



CLIMATE + FAITH



**HOW WE CAN HELP MEET
THE GREATEST CHALLENGE
IN HUMAN HISTORY**

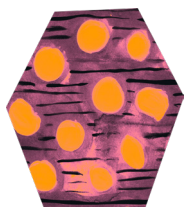


INTRODUCTION

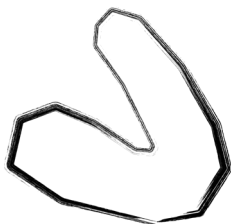
In virtually every transformative movement in human history – the abolitionist movement against slavery, the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, the movements for women’s suffrage, labor protections, dismantling apartheid in South Africa, the list goes on – in each of these cases, people of faith have been at the center of the action. Catalysts. Laborers. Visionaries. And now, as we confront what is arguably the greatest challenge in human history, God is calling us all to step up once more.



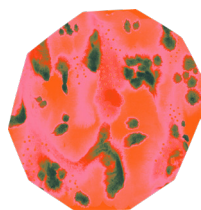
To love the world – and put our love into action. To care for creation – and pass it on to the next generation better, healthier, and hardier than we found it. Just as we might ask one of our ancestors, “How did you contribute to the Civil Rights Movement? Or did you sit on the sidelines?”, our descendents will surely ask the same of us: “How did you contribute to the fight for a livable, healthy climate for all God’s creatures, great and small?”



We know the facts: the planet is overheating, the weather is weirding, and extinctions are on the rise. But a “doom-and-gloom” approach is not the way forward – and on the contrary, in this devotional, we’ll take a “love-and-act” approach, building on our love for our neighbors, near and far, and our love for God, Maker of heaven and earth, who is nothing if not a God of creative, graceful action, in whose image we all are made.



So grab your favorite Bible, and gather with your family, friends, a small group, or your congregation. Over the course of this devotional, we’ll engage with Scripture and tradition, science and faith, proven practices and inspirational examples – all for the sake of building a tailored, tangible, practical action plan, a flexible set of faithful solutions that participate in the Spirit’s ongoing, transformative movement for the life of the world.



LET'S GET STARTED

This devotional is designed as a seven-week, 40-day pathway, though it can also be adapted and completed over the course of a weekend, or even during a full-day retreat. It can be used by an entire congregation, a small group, a family, or an individual (though teaming up with at least one conversation partner is recommended). The organizing goal is to develop a custom-made, solution-oriented action plan – and for that, a few tools might be useful:



- A Bible
- A dedicated notebook, to use as a journal, a log, and a planning guide
- A calendar of some sort, paper or digital (since all good planning is time-bound)
- An array of thank-you notes you find beautiful (ones you'd enjoy receiving!)
- A set of large index cards (5x7 work well, multicolored if you like)
- An open mind, and an adventurous spirit

A WORD ON WORDS

The intertwined challenges (and opportunities!) we'll be exploring are described in many ways: "global warming," "climate change," "climate crisis," "greenhouse gas emissions," "carbon emissions," "the extinction crisis," "biodiversity collapse," and a host of other terms and phrases. In this devotional, however, we'll be taking a different approach – and it's worth pausing a moment to understand why.

First, there's now emerging agreement – and compelling evidence – that these terms aren't as effective as we need them to be. Part of the problem is that, for example, a "greenhouse" is typically a good thing, and so it takes an extra step to convey that "the greenhouse effect" is a bad thing, never mind an urgent dilemma. Likewise, a word like "change" is pretty neutral; "crisis" doesn't specify the problem; "warming" can be misleading, not only because "warm" is a positive word, but also because our changing extreme weather can be cold as well as hot; "biodiversity" sounds like jargon to many people; and so on. What we need is language that's clear, accessible, and concerning, to match the reality we're in.

Second, some of these common terms have become politically polarizing – and when it comes to conserving a healthy world, partisan politics must be left aside. Republicans, Democrats, and Independents breathe the same air, drink the same water, enjoy the same forests and lakes and rivers and neighboring creatures. We all suffer in extreme weather, social instability, mass migration, and turbulent conflict. Indeed, the signature environmental legislation in the United States – the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act, and the

DOESN'T THIS MIX FAITH AND POLITICS?

The word “politics,” as we use it today, has two primary meanings. First, it can refer to partisan politics: political parties and candidates and elections and, too often, divisiveness and rancor. From this angle, No: faith and partisan politics should not be intertwined. God is not a Republican or a Democrat.

But the other primary meaning of “politics” is profoundly nonpartisan: it simply refers to how communal life requires effective cooperative strategies for getting things done on behalf of the community as a whole. We need excellent fire departments, for example; accessible, clean drinking water; wise laws that are fairly enforced; humane ways to care for the most vulnerable people; bridges that don't fall down – and we pool our resources and create institutions to do these things.



We call this cooperation “politics” because it helps us make healthy communities (the word itself derives from the Greek *polis*, “city”). And from this angle, Yes: faith and nonpartisan politics have always been intertwined, precisely because God calls us to create healthy, just, beloved communities. Indeed, from this angle, caring for the climate is one of the most faithful, political, nonpartisan activities imaginable – because without a healthy climate, no beloved community can be.

Environmental Protection Agency – all came into being under President Richard Nixon’s conservative Republican administration. A liveable world is not a politically partisan goal. It’s a human goal. And at its core, it’s a spiritual goal.

OK – but if we’re not going to say, “greenhouse gas emissions” or “climate change” or “biodiversity collapse,” what do we say? We’ll be proposing alternatives throughout this devotional, but here’s a quick preview: not “emissions of greenhouse gasses causing global warming,” but instead, “a thickening blanket of pollution overheating the planet.” The latter image is more relatable, accessible, and clear, and both “pollution” and “overheating” have sharply negative connotations that match reality. Another example: not “fight climate change,” but instead, “fight the polluters who are overheating the planet.” Not “a global crisis,” but instead, local impacts and local dangers to people, places, species, and activities we love. For more on all of this, check out Potential Energy Coalition’s excellent resource, “Talk Like a Human: Lessons on How to Communicate Climate Change.”



THE BASICS

What’s going on? Why is it important? What can we do? Let’s take these three questions, one at a time.

What’s going on? Humanity has been around for about 300,000 years, but we’ve been massively polluting for only about the last 70. And over the last five decades, we’ve experienced what some call “The Great Acceleration”: more than doubling the size of the human population, and even more important, more than *quintupling* the size of the world’s economies. All that growth has been driven by burning dirty fossil fuels such as coal, oil, and gas – and as it turns out, that pollution stays up in the air for a long, long time, a thickening blanket in the sky all around us, overheating the planet. The last nine years are the nine hottest in recorded human history; 2023 was the hottest yet. And within the lifetime of a child born today, we’re currently on track to *more than double* the overheating we’ve caused so far.

Why is this important? Because overheating the planet leads to more extreme weather, more extreme vulnerability, and more extreme unrest.

Extreme weather: that means more hurricanes, floods, melting ice caps and snowpack, sea level rise, droughts, wildfires, and wildfire

smoke. **Extreme vulnerability:** that means more heat waves, toxic air, crop failures, hunger, thirst, poverty, disease, and extinct species. **Extreme unrest:** desperate people don't stay put, they search for a better life elsewhere – and that means more refugees, conflict, and turbulence. That's why Earth's overheating is important: extreme weather, vulnerability, and unrest.

What can we do? Four things: first, we can stop the polluters from continuing to thicken the blanket that's overheating the planet. Second, we can help speed up the upgrade to cleaner, cheaper, safer energy sources, and more efficient, effective energy usage. Third, we can conserve and restore the parts of creation (like forests and peat bogs) that help remove some of the carbon pollution out of the air, thinning the blanket and cooling the planet. And fourth, we can spread the word about all of this, set an example, and help shift the cultural conversation (including the political conversation) away from polarized partisanship and toward common sense, cooperative action. How do we actually help in these four ways? By creating a custom-made, solution-oriented action plan – and that's exactly what this devotional is designed to help you do.



Oh – and one more thing: we human beings created the majority of this problem over the last five decades, since the early 1970s. And *this* is the decade, the 2020s, in which we need to take major strides toward solving it. The world's best climate scientists have weighed in, and the consensus is clear: if we want to avoid the worst of the extreme weather, vulnerability, and unrest caused by overheating the planet, by 2030 we need to *cut in half* the pollution we're spewing, and that means acting now. It's time. The cavalry isn't coming; we are the cavalry! By almost any measure (potential death, disease, displacement, extinctions), this is the greatest challenge (and opportunity!) in human history – and God's call to action is ringing like a church bell.

Let's get to it!

MORE SCIENCE, PLEASE

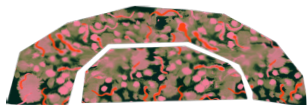


What exactly is “the greenhouse effect,” anyway? A botanical greenhouse works because of the peculiar properties of glass, which can’t absorb sunlight (with its short wavelength), and so the light passes right through it; that’s why we perceive glass as transparent, even though it’s a solid. On the other hand, though, glass can absorb heat (with its longer wavelength). So the sunlight’s energy passes into the greenhouse, heating up the air and plants and pots and other stuff inside, and consequently, those things radiate some heat – and the glass traps the heat inside the greenhouse (technically it slows down the heat’s escape, but the effect is to heat up the interior space). Voilà! Even on a cold day, it can be quite toasty in a greenhouse. Sunlight can easily get in; heat can’t easily get out.

“Greenhouse gasses” in the Earth’s atmosphere – such as carbon dioxide and methane (among others) – work in basically the same way: sunlight passes through and heats things up, but the radiating heat is trapped (again, technically the gasses slow down the heat’s escape). Human activities such as burning fossil fuels, animal agriculture, and producing cement spew a lot of those heat-trapping gasses into the sky. And what do we typically call a “covering layer” that traps heat radiating from beneath it, heating up the space below the layer? We call it: a blanket.

Here’s one more metaphor from everyday experience: this same effect happens in a car that sits for a few hours in a sunny parking lot on a summer day. The sunlight passes through the glass, heating up the car’s interior, and the glass and metal and vinyl trap the heat in – creating a life-threatening situation for pets or children inside the car. That’s another way to picture what we’ve been doing these last 70 years or so: the solar system is a sunny parking lot, we’re building a giant car around the Earth, and our home is getting dangerously hot.

WEEK ONE: FROM ASHES WE RISE



**FOR WHERE YOUR
TREASURE IS, THERE YOUR
HEART WILL BE ALSO.
+ MATTHEW 6:21**

READ

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

REFLECT

In some churches, the palm branches from Palm Sunday are burned to ash after the service.

The following year, on Ash

Wednesday, the beginning of Lent, the ash is applied to the foreheads of the faithful – completing a kind of annual circle. On one side, the joy of the palms, the promise of deliverance; and on the other, the simplicity of ashes, an ancient sign of repentance and humility. As the ashes are applied in the sign of the cross, each person hears the same words: “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (compare Genesis 3:19).

Humility is always a good place to begin. At the heart of one of Jesus’ most famous sermons, he warns against taking actions – even “holy” or “righteous” actions – in order to “be seen by others” (Matt 6:5). All of us are vulnerable to this kind of seeking recognition, and a helpful safeguard as we embark on any good work is to remember that “we are dust”: we stand not above others but always with others, humbly walking alongside God and neighbor.

And sure enough, when it comes to the pollution blanket we’re wrapping around the planet, all of us are complicit. Self-righteousness is ruled out. Our clothes, the food we eat, the energy we use, the leaders we support – none of us can say we’re not part of the problem.

But on the other hand, from that position of humility, we can also identify the problem’s major causes and culprits. Our individual contributions, while they should certainly keep us humble, are nevertheless almost vanishingly small. The major polluters? The corporations who build and maintain the energy systems we use, and the agricultural systems we depend upon – as well as the financial institutions who invest in them, and the governmental policies that support these industries (and don’t support alternatives).

In the end, those humbling words, “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return” are also a call to action. Time is precious; let’s use it wisely. And what’s more, the idea that we’re dust is an echo of the creation stories in the Book of Genesis, where God makes humanity out of the humus, ‘*adam* (humanity) out of *adamah* (earth), for a specific purpose: to be a steward of creation, a gardener for the garden. We’ll turn to the first creation story in Genesis next week – but for now, we begin here: from a position of humility, we can act with insight and courage. From ashes, we rise.



PRAY

God of love and justice, Maker of heaven and earth, help us to begin. Give us the strength we need to repent in dust and ashes, changing for the better not only our own lives, but our communities, our climate, your creation. Humble us, embolden us, remind us of our deepest calling. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

PRACTICE

JOURNAL: Take stock as you begin the journey through this devotional: what are your goals, hopes, and key questions? When it comes to helping to meet this great challenge, what are you struggling with? What are you excited about? Where do you sense the Spirit stirring?

DISCUSS: With a partner or small group, explore what strikes you about this week’s readings (as well as the devotional’s introductory sections). How is your thinking evolving? Where do you want to dig deeper?

DISCUSS: In your experience, how should we balance humility and boldness in this work? When does humility help – and when does it hinder? When is boldness essential – and when is it counterproductive?

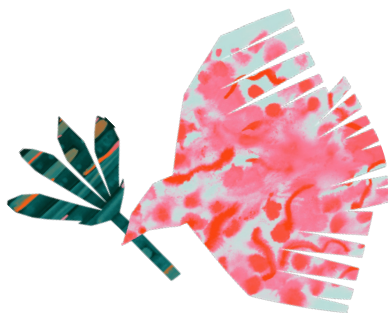
FOR FAMILIES: A picture’s worth a thousand words: get some paper and markers (or make a collage), and work together to make pictures of some of the key ideas in the “More Science, Please” section above: a greenhouse with light coming in but heat not going out, the Earth surrounded by a blanket of pollution, or the Earth surrounded by a giant car. Post your masterpieces up on the fridge, or somewhere else you see every day.

WALKING THE TALK: Take a walk-around of your apartment, house, church, or workplace. What opportunities do you see for increased energy efficiency, or shifting to cleaner energy sources? We'll be exploring this topic later in the devotional, but make an initial list of ideas in your journal; even small things count! Are there energy auditors available in your area, to help you with this kind of inventory? Do you have neighbors who have made similar changes recently, who could give you a tour and some guidance?

PLAN

Your custom-made, solution-oriented action plan will be built in seven steps:

1. **Teaming up**
2. **"Inward" inventory**
3. **"Outward" inventory**
4. **Identify key obstacles**
5. **Craft your climate story(ies)**
6. **Set flexible, time-bound goals**
7. **The action verbs: team up, invest, divest, encourage, advocate, celebrate, try again**



This week is **STEP ONE: Teaming up**. Join forces with a partner or small group, and have an initial get-to-know-you conversation, taking as your starting point the journal prompt for this week (see above).

WEEK TWO: GOD'S BELOVED



**YOU ARE MY
SON, THE
BELOVED;
WITH YOU I AM
WELL PLEASED.
+ MARK 1:11**

READ

Mark 1:9-15

REFLECT

In Mark's story of Jesus' baptism, at least two things stand out. First, God's intimate, parental declaration of love: an announcement that applies

directly to Jesus, of course, and also to all of us, as members of “the Body of Christ” (Romans 12:4-5).

And second, the setting: the Child of God's public ministry begins outside, immersed in the Jordan River – and then the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, drives Jesus even deeper into the wilderness, “with the wild beasts” (Mark 1:13).

It's worth noting that the very first word in Mark's Gospel (translated, “The beginning...”) is the same opening word in the Greek translation of the Book of Genesis (translated, “In the beginning...”). Mark is clearly evoking that older story, framing the good news of Jesus' ministry by referring to God's original creativity – and humanity's original calling.

In the first creation story in Genesis, God acts as a host making a home for guests: first creating habitats, then creating creatures – and finally, creating humankind as a deputy made in God's image to care for them all (Genesis 1). This is the arrangement God calls not only “good,” but “very good” (Genesis 1:31).

Reading this story over the years, some Christians, and some critics of Christianity, have disastrously misread God's remark that humans shall be given “dominion” over “every living thing that moves upon the earth” to be a license to plunder and consume (Genesis 1:26-28). But on the contrary, in the same breath, God also instructs humanity to “be fruitful and multiply,” an objective obviously incompatible in the long run with destroying or depleting creation. What's more, immediately before the first mention of “dominion,” God proclaims that humanity will be made in God's image – which is to say, in the image of the One who has been gracefully, generously, hospitably creating the world since the beginning of the story. To interpret this exchange as if *this* God would then turn around and instruct *this* creature, created in God's image, to go and plunder and consume and ravage creation, thereby acting disgracefully, ungenerously, and inhospitably, is to ignore the story itself.

No, the first creation story in Genesis casts humanity not as a marauding looter but rather as a steward, a custodian, a deputy of divine care for creation. This is our original calling, and as we'll see in the weeks ahead, this is also the vocation to which Jesus restores us, beginning again in the waters of the Jordan. This is the role, the deeply human signature, for which we were made and with which God is “well pleased.” The second creation story in Genesis delivers a similar message from another angle; we'll turn to that story next week.



PRAY

God of grace and generosity, restore us to our graceful, generous calling. Grant us the love, courage, and wisdom to care for your creation: stepping back when we should step back, stepping up when we should step up, helping life to flourish in all its wondrous beauty, from the waters to the wilderness. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

PRACTICE

JOURNAL: When you consider the wonders of creation that mean the most to you, what specific places and experiences come to mind? What do you most want to preserve for generations to come?

DISCUSS: How might thinking of your care for creation as part of the Body of Christ's ministry in the world shift how you understand or experience that care?

DISCUSS: As you read the first creation story in Genesis 1, do you agree that "dominion" means stewardship and hospitality, not depletion and destruction? Why or why not?

FOR FAMILIES: Share your favorite outdoor places in the world, including close by, places you want to protect and preserve. What animals live there? Visit one or two this week, and along the way, talk about how important – and fun! – it is to preserve a healthy world.

WALKING THE TALK: Begin making a "map" of key organizations, citizens' groups, government initiatives, communities of faith (or committees within them), and key individuals in your area, region, and state. If you're not sure at this point – don't worry! Ask around, do some internet searching, subscribe to some newsletters, and build up the "map" little by little. Wise, effective action depends on knowing who's doing what nearby, both so you can help and so you can avoid reinventing the wheel.

PLAN

This week is **STEP TWO: Taking an "inward" inventory.**

Any excellent action plan will be tailored to the person's (or the congregation's) temperament. What do you love to do? What gives you life? And by the same token: What activities do you dislike? What bores you to tears, or leaves you feeling drained?

With your journal in hand, and in conversation with a partner or small group, take an “inward inventory” and create a kind of portrait of your temperament. Here’s a list of questions to stimulate your thinking:

1. Introverted or extroverted (or a little of both)?
2. OK with confrontation? Or inclined toward consensus?
3. On stage? Or behind the scenes?
4. Enjoy inviting others to join? Or working with those who already have?
5. What activities do you truly love and look forward to?
6. What sustains you over time? Social support? Accountability? Staying in touch with why you’re doing this in the first place?

Finally, the amazing marine biologist and science communicator, Ayana Elizabeth Johnson, has a wonderful “Climate Action Venn Diagram” tool. It’s similar to Frederick Buechner’s famous definition of “vocation”: “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” Johnson says we should focus on the overlap between three circles: “What brings you joy?”, “What work needs doing?”, and “What are you good at?” Check out her talk on the “Link Sheet” accompanying this devotional.

WEEK THREE: GARDENING THE GARDEN



**FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO
SAVE THEIR LIFE WILL LOSE
IT, AND THOSE WHO LOSE
THEIR LIFE FOR MY SAKE,
AND FOR THE SAKE OF THE
GOSPEL, WILL SAVE IT.
+ MARK 8:35**

READ

Mark 8:31-38

REFLECT

As we saw last week, in the first creation story in Genesis, God fashions humankind as a steward for “every living thing” (Genesis 1:28). The same theme echoes a few chapters later, in God’s “restart” of creation, where God instructs Noah to bring two of “every

living thing" into the ark – essentially a return to humanity's original role (Genesis 6:19).

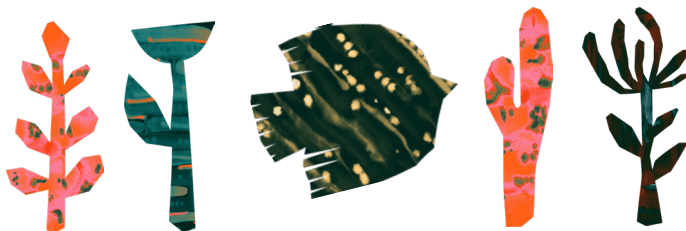
And if this wasn't clear enough, in the second creation story in Genesis (Genesis 2 – 4), the storyteller begins by painting a picture of the earth as a wasteland without plants or animals, and casts humanity as the divinely appointed gardener called "to till it and keep it" (Genesis 2:4b-8,15). The Hebrew word translated "till" can also mean "serve," "minister," or "benefit," and the word for "keep" can also be "protect," "safeguard," or "preserve."

It's not that we can't take care of ourselves, too; indeed, the gardeners may "freely eat" of the fruits of the trees (Genesis 2:16). But the core of our vocation is gardening the garden. We take care of ourselves not for our own sake alone, but precisely in order to care for creation, to make it hospitable for all our neighbors, all God's creatures, great and small.

In fact, whenever we do act for ourselves alone, we break with this original calling, this key to our deepest identity, and so we fall away from who we really are. In the Genesis story, when the human couple maneuvers for merely their own gain (to "be like God," as the serpent puts it (Genesis 3:5)), they lose their way. They turn inward, away from God and the garden – and end up exiled from the Eden they were made for.

In short: when we turn inward, we exile ourselves. When we turn outward – loving God, our neighbors, ourselves, and the whole garden of creation – we come back home.

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus describes this inward/outward situation this way: "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it" (Mark 8:35). Following Jesus involves a sometimes difficult, sometimes painful process of opening up, transforming from being turned inward in self absorption to being turned outward in love and service. This isn't easy: at times it feels like what Jesus calls, "denying yourself" and "taking up your cross." And it's also the path that leads to new life.





PRAY

God of the cross and resurrection, give us the trust and humility, the courage and hope we need to live for the sake of the Gospel. Make us gardeners again, serving and preserving, tilling and keeping. Return us to who you made us to be – not for our sake alone, but also for your sake and our neighbors' sake, all creatures, great and small. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

PRACTICE

JOURNAL: Gardening is difficult – and so is fighting for a healthy home planet. What do you find most challenging about this work? Which activities? Which emotions?

DISCUSS: What keeps you going when the going gets tough? Jesus' metaphor of "taking up your cross" doesn't mean we should court or prolong suffering, but it does recognize that following Jesus, loving God and neighbor, involves suffering. What does this look like in your experience? How do you keep moving forward?

DISCUSS: As you survey the "garden" in your corner of the world (your neighborhood, town, city, or region), what "gardening" needs to be done? What "seeds" need planting, what "compost" needs to be added? Where are exciting things happening – or being hindered?

FOR FAMILIES: Let's clean up the garden this week! Pick a local park or patch of woods, bring a trash bag, and leave the place better and more beautiful than you found it.

WALKING THE TALK: Keep working on your "map," little by little, and now take it to another level. Challenge yourself to reach out to three organizations or individuals on your map this week, asking to find out more, and how you can help. Ask whomever you connect with who else they'd recommend you reach out to as you build your "map in progress." This work often happens one connection at a time – and one thing leads to another!

PLAN

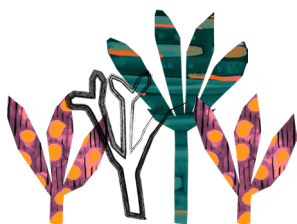
This week is **STEP THREE: Taking an "outward" inventory.** Gardeners need to know the garden!

Start with the third circle in Ayana Elizabeth Johnson's "Climate Action" Venn diagram: What work needs doing? Write down your thoughts, and also reach out to at least three other people: friends, smart acquaintances, or folks with interesting vantage points on "the garden." Explain that you're filling in Johnson's Venn diagram, and you'd like their honest opinion: what work most needs doing?

Next, in your journal, make a sketch of your "sphere of influence." Everybody's got one! It might include family, friends, acquaintances, teachers, neighbors, coworkers, groups, elected officials, institutions, businesses you patronize, and so on. It might be just a few, or it might be a bunch.

And finally, what's your "peculiar position" in the garden? What's the thing that only you can do, or the sphere that only you (or you and a few others) can influence? For example, only a certain grandmother can connect and influence her grandchildren with trusted wisdom. For a certain teen, only he can rally his friends to approach his high school principal with an idea about solar panels. For a professional, only she can approach the factory floor manager. For a parent, only he can connect with his kids about how they're feeling. For a donor, only she can put positive pressure on a local elected official. What about you? What's your peculiar position?

WEEK FOUR: GOD'S HOUSEHOLD



**STOP MAKING
GOD'S HOUSE A
MARKETPLACE!**
+ JOHN 2:16

READ

John 2:13-22

REFLECT

The opening stories in Genesis paint two portraits of creation as a place of growth and thriving life, with humanity cast as stewards and gardeners created in the image of God precisely in order to help facilitate that flourishing.

And on the other hand, when we take and use creation's treasury in ways that exploit, deplete, and destroy habitats, we treat our home not as a garden but rather as a marketplace of extraction and monetary gain. Dirty fossil energy is a case in point: coal, oil, and natural gas are long-buried, fossilized remains of ancient plants and tiny animals, and when we dig them up and burn them, we spew a heavy blanket of pollution into the sky.



Now, Jesus isn't against economic activity; he doesn't go around condemning village markets, and after all, the word "economy" derives from "household management" (from the Greek *oikonomos*, "steward," and *oikos*, "house"). Nor is making use of creation's blessings necessarily a bad thing. Rather, the key question is the gardener's question: Will this particular use leave the garden better off, or worse? Does it draw us more deeply into our divine calling as creation's caretakers, or distance us from it? And in that sense, does it distance us from God?

Indeed, when a particular "marketplace" creates this kind of distance, pulling us away from our sacred calling – Jesus sharply, passionately disapproves. In the Gospel of John, for example, Jesus begins his public ministry by stirring up an angry ruckus in the Jerusalem Temple, driving out vendors and money changers, in effect enacting the Hebrew prophet Zechariah's vision of an era when "there shall no longer be traders in the house of God" (Zechariah 14:21).

Why were the traders there in the first place? To support the Temple's sacrificial system: worshipers would first exchange their money for the permitted currency, and then purchase animals – cattle, sheep, doves – to sacrifice on the Temple grounds. Zechariah seems to be envisioning a more direct, intimate relationship between God and humanity, without the intermediate layer of the sacrificial system – and Jesus picks up this mantle. It's as if he declares, *A new era of God-with-us is dawning: and so the world's conventional patterns and systems – "business as usual" – need to be cleared away!*

And such "business as usual," of course, isn't limited to temples. It's everywhere we turn, and our task is to look for opportunities to create new patterns, systems, and economies ("household management"), both individually and communally, that better care for creation.

Creation: the original temple, and God's magnificent household. Let's stop making it an extractive marketplace!



PRAY

God of passion and new life, give us the boldness we need to clear away old systems that destroy, and to build new ones that care for creation, revive our sacred calling, and draw us closer to you. When righteous anger is fitting, or when compassionate patience is fitting, kindle it in our hearts, for the sake of your household. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

PRACTICE

JOURNAL: What "business as usual" (economic or otherwise) is God calling you to "clear away" in your personal household, or to help transform in your community's household?

DISCUSS: One way to think about money in our lives is through the lens of "consuming resources" – but another is as "investing in the future we want to live in." How can our economic activity, personally and communally, become a positive part of (1) the fight for a healthy climate, and (2) our relationship with God?

DISCUSS: As an enactment of Zechariah's vision, Jesus' rebuke of the Temple's "traders" seems driven by a passion for a more direct, intimate relationship between God and humanity. What activities give you a sense of closeness with God?

FOR FAMILIES: Family meeting time! Talk together about a few of the organizations on the community "map" you've been working on, and pick one you want to support with a family donation (or "investment") of whatever amount makes sense. Even modest contributions make a difference – and help us to practice generosity and hope for the future.

WALKING THE TALK: One of the ways we shape the world around us is through our economic lives, managing our personal and communal households. Do you (or your congregation) have a checking or savings account? Banks don't just hold our money; they lend it out, often to businesses who need loans for major projects (and for every dollar of ours they have, they can lend 10 dollars!). Does your bank lend to dirty fossil energy projects? Clean energy projects? Do some research on

your options – and remember, you don't have to switch all at once. Just opening a new account in a climate-friendly bank or credit union is a powerful step forward. Over time, you can use the new account more and more...

PLAN

This week is **STEP FOUR: Identify key obstacles**. The first step in navigating through a challenge is to name it and face it.

As you think about developing your action plan, what key obstacles stand in your way? Start with emotions: Do you (or your community) struggle with feeling discouraged, overwhelmed, or hopeless about our overheating home? Angry? Sad? Ashamed? Then consider intellectual and strategic dimensions: Are there aspects of the challenge you don't yet understand? Are you unsure what steps to take next? Are there difficulties or headwinds in your context? Economic limitations? Other challenges?

Rank your list of obstacles, and identify the most important four or five. Then, in conversation with a partner or small group, clarify the obstacles and identify some specific ideas about how to make progress toward navigating through them.

WEEK FIVE: TALKING THE WALK



**FOR GOD SO LOVED THE
WORLD... + JOHN 3:16**

READ

John 3:14-21

REFLECT

John 3:16 is often said to be the Gospel story boiled down to a single verse. It's a love story, and it's worth noting that the verse doesn't say God loved this religion or that one, or this sect or that one, but

rather “the world.” For John, the poignant heart of the story is that Jesus dwells in the world, but “the world did not know him” (John 1:10). And yet God loves the world anyway.

This kind of generous love is also at the heart of humanity’s story, including our work – as steward, as gardener – to slow, stop, and eventually reverse the overheating of the planet. Indeed, part of what makes this problem so challenging is that it’s not only technical; it’s also cultural, and cultures are made of stories.

Fossil fuels, cement production, animal agriculture – these things are so deeply woven into our lives that the situation is analogous to a kind of collective addiction or servitude. As it turns out, however, one of the most influential stories in human history chronicles a liberation from just this sort of captivity: the story of the Israelites’ exodus from enslavement in Egypt. It’s a story at the heart of Judaism, and it’s also at the heart of the Gospels: the Last Supper, for example, was a Passover Meal. At



ISN'T THIS CHINA'S FAULT?



Among countries, China is currently the leading contributor to the pollution blanket overheating the planet. But China also has a very large population. On a per capita basis, the United States contributes more than China does by a long shot – almost twice as much per person!

What’s more, historically, the U.S. is far and away Earth’s leading polluter since the Industrial Revolution began: again, almost twice as much as China. And by the way, “second place” in the historical pollution competition goes to Europe (adding up the pollution from the countries now in the European Union). China’s in third.

So yes, China is part of the problem. But for the United States and Europe, if we ask who’s primarily responsible for the thickening pollution blanket around the Earth, we need look no farther than a mirror. And so as we read the exodus story, we can and should identify with the Israelites – but at the same time, in certain respects, we can also identify with Pharaoh’s empire. All the more reason, of course, to step up, take responsibility, and get to work!

bottom, the exodus story is about a people moving from bondage (the word for “Egypt” in the story is *Mitzrayim*, literally “the narrow places”) toward freedom in the Promised Land.

At a pivotal moment, Moses delivers the good news to the Israelites that God has heard their cries and promises to deliver them – but they don’t listen “because of their broken spirit and their cruel slavery” (Exodus 6:9). Indeed, resistance to life-giving change doesn’t only come from oppressors; it also comes from those with the most to gain. The Israelites, too, require persuasion.

And speaking of persuasion, the saga’s infamous ten “plagues” may be read not only as divine pressure, but also as a cascade of ecological disasters: the Nile River’s failure leads frogs to flee into the human settlements; the frogs’ absence leads to a rise in insects; more biting insects leads to livestock disease; and so on. The larger point is clear: one of the consequences of imperial oppression is the breakdown of creation, and God is speaking through this litany of ruin. The question is: Will Pharaoh listen? Will the brokenhearted Israelites? Will we?

Every Passover Seder, Jews remember this saga in a poetic, here-and-now oriented way, and Christians should follow their lead. How are we captives today? How are we captors? How is God calling us toward a new freedom, a new “Promised Land,” a new expression of love for the world?



PRAY

God of love and liberation, who delivered the Israelites from enslavement, give us a vibrant spirit of hope and resolve. Help us to tell the story in ways that open up new avenues, new expressions of your love for the world. Help us to listen as creation groans, to heed the signs of the times. Shepherd us all toward a new Promised Land. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

PRACTICE

JOURNAL: For more on interpreting Exodus in light of our overheating planet, check out Ched Myers’ remarkable essay, “Nature against Empire: Exodus Plagues, Climate Crisis and Hardheartedness,” and reflect on it in your journal. And more generally: when it comes to our

“overheating” ways of life, from what kinds of servitude and addiction do you and your community need to be freed?

DISCUSS: What’s your climate story? How would you boil down, in a brief story or vignette, the deepest reason for your commitment to this work?

DISCUSS: The Jewish liturgy for the Seder calls on participants “in every generation” to read the exodus story poetically, as if it’s taking place today. In light of our overheating home: How are we captives? How are we captors?

FOR FAMILIES: Make your family climate story! Write it out, put it into pictures or photos, draw it comic-book style, or make a slide deck. For each member of the family, what’s the “why” that makes you want to help tackle this challenge? And as a family, what’s your collective “why”?

WALKING THE TALK: When it comes to cultural transformation, “talking the walk” is actually part and parcel of “walking the talk.” This problem and its solutions need to become more and more a part of our everyday conversations, from chit-chat to engaging sermons, grand oratory to bite-sized social media. Once you’ve got your climate story written (see below), challenge yourself to share it with one other person this week.

PLAN

This week is **STEP FIVE: Craft your climate story(ies).**

A climate story is a person’s (or a family’s, or a community’s) answer to the question: *Why are you devoting time and energy to the fight for a healthy climate?* It’s a powerful tool – one of the most powerful we’ve got! – as we work toward cultural change.

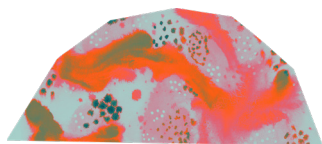
Using your journal, think of your story in three basic steps:

1. **Start with love:** What are places, experiences, and people you love and want to preserve? Starting with an specific image or a vignette can be very effective.
2. **Name your concern:** On the basis of this love, pivot to your concern about the thickening blanket of pollution overheating the planet. What’s at stake?
3. **Close with credible hope:** Not pollyanna optimism, but a credible kind of looking forward – and a call to action.

Try creating three versions of your climate story: one that's about three short paragraphs, suitable for something you might tell a friend over coffee; a second that's about three sentences long, the proverbial "elevator speech"; and a third that boils your story down into a single sentence, suitable for integrating into conversations about other things.

The big goal here is "fluency," the ability to weave your climate story into many different situations: conversations with friends, meetings at work, letters to the editor, phone calls with loved ones, chance meetings in the supermarket – you name it. Our overheating planet is a cultural problem, and cultural change doesn't happen until lots of people are talking about it.

WEEK SIX: THE FULLNESS OF TIME



**AND WHAT SHOULD I SAY,
“FATHER, SAVE ME FROM
THIS HOUR”? NO, IT IS FOR
THIS REASON THAT I HAVE
COME TO THIS HOUR.
+ JOHN 12:27**

READ

John 12:20-33

REFLECT

It's amazing when you think about it: we human beings (especially those of us in the wealthier countries, in the United States and Europe in particular) have been thickening the blanket of pollution around the earth for the past two centuries, and mostly for 70 years or so – and

here we are, living in the *decade* when major progress must be made. In other words, we're living in what many of the Bible's authors called *kairos* time, "opportune time," an era when "the time has come."

It's both daunting and inspiring – and each of these feelings can be harnessed to help us build the right mix of urgency, humility, and courage: the willingness to act now, the openness to collaborate and learn from

WHAT'S THE BIG PICTURE STRATEGY?

In the big picture, the broad-based, systematic changes we need can only be put into place by state and national governments: investments in clean energy research, development, and implementation; and laws that create standards all competitors in a particular business sector are required to meet (thus leveling the playing field for those businesses as they compete with each other, and incentivizing them to invest and innovate). With this in mind, devoting time, energy, and treasure to help ensure our elected officials are climate-conscious makes very good sense.

Part of this political picture, though, is helping to create the “bottom-up” political will – and political pressure – to elect candidates concerned about our overheating planet, and to hold current officials accountable. And that means getting more and more people telling our climate stories, spotlighting the pollution blanket around our home planet and what can be done about it, moving this important cultural shift forward.

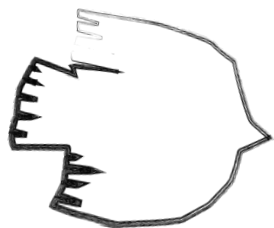
That’s where attending to our “carbon footprint” begins to make sense. Not because reducing our personal impact makes a significant difference in itself (in fact it’s infinitesimally small; your *entire life’s* “carbon footprint” is equivalent to *less than one second* of the pollution currently being spewed by Exxon alone), but rather because our efforts create positive ripple effects: supporting new industries, encouraging others by example, deepening our commitments to the larger movement, and so on.

In fact, the very idea of a “carbon footprint” was invented by a marketing firm working for British Petroleum, no doubt in part to turn our attention away from the dirty fossil energy industry. So let’s not fall for it: we should keep our eyes on the big picture (and the industries profiting from the problem), and at the same time take steps, humbly and cheerfully, to reduce our household’s pollution as part of a larger cultural change strategy. The more of us do what we can, the more the movement will pick up the momentum – and create the political power – we need.

others, and the chutzpah to persevere through setbacks and false starts. Jesus provides a model here, framing his presence as perfectly timed with his mission: “it is for this reason that I have come to this hour” (John 12:27). Analogously, the work of the church – the Body of Christ – is always “for a time such as this.” Our presence here and now is perfectly timed with our mission. Work needs doing, and we’re here to do it.

But notice, too, how Jesus pictures his work. He’s planting a seed: “unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies,” he says, “it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” His adversaries might have thought they were killing him, and his friends might have thought they were burying him – but in fact, they were *planting* him. And in the fullness of time, from his death and resurrection arose the movement of the church. In the same way, following Jesus, our actions – even the ones that at first may look like defeat – can plant seeds and bear fruit for generations to come.

The time is now – but this isn’t a sprint, it’s a marathon, and so we need to pace ourselves by setting flexible, time-bound goals. See below!



PRAY

God of yesterday, today, and tomorrow, thank you for bringing us to “this hour.” Help us to follow you, with poise and courage. Be with us when we feel troubled. Help us to trust in the seeds we plant, even and especially those whose fruit we may never see, whose harvest will bless generations to come. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

PRACTICE

JOURNAL: The time is now! How does this fact make you feel? Daunted? Inspired? Both? Something else? Do you sense God calling you to a particular next step?

DISCUSS: For the sake of a healthy climate, what changes would you like to make in your life over the next five, ten, or twenty years? What changes would you like to see in the world?

DISCUSS: Take a look back a few generations: how did their decisions affect our world today? What ripple effects would you like your life and work to have into the future?

FOR FAMILIES: Write a family letter to one of your elected representatives to share how important a healthy climate is to you. Have each family member sign it – and take it as an opportunity for an age-appropriate conversation about how democracy works.

WALKING THE TALK: The time has come: pull together an overall list of action steps that are pertinent and doable in your life. For ideas and guidance, use the “Link Sheet” accompanying this devotional. Write one idea on an index card (color-coded by type-of-action if you like, using categories such as transport, food, home, politics, purchasing, energy efficiency, and so on). Having one idea per card means you can sift and sort them as you prioritize and strategize.

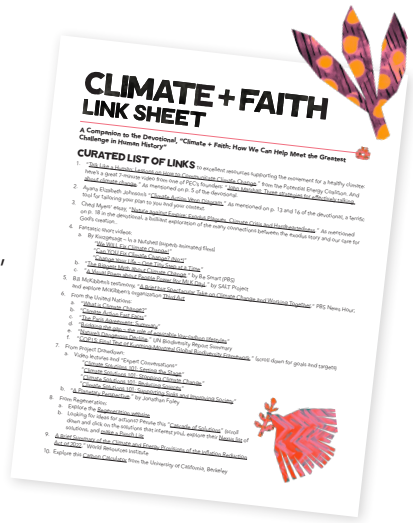
PLAN

This week is **STEP SIX: Set flexible, time-bound goals.**

It’s one thing to say, “I’m going to do XYZ” – and quite another to say “I’m going to do XYZ by May 1st.” Setting time-bound goals helps hold us accountable (deadlines make the world go around!), but it also helps us think in terms of sequencing, decision-making processes, and workload. Real life happens in time, and so any excellent action plan is spelled out on a calendar (paper or digital – either can work, as long as you use it consistently).

Time-bound, yes – and at the same time, flexible and evolving. Circumstances change, new possibilities open up, and deadlines need to shift. This ongoing dance is what it’s all about: setting firm deadlines, holding yourself (and each other) accountable to them, and adjusting the details when necessary.

First, generate an overall list of potential actions (see “Walking the Talk” above – and for ideas, check out the “Link Sheet” accompanying this devotional). Second, start prioritizing and experimenting with deadlines: What do you want to do first, in the weeks or months ahead? Which are the bigger, longer term goals? Share your thoughts with a conversation partner or small group.



WEEK SEVEN ACTION VERBS!



**HOSANNA! BLESSED IS THE
ONE WHO COMES IN THE
NAME OF THE LORD!
+ MARK 11:9**

READ

Mark 11:1-11

REFLECT

We began this journey seven weeks ago, with the ashes of humility and repentance, ashes made of celebratory palms. And so we end with those palms: the time has come to act, to go public, to take to the streets and shout “Hosanna!”

In Mark’s story of that first Palm Sunday, Jesus is essentially engaged in a kind of raucous street theater, enacting the prophet Zechariah’s vision of a king, “humble and riding on a donkey,” arriving in the holy city (Zechariah 9:9). The crowds, the waving palm branches, the ancient chant echoing through the scene – it all gives the impression of creation itself rising up in praise. As Jesus puts it, even if the people were to keep silent, “the stones would shout out” (Luke 19:40).

And what about those palm branches, anyway? It turns out the palms iconically evoke the celebratory Feast of Booths (Hebrew *Sukkot*, pronounced, “Soo-COAT”), during which worshipers processed around the temple altar in accordance with God’s instructions to Moses: “you shall take the fruit of majestic trees, branches of palm trees...and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days... You shall live in booths [temporary shelters made of leafy branches] for seven days...so that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt” (Leviticus 23:40-43).

In other words: Sukkot echoes the exodus journey through the wilderness; and Palm Sunday echoes Sukkot. That day in Jerusalem, then, the palm branches signaled the people’s joyful hope that Jesus will lead a new exodus, delivering them from bondage into a new way of life.

And what about that cry, “Hosanna”? It has a double meaning: on one hand, it’s a cry of celebration, admiration, and joy; and on the other, the word literally means, “Save us, we pray!” This is a kind of anticipatory joy, celebrating a deliverance both already begun and still yet to come, as well as a humble acknowledgement that we can’t do this alone. We need Immanuel, “God with us.” And we need one another, too, all creatures great and small.

If creation once groaned and rose up with plagues, here it springs up with leafy branches and song, humility and hope. In a single word, “Hosanna” summarizes the posture we need as we move forward from Palm Sunday into Holy Week, to the cross, the empty tomb, and beyond. After the parade, it’s time to burn the palms to ash, and begin again. From ashes we rise. Difficulties lie ahead, and beyond them, the beautiful, just, fruitful garden we’re all born for.

Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest!



PRAY

God of love and joy, who guided and strengthened the Israelites through the wilderness for 40 years, who guided and strengthened Jesus through the wilderness for 40 days – thank you for guiding and strengthening us through this 40-day journey. Make us into the stewards, gardeners, liberators, and celebrants you are calling us to be. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

PRACTICE

JOURNAL: Take a look at your journal entries so far, and take stock of how your thinking has evolved. What key “takeaways” would you highlight?

DISCUSS: With your partner or small group, discuss the journal prompt above. What can you learn from each other? How can you support one another?

DISCUSS: How does thinking about palm branches as a link to the exodus story, and “Hosanna” as meaning “Save us, we pray!”, change your experience of Palm Sunday? How does it enrich your experience of the movement for a healthy climate?

FOR FAMILIES: Dive into the “action verbs” planning below: decorating the index cards, brainstorming examples of each verb, and working together to swing into action! Plan a family party (with a special dessert!) to celebrate your family’s action plan.

WALKING THE TALK: We tend to think of being part of a movement as serious work – and yet it’s essential that it also involve play, celebration, and joy. This week, celebrate your completed action plans, your new connections, your new hope (even if it’s just a glimmer!). Whether it’s dinner with a friend, a dessert with your family, a potluck with your small group, or a “commissioning” worship service: celebration is indispensable!

PLAN

This week is **STEP SEVEN: Do the action verbs – at your pace, in your place.**



Which action verbs? Team up, Invest, Divest, Encourage, Advocate, Celebrate, Try again. To help remember, you can use this acronym: TIDE ACT. We’re turning the tide – one action at a time!

TEAM UP: A duo, a trio, or a small group, meeting weekly or monthly. Virtually everything worthwhile is a group effort – and collaboration is humanity’s secret sauce. This is the most important step!

INVEST: Support solutions with your time and money. Volunteer or give to an organization. Make your apartment or house more energy efficient. Do your banking or investments with climate-friendly financial institutions. If you’re buying a major appliance or car, go electric! If you fly, pay for carbon offsets. All this takes time and money – and that’s the point: think of these as investments in the planet’s future.

DIVEST: By the same token, don’t support what isn’t helping. Divest from dirty fossil energy, deforestation, animal agriculture, and banks and mutual funds who finance such things. Again, this isn’t all or nothing – there’s no “purity” here – and every little bit helps.

ENCOURAGE: Gratitude is a super power! Send a handwritten thank-you note to an individual, an organization, a business, or an elected official. Fill the world with encouragement! Try this as a weekly practice (it makes you feel great, too!).

ADVOCATE: Get political (but not partisan!). Attend a march; write a letter to the editor; advocate for change at work or school; attend a government meeting; call an elected official; vote for climate sanity, encouraging others to do the same. Try this as a monthly practice.

CELEBRATE: Let people know when you take a step, little or big (passion is contagious!). When you set a deadline for a goal, schedule a celebration to mark it – and look for ways to celebrate the steps others are taking, too.

TRY AGAIN: Stumbles and setbacks are guaranteed; the question is whether we'll keep at it nonetheless. They're not "mistakes" as much as "first drafts." Take the note and get back in the game. There's a reason that "repentance" is a regular practice in Christian life!

WHAT'S FOOD GOT TO DO WITH IT?

The burning of dirty fossil fuels for electricity, heating, and transport gets a lot of attention – and well it should, since it's the primary contributor to the pollution blanket overheating the planet. But there's another major contributor that doesn't get as much press: animal agriculture.

Why is animal agriculture a problem? Well, for one, it creates pollution, including those heat-trapping gasses that animals, um, "give off" occasionally (including methane, an extremely potent heat-trapping gas).

But animal agriculture is also exceptionally intensive in its resource use: it takes much more land and food and water to raise cattle, for example, than it does to grow the calorie-equivalent of lentils (lots of protein in lentils!). And a lot of the deforestation on planet Earth, both historically and today, is due to clearing land for pasture and for crops to produce animal feed. It's a double-whammy: animal agriculture both creates heat-trapping gasses and ruins some of the best landscapes for pulling those gasses out of the atmosphere.

So we've got to shift away from dirty fossil energy, yes – and we also have to shift away from animal agriculture. But remember: this isn't an all-or-nothing game. The less meat and dairy we eat, the better. Three times a day, we have opportunities to live out our values. And veggie-based dishes are delicious!

Put each action word on a large index card (the more decorated, the better!), and on the reverse side, jot down examples of things you'd like to do in that category. Keep these cards close and sift through them regularly – perhaps once a week (Sunday night, perhaps?). Cycling through the stack helps keep your planning interesting, balanced, and effective.

Finally, with all this in mind, it's time to put the finishing touches on your custom-made, solution-oriented action plan. Sort and prioritize your potential actions into a time-bound, flexible plan that works for you: at your pace, in your place. How does each option fit with your temperament, context, and key obstacles? How does it relate to time? Try grouping the options under "yearly," "monthly," and "weekly," and plan to do one big goal each year, one medium goal each month, and one little goal each week.

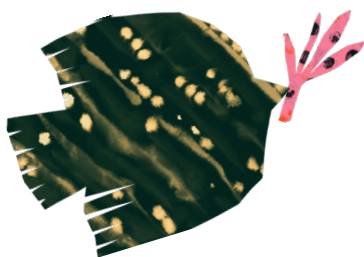
For example: this week, I'm going to attend a local group meeting, eat plant-based on Friday, or send a thank-you note to a local organization; this month, I'm going to meet with my climate partner (or small group), research induction stoves, or attend a rally; and this year, I'm going to take a train-based vacation (not plane), or shift some of my investments to climate-friendly mutual funds, or invest in a new electric appliance.

You get the idea: tailor the plan to who you are, what opportunities you have, what your schedule permits, and what's most likely to keep you sustained in the work.

From ashes to palms, repentance to celebration, captivity to freedom, cross to resurrection – the journey is epic and promising, and it begins today. It's not only "a life's work," it's the work of life itself, God's work, what Jesus called the work of abundance:

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10).

🍎 **HOSANNA! HOSANNA IN THE HIGHEST!** 🍎





EVENTS

