

Sermon Transcript

“Finding Security in an Insecure Age”

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You know what I'm afraid of? I'll tell you. I'm getting married in June. (No, that's actually not what I'm afraid of!) What I'm really afraid of, and what my fiancé, Juliana, and I have talked about, is the idea of bringing a child into this world.

Don't get me wrong. I love kids. I'm the oldest of five. I'd think I'd be a good father. But I did recently say to Juliana, “I'm not sure about bringing children into the world.” The reason? Perhaps it seems silly, but it's global climate change.

As I've educated myself on climate change, I am downright scared of what the next 50 years holds, as we face increasingly severe draughts, more extreme weather, larger hurricanes (not a problem, in Minnesota, I know!), unbearable heat waves, crop failure, acidic oceans (oceans absorb about 30% of carbon dioxide, which increases acidity) and mass extinctions.

Now, I know my fear of bringing children into the world is not unique to me. Surely those who lived during the Cold War or Cuban Missile Crisis felt a similar fear. But what frightens me is that it's the *whole the planet* we're talking about, and we seem to be at a tipping point, with a very narrow window of time left to restore balance to the earth.

And if you want to know the truth, I blame Minnesota. Not really, of course; but when Juliana and I moved here, I had the expectation of bitter cold winters. But with the exception of those cold weeks in February, it's been mild. In fact, around the world, it's the mildest winter on record. Experiencing the warmer weather here has been a wake up call for me.

In fact, the Star Tribune recently ran an article about the possible construction of several *indoor* ice rinks because Minnesota winters just aren't cold enough anymore. And then there was the article in Friday's paper about leading scientists who are saying that in the next 50 to 100 years, the polar ice caps (the giant air conditioners of our planet) could be ice free during the summer.

I don't even want to tell you what that means for the world's coastal communities.

Lest you think me a "chicken little" up here, claiming that the sky is falling, I am aware that over time, the world's climate changes, often with glacial ice advancing and receding. But according to the most recent report from the 2000 Scientists who comprise the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the changes that are happening now are directly related to human burning of oil, coal, and gas, all of which release carbon dioxide.

The greenhouse effect is what makes life possible, and for much of the past 500,000 thousand years, carbon dioxide on Earth has been between 220 and 280 parts per million. Since the industrial revolution, it's slowly inched upwards and in the past 50 years has spiked to 380 parts per million. To put this in some context, average global temperatures now are as warm as they have been in the past half million years.

Now, I'm not trying to be Dr. Science up here, but one of the things that scares me about carbon dioxide is that it stays in the air for about 100 years. This means, as author Tim Flannery writes in *The Weather Makers* that we've already made a big time commitment to global warming (166).

It is estimated that if we collectively reduced our greenhouse gas emissions by 70% to 80% in the coming decade that by the start of the 22nd century, we may have achieved some sort of climate stabilization, perhaps doubling our CO₂ to about 500 ppm. At this range, temperatures would be 4 to 7 degrees hotter. Just to give you a reference point, we know that from core ice sampling, it was 55 millions years ago, that CO₂ was last at that level.

And at that time, as author Elizabeth Kolbert say in her book, *Field Notes from a Catastrophe*, "crocodiles roamed Colorado and sea levels were nearly 300 hundred feet higher than they are today." A scientist with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration put it – only half-jokingly – this way: "It's true that we've had higher CO₂ levels before. But, then, of course, we also had dinosaurs" (129).

Elizabeth Kolbert continues, "A possible consequence of even a four or five degree temperature rise is that the world will enter a completely new climate regime, one with which modern humans have no prior experience" (127).

It's like we're pushing a big boulder that perched atop a mountain. At first, nothing happens, then it starts to rock, then rock some more, and then you push again, and it slowly begins to move, then rumble down the hill.

"And then you think, maybe that wasn't the best idea."

Sea ice scientist, Donald Perovich puts it this way, "If the climate really starts rolling, we don't really know where it will stop" (34, *Field Notes*).

As James Lovelock, author of the *Revenge of Gaia*, writes, "What makes global warming so serious and so urgent is that the great Earth system, Gaia, is trapped in a vicious circle of positive feedback. Extra heat, from any source, whether from greenhouse gases, the disappearance of the Arctic ice or the Amazon forest, is amplified, and its effects are additive. It is almost as if we had lit a fire to keep warm, and failed to notice, as we piled on the fuel, that the fire was out of control and the furniture had ignited. When that happens, little time is left to put out the fire. Global warming, like a fire, is accelerating and almost no time is left to act."

I'm going to pause here and take a breath. So, those are my fears, and as you can tell, I'm giving you a big dose of my fears. But I want to bring faith into the picture, to weave that in. Because fear alone doesn't help anyone. Obviously, I believe that global climate change is real, and that we must drastically reduce our CO₂ emissions before set off unstoppable warming. But if I'm not careful, I can make an "idol" out of this fear.

My fear, left unchecked, becomes a sort of false God, and can push aside everything else in my life – joy, happiness, the Holy, even the idea of parenthood. Or, on the flip side, my fear could force me to avoid confronting global climate change, and I could just continue with business as usual. Fear, as an idol, does this to us, demanding we either avoid what scares us, continuing with business as usual, or we become consumed by it, with Red and Orange Terror alerts, for example. Neither of these choices is healthy nor provides a real sense of security.

So what does real security look like? And what's faith got to do with it?

First, for me, real security begins when I remember what I believe about the nature of the Holy and the world. Like our responsive reading, I believe that there is a Spirit, an energy, alive in the world that connects everything, despite the illusion of separation and isolation.

We can free ourselves from this illusion by embracing our connection to all that is, by realizing, as Physicist and Cosmologist Brian Swimme says, that “that which blossomed forth as cosmic egg fifteen billion years ago (that same energy) now blossoms forth as oneself, as one’s family, as one’s community of living beings, as our blue planet...” (from *The Hidden Heart of the Cosmos*.)

Vaclav Havel declares that “these connections liberate us, and we sense a reality beyond our everything, a higher reality to which we are all accountable in one way or another.”

Author Barbara Holmes puts it this way, “To realize the rarity of blue/green life sustaining planets in the cosmos puts ecology on the top of the priority list.” (*Race and the Cosmos*.) Thus, with a growing sense of connectedness comes a growing sense of responsibility. And for me, a sort of security comes from realizing that I am in relationship with the whole, and that what I do, (good or bad), will effect the whole, in ways I will never see.

Secondly, I find inspiration and a sort of security when I think about the story of Bob Geldof. You probably don’t remember Bob Geldof, but he was the lead singer of that 80’s band, The Boomtown Rats.

He’s not remembered for his one hit single, “I Don’t Like Mondays,” but instead as the person who started the LIVE AID concerts. Of course, Bob Geldof didn’t set out to hold two gigantic fundraising concerts on two continents. He had simply read about the mass starvation of people in Ethiopia, and he decided to do something. He and his band had been playing small pubs around England, and he asked one of the owners he knew if he would host a benefit concert.

The owner said sure and Geldof began putting up fliers.

Soon, Geldof got a call from a guy named Mick Jagger, who had seen the fliers and wanted to see if his band could play in the benefit as well. And as word spread, Eric Clapton, Elton John, Sting, and a number of other musicians signed up to play, as well.

Suddenly, the concert venue had to be changed from a little venue to a huge stadium in central London. Soon, a simultaneous concert in Philadelphia, was being planned. These two concerts, broadcast around the world raised over \$200 million and saved many lives.

What sticks with me about this story is that Bob Geldof had a concern (people were dying in Africa) and he wondered, “What can I do?” Now, as author Stephen Covey explains, we all have a sphere of concern (there

are things in the world we're concerned about; the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Darfur, the War in Iraq, etc.) which can be huge. We've all had conversations where we start examining the ills of the world (all those things in our sphere of concern). After a couple of hours, we're depressed and cynical, certain that the world is going to hell.

But as Covey points out, the people who get things done are the ones who focus their time and energy working *within their sphere of influence*, and by doing this, increase their influence.

Think of Bob Geldof. He thought, "I've got a band...A small venue...I'll do a benefit concert." He did what he could, with creativity, joy, and love, in his sphere of influence – and had a huge impact.

Here's how this lesson plays out in my life... It's true that I can't write Federal Legislation that limits and controls carbon emissions. But I can (and have) put in compact fluorescent light bulbs, replaced my lawn mower with a push mower, and signed up for wind energy with Xcel.

And I'm transitioning to being a vegetarian (which, by the way, are far as reducing greenhouse gas emissions, is about the same as buying a hybrid car. And a good deal cheaper, too!)

Alone, this doesn't add up to much, but then there's this community. We just hosted a Morgan Forum about Global Warming – and hundreds of people here are educating and supporting each other as they seek to become the change they want to see in the world. If all of us make these little changes...it adds up.

I'm telling you, we have a tremendous sphere of influence here...that spirals out in all sorts of directions... As just one small example, in just 6 short months we've given away over \$40,000 from our offering to different organizations. We've touched hundreds, thousands of people's lives.

I think of the parable of the Black Nosed Buddha. It's a beautiful reminder to put aside fear or insecurity, and to realize that we are meant to share the bounty and the gifts of our lives – to set loose the sweet perfume of generosity, lest we blacken our own nose.

Indeed, within our spheres of influence, as Marianne Williamson says, "Our playing small does not serve the world. As we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fears, our presence automatically liberates others."

It gives me hope, and my fear begins to lesson. And I realize that no matter the state of the world, being a father might sustain and inspire me in ways I can't even anticipate. And because everything and everyone is connected, we can not imagine or know how our loving actions, in our sphere of influence, will play out in the wider world. So this morning, friends, as we face challenges unlike any faced before, I beg and challenge you to put aside the idols of fear, and to act boldly, with joy, and with love, as you let your light shine.

May it be so. Amen.