

Well, I thought we'd take a break from politics and talk about the weather...

How about that heat wave? Did everyone manage to stay cool?

I don't know about you, but our house doesn't have air conditioning, or even a swamp cooler. Until just recently, 90 degree weather was kind of a rarity in northern New Mexico, something you put up with for a day or so.

It's getting to be a regular occurrence.

100 degree days are also showing up every few years now, and that's probably going to start being something that happens a day or two every summer, and then a few days every summer, and at some time in the not so distant future, for weeks.

Because global warming is no longer something that's going to be happening in the future. The future is here. The future is now.

I'd say Welcome to the Future, but this isn't the glorious techno-future they imagined when I was a kid. Although I hear the flying cars are finally almost ready..

This future is hot, uncomfortable, expensive, unpredictable, and dangerous.

Just after the election – ok, I lied when I said I wasn't going to talk politics. But I'll try not to do too much of it.

Just after the election, in mid-November of 2016, Noam Chomsky pointed out that the election of Donald Trump was overshadowing a much more important piece of news - the fact that the average level of CO2 in the atmosphere had permanently passed the 400ppm mark.

That means every day, not just the annual peak.

And no one seemed to be paying attention – except perhaps a few climate geeks and environmentalists. If the main stream media reported it at all, it was a brief mention before a commercial, lost in all the hubbub.

Lost in the sounds of victory cheers from the Right, and lost in the sounds of wailing and gnashing of teeth from the Left.

Back in 2009, I was the lead organizer for one of the first 350 rallies in Portland, Oregon. Unlike most climate demonstrations, this one was interfaith and multicultural. I enlisted not only local faith leaders, but a few indigenous leaders from the area, to speak out about climate change. Everyone said it was a great rally, although few of us expected it to change much.

Still, it was nice to know you weren't alone, and hope that we made some impact.

At the time, average annual CO2 levels stood at 390ppm, and we were hoping to get the world to cap them at 400ppm.

This April the Mauna Loa observatory site recorded CO2 levels peaking above 409ppm for the first time in a couple of million years.

I'm not sure whether to cry or smash things or both. It seems so naïve now.

**

We humans have changed the world irrevocably. There is no going back.

Few believe that staying at or below 2 degrees C – that's 3.6 degrees F – of warming is even possible any more. We'd have to mobilize globally on a WWII scale to do so, focusing all the nations economies and all our political will on bringing CO2 emissions to a halt within ten years. Good luck with that.

The world of 2C or more is going to be tough. And it's coming faster than we feared. We are now looking at 8-10 feet of sea level rise by the end of the century. More heat waves. The Arctic Sea ice gone. Oceans ultimately so acidic they can't support current life forms.

Billions of refugees. 12-13 million displaced people in the US alone. Dropping agricultural production with food becoming more expensive and harder to get. Water too.

And we can expect increasing conflict as the situation worsens. The Pentagon considers global warming to be the number 1 security threat to the United States.

But we've known about most these consequences for at least 20 years or more. And that little list doesn't take into account ecological collapse, other pollutants, and tipping points like Arctic methane that send temps spiking upward even faster. Or other consequences we hadn't yet

imagined, like the jet streams swinging unpredictably across the continents, sweeping the land like a mad broom.

Every additional PPM of CO₂ in the atmosphere increases the probability for irreversible catastrophic outcomes. We don't even want to contemplate 500ppm, or 4C.

We are in a climate emergency.

There is no other way to put it. Our house is starting to burn down. The smell of smoke is everywhere and the flames are flickering along the floor boards.

But we were in a climate emergency 20 years ago. Those paying attention could smell the smoke even then.

We can't go another 20 years.

**

I must confess I find this state of affairs more than a little frustrating. I mean, this shit is real. Realer than real. It is the implacable and merciless reality of chemistry and physics.

So I ask your forgiveness in advance if I perhaps sound a little despairing, and let my anger creep through.

There's a temptation a minister has sometimes to soften their words, to be nice, not to offend or push people too hard.

And on other hand, there is the duty to speak the truth with our prophetic voice.

But we no longer listen to prophets in this country. We can't tell the real ones from the fake ones. We have prophets galore, prophets in every nook and cranny of our cities and the internet.

I've preached or written on this topic for over twenty years. I've offered suggestions about how we can each deal with this emotionally using the work of Joanna Macy. Something I still find foundational and a must-do for all of us.

I've preached that as a faith, we have an obligation to take the lead in this. We must turn all our efforts to stopping additional CO2 emissions by whatever means we can, with whomever, under any banner.

I will say it again: The defining issue of our age is not the decline of Western civilization, or racism, or oppression, or inequality, or Islamophobia, or Islamic terrorism, or capitalism, or any other ism.

The defining issue of our age is whether human beings can cease dumping carbon into the atmosphere in time to avert total catastrophe. Period. Because unless we do that, everything else is moot.

When the house is burning down, the first thing you do is put out the fire. You don't keep pouring gasoline on it.

And you don't stand around arguing about how to put out the fire, or who gets to put out the fire, or what coalition gets to run the house after the fire is out. Or my personal favorite, that we have to rebuild the fire engines while putting out the fire.

Which is where I differ with those focused on environmental justice. Put out the fire first. If we can build coalitions while doing so, great, but we can't make that a precondition for stopping carbon emissions. Put the fire out first.

Put out the fire. With whoever can pass a bucket, drive a fire truck, pick up a shovel, or spit hard. With whatever crazy collection of misfits you can cobble together. Or just you by yourself, if that what it comes down to.

**

But in today's world, we all need to be empowered to act by having some official status.

Raise your right hands.

I hereby appoint you all charter members of the Northern New Mexico Volunteer Climate Fire Department.

By the powers invested in me by the Spirit of Life and our Mother Earth, I empower each and every one of you to put out climate fires anywhere, anytime, with any means necessary while not harming other beings in the process, if you can. But like Smokey the Bear teaches us, that fire needs to be dead out.

I further empower you to arrest or impede anyone – including yourself – pouring gasoline on the fire. This is a criminal act now. Give out tickets. Put the worst offenders in jail.

And you are authorized to deputize everyone you meet into your department, to have them form their own Climate Fire Departments, and to invest them with the same powers and obligations I have given you.

Go forth and put out fires.

**

It's good to see some laughter. But I am quite serious about this. This is no longer a job we can leave to governments or agencies or businesses. They've mostly shown themselves to be hypocritical and ineffective, unwilling to place the good of the whole before their own self interests.

If they won't act, we will. We are not powerless. There is so much we can do every day. Carbon is being spewed out all around us. Let's learn to see it and stop it right here at the local sources.

The fire line is where you stand. The fire line begins at our skins, and is raging all around us.

This job will not give you a paycheck. This job will mean long hours and sacrifice. There will be no medals or recognition, except maybe in Heaven. There will be no ticker tape parades or victory celebrations, unless you - we - succeed.

If we fail, then at least we tried. For it is truly better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all. And putting out this fire is ultimately an act of love, an act of love for all creation and all its creatures.

I know you love the world, or at least some small part of it.

I am here today begging you to act on that love.

**

We are in a climate emergency.

And there is some hope. Global emissions may have – may have – peaked. More and more alternatives to fossil fuels are being implemented. Wind, solar, and other renewables are on the rise. More and more people around the world are waking up to the danger. Our local communities are stepping up and committing to sustainable energy and food production.

But we are in a race against a raging wildfire, and there is nothing more important now than that race. Nothing.

I intend to get more serious about this than ever before, and I ask you to join me.

By the end of the month, I'll have my own more rigorous personal carbon reduction plan with goals and timetables. In the next few weeks I will examine everything from my travel to my food. Then I'll make a list of what goes away. Every time I think about what I am giving up, I'll smile and think of President Trump.

I pledge to get our city and our state, our counties, and other local governing bodies to set up their own carbon reduction plans. To levy new carbon taxes. To find ways to limit cars and trucks and planes. To kick those pouring fuel on the fire out of office, or put them out of business.

It's time for all of us to step up in a creative fashion and make this the moment when humanity decided to meet the great challenge of our time. Let's make it official.

We are the northern New Mexico Volunteer Climate Fire Department, and we have a job to do.

Let's go do it.