

Greta Thunberg: At 16, Climate Change Activist Makes Difference

It was my birthday on Sept. 18 when I celebrated 73 years of experiencing God's great big beautiful world.

I have had the privilege of seeing many different places and meeting people from many different cultures, people who have challenged my thinking and enriched my life.

But like so many of you, I am aware of the dangers that our world and its peoples are facing as the reality of climate change becomes apparent.

The intense weather events such as the flash floods in southern Spain, the heatwaves and subsequent fires across Europe this summer and Hurricane Dorian, which devastated The Bahamas this month.

I received as a birthday present from my elder daughter a copy of Greta Thunberg's book, "No One Is Too Small to Make a Difference" (London: Penguin Books, 2019).

This is a passionate text, a mere 68 pages long but packing a very challenging message about climate change.

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We have all become aware of Thunberg, the 16-year-old Swedish schoolgirl with Asperger's syndrome who, when she was 15, decided to strike from her schooling and sit on the steps of the Swedish Parliament campaigning for action to address climate change.

From the tiniest of seeds great trees grow, as Jesus said (Mark 4:30-32), and from this initial action has sprung the worldwide Youth Strike 4 Climate campaign, in which millions of schoolchildren and young people have left their lessons on one day a month to challenge the leaders of the world to mitigate against climate change.

Thunberg has received a number of honors: the Prix Liberté, Amnesty International's Ambassadors of Conscience award as well as a Nobel Peace Prize nomination.

She has met with Pope Francis, addressed the Swedish Parliament, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the European Union Assembly, the U.K. Parliament, two U.S. House of Representative committees on Sept. 18 and today is addressing the U.N. climate summit in New York.

The book records some of the speeches that Thunberg has made to these august bodies.

In her introduction, she writes, "If people knew that the scientists say that we have a 5 percent chance of meeting the Paris target, and if people knew what a nightmare scenario we will face if we don't keep global warming below 20 C, they wouldn't need to ask me why I'm on strike outside parliament."

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She says that as someone with Asperger's, she sees everything as "black and white," thus, if emitting greenhouse gases causes global warming and the resultant climate change, we must stop emitting greenhouse gases.

She says that in 2078 she will celebrate her 75th birthday, but "what we do or don't do, right now, will affect my entire life and the lives of my children and grandchildren."

Some politicians, including those of our own government, have suggested that she would be better off in school studying climate change.

Her reply is clear: "We already have all the facts and solutions. All we have to do is to wake up and change."

She challenged the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos in January 2019 to set aside their economic goals to safeguard the future living conditions of all people. She concluded her second address in Davos with these words:

"We must change everything in our current societies. The bigger your carbon footprint, the bigger your moral duty. The bigger your platform, the bigger your responsibility.

"Adults keep saying: 'We owe it to the young people to give them hope.' But I don't want your hope. I don't want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day.

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“And then I want you to act. I want you to act as you would in a crisis. I want you to act as if our house is on fire. Because it is.”

To the U.K. Parliament in April 2019, she gave an impassioned speech about a lost future and a lost hope, in which she said, “You lied to us. You gave us false hope. You told us that the future was something to look forward to. And the saddest thing is that most children are not even aware of the fate that awaits us.”

She gave a direct challenge to the U.K. government. “The fact that we are speaking of ‘lowering’ instead of ‘stopping’ emissions is perhaps the greatest force behind the continuing business-as-usual.

“The U.K.’s active, current support of new exploitation of fossil fuels - for example, the U.K. shale-gas fracking industry, the expansion of its North Sea oil and gas fields, the expansion of airports as well as the planning permission for a brand-new coal mine - is beyond absurd.

“This ongoing irresponsible behavior will no doubt be remembered in history as one of the greatest failures of humankind.”

Her last words were: “I hope my microphone was on. I hope you could all hear me.”

We need to hear Greta Thunberg’s prophetic voice today. She speaks about being 75 in 59 years’ time - two years older than I am now.

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Maybe this is the problem; politicians and leaders of industry and economics are nearer to me in age than to Thunberg. Maybe we don't grasp the urgency.

Her book is one which we should all read, hear her challenge and act today. A present worth receiving for your birthday or any other day of the year.

Editor's note: A [version](#) of this article first appeared on the John Ray Initiative [blog](#). It is used with permission.