests of St. Gregory's. Lynn was herself battling cancer and was, as Sara describes her...acquainted with grief. Lynn asked Sasha if she wanted a special blessing.

From the shrine, Lynn took a small container of oil and showed it to Sasha. The girl stood up, very still, in front of Lynn's chair. "I'm going to put my hands on you and pray now, if you're ready," Lynn said, and Sasha nodded. "Jesus is always with you," Lynn told Sasha, as she finished rubbing the oil on her skin, "no matter what happens to you, even when bad things happen. You're not ever alone."

"Two weeks later, Sasha came back to the pantry with her aunt. She ran up to me, leaped into my arms, kissed me, and said, "Let's go find Lynn. I want a special blessing." We anointed her again, and again Sasha received the oil deliberately, with great attention, listening to every word of our prayers. Then she corrected Lynn. "It's not AH-men," Sasha said, "It's A-men." I asked her what *amen* meant. "It means thank you," Sasha said.⁷¹

The third reason for remembering who we are – Baptism marked the beginning of Jesus' ministry and it can launch us in our ministry today. We don't know how that ministry will take shape. Surely, it already has taken shape in our lives, but we don't know what lies ahead. Just like Sasha we can remember the promise of Jesus "Roads may get dirty the seas may get rough, you may get weary, the way may get tough. But I will be there and I am enough, put all your trust in me. Come Follow Me."

There is one short parable to visit before we begin our sharing session.

Read Matthew 7:1-5 (Parable of the Log and Speck)

As we start to think about what our Incarnational ministry might look like, let's remember this

parable. There are so many things in this world that need attention...so many things that need repaired...so many injustices that need confronted. But we can't be looking to focus on the speck (or even the log) in a neighbor's eye without examining to see if we have a log in our own eye. We must enter this ministry as humble and vulnerable followers. Remember the song "Sometimes Peter". God isn't finished with us yet! The waters of Baptism don't give us all the answers....don't make us holier than thou people. They are waters that promise us

⁷¹ Sara Miles Take This Bread (Ballantine Books 2007) The entire story is found on pages 235-238.

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grace day by day. Remember Sara Miles reflection on her own baptism....

"Nothing about that water had made me safe. It had pushed me further from the certainties and habits of my former life, taken me away from my family, and launched me on this mad and frustrating mission to feed multitudes. It had eroded my identity as an objective journalist and given me an unsettling glimpse of how very little I knew. I was no less flawed or frightened or capable of being hurt than I'd been before my conversion, and now, in addition, I was adrift in this water, yoked together with all kinds of other Christians, many of whom I didn't like or trust.

We invite you now to what we call an IN DEPTH Sharing Session. You might think of it as helping each other with the logs in our eyes. (Distribute and review the In Depth Sharing Sheet of Instructions.)

Question for the IN DEPTH Sharing Session

In what ways do you feel incomplete in your life?

Distribute the In Depth Sharing sheet of Instructions and then dismiss the larger group to smaller group settings

In Depth Sharing and Renewal of Baptism

In small groups, we want to go deeper with each other and experience God's baptismal grace through one another. Remember Dorothy Bass' words... "For all Christians, baptism embodies release from yesterday's sin and receipt of tomorrow's promise; going under the water, the old self is buried in the death of Christ; rising from the water the self is new, joined to the resurrected Christ."

1) Begin with this unison prayer:

God of grace, wholeness and peace, we turn to you in this moment of sharing with each other. Help us to trust your presence in and through us. Help us to speak to each other those things which are on our hearts and remove those obstacles which we carry in our inner lives. Help us to be vulnerable with one another and then to share a word of grace and hope to each other. Amen.

2) Each person should be given opportunity to share ways they feel incomplete in their life and relationships. Remember that what is shared is to be held in strictest confidence. What is shared in the smaller groups is not even to be shared in the larger group or with participants of other sharing groups. Confession may be part of this sharing, not just for what has been done but for what has been left undone. Be specific and avoid generalities. We are all wounded healers.

3) Those listening need to be genuine. Remember to share warmth, empathy, and respect. Hear the pain, feel the hurt, and accept the words. **Don't try to talk people out of what they are saying**...but help them with forgiveness, love, and new hope. Each person should speak a word of forgiveness and grace to the others (Remember Sasha's story as you have a few drops of water touch your forehead while others in your group say the words.... "Remember who you are, one who is loved by God")allow each person hear the certainty that God's love is real for their lives.

4) Close with this prayer:

Lord God, thank you for your love. Thank you for our lives as broken and as incomplete as they sometimes seem. Use us as your vessels. Thank you for the love we have shared with each other and have experienced today. Help us to continually extend forgiveness and grace to each other and to grow in love. Amen.

(May be copied for elective handout)

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Session 8 – Suggested Plans

Session

The final talks of the elective involve Christian Practices that might be embodied as strategies to care for creation. As a fun beginning share Mary Lu Walker's song "The Carrot". https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z_UAESkGjDw Talk 8: Incarnational Ministry explains the idea of Christian practices and then offers three examples. One illustrative video's is a Ted Talk by Ron Finley (the Guerrilla Gardener). https://www.ted.com/talks/ron_finley_a_guerrilla_gardener_in_south_central_la?utm_campaign=tedsread&utm_medium=referral&utm_source=tedcomshare Distributing "A Beginning List of Christian Practices" might be useful. More next step resources will be offered in the next session. After the small group sharing session, watch the Flash Mob recording of "Ode to Joy". [Flashmob Flash Mob - Ode an die Freude \(Ode to Joy \) Beethoven Symphony No.9 classical music - YouTube](#)

Talk 8: Incarnational Ministry

“Christian practices are things Christian people do together over time in response to and in the light of God’s active presence for the life of the world in Jesus Christ.”

Dorothy C. Bass⁷²

You might be wondering how can a children’s song like “The Carrot”⁷³ by Mary Lu Walker be a good introduction to a talk on Incarnational Ministry. Did you know that community gardens is something that congregations are planting all over the place. Of course, the key insight of the song is that sometimes the smallest among us (like the mouse) might be the very one to help get the job done. That’s always good to keep in mind, especially when a problem as big as the long emergency has us wondering...what can I possibly do that will make a difference? We can pull on this carrot together.

We thought we would turn to Jesus again and listen to one of his very familiar parables. It’s actually the first parable found in Mark’s gospel. Since Mark’s gospel was the first written gospel, you could say it is the first parable to appear in the written accounts of Jesus’ ministry.⁷⁴

⁷² Dorothy C. Bass Practicing Our Faith (John Wiley & Sons 1997 ,2010) p. 5

⁷³ Mary Lu Walker Dandelions (Paulist Press 1975) p. 7 Also see Appendix C for the lyrics of the song.⁷⁴ Greg Carey Stories Jesus Told (Abingdon 2019) The first chapter of the book deal with this Parable of the Soils.

Read Mark 4:1-9

One of the unique features of this parable is that it doesn’t stand alone in Mark’s gospel. It comes with its own interpretation. You might remember that hardly anyone in Mark’s gospel (including the disciples) really understands who Jesus is and what he’s talking about when he talks about the kingdom of God. So, at least with this parable, Jesus takes the disciples aside and explains what he’s talking about. Let’s read on to the end of his explanation.

Read Mark 4: 10 – 20

Greg Carey in his book, Stories Jesus Told focuses on the soils of the parable more so than the seeds. He maintains that most farmers, especially in Jesus’ time, would not likely be casting seeds that clearly don’t have a chance to grow. Jesus of course, wasn’t teaching a lesson for Master Gardeners. He was teaching a lesson to his disciples. Looking at the soils of the parable might give his followers an idea of how the message...his word...might be received.

Even before Jesus tells this parable, according to Mark's gospel, his ministry has had opposition. Like that seed on the hard path (the first soil example), his ministry never really had a chance with some people. If we can step aside for a moment, and look ahead to our own incarnational ministry, sometimes it's important to anticipate the opposition we might find, even in launching a ministry. There is some real wisdom in finding out how "good news" can be "bad news" for some people. It is sometimes said that if a plan doesn't have *some* opposition, it's likely not a plan that is going to make much of a difference in people's lives.

The second soil of the parable is the rocky ground. Carey identifies Peter as an example of a person for whom the faith takes hold but then falters. "Like the seed that falls on rocky soil, Peter fails Jesus when things get hard. He (Peter) does well at first, spectacularly so on some occasions. In the end, however, Peter runs away scared and will not declare his allegiance. But Jesus does not fail Peter."⁷⁵

The third soil identifies the thorny weeds. The things that choke the growth of the seeds in this instance are "wealth and other worldly affairs." (Carey) There may be interest at first, but people may have other priorities.

The parable's good soil in verse 20, is what we've all been waiting for. There will be a harvest, so keep sowing those seeds.

This parable of Jesus sets the stage for our need at this point in the elective, to discuss incarnational ministry. We are the body of Christ today. We have the greatest challenge the world has ever faced, right now, in our own time and place.... the long emergency of climate

⁷⁵ Ibid p. 14

change and the things that are happening everywhere we turn in God's creation.

We can respond to this long emergency by embodying actions that will make a difference. Let's call those actions incarnational ministry. So often, in the past, we have talked about how the ministry of the church depends upon the gifts of each member. While that is still true, perhaps there is a better way to define the action of the church that is needed. Gifts of each member can be a "me" thing while incarnational ministry is so much more a "we" thing. The building blocks of incarnational ministry are, what many these days, refer to as spiritual practices.

Often In recent years, a whole body of Christian literature has been published describing Christian practices. So just what are Christian practices?

"Practices address fundamental needs and conditions through common human acts... Practices are done together and over time...practices possess standards of excellence⁷⁶lastly, we want to have the practices help us see just how our daily lives are all tangled up with the things God

is doing in the world.”⁷⁷ While some of the practices may indeed take place inside a church, many of the Christian practices we will be suggesting belong outside of the church.

The Practice of Healing

The practice of healing might be a good example with which to begin. Some congregations have included healing rituals in their worship services. In her book, Searching for Sunday, Rachel Held Evans identifies any number of life experiences that may need healing: a divorce; a diagnosis; a miscarriage; a bout of depression; someone comes out; a hard question; an uncomfortable truthshe writes what they may find “when they bring their pain or their doubt or their uncomfortable truth to church, is someone immediately grabs it out of their hands to try and fix it, to try to make it go away.”⁷⁸

The practice of healing according to Evans does well to know the difference between curing and healing. She continues. . . . “I believe the church is called to the slow and difficult work of healing. We are called to enter into another’s pain, anoint it as holy, and stick around no matter what the outcome.”⁷⁹

The poignancy of Rachel’s memoir, especially the chapter on healing, is that just a few years from its publication in 2015, she died at such a young age, as a result of cerebral edema. Her words have almost a prophetic quality to them. . . . “if the world is watching, we might as well tell

⁷⁶ This certainly means we do the best we can by them. And just as an individual might say, “That’s not my gift”so too a congregation might say “that’s not our spiritual practice.”

⁷⁷ Dorothy C. Bass Practicing Our Faith (John Wiley & Sons 1997, 2010) p. 6-8

⁷⁸ Rachel Held Evans Searching For Sunday (Nelson Books 2015) p.208

⁷⁹ Ibid p. 208

the truth. And the truth is, the church doesn’t offer a cure. It doesn’t offer a quick fix. The church offers death and resurrection. The church offers the messy, inconvenient, gut-wrenching, never-ending work of healing and reconciliation. The church offers *grace*.”⁸⁰

The practice of healing may seem to have a narrow application that would work best in liturgical settings or support groups in the church. But what about the healing needed for the long emergency of climate change. Can we really expect a miraculous cure or is it more like the slow and difficult work of healing, entering into the earth’s pain and brokenness, anointing it as holy, and sticking with it no matter the outcome.

The practice of healing may take us outside to plant trees or take us on a work camp to a hurricane ravaged area to help rebuild a home of a near or distant neighbor.⁸¹

One of the growing movements these days involves the creation of natural wildlife habitats. The kinds of landscaping that churches and their members do, can have a dramatic influence on the well being of pollinators like bees and birds. One of the ways naturalists look at invasive plants (which by the way often get used in landscaping) is that they push out natural plants and while they may look attractive to us, for the wildlife, they may provide very little food value. Invasive plants like day lilies, for example, are more like junk food for small pollinators. Some of us might remember, how as a child we would see lots of bees moving among the clover in our yards. Not so much these days. Creating more natural wildlife habitats can be a healing process.

Ron Finley is called the Guerrilla Gardener of South Central, Los Angeles. Finley was concerned about the poor health of so many of his neighbors and how living in areas described as food deserts exasperated the problem. So he started gardening anywhere he could find available ground. This is community gardening taken to a new level. Let's have Finley tell you his story.⁸² (TED talks by the way, are excellent resources for exploring lots of topics related to the climate crisis.)

Hospitality

In the scriptures, offering hospitality is almost like a moral imperative. There is that expectation

⁸⁰ Ibid p. 209

⁸¹ Some Sunday worship during the 10 weeks that the Seas May Get Rough Elective is being used, A worship service may be planned with an environmental theme. An Order of Healing might also be offered that same service inviting people to come forward for their own healing, for the healing needs of others, and for the healing needs of our common home (to use Pope Francis' image of creation.

⁸² A guerrilla gardener in South Central LA (Ron Finley| TED2013)

that God's people will welcome strangers and treat them justly. In church life, hospitality can often mean providing an extravagant welcome. But what if people come knocking at our doors because the places where they had lived are no longer habitable. What if the greatest need to practice hospitality involves helping climate refugees. These days, there are 80 million refugees worldwide. 45 million are internally displaced, meaning they remain in their native land, just not where they once lived. Over the next 30 years the projections are that there will be 140 million more displaced.

One story that is sad but hopeful involves the Pacific Island nation of Kiribati (keer-i-bas). The former president of Kiribati, Anote Tong returned to his nation following the 2009 Copenhagen climate change conference to tell his people that it was likely their nation would be totally under

water by the end of the century. In 2014 President Tong purchased 6,000 acres of forested land on Fiji's second-largest island.⁸³ (This is about the size of Lancaster City.)

Back in 2021, a pastor from the Fiji Islands, Rev. James Bhagwan, the General Secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches described how important it will be to provide hospitality to the Kiribati people. Being forced to live in a higher than sea level habitat will be an enormous change to their way of life and culture but as a nation state they have no other options. It is no small thing that existing churches in Fiji are already thinking about ways to open their land and their help to this future migration.

How would any of our congregations in the US practice hospitality with climate refugees? Since 9/11 the annual quota for refugees has been on average fewer than 50,000 each year. Given the worldwide refugee population that is about 1 person per 1,000. So much for doing our fair share. Refugee Resettlement programs with groups like Church World Service (with an office in Lancaster) are one option for offering hospitality but the lower number of refugees in recent years has limited that ministry effort. Perhaps the most likely needs to explore are the climate refugees in our own country. Folks who have been displaced because of extensive damage in ever more powerful and more frequent hurricanes, tornadoes, fires.

One final suggestion of the practice of hospitality would involve what the church does for the homeless population in its own community. Sharing food for meals at community feeding centers is a practice that many churches have done for years.

Discerning Desires

Douglas A. Hicks in his book Money Enough: Everyday Practices for Living Faithfully in the Global Economy⁸⁴ describes the practice of discerning desires. It really is a practice that

⁸³ Mary Robinson Climate Justice (Bloomsbury Publishing 2018) pg 86

⁸⁴ Douglas A. Hicks Money Enough: Everyday Practices for Living Faithfully (Jossey Bass 2010)

encourages a congregation and its members to take a hard look at their consumer habits in order to make changes that will make a difference (even in a small way) as we face the future with a growing concern for how the “haves” of this world can share with the “have nots.” This is a practice that seeks to have people make a distinction between their wants and their needs. We may want many things, but our needs are those that are genuinely essential.”⁸⁵

There is much talk these days about our carbon footprint, how the things we buy and the life style we live has been so connected to the use of fossil fuels. Anything we do to reduce our dependency on fossil fuels, from the kinds of cars we buy, to the products we buy (transported from somewhere if not made locally), to the food we eat, can help reduce carbon dioxide

emissions. There is also a growing trend that suggests that churches and members of those churches might consider “carbon offsets” to voluntarily compensate for their carbon footprint. Carbon offsets would be investments in projects that help mitigate the impact of the climate crisis.⁸⁶

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These are just a few examples of the kinds of Incarnational Ministry that we can do together for the benefit of our common home and our neighbors near and far. The more we understand all the ways that our world is being impacted by harmful and unsustainable human activity the more we may ask ourselves “What can we do...what must we do?” Katharine Hayhoe, a climate scientist and an evangelical Christian, likes to say “There is not a silver bullet when it comes to dealing with the climate crisis. There are, however, lots of silver buckshot.”

Question for the Small Group Sharing

What are some practices of incarnational ministry (“silver buckshot”) embodied in our church and what new practices could be embodied?

After this session’s talk and small group sharing, we will watch a FLASHMOB recording of “Ode to Joy.” Then these closing comments prior to dismissing the group.

<https://youtu.be/kbJcQYVtZMo>

⁸⁵ Ibid pg. 41

⁸⁶ One of the most effective “Next Steps” for a congregation after experiencing the Seas May Get Rough Elective can be to establish ways that church member can determine their carbon footprint. Some churches are already developing projects for members to invest dollars that members are willing to contribute as “carbon offsets.”

Remember Bishop Robinson’s quote about Baptism (and Confirmation) . “By Baptism we were, so to speak, signed on (and at Confirmation we were put in the cast) as actors in a great company, whose very *raison d’être* is to present to the world – or rather let Christ present through it – the drama, the finished act, of its redemption.”

Can you begin to think of Christian Practices as small dramas that we participate in to bring transformation, joy, and hope to the long emergency of climate change. If you can think of each practice as a mini-drama, then which of the practices will you want to take a part. The good news is that there are no audition for the parts. You get to be a part in any of the practices

that you feel called to join. Did you notice how those watching the flashmob we just saw...how they got caught up in the experience? Did you especially see the children? As we head home from our session...may we leave with the trust that when we take to the streets to join others in the drama of partnering with God to restore wholeness to all creation...who knows...someday soon our children or our children's children may be seen dancing in the street.

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A BEGINNING LIST OF CHRISTIAN PRACTICES.

“Christian practices are things Christian people do together over time in response to and in the light of God's active presence for the life of the world in Jesus Christ.”

Dorothy C. Bass⁸⁷

We have given a brief description so that you might understand something about each practice listed below. The number beside the practice indicates the book (listed at the bottom of the list on the next page) that has an entire chapter to explain the practice and its meaning for us today. The description below are direct quotes from the books. For your Sharing Session, try to identify one of the practices that your church already embodies. Then, identify a

practice that might be a possibility for the church. The practices suggested here are just some of the Christian practices found in recent literature.

Honoring the Body (1) There is an intimate connection between sacredness and vulnerability. Sometimes it is a long struggle to be at home in the body, this difficult friendship

Hospitality (1) In the Bible, offering hospitality is a moral imperative. There is that expectation that God's people will welcome strangers and treat them justly.

Household Economics (1) I'm really not interested in your story of faith. I want to know about your story with money.

Keeping Sabbath (1) We need Sabbath even though we doubt that we have time for it.

Discernment (1) Discernment always aims at enhancing one's participation in the work of God; it is always undertaken for the glory of God and the healing of the world.

Forgiveness (1) The central image for Christian understanding of healing is not *cure* but *wholeness*.

Dying Well (1) We belong in life and in death to God, whose love is stronger than death. Dying well embraces both lament and hope, and both a sense of divine judgement and an awareness of divine mercy.

Singing Our Lives (1) When people sing of God, an embodied theology – a way of living and thinking about life in relationship to God – is formed and expressed.

Surviving (2) We will view our economic decision making as one of our most important attempts to live a good and faithful life.

Valuing (2) Economic decisions should always be made with a view to a relative center, such as financial security, but also with a focus on more enduring values that reflect God's purposes.

Discerning Desires (2) We may want many things but our needs are those things essential for living.

Providing (2) The claim that God provides runs counter to the stark contemporary reality in which about a billion human beings do not have enough food to escape malnutrition. It is not a supply problem – it is a sharing problem.

Laboring (2) We should understand labor broadly as any and all human activity that intends some productive outcome.

(Over)

⁸⁷ Dorothy C. Bass [Practicing Our Faith](#) (John Wiley & Sons 1997 ,2010) p. 5

Recreating (2) In the language of capabilities, being well rested, having sufficient time for play, and participating in religious or spiritual practice are all significant parts of living a faithful and healthy life.

Doing Justice (2) In a world of vast economic inequalities, how do we help bring about the conditions of moral equality.

Sharing (2) So let us acknowledge just how challenging it is to think about, let alone put into practice, sharing the creation.

Vision (3) The people of God are not the only creatures capable of praising God, after all...According to the Bible, even trees can clap their hands.

Reverence (3) For my father reverence was the proper attitude of a small and curious human in a vast and fascinating

world of experience.

Groundedness (3) The miracle is not to walk on water but on the earth (Thich Nhat Hanh)

Wilderness (3) God does some of God's best work with people who are truly, seriously lost.

Community (3) Most of us need someone to tell our stories to...the main impediment to living a life of meaning is being self-absorbed.

Prayer (3) Only you can say whether God answered your prayer. If you have any sense, you will ask some one with more experience that you to help you decide what the answer means, but even then the choice is yours. Are you still waiting for God to answer you, or is your life the answer you have been seeking, hiding in plain view?

(1) Practicing Our Faith Dorothy C. Bass - The quotes from this book represent chapters written by different authors.

(2) Money Enough Douglas Hicks - All the chapters of this book were written by Douglas Hicks. (3) An Altar in the World Barbara Brown Taylor - All the chapters of this book were written by Barbara Brown Taylor

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Session 9 – Suggested Plans

Session

Talk 9: Mature Faith and the Long Emergency introduces participants to characteristics of mature faith and how each of those characteristics might be connected to Christian practices that can be important ways to respond to the long emergency of climate change. While the talk suggests specific practices perhaps the most important handout of the session is the NEXT STEPS pages. This is the session to encourage a congregational action plan. The hope of the Seas May Ge Rough Elective is that more and more members of the congregation might be encouraged to get involved with important climate action. This is why we end the session with Greta Thunburg's Ted Talk <https://youtu.be/H2QxFM9y0tY> suggesting that hope only comes by action.

Talk 9 - Mature Faith and the Long Emergency “The

community of faith is a true ecology of vocations.”

James Fowler

We want to share one final parable of Jesus. It's called the laborers in the vineyard. You might know this story from having heard it again and again. As you listen today, however, for the voice of Jesus in this field of familiarity, think about the long emergency of climate crisis.

Read Matthew 20: 1-19

Greg Carey reminds us that when a parable suggests that the kingdom of heaven is like a vineyard and that there's an owner in the story...we can safely think the story involves God and God's domain. Carey describes two rather predictable interpretations....one, more heaven bound (as in, even the last minute call provides salvation) and the other, more justice-oriented (as in, everyone has earthly needs and requires daily bread. God wants to provide for those needs). Surely both these concerns can be important to us.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Greg Carey Stories Jesus Told (Abingdon 2019) Chapter 2 (Funny Business) p. 19-33 deals with this parable.

Most of us here today, however, have probably been idle, when it comes to matters of climate change. That's not very fair for me to say...so what I really should say is.... *I have been idle in taking seriously this long emergency.* I picked this parable without really thinking about its traditional meaning or meanings. I chose the text because I'm a late comer. And the truth be told, I'm not showing up for the wages. I'm not even consoled by the language of the last being first or the first being last. Here's my rather unorthodox way of seeing Jesus' lesson for us today.

The vineyards of Jesus' day were hardly threatened the way land and water is threatened today. The earth did ok with agrarian cultures for a long time. It's been the industrialized world of the last two hundred years that has put us at such high risk. Is it far-fetched to think that God might be out looking for laborers today who will work to restore wholeness to creation?

I'm a latecomer to this kind of calling by God. But there's something within me that believes God is ready to say to all of today's recruits, latecomers as well as those called earlier in the day.... "Meet me at the vineyard first thing in the morning. Meet me there, **every morning** until we turn this crisis around." The question for us, today and tomorrow.....Will we show up?

Are you ready to consider the kind of work we are being called to do? I'm hoping you are really to get to work in some way, some how, ...remembering that there are countless "silver buckshot" things that can be done. We want to make sure, however, that we put our best foot forward. We will need the resolve of a mature faith.

Almost 30 years ago there was a major study involving several mainline denominations (the UCC being one of them). The study wanted to determine the faith maturity of adults and youth in those denominational churches. You can't conduct a study like that without knowing what you are looking for. So, the folks back then, came up with eight core dimensions of mature faith (see the page in your booklet describing the characteristics).

What are the characteristics of a person with mature faith?

- 9. Trusts in God's saving grace and believes firmly in the humanity and divinity of Jesus. (TRUST)**
- 10.Experiences a sense of personal well-being, security, and peace. (ORDER)**
- 11.Integrates faith and life, seeing work, family, social relationships, and political choices as part of one's religious life. (INTEGRATION)**
- 12.Seeks spiritual growth through study, reflection, prayer and discussion with others. (NURTURE)**

- 13. Seeks to be part of a community of believers in which people give witness to their faith and support and nourish one another. (COMMUNITY)**
- 14. Holds life-affirming values, including commitment to racial and gender equality, affirmation of cultural and religious diversity, and a personal sense of responsibility for the welfare of others. (VALUES)**
- 15. Advocates social and global change to bring about social justice. (ADVOCACY)**
- 16. Serves humanity, consistently and passionately, through acts of love and justice. (OUTREACH)**

These eight dimensions can also be collapsed into two overall themes. A person of mature faith experiences both a life-transforming relationship to a loving God – the vertical theme – and a consistent devotion to serving others – the horizontal theme.

TRUST, ORDER, INTEGRATION, NURTURE, COMMUNITY, VALUES, OUTREACH, ADVOCACY.....all these facets of mature faith interact with each other in many different ways. It's hard to say where one ends and another begins. Perhaps it's best to think of it as an ecology. It's the way we, as the body of Christ, interact with the world around us. We like that word... 'ecology' because it can be used to describe the church as well. As the body of Christ we interact with our environment too. Our corporate body influences our world in a special way...Christian practices (as we suggested last night) help shape our incarnational ministry in our neighborhood, or community, our nation, our world. James Fowler has a unique way of describing communities of faith. He says..."The community of faith is a true ecology of vocations."⁸⁹

It just so happens that one way of arranging the eight words of mature faith forms a very important acrostic. Values

Oder

Community

Advocacy

Trust

Integration

Outreach

Nurture

As we begin to think about the days ahead, even days after days ahead, laboring in God's vineyard, restoring it to wholeness and health, let's consider how this idea of mature faith can help shape both our 'doing' and our 'being.' The VOCATION of faith can offer us ways to stay connected to God which is our hope AND connected to actions that will help restore creation to the goodness that God intended it to be.

We started the process in Session 8 talking about the Practice of Healing, the Practice of Hospitality, and the Practice of Discerning Desires. There are other practices that we want to highlight today, especially as they relate to mature faith. These suggestions are only meant to prime the pump. As you and your congregation begin to plan incarnational ministries to address the climate crisis, you will discover countless other practices that can be done.

TRUST - We hope that you have a new and deeper appreciation for the meaning of Baptism and especially how important this sacrament can be in this long emergency. It's going to be a hard road ahead requiring changes that won't be easy. Some things about our lifestyles (especially privileges that we have taken for granted) are just not sustainable. Some things have to go. But these necessary losses can give way to new life for ourselves and others. The Practice of Baptism can be a much more regular feature of our daily devotions⁹⁰ and our corporate gatherings.

Any time the congregation shares the sacrament, especially with babies or young children, it can be an important time to be reminded that our promises to the child and to his/her family is to do all we can to make the world a safer and healthier place for all. That's a huge order BUT it is the best gift we can give our children. One suggestion, at such a time of baptism, may be to have church members write notes or letters to the child receiving baptism indicating how the church is working to restore creation to better health. The practice of Letter Writing can be a powerful testimony of hope.

ORDER – Do you recognize the verses of this old familiar hymn. “Dear Lord, Creator good and kind, Forgive our foolish ways. Re-clothe us in our rightful mind, In purer lives Thy service find, In deeper reverence, praise. Drop Thy still dews of quietness, Till all our strivings cease; Take from our souls the strain and stress, And let our *ordered* lives confess The beauty of Thy peace.” What did John Greenleaf Whittier in 1872 mean by these words.... “let our *ordered* lives confess.” Does his use of the word *ordered* suggest personal well-being, security, and peace? You bet it does. The ordered life is life that has purpose. It's a life in which our desires, our loves, are pointing us toward a good end...even a godly end. The ordered life is life on that

“second mountain” we talked about earlier.

⁹⁰Tish Harrison Warren Liturgy of the Ordinary (InterVarsity Press 2016) p. 15 Warren suggest remembering our baptism can be the first act of our daily waking moments.

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The Practice of Singing Our Lives will likely find us in worshipful settings (whether it be in our church sanctuary, on a elective, or even, in the shower). What we sing can sustain us on the way. Indeed, some songs may be the cadence of protest marches. “We Shall Overcome.”

When we practice singing our lives, it can help us sustain an ordered life. “My life flows on in endless song: above earth’s lamentations. I hear the sweet, though far-off hymn that hails a new creation. Through all the tumult and the strife, I hear the music ringing; It finds an echo in my soul – how can I keep from singing?”

INTEGRATION - Is there a way to bring the various areas of our lives together into an integrated whole? Some years ago the “in thing” especially for businesses and organizations was developing mission statements. One church we know decided to ask people to create personal mission statements. There are any number of areas of our lives that could contribute to an integrated life: our relationship to God; our church involvement; our work (our job or avocations); our community involvements; our circle of family and friends; our relationship to our own body. We can think about the connection of these areas of our lives with the long emergency of climate change.

NURTURE – There are so many practices for this dimension of mature faith. Study groups (book studies or video/Ted talk discussions) and prayer opportunities (walking a Labyrinth or a climate prayer walk) can not only broaden our understanding of the larger issues involving the climate crisis but these can be opportunities to strengthen our capacity to meet the future head on. (We have a page of suggestions of resources that you might consider for ongoing opportunities in your church).

Our UCC Environmental Justice minister, Brooks Berndt shares the wisdom of a beloved French Catholic priest, Abbé Pierre.⁹¹ “He declared that we must always see with both eyes: one focused on the world’s suffering so that we might fight against it and one focused of the world’s wondrous beauty so that we might give thanks for it.” Can you envision prayer walks keeping both eyes open.... “one focused on justice and one focused on gratitude.” Prayer walks might be in natural settings, while others might be in more urban areas. What would you see using both eyes? You might try walking around the immediate neighborhood of your church.

COMMUNITY – In his book, Life Together, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote ... “ Let him who cannot be alone beware of community... Let him who is not in community beware of being alone.” This elective we would hope, has been a significant example of Christian Community and what it takes to be in a community of faith together. Remember the words of the song

“Special People”... “Everybody needs a family we can call our own; everybody needs to feel a part of something whole; A friend who you can talk to, when you’re feeling down; Someone

⁹¹ Brooks Berndt Cathedral on Fire (United Church of Christ 2020) pg. 8

who will help you get your feet back on the ground.”

Barbara Brown Taylor thinks of community as *The Practice of Encountering Others*. She writes... “At the very least, most of us need someone to tell our stories to. At a deeper level, most of us need someone to help us forget ourselves, a little or a lot. The great wisdom traditions of the world all recognize that the main impediment to living a life of meaning is being self-absorbed.”⁹² Taylor suggests another key insight that surely may help us as we take climate action most seriously. “The Desert Fathers,” she writes, suggest “that the hardest spiritual work in the world is to love the neighbor as the self.”

Of course, church isn’t the only place to find community. But it is certainly a very important way to learn the Practice of Encountering Others.

VALUES – There are lots of values to be explored when looking at the “long emergency” of climate change. You could transform some values by elevating them to the level of being virtues and then, turn those virtues into practices...wonder, humility, gratitude, self-control, respect, care...it’s quite a list and it keeps growing. Some would say that Hope is a virtue and we can certainly believe that there are people who Practice Hope. “ St. Augustine once described Hope as having two lovely daughters, anger and courage. Anger, so that what must not be, shall not be. Courage, so that what must be, shall be.”⁹³

One of the challenging things about values, virtues, and practices especially as we engage congregations to become more involved in climate concerns, is to think about what is the most important things to be doing. There can be a temptation to create a hierarchy...a top ten list of important things to do. Should we work to provide a habitat that helps pollinators like birds and bees? Or is it more important to sponsor a climate refugee family who happens to be fortunate enough to resettle in our community? Or do we seek justice for those often black or brown folks trapped to live in environmentally hazardous places that were chosen as toxic site locations because poorer communities lacked the power to push back.

All these things are important if someone has the will and the way to do something about it.

But let’s look at a lesson about the Practice of Valuing. “ Kenneth Feinberg had the unenviable job of placing a monetary value on the lives lost in the tragedy of September 11, 2001.”⁹⁴ Feinberg had to determine and then recommend the compensatory value of the life of each person who died that day. What most people don’t know is that there exists a legal and economic practice in determining such a matter. Consequently the family of the food server at the Windows on the World restaurant received far less compensation than the family of a high

powered investment officer. Feinberg would shortly thereafter, write a book titled What Is

⁹² Barbara Brown Taylor An Altar in the World (HarperOne 2009) pg. 91

⁹³ Larry L. Rasmussen Earth Community Earth Ethics (Orbis 1996) p. 179-180

⁹⁴ Douglas Hicks Money Enough, p. 17-18

Life Worth? A few years after 9/11 he was called upon again, this time to be the expert in victim compensation after 32 faculty and students were killed at Virginia Tech. In that time between these two tragedies, Kenneth Feinberg learned something about the Practice of Valuing. All the families of the Virginia Tech victims were compensated equally. It's not hard to understand that market economies don't provide equal voice or influence to each participant. So how would you even begin to think about a more just way of looking at the challenges of distributing wealth. That's where the Practice of Valuing can be helpful.

ADVOCACY and OUTREACH are like distant cousins. Think of their relationship in this way. Outreach lives downriver from Advocacy. The river isn't too healthy any more especially where Outreach is needed...you know, doing things like taking care of people, acts of love. Since the fishing in the river has gone bad, Outreach is there to help provide a soup kitchen so people have something to eat. Advocacy, on the other hand, is upstream from Outreach and is convinced that a big plant is a major polluter and is likely the main reason the fish are dying off. Advocacy wants the plant to clean up its act. You can understand, certainly that advocacy will practice social justice, while outreach will practice providing needed services. Advocacy may encourage us to exercise the most important practice of the long emergency. We are called to vote and get out the vote for the right people.

And who might the right people be? People who know what joy is all about! Rebecca Solnit has a unique way of describing joy. "Joy doesn't betray but sustains activism. And when you face a politics that aspires to make you fearful, alienated and isolated, joy is a fine act of insurrection."⁹⁵

You shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace.

The mountains and the hills will break forth before you.

There'll be shouts of joy and all the trees of the field

Will clap, will clap their hands.

And all the trees of the field will clap their hands (clap, clap)

The trees of the field will clap their hands. (clap, clap)

The trees of the field will clap their hands, (clap, clap)
While you go out with joy. (Repeat again more getting faster.)

⁹⁵ Rebecca Solnit, Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities (Nation Books, 2004) pg. 17

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Question for Small Group Sharing

What have been the most important insights of the Seas May Get Rough Elective for you and how will they influence your actions in the days ahead?

The following SIX pages include even more suggested NEXT STEPS. These ideas can be very helpful for a local church to consider climate change action in the future.

NEXT STEPS after the Seas May Get Rough Elective Plans for congregational use after a elective. As well as General Resources, other resource ideas are offered under the headings of Mature Faith Core Dimensions.

General Resources

For an excellent introduction to climate change and a faith response, see the talks by Dr. Katharine Hayhoe. Dr. Hayhoe is constantly adding to her You Tube presentations use the newest presentation you can find for the most up to date information. Here are some older ones: “Climate Change: Facts, Fictions, and the Christian Faith.” <https://youtu.be/NqjBioAQaM0> Also by Hayhoe, “Talking Climate: When Facts Are Not Enough” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nkMIjbDtdo0> Though similar in content each video has a different approach to the issues.

[Three other handouts have also been distributed at the end of the elective: “50 Ways to Be the Change” from Martha Stewart Living \(April 2020\); “Climate Concern Videos, Ted Talks, and You Tube” provides a list of resources that can be used in a variety of settings; “Suggested Books” is a list of books compiled by Dave Bushnell.](#)

An excellent study book for a congregation is a book by Jim Antal (UCC Pastor), “[Climate Church, Climate World.](#)” Antal suggests that the “long emergency” of climate change requires that we repurpose the church as we know it.

As suggested in talks 8 & 9 of the elective, congregations will do well to look closely at Christian Practices as a way of embodying a response climate change concerns. When exploring Christian Practices for your church it is suggested that a small group be formed to discuss/study the practice and then plan appropriate actions.

The core dimensions of mature faith (Talk 9 of the Seas May Get Rough Elective) are NOT presented below as they appear in the acrostic (VOCATION). However, they could be understood as dimensions to be worked on “inside” the life of the church (the first four dimensions considered) and dimensions lived “outside” the church in incarnational action. (the other four dimensions). And while these core dimensions intersect with our lives in many ways, these NEXT STEPS of the Seas May Get Rough Elective seek to connect our faith primarily with the concerns of climate change.

TRUST

“Trusts in God’s saving grace and believes firmly in the humanity and divinity of Jesus.” The experience of God’s grace is the key element in this core dimension of faith.

The Practice of Baptism is one of the most important ways to talk about God's love and the trust that we have in abiding in that love. The dying to self and rising to new life in Christ is a deep source of hope to face the changes that the future may bring. The faithful lifestyle of the future will necessitate a dying to so many "old" ways of being in the world and taking on a new life which cares for all creation.

Book: Martin E. Marty, Baptism: A User's Guide is a great study book. Especially to see the ways Marty suggests Baptism as a daily reminder of God's love.

Films: "Tender Mercies" is a film used (excerpt) in the CFM elective. You may want to watch the entire film and discuss it. Also, an excellent you tube is "Baptism: Sacrament of Belonging" [Baptism- Sacrament of Belonging. 1969 - YouTube](#)

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Practices: The Practice of Baptism (and Baptismal renewal) – One suggested practice is to write letters to any child being baptized; The Practice of Healing – congregations that share the Order of Healing (UCC Book of Worship) regularly experience the grace of trusting that healing is in God's hands.

Worship: Jim Antal suggests that anytime there is a baptism in the church, especially a child, the message needs to include how we are working to ensure a future for our children and our children's children. For excellent worship resources (six Sundays on a three year cycle) see [seasonsofcreation.org](#). These resources are designed for fall use but can be adapted for other times of the year.

ORDER

"Experiences a sense of personal well-being, security, and peace."

As the hymn "Dear Lord, Creator Good and Kind" (words of John Greenleaf Whittier) suggests "let our ordered lives confess". Order suggests a life of well-being, security, and peace.

We are reminded of St. Augustine's insight... "You (God) have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you. (God)"

Books: Douglas A. Hicks, Money Enough writes about the use of money in our lives. His chapter on the Practice of Discerning Desires is especially helpful for this core dimension of faith. Another book, The Alter in the World by Barbara Brown Taylor offers a geography of faith. James K.A. Smith's book, Desiring the Kingdom provides a scholarly look at how worship provides practices of formation and discipleship. "the book focuses on what Christians do (more than what they think), articulating the shape of Christian 'social imagination' as embedded in the practices of Christian worship." Rachel Held Evans book, Searching for Sunday has an important section "Anointing of the Sick".

Films: "Same Kind of Different as Me" (2017) is a film about a successful art dealer who seems to have everything until his wife and a homeless man helps him find a new way of being in the world. A scene from the film was used in the elective. Also you may want to listen to Millard Fuller tell his story of how he found his "ordered life" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iq8_Y4fP6pl which was the beginning of the Habitat for Humanity movement.

Practices: – Try the Practice of Singing our Faith by taking a Stewardship and Creation Hymn and singing it each Sunday for a month. Have a special activity/project for each Sunday that is suggested by the words of the hymn. (Example # 559 in NCH) "Thank You God" by Brian Wren. Children could be encouraged to illustrate the verses of the hymn with original artwork. The Practice of Discerning Desires helps us understand the difference between wanting something and needing something in our consumer oriented culture. The Practice of Groundedness (a chapter in The Altar in the World) suggests how important an ordinary walk can be to help us be connected to all that is around us.

Another practice could be Walking a Labyrinth - Taylor describes her experience. You would be surprised of the number of Labyrinths that exist these days. You can walk on one in the library of Lancaster Theological Seminary. There is also a great outdoor Labyrinth at Epler's Church Cemetery in Leesport, PA. It's a way to walk and pray oneself into a ordered life. Check out these suggestions for walking a labyrinth.

<https://veriditas.org/resources/Documents/Handouts/Walking%20the%20Labyrinth.pdf>

INTEGRATION

“Integrates faith and life, seeing work, family, social relationships, and political choices as part of one’s religious life”

The suggestion made in the Seas May Get Rough Elective for the most useful exercise in integrating all aspects of a person’s life is to develop a Personal Mission Statement. [https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/personal-mission-statement-](https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/personal-mission-statement-examples?utm_campaign=earnedsocial%3Acareerguide%3Asharedirectshare%3AUS&utm_content=How%20to%20Write%20a%20Personal%20Mission%20Statement%20%2840%2B%20Examples%29&utm_medium=social&utm_source=directshare)

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[examples?utm_campaign=earnedsocial%3Acareerguide%3Asharedirectshare%3AUS&utm_content=How%20to%20Write%20a%20Personal%20Mission%20Statement%20%2840%2B%20Examples%29&utm_medium=social&utm_source=directshare](https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/personal-mission-statement-examples?utm_campaign=earnedsocial%3Acareerguide%3Asharedirectshare%3AUS&utm_content=How%20to%20Write%20a%20Personal%20Mission%20Statement%20%2840%2B%20Examples%29&utm_medium=social&utm_source=directshare)

For this reason, this core dimension of mature faith may be the MOST IMPORTANT one.

Support Group: There may be a group of people in your congregation who want to take “the long emergency” with such a commitment that they will form a support group in which people not only develop personal mission statements BUT also support each other and hold each other accountable to make and sustain the lifestyle changes that are appropriate for the living of these days. (For examples – consumer habits that need changed, monitoring our carbon footprint and water footprint, investment choices.)

Film: “Entertaining Angels: The Dorothy Day Story”. You can watch this film as a group and then take some reflection time to write a personal mission statement for Dorothy Day.

Practice: The Practice of crafting Your Own Climate Story. The University of Pennsylvania Program in Environmental Humanities offers a great workbook (adaptable for most all ages) entitled “My Climate Story – Recipes for Crafting, Telling, & Sharing Your Own” . <https://youtu.be/kkwGAIizU-8> For the link to the workbook [My Climate Story Workshop Resources | My Climate Story \(my-climate-story.org\)](#)

NURTURE

“Seeks spiritual growth through study, reflection, prayer, and discussion with others.”

There are SO MANY resources for study to deepen a congregation’s understanding of “the long emergency” of climate change. While the hope is that further study and prayerful attention is never an obstacle to more urgent actions (including action plans of a congregation), it is always useful to go deeper in understanding the issues. Rob Hopkins, co-founder of Transition Towns Totnes and Transition Network has written a book entitled From What Is To What If (Unleashing the power of imagination to create the future we want.) Nurturing activity in the church needs to connect us to HOPE as we face an uncertain future.

Books: Here is a sample list of mostly non-fiction books that a Climate Book Group might read and discuss over a period of 8-12 months. Climate Church, Climate World by Jim Antal; Laudato Si by Pope Francis; Cathedral on Fire by Brooks Berndt; Flight Behavior (fiction) by Barbara Kingsolver; Our Only World by

Wendell Berry; [This Is God's Table](#) (Finding Church Beyond the Walls) by Anna Woofenden; [An Altar in the World](#) by Barbara Brown Taylor; and [Liturgy of the Ordinary](#) by Tish Harrison Warren.

Films: Two films are recommended here to function almost as parables. “Babette’s Feast” (with English subtitles) has often been interpreted as a sacramental lesson about how a meal changed everything for a religious sect in late nineteenth century Denmark. The film, “The Bolero” is a profound musical experience as Zubin Mehta (in much younger years) conducts both rehearsals and then, a final performance of Ravel’s classic work. It has been used as a leadership development film as it suggests what it takes to work together.

Practices: The Practice of Prayer Walking (as mentioned during the Seas May Get Rough Elective) can be as simple as a walk around the neighborhood of the church. The intention of the walk is simply to be in prayer for neighbors (some known and others unknown). Hopefully this regularly scheduled walk can incorporate any prayer requests suggested by neighbors who are passed along the way. The Prayer Walk could be an occasion of song (like Christmas caroling) at certain times of the year. The Practice of Naming is an idea that is explored by Debra Rienstra in the book, [Beyond Stewardship: New Approaches to Creation Care](#). Rienstra

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suggests to know the names of plants, animals, even people in places as close to us as our neighborhood, puts us in a new relationship with them. It allows us to experience delight, caring, and sometimes suffering.

See the suggested resources listed above - [“Climate Concern Videos, Ted Talks, and You Tube” provides a list of resources that can be used in a variety of settings; “Suggested Books” is a list of books compiled by Dave Bushnell.](#)

COMMUNITY

“Seeks to be part of a community of believers in which people give witness to their faith and support and nourish one another.”

Bill McKibben, one of the prominent activists of the climate change movement is often asked “What can an individual do for climate change?” McKibben is quick to reply, “Stop being an individual!” The collective identity that we share with other Christians is that we are the body of Christ. It is so important that we shape our witness *outside* the church so that we not only demonstrate community but we also work with others to embrace the life giving force of community.

Books: [The Transition Handbook: From oil dependency to local resilience](#) by Rob Hopkins; [INCARNATE: The Body of Christ in an Age of Disengagement](#) by Michael Frost. Both these authors believe that the resiliency of a community is what will enable people to face the future. Hopkins’ book describes the movement called Transition Towns in which local communities (esp. in England and the US) are creating new ways to have their communities be adaptable to change and be diverse. Frost’s book, especially chapters entitled “Placed Persons” and “Adopting an Incarnational Posture” suggests “love your neighbors...not the ones we pick out but the one’s we have.”

Films: You Tube “Transition Town: What’s It All About? with Rob Hopkins. <https://youtu.be/tuYSDUflfts>

“The Power of Community: How Cuba Survived Peak Oil” can be purchased at www.powerofcommunity.org
This film tells the story of the Cuban people’s hardship, ingenuity and triumph over sudden adversity (the loss of imported Soviet oil in the early 1990s). Cuba provides a valuable example of how to successfully address the challenge of reducing our energy use.

Practice: The Practice of Resiliency can be developed out of the ideas found in the Transition Towns experiences (mentioned above.). The first step in this practice would be to have a public gathering (called “Unleashing”) in which the challenge of Climate Change or Peak Oil is presented. The purpose of this public event is to launch a Transition Initiative in which people brainstorm projects that can help develop community resiliency.

The Practice of Hospitality (welcoming the stranger) is so much more than having a coffee hour at church. In those communities who happen to have refugees resettling, hospitality can be providing support or aid to a new immigrant family. Hospitality can be embodied by supporting public policy decisions or barely noticeable acts of kindness.

VALUES

Holds life-affirming values, including commitment to racial and gender equality, affirmation of cultural and religious diversity, and a personal sense of responsibility for the welfare of others.

There are lots of values to be explored when looking at the issues of climate change. You could transform some values by elevating them to the level of being virtues and, turn those virtues into practices...wonder, humility, gratitude, self-control, respect, care...it’s quite a list and it keeps growing. Some would say that Hope is a virtue and we can certainly believe that there are people who practice Hope. “St. Augustine once described Hope as having two lovely daughters, anger and courage. Anger, so that what must not be, shall not be. Courage, so that what must be, shall be.”

Book: “Earthkeeping and Character” by Steven Bouma-Prediger (2020) provides a framework which identifies core virtues that are needed to care for our world. A list of such virtues would include: amazement, modesty, wonder, humility, gratitude, self-control, wisdom, respect, care, fortitude, expectation, courage and hope.

Film: “The Ultimate Gift” (Life is how you live it...not how you spend it.) The Ultimate Gift sends a young man (Jason) of privilege on an improbable journey. The young man’s wealthy grandfather dies but offers his grandson a most unusual inheritance of twelve tasks challenging Jason to grow as a man. Along this journey, Jason develops values that lead him to the deep roots of stewardship. [Nature’s Best Hope by Doug Tallamy - YouTube](#) Douglas Tallamy urges homeowners to take environmental action into their own hands one yard at a time. He has started a nationwide movement to convert lawns to part of what he calls “The Homegrown National Park”.

Practices: The Practice of Connecting with Others. Katharine Hayhoe finds that there are lots of people who disagree with her science data concerning global warming. She writes “we really don’t have to agree on the science, as long as we agree on something that matters *more*. Earthkeeping virtues (like those listed above) can be pathways to common ground and shared purpose. The Practice of Earthkeeping is one practice that can involve everyone who has a piece of land to steward and can create a more natural habitat. (See Doug Tallamy’s presentation.) The Practice of “Silver Buckshot”. When we find our niche in caring for creation, it’s important to remember that there are multiple ways that people can make a difference. There are multiple ways to work at healing our world. The virtues of earth keeping offer people many paths of action. Action is what generates hope.

Worship: Earthkeeping virtues can be the topic of many sermons throughout the year.

ADVOCACY

Advocates social and global change to bring about social justice

Advocacy can be defined as public support for or recommendation of a particular cause or policy. This is the place where climate concerns and justice concerns go hand in hand. There are any number of Advocacy groups to join. One of the most effective ones in the Citizens Climate Lobby. [Citizens' Climate Lobby | Solutions to Climate Change \(citizensclimatelobby.org\)](https://citizensclimatelobby.org) CCL has been working tirelessly to encourage a tax on carbon as a way of encouraging a transition to cleaner energy. Other Advocacy groups include 350.org, Sunrise Movement (a youth movement), and World War Zero. Many of these groups have local chapters.

Videos: One of the youngest voices in climate advocacy work is a young Swedish girl named Greta Thunberg. [The disarming case to act right now on climate change | Greta Thunberg - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K8mQzF0Uq88)

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One of the most disturbing example of Environmental Injustice is an area called Cancer Alley [Louisiana's 'cancer alley' residents vow to fight plastic plant - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K8mQzF0Uq88)

Books: “The New Climate War” by Michael Mann . This book documents how the fossil fuel industry has sown seeds of doubt about the impacts of climate change. Mann even talks about how people concerned about the climate can become divided by fixating on specific lifestyle choices. Having a plant based diet vs. one with meat (especially red meat). “A Terrible Thing to Waste” by Harriet Washington researches environmental racism and its assault on the American Mind. It examines things like lead poisoning and how communities of color are often the nearest to the places where hazardous materials have been dumped.

Practices: The Practice of Writing Letters. Writing letters to elected officials and at times actually visiting those politicians is an advocacy action. This can also be practiced as Letters to the Editor (LED) to be published in your local newspaper. The Practice of Voting. There are many Environmental Activists who maintain that the most important acts are to know which candidates care about climate agendas and to vote them into office.

OUTREACH

Serves humanity, consistently and passionately, through acts of love and justice.

Outreach is perhaps the most outwardly practiced dimension of our faith. The church does fine work in meeting needs of neighbors near and far. Certainly the long emergency of climate change will find many opportunities that invite action of service.

Videos: Churches often send teams of workers to areas impacted by natural disasters, like floods, hurricanes, fires, and tornados. The Fuller Disaster Rebuilders is a good organization that many UCC churches have used to coordinate work camp trips. <https://youtu.be/kPuoWbfl-EA>

Food insecurity is always an issue facing vulnerable populations in any community. Wittle Farm Growing Project in Elizabethtown, PA is a way that local congregations (and especially families with children and youth) can help plant, tend, and harvest fresh fruits and vegetables for food pantries all around Lancaster County.

While this video was made in COVID times when activities were restricted, it gives a good overview of the Growing Project. <https://youtu.be/ZjB08zeggMs> Wittle Farm, part of the Lutheran Camping Program in Central PA is a demonstration plot for caring for the land and for growing crops in sustainable ways.

Books: “This is God’s Table: Finding Church Beyond the Walls” (2020) by Anna Woofenden is a great story about how a congregation planted a garden and turned it into a setting for work , worship, and feeding the community. “The 24-Hour Soup Kitchen” (2020) by Stephen Henderson Giving food to the hungry is a sacred responsibility and joy. This beautifully written series of autobiographical vignettes relates how a minister’s child turned world-traveler discovered the various ways needy people are fed around the globe.

Practices: The Practice of Healing (as suggested in Talk 8 of the retreat) can have us going on a work camp. It can have us cleaning up a local stream. It can have us planting trees. The Practice of Organizing can have us working to help start a Solar Co-op. <https://www.solarunitedneighbors.org> *It could have us plan a Neighborhood Climate Fair or a Climate Summit for an entire area.*

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Session 10

Session 10 – Suggested Plans

Talk 10: Songs by the Seaside is the final talk of the elective. The theme of the talk is that the work of climate action may require times when we are recalled to the challenges facing us and our world just as Peter was recalled to his work as a disciple after the Easter experience. The songs of this talk should be available to be shared.

If possible, each of the households represented as part of the elective might be given a framed print of the IHI picture as a reminder that we are the Body of Christ today. End the final session of the elective singing the Come Follow Me theme song.

TALK 10: Songs by the Seaside

“I wanted you to see what real courage is, instead of getting the idea that courage is a man with a gun in his hand. It’s when you know you’re licked before you begin but you begin anyway and you see it through no matter what.”

Atticus Finch, in To Kill a Mockingbird.

There is one more story from scripture that we’d like to share before we end our elective

together. It's something that happened to Peter and the disciples after that first Easter. But listen to the story for yourself.

Read John 21:1-3

Song: "I'm Going Fishing" by Dave Bushnell

I wish that I could understand what's happened.

The evidence seems just too good to be.

Is Jesus now alive and in our midst again?

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And if he lives....What does he think of me?

Refrain: I'm going fishing. At least it's something that I understand.

Cast out a net, then pull it in, and if it's empty try again.

Why pretend I'm something that I'm not? I'm going fishing.

The others want to follow my example.

But how am I to know what's best to do.

Our night of grief seemed ended in a dawn of hope.

But now a cloud of doubt is passing through. (Refrain)

Sometimes all we know amounts to nothing.

And loneliness is deepest in the night.

Our net of dreams drags us along in emptiness.

All that remains is waiting for the light. (Refrain)

For those who enjoy fishing anything in the scriptures having to do with fish catches their attention. And this story has always been a favorite. Loving fishing or not, there may have

been times in our life when we could really identify with Peter's post resurrection quandary. What was being a disciple of Jesus all about anyway? Situations don't always turn out like we plan or like we anticipate. We don't always know where the road will take us. It's possible and in fact, even probable, to have a little after Easter letdown.

As we think of entering this long emergency of climate crisis there's not any certainty that our efforts will succeed. "Roads may get dirty and seas may get rough, you may get weary, the road may get tough." But there is this promise. Christ is risen. Christ is risen and in our midst. "I will be there", he says, "and I am enough, put all your trust in me."

Do you know what Peter needed? It's something that you and I might need in our own way. Peter had been *called once* to be a disciple....but we can view this story today as Peter's *recall*. You know what a recall is, of course.....something needs fixed...something needs to be adjusted. We can't imagine living the Christian life as a disciple without having these periodic

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needs to be recalled. It seems that this is exactly what Jesus was offering. But listen for yourself....

Read John 21: 4-8

Song: "From Where I Stand" by Dave Bushnell

From where I stand, I can see.

Cast your net to the other side.

From where I stand, I can say,

The other side's not far away.

And it's full of life.

Yes, it's filled with life.

From where I stand, I can see.

Cast your net to the other side.

All that you need is not far away.

Trust me now. Trust somehow.

And be full of life.

Yes be filled with life.

*From where I stand, I can see
Just how much you've longed for me.
I know how hard you have tried.
But I've been to the other side.
And it's full of life.
Yes, it's filled with life.*

At the very beginning of our elective we heard how UCC Pastor Jim Antal along with another climate change activist Bill McKibben, talk about repurposing the church. Can we be honest

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with each other about something? Isn't this call to repurpose the church really admitting that we need a recall just as much as Peter and the first disciples needed one.

After sharing breakfast with the disciples Jesus took Peter aside. This is what happened.

Read John 21:15-17

*Song: "You Know That I Love You." by Dave Bushnell
Here we are face to face. Help me through my disgrace.
I denied you, turned and ran away.
Do I love you more than these?
Is love like wind or a gentle breeze?
I can't compare. But I vow this is true -
Lord, you know that I love you.*

Why do you ask again? Was it unforgivable sin?

When I denied you, turned and ran away.

I will feed and tend your sheep.

That's a promise I can keep.

I will serve them in everything I do.

Lord, you know that I love you.

The beautiful thing about Peter's meeting with Jesus at the seaside is that Jesus, while holding the disciple to accountability for his denial, made a second chance something possible.

When God comes to us and draws near to us...in the good times and in the hard times....we