

An Introduction to the Kairos Moment

Worship is *the* central act of the church. What we do – or don't do – in that time is an expression of our commitments and our theology. That's why the UCC's Kairos Mobilization Plan suggests devoting "at least one minute each Sunday to being a Kairos Moment for inspiration, reflection, and calls to action." Most weeks, you could use a consistent time in the service (near the offering, or with the announcements, or paired with prayer concerns) to have a short reading. It could be a statement from a member of the congregation, or a passage from a book or article, a story from the news, or an extra scripture reading. Some samples showing this variety are in this document; others soon will be available from the UCC. Other weeks, the Kairos Moment might be longer: the whole sermon, a highly focused prayer, a special liturgy of confession, or a detailed action alert. If this sort of a Kairos Moment happens *every week*, it will be a powerful affirmation of your congregation's commitment.

This document has 14 possible "Kairos Moments" that could be used in congregations.

We invite you:

- Use some or all of them in your worship setting.
- Give us feedback on which of these seem helpful and enticing, and if any of them strike you as inappropriate or not helpful to the cause.
- Submit your own contributions for "moments" with original writings, quotations, or other short readings. We're asking that each submission be around 200 words.

Please send comments or submissions (no later than June 1, 2020) to Peter Sawtell, ministry@eco-justice.org.

In the near future, these and other suggested Kairos Moments will be made available through the Environmental Ministries of the national United Church of Christ.

Money and the Climate Crisis

Jeff Spencer

Every Sunday, we receive an offering. We do this for both spiritual and practical reasons. For instance, the practice of sharing is good for our spirit. Likewise, the offering invites us into a deeper commitment to God's mission in the world and how we fulfill our part of it in our church.

Practically, our church needs money to function. We need money to meet payroll and buy curriculum, to stock the restrooms with necessary paper products and to provide coffee at our fellowship time after worship.

I bring this up because those practical reasons mirror the needs for money all organizations have. This is true even of huge corporations, like fossil fuel companies. When an oil company decides to drill a well or to build a pipeline, they turn to banks and bonds to finance the work. And they turn to insurance companies to insure the project.

We know how dangerous it is to extract the carbon in that oil so it can be burned and emitted into the air. The safest place for that oil and the carbon it carries is right where it is: in the ground.

If we can't convince oil, gas, and coal companies to leave it in the ground, maybe we can convince the banks and bond dealers to stop financing the extraction of fossil fuels. And maybe we can convince the insurance companies to stop insuring the extraction efforts.

If we are going to respond to this kairos moment, to this moment in human history when we can see both the dangers of continuing with business as usual and the possibilities of moving closer to the kingdom of God by making deeply needed changes, action that is bold and creative is needed. To learn more about the movement to stop the money pipeline, go to stopthemoneypipeline.com.

Struggling Churches May Be Climate Justice Teachers

Craig Schaub

If your church struggles to pay for outside resources, there's a good chance your church improvises creative ways to meet our current climate crisis. Limits often spawn resourcefulness and sometimes a different kind of thriving.

We read in Deuteronomy "If you obey the Lord your God... all these blessing shall come upon you and overtake you..." Much of obedience is living within limits, discovering joy, depth, and connection inside limits.

It's the opposite of how we often measure success. We are convinced things are humming when there is unlimited economic growth hiding the true costs to many humans and the planet.

Suggestions of reduce – reuse – recycle, zero waste, eating local, church carbon offsets, or energy conservation nibble the edges of a big idea: Obedience to some limits often brings blessing, creativity, and deeper relationship.

Some economists say we should scrap the misleading index of prosperity called the Gross Domestic Product and replace it with holistic measures to include leisure time, ecological restoration, cultural diversity, community vitality, income equity and soulful wellbeing. What would such a congregational index look like? Have some fun imagining how your church could measure Gross Spiritual Thriving or a People and Planet Resilience Index. What would you include?

Hours of prayer unplugged from the messages to consume? Small and slow home-grown solutions because you couldn't outsource? The barter of space and time with other community non-profits? Projects to build economic and ecological resilience in your neighborhood? What loads of carbon and sunshine and rain did everyone and everything capture connected with your church?

Struggling churches might just be incarnations of a different way of measuring growth. With gratitude, and often by demand, we're flipping notions of economy. That's an essential prophetic role if we are to face the climate crisis. May we live obediently to receive blessings which "come upon us and overtake us."

The Environmental Crisis Is a Theological Problem

Excerpts by Peter Sawtell from Sallie McFague, *A New Climate for Theology*, p. 30-32
This can be used as one longer "moment," or divided into two week's readings.

Part 1:

Sallie McFague was one of the world's most influential environmental theologians. Her words, from "A New Climate for Theology: God, the World and Global Warming" are a reminder about why it is important for churches to act in this Kairos time.

Deep down, beneath all of our concepts and ideas about ourselves, is a sense, a feeling, an assumption about who we are. They have to do with the deepest questions of human existence. We act all the time on the basis of these deep assumptions of who we are and who God is, even while not acknowledging that we have such assumptions.

The environmental crisis is a theological problem, a problem coming from views of God and ourselves that encourages or permits our destructive, unjust actions. For example, if I see myself (deep down) as superior to other animals and life-forms, then of course I will act in ways that support my continuation in this position.

So we are suggesting that *who* God is and *who* we are must be central questions if we hope to change our actions in the direction of just, sustainable planetary living. The problem lies in our theologies and anthropologies. The problem, as many have pointed out, is a "spiritual" one, having to do with our will to change.

Part 2:

Sallie McFague was one of the world's most influential environmental theologians. Her words, from "A New Climate for Theology: God, the World and Global Warming" are a reminder about why "the environmental crisis is a theological problem."

A communitarian view of human beings is an ecological, economic one. It is a view of our place in the scheme of things that sees our well-being as interdependent with all other life forms in a just, sustainable way.

But most churches today are not "ecological." The Sunday sermon is not about the flourishing of God's whole creation; most often, especially in North American well-off churches, it is aimed at the care and comfort of human individuals. But the well-being of the whole of God's creation is not seen as part and parcel of the gospel message.

But can human beings thrive apart from nature? If salvation is understood as eternal life for some humans, then perhaps the answer is yes. But if salvation means the flourishing of all God's creatures here and now on this earth, then the answer is no. The world cannot be left out. The church must become ecological through and through.

Australia and Knowing Our Calling

Jeff Spencer

The photographs started off being Beautiful and eerie and haunting. Then we started hearing the stories behind the photographs.

32,400 square miles burned in the Australian wildfires in the last few months of 2019, an area a little smaller than the entire state of Indiana.¹ A billion animals killed from flame and smoke and post-fire starvation.² Fears that all of the wild animals of some species are now dead.³ More carbon released in the last three months of 2019 by burning vegetation (that's supposed to be absorbing carbon, not releasing it) than Australia produces from every car, home, and factory in a typical eight months.⁴

We know how increasing levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere are causing the very climate changes that make the fires more extreme and devastating, and make the fire season longer than we have ever seen.

“The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it,” the Psalmist tells us (Psalm 24:1). And the Genesis storytellers remind us that God has placed the stewardship of this creation we call earth in our hands. As God’s children, we are failing in this sacred vocation.

It is time to repent. This is the decade when things must change. Now. In this kairos moment.

If you’re looking for some good news in the midst of the devastation, consider this: when you are working to mitigate the climate crisis you can know, without a doubt, you are doing the most important thing you could be doing.

¹ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/australia-wildfire-bushfire-size-2020-n1112006>

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/11/world/australia/fires-animals.html>

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/jan/04/ecologists-warn-silent-death-australia-bushfires-endangered-species-extinction>

⁴ <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/bushfires-spew-two-thirds-of-national-carbon-emissions-in-one-season-20200102-p530ez.html>

A Story from Camp

Rev. Tom Martinez

Many progressive Christians are well aware of Climate change, but aren't quite sure where to begin addressing it. One way is through the power of story. Arizona Interfaith Power and Light has hosted events that invite participants to share a story drawn from an experience in nature. It might be an experience of God's sacred presence, a breathtaking sighting of a wild animal, being overwhelmed by the beauty of a sunset over the Grand Canyon—or all of the above! Stories remind us of our connection to the natural world, to each other and to life's sacred depths, which we sometimes call God!

My step-son Emilio told me a story when he got back from the SW Conference's summer camp up in the mountains of northern Arizona (yes we have some mountains up there!). As he tells it, one night they were singing around a campfire, when a family of deer emerged from the woods. His eyes lit up with excitement as he recounted the synchronicity of the experience. "Here we were singing about not being alone," he exclaimed, "and this deer comes out of the woods and stops and looks right at me! It was so cool" Nature is cool. Sometimes we need to remind each other of that!

Consider holding an event in which people are invited to tell each other their stories drawn from experiences in the natural world. It's a great way to ease onto a path of engagement in these challenging times, and to celebrate the beauty and power of God's creation!

Resources: for folks who want to go deeper into the art and practice of story-telling, check out, *Re-Creating a Life: Learning How to Tell Our Most Life-Giving story* (by Diane M. Millis, Ph. D., 2019). And for those interested in spiritual direction there's, *Reading Your Life's Story: an invitation to spiritual mentoring*, by Keith R. Anderson. And many people are finding story-telling useful in relation to social justice organizing, check out the work of Marshal Ganz who has pioneered an approach to public narrative using what he refers to as the story of self, the story of us and the story of now: (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zCu-pW16Se8>)

Nature as a Healing Balm

Rusty Eidmann-Hicks

Richard Louv, in his book, *Last Child in the Woods*, coins a term: *Nature Deficit Disorder*. He describes it as “*the human costs of alienation from nature.*” (p. 34)

Louv’s contention is that we’ve lost something important in the process of industrializing, and that our separation from the natural world has severe implications for our spiritual and emotional health. He writes: “*Nature is often overlooked as a healing balm for the emotional hardships in a child’s life. You’ll likely never see a slick commercial for nature therapy, as you do for the latest antidepressant pharmaceuticals. But parents, educators and health workers need to know what a useful antidote to emotional and physical stress nature can be.*” (p. 48)

Jesus, whenever he got stressed out, would go out ‘to a lonely place’ or to a mountaintop, or go out on a boat into the sea. He knew what it meant to take time alone in nature, and how healing that could be. It drove his disciples crazy, but it was often how Jesus renewed his strength and spiritual sanity. Some scholars believe Jesus was a desert mystic before his ministry, like John the Baptist who lived on locusts and wild honey and wore camel hides for clothes. I like to believe Jesus learned a lot from his wilderness retreats.

“*Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them...And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? (Mt 6:26-27)* Something is out of whack when we have become so disconnected from the literal roots of our lives. It’s time to learn from birds of the air and flowers of the field how to deal with anxiety, and from our Savior who figured all this out in the stillness of the wild.

Cut Off from Nature

Rusty Eidmann-Hicks

Richard Louv, in his book, *Last Child in the Woods*, coins a term: *Nature Deficit Disorder*. He describes it as “*the human costs of alienation from nature.*” (p. 34)

He describes his sadness at the loss of a connection with nature for many children in our day: “*The shift in our relationship to the natural world is startling, even in settings that one would assume are devoted to nature. Not that long ago, summer camp was a place where you camped, hiked in the woods, learned about plants and animals, or told firelight stories about ghosts or mountain lions. As likely as not today, “summer camp” is a weight-loss camp, or a computer camp. For a new generation, nature is more abstraction than reality. Increasingly, nature is something to watch, to consume, to wear – to ignore. A recent television ad depicts a four-wheel drive SUV racing along a breathtakingly beautiful mountain stream – while in the backseat two children watch a movie on a flip-down video system, oblivious to the landscape and water beyond the windows.*” (p. 2)

At a time when our souls need the healing calm and vitality of the natural world more than ever, we are more cut off. The natural world desperately needs we humans to stop paving over landscapes and animal habitat, and spewing carbon into the atmosphere, and plastics into the ocean. Like Jesus, we can use time away on a mountaintop or on the sea or in a forest. But more so, we can use the wisdom to regain balance and sustainability for ourselves and for our children’s futures.

Nature Hangs on the Cross

Rusty Eidmann-Hicks

Our human world, so wrapped up in cocoons of technology and industry, is transforming this world into its own image. Natural harmonies, interdependent communities of life, habitats that support vast colonies of creatures are being leveled, blasted, and destroyed. You've heard the figures and facts – dramatic rise in carbon dioxide, loss of top-soil, mass extinctions, burning of the rain forests, melting of glaciers, depletion of ocean life. Like a litany of lamentation, it goes on. Nature hangs on the cross. “Forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.” (Lk 23:24) Every day is Auschwitz for animals. We reap what we sow. We have lost intimacy with the natural world, and with sacred balance and respect that teaches us how to live.

Wendell Berry writes this: *“We no longer hear the voice of the rivers, the mountains, or the sea. The trees and meadows are no longer intimate modes of spirit presence. The world about us has become an ‘it’ rather than a ‘thou’. We continue to make music, write poetry, and do our painting and sculpture and architecture, but these activities easily become aesthetic expressions simply of the human. They lost the intimacy and radiance and awesome qualities of the universe.”*

In losing intimacy with nature, we run the risk of losing intimacy with God. Thankfully, resurrection is the heart of our faith. Human ways can be transformed into God's ways. We can regain healthy ecosystems and sustainable practices using wisdom passed down through our faith: simplicity, compassion, holy resistance, and prayerful healing. With the Spirit's guidance, we can walk gently and fashion societies of God's peace that mirror nature's rhythms.

Gratitude from a Whale

Rusty Eidmann-Hicks

God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." (Gen. 1:22) God has provided us with this magnificent planet, this complex and achingly lovely world, filled with a vast array of fabulous creatures.

I read recently about a whale that had become caught in a mess of fishing net, so that she couldn't move and would soon drown. A group of divers were called out to help, and very carefully, they cut through the web of nylon cord that was holding this whale down. They cut around the fins and back flippers, aware that they could easily be severely hurt if the whale began to lash and struggle. One diver spoke with awe of the sensation of cutting the webbing by the whale's mouth and looking directly into her enormous eye, which seemed gentle and curious. Finally, when all of the fishing net was cut, the whale floated free, but then turned around suddenly. The whale swam up to each of the divers and gently nuzzled them. The divers were convinced that the whale had turned back out of gratitude, to thank each of them for saving her life.

An astounding web of life surrounds us, a myriad of wondrous creatures, with intelligence and sensitivity. We share similar sensations, sight, breath, gratitude, grief and love. Our climate crisis can serve to humble us to recognize our place in the web. We can plant seeds of a new tomorrow, founded on peace and balance, harmony and simplicity, in tune with the rhythms of life and connections with each other, even those with fins, feathers, scales or fur.

God Is Calling Us to Pay Attention

Rusty Eidmann-Hicks

A story of the Buddha goes that while walking in a farmer's field, he bursts into tears when he saw a family of ants whose home was destroyed by the farmer's plow. He wept to see them scrambling to save the larva of their children. He realized that in order to eat, some life must be destroyed.

This dilemma is more and more acute now in our age, as industrialized farming and industry churns the earth and spews carbon and pollution. Our products come in sleek, shiny packages, shrink-wrapped without smell or blood, yet they come with great cost. This earth is being crucified slowly, quietly on a cross of our own consumption. Like those who walked by the suffering Christ, wagging their heads and laughing, we carry on as if nothing is wrong.

God is calling us to pay attention. God calls us to face the suffering of this world – so that out of suffering can come transformation. We pray “Thy kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven,” seeking to replicate the harmony and joy of heaven on this earth, not in some distant reality. We don't have to deny our confusion, complicity and consumption. God offers us ways to claim repentance, forgiveness and resurrection; and to seek a new relationship with our earthly home. Embedded in our faith are seeds of a new tomorrow, founded on peace and balance, on harmony and simplicity. Let us move beyond our guilt and denial, unite with God's grace to heal our planet, and restore our souls by restoring the natural world.

The Universe as Story

Rusty Eidmann-Hicks

In their book, *Journey of the Universe*, philosopher Brian Swimme and historian Mary Evelyn Tucker write: *“The universe is not simply a place but a story—a story in which we are immersed, to which we belong, and out of which we arose. This story has the power to awaken us more deeply to who we are. For just as the Milky Way is the universe in the form of a galaxy, and an orchid is the universe in the form of a flower, we are the universe in the form of a human. And every time we are drawn to look up into the night sky and reflect on the awesome beauty of the universe, we are actually the universe reflecting on itself. . . Our human destiny is to become the heart of the universe that embraces the whole of the Earth community. We are just a speck in the universe, but we are beings with the capacity to feel comprehensive compassion in the midst of an ocean of intimacy. That is the direction of our becoming more fully human.”* [3]

As people of faith, we dedicate ourselves to move in the direction of compassion, of respect and love for not only people, but also for the natural world. This is our story – reflected in a journey from an Eden of harmony and sustainability, to our present dilemma of a world in peril, threatened by a flood of toxic waste and climate imbalance. We can fashion an Ark of blessed hope, to journey over terrifying waters of change to a compassionate, green, sustainable future.

An Urgent Moment.

Stephen Gifford

Caring about and for the Earth has taken on a new urgency. What should you do? Well, *Don't just stand there! Do something!* Start simple. Find ways to be more environmentally conscious as a congregation. How about praying for creation and this crisis in some way every Sunday. Convene an action group to lead this ministry – actualize those prayers. There are online resources out there. (WebofCreation.org, CreationJustice.org) Find ways to partner with organizations who are taking political action.

But also: *Don't just do something, stand there!* Or rather, *take a step back*, and let's do our biblical and theological homework. Creation theology is much neglected. We have allowed ourselves to think that God's plan is simply, and only, for humanity's salvation from the earth. We have glossed over how God's covenant of faithful loving is rooted in a Creation theology that looks for the redemption of the whole earth (Romans 8.) We have dismissed as "just poetry" the place of nature's flora and fauna have in offering praise to the Creator (Psalm 104). We have, with little awareness or remorse, displaced God as our Sovereign, adoring our own accomplishments, wallowing in our conspicuous consumption of earth's resources and generally dismissing any accountability to the Creator for our role as the garden keepers of God's good creation. There is a need for much reflection and repentance. *UCC leader, Jim Antal's Climate Church, Climate World or Pope Francis' Laudato Si are good places to start.*

Missional urgency emerges when we recognize the gap between what God expects of us as God's own people and our present state of affairs. As God's people we are, through our holiness and justice seeking, to preserve and enhance life for *all* of creation, So this missional urgency has come to us. And we must play a crucial role in God's desire to redirect humanity's self-destructive and nature decimating ways. We can be yeast, salt and light for a new way and a new day.

A Short Story About Silence

Rev. Peter Sawtell

A few years ago, I spoke with a young woman about the work of my non-profit agency, which helps churches develop environmental perspectives in their worship, education, buildings and advocacy.

She responded with both surprise and delight. Her brief comment spoke eloquently to me about the need for churches to speak up:

"I've always been involved in the church, and I've always cared deeply for the environment. But I never heard the church talk about the environment, so I thought I was wrong."

For whatever reason, the church has often been silent about the need to care for God's creation. Most churches recognize the need to speak and act about issues of human rights and social justice. We have not done as well in extending our concern beyond the human realm.

Our silence sends a powerful message. As the woman felt so clearly from her years of church life, silence speaks a loud message: This is not important! This is not even deserving of my interest and my attention.

These weekly Kairos Moments are one way for your church to break the silence.

What Kind of World?

Rev. Peter Sawtell

When I visit churches to talk about the climate emergency, there's one question that comes up over and over again. The good-hearted church members are usually asking themselves, "what kind of world do we want to leave for our children and grandchildren?"

I tell them that they're asking the wrong question. The one we need to be asking is, "what kind of world do our children and grandchildren have a right to demand from us?"

The normal question is one that wants us to be charitable. How good an inheritance do we want to leave them, and how much do we get to claim for ourselves? How much do we want to change our lives for the sake of our kids?

We might decide that our own comfort, convenience and prosperity are more compelling than what the planet will look like in 50 years. Indeed, that's precisely the way our global society is answering the question. The way we're trashing the planet shows that we're willing to leave them a ruined world.

But if we ask what they have a right to demand from us, then their needs get considered first. It is a question of intergenerational justice, not charity. At the very least, our children and grandchildren have a right to a livable planet. How can we, as justice-seeking Christians, respond to their demand for a livable world?