

Hope for the climate (Acts 16:9-15; Psalm 67; Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5; John 5:1-9)

Given the environmental future we're facing, we would do well to address it with resurrection hope.

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The texts for this Sunday give ample opportunity to tease out themes of responsibility, vision, and hope in the face of ecological degradation and climate change. Given the environmental future we're facing, we would do well to address it with resurrection hope.

1) The book of Revelation culminates in the vision of the New Jerusalem, descending from on high. The images are pulsing with health and life, with the crystalline river filled with the water of life and the tree of life for the healing of the nations.

Scripture ends where it begins, with harmony among humans and creation and a tree in the midst of it all. Death has lost all power. Sin is nowhere to be found. Civilization and nature exist together. There is utter peace in all that God has made.

This is almost the polar opposite of the vision that comes for me when I read climate reports. Climate despair is real. With good reason, people who are paying attention to environmental science are losing hope that any beautiful vision exists for our future. God's New Jerusalem—which takes place on the earth and not in some faroff heaven—can inspire and give hope. It can give us something to work for and pray for. If we can't imagine it, we can't become it.

2) The Acts text features Lydia's conversion. Paul is unsuccessful in this stage of his journey—until he finds Lydia. She is just one person. The climate movement is still characterized by small, disparate communities, even though the science is no longer debated in rational circles. These communities are working with relatively little, when compared with the powers against them and all that needs to change.

Paul's persistence is a model for anyone who believes God's word can change the world but is disturbed at the return on investment for their efforts. The kingdom of God often looks slow and small. Keep going.

3) Also in Acts, the term "household" (*oikos*, aka "eco-") does more than just evoke the ecological world, though it does that. It also helps us think about our sphere of influence.

One tricky piece of the climate struggle is that the problem is too large when compared to the individual power most people think they have at their disposal. Recycling cans is good, but it's not going to gain us the planetary health we need.

Lydia is converted. She changes. Then she lets the gospel conversion extend to her household. Then her household welcomes others. A whole church is formed. Where climate is concerned, people have far more influence than they have exercised so far. What does it take for the whole household to be changed?

4) I hear Psalm 67 as an anthem to climate justice. "That your way may be known upon earth." "Let all the ends of the earth revere him." Sing it loudly! We need to recall that the earth is in God's hands.

5) Finally, Jesus' healing the man in John 5 points toward the sabbath, which benefits the earth as well as the humans who inhabit it. Healing, rest, and worship are related. God can heal what ails us, but we must be willing.

Jesus asks the question, "Do you want to be made whole?" People who are alive today—not to mention future generations—are depending on us answering that question "Yes Lord" and then doing what it takes to get there.