

April 23, 2023

Let us pray.

O God of Love, O God of Truth;

Let us say strong things gently and gentle things strongly.

Let us speak the truth in love to all  
and love the truth that lives in each.

Let us hear the truth as we each need it and live that truth.

O God, we heed it through Jesus; Your Word & our Lord.

Amen.

## **Rebuking The Wind & Rain**

(An Earth Day Sunday Sermon)

*Job 28:25-28 “God understands the way natural things are and how they work. God looks to the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens. God gave weight to the wind and apportioned the waters, God decreed the rain and thunderbolt and declared it and established it and searched it out, and said to humankind, “Have reverence for the Lord. That is wisdom...”*

*John 3:8 “The wind blows where it wishes and you hear its sound but do not know its source. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”*

*Matt. 5:45 “Be children of your heavenly Father. Know that he makes the sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain to fall on the righteous and the unrighteous...”*

*Matthew 8:23-27 “When Jesus and his disciples boarded a boat, a windstorm arose on the sea threatening to sink the boat. Despite all this, Jesus went to sleep. The frightened disciples woke him up, saying, ‘Lord, save us!’ We are perishing.’ Then Jesus said to them, ‘Why are you afraid? Oh, you little believers.’ So he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea and there was dead calm. Amazed, the disciples said, ‘Who is this that even the winds and sea obey him?’”*

I begin with a well-worn expression: “Acts of God”.

We hear it a lot in the world of insurance,

who try to sell policies protecting against them.

In underwriter’s legalese, an “act of God” is

an accident or natural event inflicting damage

that people couldn’t have reasonably prevented:

-house fires caused by lightening,

-property damage caused by hurricanes or tornados,

-death or destruction from earthquake or flood.

With this curious marriage of business & theology!

what I’d like to know,

“Can an atheist get insurance for “acts of God”?”

This morning - on Earth Day Sunday-

I’d like to add to the climate change conversation

the notion of “Acts of God”.

Up till now, the main emphasis in media,

politics, business, education & regular conversation

and even preaching in churches,

has been on **man-made climate change**.

Nearly 100% of the scientific world agrees

human beings have magnified and exasperated

global warming and climate change.

And yet, people still debate. They still own opinions.

They still try to persuade.

They act as if we have the luxury of choices,  
and live as if solutions - like the problem itself -  
is mostly in the hands of humans.

But in the midst of all this debate  
seldom do we consider the role of “Acts of God”.  
Now, by “acts of God” I don’t mean it the way  
insurance companies do;  
I mean it biblically. I mean it theologically.  
I mean it as in the book of Job.

*“God understands the way natural things are and how they work  
God looks to the ends of the earth  
and sees everything under the heavens.  
God gave weight to the wind and apportioned the waters,  
God decreed the rain and thunderbolt  
and declared it and established it and searched it out,  
and said to humankind,  
“Have reverence for the Lord. For that is wisdom...”*

I mean it as in the Gospel of John,  
*“The wind blows where it wishes  
and you hear its sound but do not know its source.”*

I mean it as in the Gospel of Matthew,  
*“Be children of your heavenly Father.  
Know that God makes the sun to rise on the evil and the good  
and sends rain to fall on the righteous and the unrighteous...”*

In other words, acts of God are all those

---

hard to define energies that drive the machinery of nature. They are the “givens” of nature, so invisible and hard to understand that they feel like “Acts of God.”

And they aren't up for debate.

Acts of God aren't open to question and avoidance.

Acts of God aren't matters of sin or faith, good or evil, righteous or unrighteous, they are the inevitable experience of what it means for human beings to be a species, and how to live in the established structure of the natural world.

Whether you're an atheist or believer, “Acts of God” affect you.

The attitude difference between man-made climate crisis and acts of God - reminds me a bit of the cartoon that shows a board of trustees in a meeting room. Calmly they sit as flood waters rise up to the table. Casually they take a vote as to whether or not to call the plumber. And the vote barely passes, 5 to 4!

Acts of God aren't up to a vote. They aren't debatable. They are simply experienced, whether we like it or not.

And, when it comes to Climate Change,  
“Acts of God” ARE happening. It’s called Evolution.  
and It’s has been at work since time began.

The changing environment changes all living things.  
For example, eons of ancient drought  
forced primordial human beings to travel far distances  
in search of better food and water.  
And from walking on all-fours,  
they evolved to walking upright.

And with greater travel,  
primordial human beings were forced  
to interact and communicate with different peoples.  
And that helped evolve a larger human brain.

And with the changing climate  
came farming and raising cattle.  
Alas, the first primordial humans could only drink milk  
from human’s, not animals. They were lactose intolerant.  
But eons of trying to drink it and getting sick  
slowly evolved lactose TOLERANCE .

The changing environment has always  
and will always be changing us.  
Science calls this, called “adaptive versatility”  
but in the most basic sense they are, “Acts of God”.

---

And our current man-made climate crisis  
is forcing still more it.

The warming climate has already changed certain species.

- Canadian squirrels, salmon  
and other animals are starting to breed younger  
in life. (Some wonder if this is happening to humans?)
- Likewise flowers bud sooner and longer.  
(Some wonder if this is the cause of greater allergies)
- Butter flies are heading south earlier,
- Mosquitos are waiting longer to go into dormancy.

Even polar bears have started a brand new appetite.  
Instead of strictly a diet of seals,  
they have begun eating goose eggs.

Meanwhile, we human beings,  
sit fat and sassy in our superiority, thinking,  
**“No problem, we can adapt. We can dodge.  
We can wear lighter colored clothing,  
put on more sun screen,  
crank up the AC and drink more liquids,  
and innovate our way out of this.  
We don’t have to drastically change  
our sacred life-styles.”**

Whether or not we change, we are being changed.  
To think we are above “acts of God” is lunacy.

Climate change has already had its affect on us.

-Asthma, lung disease, COPD, is way up  
because pollen is way up  
to compensate for global warming.

-The degradation of earth's atmosphere  
and over-exposure to ultraviolet rays,  
has already increased cataracts, macular degeneration,  
cornea cancer and conjunctivitis.

“Acts of God” have already begun changing us  
regardless of whether or not we want to change.

The automatic increase in malaria and other parasitic  
and biologic illnesses  
is predicted to increase sickle cell anemia  
and other blood disorders.

The continued exposure to unabated ultraviolet,  
will increase skin cancers,  
and slowly, the genetic pool of fair-skinned peoples  
will decrease  
and people with higher levels of “melanin”,  
the chemical that produces darker-skin  
will slowly prevail.  
Unfortunately, too much melanin also produces  
various birth disorders.

Then there's those micro organisms in the human gut.  
Because climate change will manipulate agriculture  
due to greater drought and worsened floods,  
what we are able to digest will undoubtedly change.  
That prime rib steak you now enjoy  
in the future, your progeny may not.

Many harbor the illusion that conservation - ie.  
-keeping things as we like them- is a possibility.  
But the adaptability that climate change automatically  
causes will change us.  
Inevitably it will come, bringing with it tragic costs  
as well as amazing salvations.

And this reminds me of the bible story  
of Jesus rebuking the wind and calming the storm.  
This story has several truths to teach us about  
climate change.

**1<sup>st</sup>. WE ARE ALL IN THE SAME BOAT!**

Thinking we can attack climate change state by state,  
nation by nation is a fallacy.

The only way to face "Acts of God" is together.

**2<sup>nd</sup> WE ARE IN THE MIDST OF A STORM.**

The evolutionary change that happens from  
"Acts of God" occur over generations.



It takes generations to adapt to most changes.  
But when “Acts of God” become storms,  
like they did for the dinosaurs,  
then the change that happens is extinction.  
Storms become perilous.  
Storms become tipping points.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> WE MUST WAKE UP TO THE CHRISTLIKE CHANGE THAT IS NEEDED.

The Greek word for ‘rebuke’ means to  
“to set weight upon”.

It hails back to the book of Job  
and how the creating acts of God were described.

*“God gave weight to the wind and apportioned the waters”*

In other words, Jesus doesn’t try to fight “acts of God”.  
And certainly, Jesus doesn’t dismiss the “Acts of God”.  
He only puts the wind and sea back;  
back into it’s god-given order.

### 4<sup>th</sup> TO SURVIVE THIS STORM REQUIRES HUGE FAITH.

Not little faith, not narrow-minded perspectives,  
not little selfish goals,  
but huge, sacrificial, global and all inclusive faith.  
Because ultimately,  
there is no insurance for “Acts of God”!

Prayer of Pastoral Care Easter 3; Earth Day Sun April 23, 2023  
Psalm 116 says, *"I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my supplications. O LORD, I am your servant."* Let us unite our hearts in prayer, saying God of resurrection, **hear our prayer.** We pray for the church in throughout the world, that as we celebrate the days of Easter we may renew our faith and strengthen our witness in Jesus' name. May we recognize Jesus' risen presence with us. God of resurrection, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all pastors, teachers, and all who are ministers of your goodness and grace that they may lead your church with wisdom and courage. May your Spirit guide the deliberations of the annual meeting of the Vermont Conference of the UCC this coming Friday and Saturday in Rutland. We thank you for the many who help the Conference to thrive in its mission to all Vermont churches. God of resurrection, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for the governments of the world and their leaders. Be with the people of Sudan who are caught between two military leaders in a destructive battle for control in that land. Sustain the people of Ukraine in their fight for freedom; and be with all peoples and nations and struggling to survive in the midst of violence and war. God of resurrection, **hear our prayer.**

On this Earth Day Sunday, we pray for our planet earth, our mother and our home. May we and all people be good stewards of its resources and work to protect its abundance of life. We pray for the many who suffer from the effects of a warming climate and rising seas. May all generations be willing to sacrifice short term gains, and make sustainable choices and life styles for generations to come. Be with the many in our world

People's Hospital  
Bis...  
...

who suffer from drought and from storms and disasters, both natural and man-made. God of resurrection, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for the sick and those in distress, that they may find healing for their pain and be restored to fullness of life.

We pray for our neighbors, that we may live in peace and build healthy communities. We pray for our enemies that they may know your goodness in their lives; and that we may be servants of your peace, and not return evil for evil.

God of resurrection, **hear our prayer.**

We bring before you those on this church's prayer list.

Almighty God, receive these prayers that we offer. By the power of your Holy Spirit, may we be witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, through whom we pray. Amen.

*Hymn #97 Fairest Lord Jesus*

## OFFERING

In gratitude for God's gifts to us, let us offer our hearts and the fruit of our labor to God's service.

## \*DOXOLOGY

\*PRAYER O God, by your grace, accept the fruit of our labor and the offering of our lives. May we be a sacrifice of thanksgiving in union with our risen Lord, who lives and reigns with you forever. Amen.

Closing hymn *Will O' the Wisp Be Unbroken*

