

People of Faith Must Speak Out on Danger of Climate Change

Most weekends, I am able to escape the hustle and bustle of Kansas City and retreat to our place in the country.

As I now sit on the deck, overlooking green trees and sparkling water, I hear the morning birdsong and breathe in the fresh morning air. The breeze caresses my skin, a gentle reminder of the Spirit, the breath of God.

I breathe in air with oxygen released by the trees and breathe out carbon dioxide that the trees again take in. Beside the still waters, my soul is restored. And all is well.

But all is not well. All is not well with the air and the earth, of which I am a part and which sustains my life. And in their silence, they call on me to speak.

In a familiar passage in Ecclesiastes, we read “for everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven” (Ecclesiastes 3:1). Among those seasons are “a time to keep silence, and a time to speak” (Ecclesiastes 3:7).

It is often easier to keep silence. I’m sure the prophets of old thought so too.

In their political environments, to speak out against faithlessness toward God and

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injustice that oppressed people was to invite the wrath of those in power.

But there came a time when each prophet could no longer keep silent. The threat of destruction was too great.

Drastic change of heart and decisive action were needed immediately and urgently. And so, they raised their voices in warning, painting pictures of devastation and ruin.

Like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Micah before him, Jesus also spoke out. He portrayed the destruction that awaited his country if they did not heed him, weeping tears of grief at all who would be lost.

In our day, there has been a tacit agreement among many to keep silent about climate change, either because the subject raises anxiety or because the issue has become caught up in our polarized politics.

Staying silent helps to avoid conflict and keeps people from getting upset. Staying silent is more comfortable because we don't have to think as much about this existential threat.

But when there is urgent danger and when something can be done, one needs to speak up. And so it is time, as people of faith, to talk about the climate crisis.

I recently spent three days with former Vice President Al Gore, along with 1,200

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other participants from across our nation and world, receiving training for the Climate Reality Leadership Corps.

The highlight of the conference was Gore's 2½-hour presentation. Carefully, he went through the scientific studies that connect increased greenhouse gases in our atmosphere to global warming.

Then, he delineated the increasing impacts we are already experiencing in more intense storms, rain bombs, flooding, drought, heat waves, wildfires, melting glaciers, higher sea levels and so much more.

Already knowing much of this, I still felt overwhelmed and then numbed as I heard it all together. It was utterly convincing.

I felt again the deep grief at what we are losing. We have not done well in fulfilling that initial mandate God gave to humanity at the beginning of Genesis - to tend and care for the earth.

But Gore also held out hope, showing the increasing use and decreasing cost of solar and wind energy, as well as the expanding number of cities, companies, states and countries committed to transitioning to 100% renewable energy.

He encouraged us with the image of our efforts toward a sustainable future being like a train straining to get up to the top of a hill and coming nearer to the top. Once it makes it over and starts heading down the hill, it will pick up speed.

So can be the transition to a clean and sustainable future that we so desperately need. And there are many things we each can do, and need to do, to make this happen.

The prophets not only forecast doom and destruction. They also cast a vision of what the future can be when lived within the reign of God.

They spoke of a radical transition from a war economy to a peace economy, when swords are beaten into plowshares.

They spoke of a flourishing earth where there is enough for each, and animals and people live in harmony with each other.

We need such prophetic imagination today, for life beyond the current climate crisis - when we have made the transition to a clean energy economy and a new way of living in harmony with the earth - can be good.

It can be healthier, more beautiful and more filled with the warmth of community than we ever imagined.

Editor's note: A [version](#) of this article first appeared on the Central Baptist Theological Seminary [president's blog](#). It is used with permission.