

*Based on Acts 5:27-29. The Apostles Commit Civil Disobedience*

The question remains: what do we do with our grief?

Subconsciously, at least, this question guides the thinking and feeling and acting of the apostles these days and months on the other side of the cross. What do we do with our grief?

There has been shock. Denial. Depression. Rage. Bargaining. And now this: a fierce determination in the face of overwhelming odds to carry on in The Way of Jesus. Smack dab in the heart of the city. On the grounds of the temple. In defiance of the powers that be, who are themselves in collusion with the Roman Empire that crucified Jesus. The very same apostles who fled in the face of danger when it came upon Jesus are now preaching and teaching and healing in pursuit of the Paradise of the reign of God, even if it threatens to cost them their own lives.

Make no mistake. What the apostles are doing is classic civil disobedience to the tenth degree. You tried to stop us by killing our leader, they are saying, but we will not be silenced. The miracle is, they pull it off. And here we all are two thousand years later gathered here today on this Earth Day Sunday as one small sign of their success.

Speaking of Earth Day, 2022. Two years into the decade, we are told, that will make or break our climate. The science is clear. The consensus among climatologists is rock solid. We who are human will either rally to transition away from fossil fuels and toward sustainable energy, thereby mitigating the worst effects of climate change or we will succumb to a horror we cannot even begin to imagine, up to and including self-extinction.

The bottom line is that our way of life, in relation to our climate, is over. And the question remains: what do we do with our grief?

It is one thing to be rational about it. Again, the science is clear, mapping out in logical ways what we must do to avoid the worst. But grief is not rational. Grief is, well, grief. And there is this thing now that psychologists have begun referring to as “climate grief.” An existential despair, of sorts, that settles in for we who are human, when in fits and starts we finally face the facts of current and pending disruption and loss for a way of life in relation to this planet that is dying and, in many ways, is already dead.

Climate grief is that often unspoken, deeply unsettling, compulsion toward hopelessness and doom that too often leads us either to escapism or to hyper activism or to such utter disgust with the human condition that we become convinced the planet would just be better off without us.

All of which makes sense. This is, after all, how grief works. Shock. Denial. Depression. Anger. Bargaining. No reason at all that should not apply to our climate.

The challenge, then, is what to do about our climate grief. How to name it. How to hold it. How to honor it. How to work through it, not just in the therapy room, but in the church. In community. Together. With God and with one another.

This church in particular has an impeccable history of turning our grief into persistent, faithful action toward climate justice. From creative financing to implement solar panels to plunging into the Potomac to fund an investment in native plants to advocacy against heavy industry polluting our water and air, SPC has insisted - even in the face of backlash - that the way of life we are living when it comes to our environment is wrong, and we cannot be silent anymore.

Some of us, I understand, like the apostle Peter before us, have even been arrested for standing firm in these convictions. To which I say, “Well done, good and faithful servants.” Your reward will surely be great in the Paradise prepared for you. And, when the time is right and the call is clear, I will join you in that act.

But it is not enough to point our finger elsewhere in our advocacy. We must also look within. Which is what the Session of SPC did two years ago when we endorsed an overture to the Presbyterian General Assembly that, if passed, will require our national church to divest its holdings in fossil fuels.

Because of COVID, that resolution among many others was deferred to this year’s General Assembly, taking place throughout June and July in Louisville, Kentucky. And, it just so happens, that yours truly has been elected as a Commissioner from Shenandoah Presbytery to that Assembly, along with the pastor of the Tuscarora Presbyterian Church in Martinsburg and two ruling elders from the Trinity Church in Harrisonburg. Rest assured, I will certainly be doing my part, publicly and behind the scenes, to “obey God rather than any human authority” when it comes to advocating for this particular overture. We will be sure to keep you informed as the Assembly draws near how you can hold us in prayer throughout the deliberations.

But that, too, is not enough. We must also reach out to those we may not normally consider our coalition partners. For example, an article in last week’s *Washington Post* highlighted an evangelical Christian ecologist’s efforts to engage religious conservatives with the same kinds of commitments we say we claim at SPC. Rick Lindroth, from the University of Wisconsin - Madison, insists among his fellow evangelicals that “Creation’s purpose is to bring praise to God.”

Which means, Lindroth insists, we “are called upon to love what God loves and to care for what God cares for,” which is, first and foremost, the Creation of which we are part. “I want people to be re-enchanted with the Earth,” Lindroth says, “one nature connection at a time.”

Which is also what we are about here at SPC on this Earth Day Sunday: re-enchancing ourselves with the Earth, one nature connection at a time. Meditating through chant on the earth, water, air, fire that is our collective body and spirit. Worshiping God through living in Earth and letting the Earth live in us, which is the only real worship of God there is. Teaching our children to love the mountains and the trees. Upcycling the bulbs of our

Easter flowers through our Sunday Studio program. And praying, fervently, every Sunday for our climate: that we who are human may become so aligned with our Creator that we truly do bless the entire Creation.

It is an investment we continually call ourselves to make on this Earth Day Sunday, even as we push for divestment of all that causes harm. And it is those investments that, truly, at the end of the day, give us the hope we need to carry on.

Let the church say, Amen!