Seven Things that Give Me Hope for the Climate Crisis

Rev. Dr. Barbara Rossing
2023 St. Paul Area Synod Assembly
Two biblical messages for our Moment: Kairos and Hope
“Kairos”: The urgent present moment.

- Mark 1:15, Jesus’ opening sermon: “The *Kairos* is fulfilled and the reign of God is at hand”
- Luke 12: 56, “You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present *kairos*?”
- Romans 8: 18, “the sufferings of this present *kairos*”
- Romans 13:11, “you know what *kairos* it is”
- Rev 11:18 “The *kairos (time)* has come... to destroy the destroyers of earth.”

(note: Revelation says the time has come to destroy *not* the earth, but rather those who destroy earth= Roman Empire).
• ELCA Social Message on Earth’s Climate Crisis

• God gives a sacred responsibility to human beings in Genesis: to care for and “keep” God’s creation for future generations. God made humans to be “keepers” of the garden, God’s earth (Genesis 2:15). ..

• From the standpoint of faith, it is reasonable to conclude that the climate crisis is, indeed, a kairos moment.

• “We use the Greek word kairos to describe a moment in time, often a brief moment in time, which has eternal significance. ... For the human race as a whole, there is now a kairos, a decisive time in our relationship with God’s creation. We will either act in time to protect life on earth from the worst consequences of human folly, or we will fail to act.

• – Patriarch Bartholomew
Hope: *It’s not too late!*

Hope for Healing: Our world is ill but this is not a “sickness unto death” (John 11:4)
The Church’s mission is to open up the space between denial and despair, for **hope**, for **healing**, to transform our energy system to a clean, renewable energy future.

With God’s help, we can do this.
The Bible gives us hope for Life on Earth—Not for leaving Earth Behind!

(not this T-shirt’s message)
Professor Katherine Hayhoe, Texas Tech University, climate scientist

• Most people have “solution aversion”
• In the face of this, we have to say that it is worth it!
Why talking about climate solutions matters so much now:

• Most Americans don’t deny climate science
• Most say they have experienced extreme weather, and attribute that to climate change
• But few say they feel **motivated** or **hopeful**.

(AP April 23, 2023, reporting on AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs poll)

The problem: People don’t seem to think there is anything they can do that makes a difference.
Rebecca Solnit: “What if climate change meant not doom — but abundance?”

• Too many people still think solving climate will mean deprivation or sacrifice

• “Much of the reluctance to do what climate change requires comes from the assumption that it means trading abundance for austerity, and trading all our stuff and conveniences for less stuff, less convenience. But what if it meant giving up things we’re well rid of, from deadly emissions to nagging feelings of doom and complicity in destruction? What if the austerity is how we live now — and the abundance could be what is to come?”

• We can have abundance!

• www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/03/15/rebecca-solnit-climate-change-wealth-abundance/
“Abundance” in the Bible: (Greek *perisseuein*)

Jesus has some things to say:

- John 10:10 “I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly”
- John 6:13, feeding of 5000, “Gather up the ‘abundances’ (fragments overflowing after all were fed)”
ANAKEPHALAIOSASTHAI (EPH 1:9-10, HOS 2:18)
• “Hope has two beautiful daughters; their names are Anger and Courage.
• Anger at the way things are, and
• Courage to see that they do not remain as they are.”

• Saint Augustine, quoted by Allan Boesak, *Dare We Speak of Hope*
It’s Not Too Late
Seven Things that Give me Hope for the Climate Crisis

1. William Shatner Seeing Earth: “It’s so fragile”
1. William Shatner seeing Earth: “it’s so fragile”
Sally Ride and other astronauts call us to care for Earth’s climate
MISSION PLANET EARTH

OUR WORLD AND ITS CLIMATES—AND HOW HUMANS ARE CHANGING THEM

SALLY RIDE & TAM O’SHAUGHNESSY
“When I was an astronaut, I spent hours gazing down at the Earth below... I could see rivers emptying into blue oceans,...I could see city lights... More than anything, though, I could see how fragile Earth is. I could see a thin, fuzzy blue line... outlining the planet. At first, I didn’t know what I was seeing. Then I realized it was Earth’s atmosphere. It looked so thin...
I realized that this air is our planet’s spacesuit—it’s all that separates every bird, fish, and person on Earth from space.”

--Sally Ride, Mission Planet Earth
Seven Things that Give me Hope for the Climate Crisis

2. Beauty
“God saw that it was good” (Genesis 1: 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, NRSV)
• Ki Tov is a refrain repeated 6 times in Genesis 1:
  • “How good” or
  • “How beautiful”

• “God saw how good it was.” (Common English Bible)
• “God saw how beautiful it was.”

• Read Genesis 1 as “liturgical poetry”
• (Ellen Davis, Scripture, Culture and Agriculture)
God made the firmament (dome; atmosphere) and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome...God called the dome Sky. God called the dry land Earth and the waters Seas. And God saw how beautiful it was.
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago,
www.lstc.edu

ZYGON CENTER
FOR RELIGION AND SCIENCE
Earth and Waters become "Co-Creators" with God:

12The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw how good it was. (Common English Bible CEB)
Seven Things that Give me Hope for the Climate Crisis

3. The Power of Prophetic Imagination
3. The Power of Prophetic Imagination

Tell Bible stories!
Dare to be a prophet of the God of life!
The World is not about to end.

“The World is about to Turn.”
The World is about to turn (The Canticle of the Turning)

"My heart shall sing of the day you bring
Let the fires of your justice turn
Wipe away all tears for the dawn draws near
For the world is about to turn."

Canticle of the Turning chorus, Rory Cooney ELW #723
Dueling Gospels: Christ’s Gospel against Rome’s Gospel

Roman Propaganda claiming to show “how the world works” (*Roma Aeterna*):

Gemma Augustea, 20 CE in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

(L to R) Emperor Tiberius, Nike, Germanicus, Roma, Emperor Augustus, Inhabited empire/Oikoumene (placing crown); Earth/Ge (holding cornucopia), Oceanus
The Bible says “no” to Rome’s gospel of conquest & violence.
Revelation’s contrasting future visions: an urgent choice between two political economies

• Apocalypse means “unveiling,” pulling back a curtain to help us see the kairos moment
• Prophecy is not prediction but warning: a wake-up call. (like the prophet Jonah’s “Just 40 days.”)
• “Babylon” (Revelation 17-18): diagnosing the pathology of the Roman Empire: Idolatry, economic & environmental injustice, military conquest,
• “Come out, my people” (Rev 18:4)
• “New Jerusalem” (Revelation 21-22): God’s vision of a renewed world, on Earth; river of life for everyone (free of charge); tree of Life for healing the nations
Imagine! God’s Earth and People Restored
sermon by Bishop Michael Curry, 2021

- “God’s earth and people restored. Imagine.
- “Imagine a world where children do not go to bed hungry at night. A world where we learn to lay down our swords and shields by the riverside and study war no more.
- “Imagine our air is clear, our water clean, our environment healing.
- --Ecumenical Advocacy Days
LET US DREAM
THE PATH TO A BETTER FUTURE
POPE FRANCIS
Seven Things that Give me Hope for the Climate Crisis

4. Indigenous Wisdom, Indigenous Communities
4. Indigenous Resistance, Wisdom, Global Indigenous Communities

“The primary difference between the Western and Indigenous ways of life is that Indians experience and relate to a living universe, whereas Western people reduce all things, living or not to objects.”

-Vine Deloria, Jr. (1933 - 2005)
WE SURVIVED THE END OF THE WORLD

LESSONS FROM NATIVE AMERICA ON APOCALYPSE AND HOPE

STEVEN CHARLESTON
Truth & Healing Movement

The ELCA’s Truth & Healing Movement is an opportunity for this church to increase our understanding of our colonizing impacts on Indigenous people in the past and present. Over the next several months, there will be opportunities to learn, raise awareness and engage in other ways to impact hearts and lives across this church. We believe that the truth, and our knowing and embracing it, is the first step toward healing for all of us.

More information will be shared in the coming days and weeks. Stay tuned to our ELCA and Living Lutheran social media channels and this page to learn about ways to get involved and share with others.
Seven Things that Give me Hope for the Climate Crisis

5. Breakthroughs in Technology faster, (and cheaper) than anyone imagined: Renewables, Battery Storage, more!
5. Breakthroughs in Technology faster, cheaper, than anyone imagined: Renewables, Battery Storage, more!
The Solutions Project.org: Let’s Create the Future We Want
100% EARTH

A vision for the transition to 100% wind, water & solar energy

2050
PROJECTED ENERGY MIX

- Residential rooftop solar: 5.4%
- Solar plants: 26.5%
- Concentrating solar plants: 2.4%
- Offshore wind: 38.2%
- Offshore wind: 11.5%
- Commercial & government rooftop solar: 1.9%
- Wave devices: 0.3%
- Geothermal: 0.7%
- Hydroelectric: 6%
- Tidal Turbines: 0.1%

40-Year Jobs Created
Number of jobs where a person is employed for 40 consecutive years

- Construction jobs: 24,389,000
- Operation jobs: 30,151,000

Reducing Energy Demand
Improving energy efficiency and powering the grid with electricity from the wind, water and sun positively reduces the overall energy demand.
New “Drawdown Roadmap” charts the path to a climate-stable future

Example: Regenerative Agriculture:

Silvopasture integrates trees, pasture, and forage into a single system. Incorporating trees into agriculture improves land health and increases carbon sequestration.

Biochar
DRAWDOWN
THE MOST COMPREHENSIVE PLAN EVER PROPOSED TO REVERSE GLOBAL WARMING
EDITED BY PAUL HAWKEN
- **Lutheran Action Team**
- To engage Lutheran (ELCA) members and congregations, encouraging their support of carbon pricing
- Public Group
Lutheransrestoringcreation.org
Seven Things that Give me Hope for the Climate Crisis

6. Communities of Hope, “Pockets” of the future, already now
Rev. Dr. Brian Blount, “Pockets of Hope”: “Jesus opened up a present pocket of future power.”
Brian Blount: Go Preach!

• “The kingdom of God is, to borrow a modern military phrase, an apocalyptic “pocket of resistance.” In a strategic sense this pocket comes from the future...

• Christians can participate in the tactical invasion that is the rule of God’s future kingdom breaking into the socio-political present. It is how African Americans build and become present pockets of future kingdom resistance.

• As the kingdom draws near in tactical pockets of resistance, so, too, does the presence of God draw near.

• We are in such a “pocket moment.”
Seven Things that Give me Hope for the Climate Crisis

7. The ELCA’s new Social Message on Climate Justice
History of “Earth’s Climate Crisis” social message (www.elca.org/climatecare)

• Authorized by ELCA Church Council in November 2021.
• Over 500 individuals reviewed the public comment draft.
• A group of reviewers consistent with ELCA diversity commitments.
• The Conference of Bishops’ Theological and Ethics Concerns Committee gave the text a final close review.
• Officially adopted by ELCA Church Council April 2023
“The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it.”

Psalm 24:1
“God said, ‘This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations.’”

Genesis 9:12
In the Scriptures, God assigns a sacred responsibility to human beings: we are to care for and “keep” God’s creation for future generations.
Created from the earth’s dust (Genesis 2:7), human beings are given the responsibility to “keep” or care for the earth…

… just as God keeps and cares for us (Numbers 6:24-26).
The Hebrew word *shamar*, translated as “keep,” means to protect and sustain Earth’s life for future generations.
This social message is rooted in our duty to be responsible caretakers of God’s creation.

Though the climate has always been subject to some change, the facts show how dramatic global warming depends on human practices.
With God’s help humanity can turn from the present course, take loving and just action, and live more harmoniously within God’s beautiful and verdant creation.
Viewed from space, Earth’s atmosphere appears as a very thin and iridescent blue line around the circumference of the planet.
The combustion of fossil fuels has powered most of the global economy for over 200 years and has permitted remarkable advances in food production, medicine, transportation, and consumer goods.
Increasing concentrations of these greenhouse gases cause Earth to retain more and more heat from the sun, which has led to an increase in global warming and related climate change.
Evidence of this warming is visible all over the world.
Ice sheets in the Arctic and on Greenland are melting at an accelerating rate.
This increase in freshwater melting, combined with the expansion of seawater due to warmer temperatures, is also raising global sea levels at an accelerating rate.
These rising seas imperil one billion people who live less than 10 meters above current high tide lines, and this will likely produce millions of climate refugees.
Changing ecosystems are hastening the extinction of many plant and animal species. This is especially true in Earth's oceans, which have stored 90% of the excess heat to date.
Warmer temperatures that result from global warming also pose grave public health risks.

The overwhelming majority have low incomes and tend to be Black people, Indigenous people, and other people of color.
Impact of Climate Change on Human Health

- Injuries, fatalities, mental health impacts
- Asthma, cardiovascular disease
- Heat-related illness and death, cardiovascular failure
- Malaria, dengue, encephalitis, hantavirus, Rift Valley fever, Lyme disease, chikungunya, West Nile virus
- Forced migration, civil conflict, mental health impacts
- Changes in Vector Ecology
- Extreme Heat
- Increasing Allergens
- Environments Degradation
- Respiratory allergies, asthma
- Severe Weather
- Water and Food Supply Impacts
- Water Quality Impacts
- Malnutrition, diarrheal disease
- Cholera, cryptosporidiosis, campylobacter, leptospirosis, harmful algal blooms
- Air Pollution
- RISING TEMPERATURES
- MORE EXTREME WEATHER
- RISING SEALEVELS
- MORE EXTREME WEATHER
- RISING TEMPERATURES
- RISING SEALEVELS
- RISING TEMPERATURES
- RISING SEALEVELS

ELCA
Earth has warmed 1.1°C since 1850; we face another 1.3°C - 1.6°C of warming over the next seven decades, with warming projected to continue increasing at the end of the 21st century.
From the standpoint of faith, it is reasonable to conclude that the climate crisis is, indeed, a kairos moment.
The ancient Greeks had two words for “time”:

- **Chronos (regular time)** referred to the usual sense of time that is ordinary, quantitative, and sequential.

- **Kairos (critical time)**, in contrast, referred to an unusual moment that is extraordinary, qualitative, and decisive.
An urgent “Kairos moment”: Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, describing the climate crisis
“For the human race as a whole, there is now a kairos, a decisive time in our relationship with God’s creation. We will either act in time to protect life on earth from the worst consequences of human folly, or we will fail to act.” --Patriarch Bartholomew
How should Christians begin to respond to this kairos moment?

All around us are voices crying out for help and transformation.
As God’s people we are called to confess:

• Our failure to consider the interests of future generations
• Our disregard for the victims of environmental injustice
• Our insufficient concern for the welfare of other species facing extinction
• Our personal complicity through high-carbon lifestyles
• Our dismissive disdain for those with whom we disagree
Members of our church have a moral obligation to be engaged in setting the direction of our country as we live out our vocation to care for God’s creation.
On the one hand, we need to *summon the courage* to face the climate crisis and the perils it poses to human civilization as well as the diversity of life on Earth.

On the other hand, we need to *exercise humility* regarding how best to address these perils.

*We can agree on ends but disagree on means.*
The ELCA calls upon individuals, agencies, organizations, corporations, and governments to pursue goals, set policies, and establish practices that:
● Affirm the overwhelming scientific evidence that the current rise in emissions and related global warming has been caused by human activity.

● Invite and engage all stakeholders to **develop climate change solutions** that are appropriate to their locale and adequate to the challenges we face.

● **Promote a just transition** from fossil fuels to a clean energy future that leaves no one behind, through public investments in economic development and job retraining programs.
Prioritize allocation of resources to those who bear the least responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions but already experience disproportionately its costly impacts.

- Foster restorative justice by fully funding the United Nations Green Climate Fund and significant funds for U.S. victims of environmental injustice within “frontline communities.”
• Reduce greenhouse gas emissions at the rate scientists project will keep global warming below 2.0 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) and as close as possible to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

○ Include an interim U.S. target of 50% reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from 2005 levels by 2030.

○ Affirm differing but increasingly ambitious reduction targets for signatories of the Paris Agreement.
• Support mitigation strategies to achieve this goal, including:
  ○ Increased regulation of the sources of greenhouse gas emissions.
  ○ Increased access to and incentives for home weatherization, energy efficiency, renewable energy systems, building electrification, and the electrification of transportation to reduce household energy burdens.
  ○ New and expanded state and federal clean-energy standards.
• Carbon-pricing approaches that successfully mitigate regressive impacts on low- and moderate-income households while also effectively reducing emissions.

• Improved forest management practices that reduce deforestation and promote biodiversity through afforestation (tree planting) in urban, suburban, and rural areas.
• Support strategies that enable adaptation to climate change, including:
  • Protection of coastal wetlands.
  • Sustainable agroforestry.
  • Decentralized renewable energy ownership, production, and distribution.
  • Securing and protecting the land rights of Indigenous peoples.
  • Increased and improved public transit
Truth & Healing Movement

The ELCA’s Truth & Healing Movement is an opportunity for this church to increase our understanding of our colonizing impacts on Indigenous people in the past and present. Over the next several months, there will be opportunities to learn, raise awareness and engage in other ways to impact hearts and lives across this church. We believe that the truth, and our knowing and embracing it, is the first step toward healing for all of us.

More information will be shared in the coming days and weeks. Stay tuned to our ELCA and Living Lutheran social media channels and this page to learn about ways to get involved and share with others.
Finally, the ELCA challenges all expressions of this church to:
• Promote creation care through preaching, worship, and educational programming.
• Consider adopting congregational commitments to creation care, for example, by becoming a Creation Care Covenant Congregation via Lutherans Restoring Creation and/or becoming a Cool Congregation via Interfaith Power & Light.
• Provide pastoral care to those struggling with “climate anxiety” and other related mental health concerns, especially our youngest people.
Witness publicly to the climate crisis and “walk the talk” by:

○ Achieving the same levels of greenhouse gas reduction that we urge the U.S. government to pursue.
○ Investing in energy efficiency and renewable energy systems.
○ Reviewing how ELCA landholdings can be used to sequester carbon, promote biodiversity, and/or encourage other life-giving relationships with creation.
○ Becoming “anticipatory communities” that model climate resiliency (e.g., emergency shelters, cooling spaces, community gardens).
• Demonstrate our care for creation via our budgeting and investment of church funds—including screening fossil fuel stocks or engaging in shareholder activism regarding such funds.

• Promote scientific literacy and instruction about global warming and climate change in all our educational institutions.

• Engage in legislative advocacy at all levels of government, individually and collectively.
• Join with ecumenical, interfaith, and secular partners working to address the climate crisis.

• Engage in acts of community organizing to build stronger relationships and more resilient communities that can take action to create meaningful climate solutions and help people understand that they have the power to make lasting change.
Where do we find hope and power for facing climate change?
Just as Martin Luther’s career reflected a dynamic of protest and reform matched to a keen sense of kairos, all Christians are called to face the climate crisis in a similar way.
We would do well to heed the insight of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., whose words in his time resonate for us as we confront the climate crisis today.

“We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now.”

- The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
Our church views the present reality and the future we are moving into with grave concern but also is empowered by a vision of flourishing and hope as God’s invitation to join God’s action toward healing the earth.
I wonder if anybody will read this.