

**When Climate Crises Collide**  
**Sunday, February 2, 2025, 10:00 a.m.**  
**All Saints Church, Pasadena**  
**The Rev. Susan Russell**

*Sometimes, Lord, it just seems to be too much ...  
 Sometimes the very air seems scorched  
 by threats and rejection and decay  
 until there is nothing but to inhale pain  
 and exhale confusion.  
 Too much of darkness, Lord,  
 too much of cruelty and selfishness and indifference.  
 Too much, Lord, too much  
 bloody, bruising brainwashing much.*

*Or is it too little,  
 too little of compassion,  
 too little of courage,  
 of daring, of persistence,  
 of sacrifice;  
 too little of music and laughter and celebration?*

*O God, make of us some nourishment for these starved times,  
 some food for our siblings who are hungry for gladness and hope,  
 that, being bread for them,  
 we may also be fed and be full.  
 Amen.*

This prayer comes from a book called “Guerrillas of Grace: Prayers for the Battle” – written over 40 years ago by Methodist pastor and activist Ted Loder.

It is a book Tim introduced to us ... and when I turned to it last week – looking for inspiration on a morning when all I was feeling was exasperation – it opened to these words that felt to me like they had been written 40 minutes – not 40 years ago. Maybe they feel that way to you, too.

Because there are times when it seems to be too much.  
 And this is one of them.  
 In fact, this is **two** of them.

For where we live and move and have our being  
 is a moment in history which is a Venn diagram of two climate crises

that have crashed in each other like tectonic plates --  
and we – my brothers and sisters and gender fluid siblings –  
are smack dab at the epicenter of that crash.

The first is the ongoing **Global Climate Crisis**  
precipitated by the erosion of the ozone layer  
protecting this fragile earth, our island home  
and exacerbated by decades of denial and deferral  
of accountability and action  
to reverse the impact our exploitation of the planet has caused,  
resulting in a growing number of large, uncontrollable wildfires  
that devastate ecosystems, destroy homes,  
and release massive amounts of carbon dioxide,  
further worsening global warming in a dangerous cycle.

The second is a **Cultural Climate Crisis**  
germinated in Pat Buchanan's 1992 "Culture Wars" speech  
fueled by a worldview grounded in so-called "biblical orthodoxy"  
framing the cultural and political divisions in the United States  
as a "religious war for the soul of America"  
setting the stage the reemergence of Christian Nationalism and  
for decades of the erosion of civic discourse,  
influencing debates on everything from education to immigration,  
creating a false equivalency between fact and opinion,  
and targeting marginalized communities  
fueling racism, sexism, nativism, homophobia & transphobia,  
anti-Semitism and Islamophobia  
all in the service of undermining social cohesion, dismantling democracy  
and making patriarchy great again.

That Venn diagram image occurred to me this week  
while navigating my own vortex of challenges  
of returning to the home Lori and I evacuated  
in Altadena at 7:30pm on January 7 in the wake of the Eaton Fire  
while continuing to respond to the pastoral needs  
of the 72 families from All Saints  
who have no home to return to  
while addressing the diocesan wide concerns  
which include our siblings in the Palisades and the devastation to their community  
and our siblings who are being targeted by executive orders  
fueled by the raging winds of the Cultural Climate Crisis  
flying through our nation's air waves like toxic embers  
igniting fires of fear, intimidation and victimization  
just as destructive to the ecosystem of our fragile democracy

as the embers that flew through our community on January 7  
igniting the fires that devastated homes, businesses, wildlife,  
and took at least 29 precious lives.

The cherry on the top was this quote from the current Vice President from recent interview:

*There is a Christian concept that you love your family and then you love your neighbor, and then you love your community, and then you love your fellow citizens, and then after that, prioritize the rest of the world. A lot of the far left has completely inverted that ... and that is no way to run a society.*

This my sisters and brothers and gender fluid siblings  
is Chaplain Susan's Exhibit A  
of how the toxic theology spewed for decades into our culture  
by Christian Nationalists like Pat Buchanan  
has eroded the brains of those who have ingested it  
as surely as the toxic carbon dioxide spewed into our atmosphere  
has eroded the ozone layer and endangered our planet ...  
laying down neuron tracks of narrow tribalism  
which erase Jesus' call to love your neighbor as yourself  
and ignoring what is arguably the correct answer on Jesus'  
"final exam" of who will enter the kingdom ...  
"Inasmuch as you have done it unto the least of these."  
(Matthew 25:40 ... if you like to look things up).

Not insasmuch as you have done it to your family first  
and then to those who look like you,  
vote like you, worship like you and think like you ...  
with some crumbs for the "rest of the world" if there is anything left.

**"Done it unto the least of these."** Period. Full stop.

Sometimes, Lord, it just seems to be too much.  
And this is one of those times.

In the twenty-three years  
I have had the privilege of preaching from this pulpit,  
there have been more times than I can count  
when I have brought you words from the inimitable Dr. Verna Dozier –  
African American biblical scholar, teacher and prophetic Episcopalian.

This is another one of those times.

And of all her words,

it may be these that I have turned to more times than any other –  
 especially when we hit “one of those times”  
 when the challenges ahead can seem so daunting  
 that we are immobilized by not even knowing where to even start.

*“Doubt” wrote Dr. Dozier, “is not the opposite of faith: fear is.  
 Fear will not risk that even if I am wrong,  
 I will trust that if I move today by the light that is given me,  
 knowing it is only finite and partial,  
 I will know more and different things tomorrow than I know today,  
 and I can be open to the new possibility I cannot even imagine today.”*

Freedom from the fear of risking because we might be wrong  
 frees us up to get it right —  
 by opening new doors, challenging old assumptions, chancing new undertakings.

And as we dwell in the center of this Venn diagram of these two Climate Crises,  
 there is an urgent need for new possibilities we cannot even imagine today  
 to overcome the very real challenges we face in this moment  
 where we are constantly bombarded by efforts to feed our fears  
 as part of a strategic plan to keep us polarized and demoralized —  
 and therefore immobilized.

And one of the most effective ways to resist that fear — to refuse to be immobilized — is to  
 listen to the voices of witness to the power of God’s love to transform even the fear in our  
 hearts into strength for the journey — voices like Dr. Dozier’s who remind us about our history  
 in order to empower us for our future.

Voices that comfort us in our affliction and afflict us in our comfort ... voices that call us to  
 continue to remember to ask of ourselves and each other: “What would it mean to actually  
 follow Jesus?”

Voices like Bishop Mariann Budde ... who wrote these words in her coming-soon-to-a-Lenten-  
 book-study-group-near-you book “How We Learn to Be Brave:”

*“The courage to be brave when it matters most requires a lifetime of small decisions that  
 set us on a path of self-awareness, attentiveness, and a willingness to risk failure for  
 what we believe is right. It is also a profoundly spiritual experience, one in which we feel  
 a part of something larger than ourselves and guided by a larger Spirit at work. Decisive  
 moments make believers out of everyone.”*

The courage to be brave when it matters most is going to be the work in front of us for the  
 foreseeable future. And the lessons appointed for today — this Feast Day of the Presentation of  
 Our Lord — offer a roadmap for at least how to begin to begin to do that work of being brave.

The prophet **Malachi** urges his listeners – and us – to “pay attention” ... literally to “stay woke” and to stay in alignment with God’s values of love, justice and compassion and reject the spiritual corruption that corrupted 5<sup>th</sup> Century BCE Israel as surely as the toxic theology of Christian Nationalism is corrupting 21<sup>st</sup> Century America. His words and that history are a reminder to me – and to us – that the challenge we face in this moment is a challenge our spiritual ancestors have faced in the past ... and that the same God who saw them through to the other side is waiting on the other side for us.

The **psalmist** reminds us – in words very dear to my heart – “*No good thing will the Lord withhold from those who walk with integrity*” – the text Louie Crew of blessed memory claimed as the foundation of Integrity USA he founded in 1974 ... at a time in the church and in the world where we literally could not have IMAGINED that one day a Bishop of Washington would stand in the pulpit of the National Cathedral and preach these words to the President of the United States:

*In the name of our God, I ask you to have mercy upon the people in our country who are scared now. There are gay, lesbian and transgender children in Democratic, Republican and independent families who fear for their lives.*

It is a reminder to me that while change **can** happen, it happens because changemakers like Louie are willing to step out ahead of their fears and imagine a new tomorrow they couldn’t imagine today. And it challenges us to go and do likewise.

And this year -- as we hear the story of Jesus’ presentation in the temple in the Gospel According to Luke -- the part of the story that stood out for me were these words of Simeon:

*“This child is destined to be the downfall and the rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that is rejected, so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare.”*

This Cultural Climate Crisis facing our nation is a moment when the “secret thoughts of many” are being laid bare.

The deep seeded biases, prejudices, unexamined privilege, greed and cruelty that have been unleashed, revealed and exposed in this time of orchestrated chaos ... to the shock of some and the not-so-much of others ... do not belong to one man or one party or one set of executive orders but are as ancient as Malachi and Luke ... are exactly what the one who loved us enough to become one of us in order to show us how to love one another called us to follow him in challenging in our day as he did in his.

For the child whose presentation in the temple we celebrate today –  
 the child who Luke tells us “grew in size and strength ...  
 filled with wisdom, and the grace of God” ...  
 is the same child who spent a life being brave ...  
 a lifetime of making small decisions  
 that set him on a path of self-awareness, attentiveness,  
 and a willingness to risk failure –  
 even up to death on the cross –  
 in order to liberate us to love each other as God loved us.

And two thousand years later, his life and work and witness  
 still inspires us to gather today –  
 at this center of this 21<sup>st</sup> century Venn diagram of Climate Crises –  
 to be brave enough to gather at this altar ...  
 to receive the bread and wine made holy ...  
 and to ask the God who called us together  
 to help us be brave ...  
 and to send us out as beacons of that love  
 into our beautiful and broken world.

Let us pray again:

*O God, make of us some nourishment for these starved times,  
 some food for our siblings who are hungry for gladness and hope,  
 that, being bread for them, we may also be fed and be full. Amen.*

*A Sermon for February 2, 2025: The Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord  
 All Saints Church, Pasadena @revsusanrussell*