

“Delivering New Life”

Isaiah 9:2-7; Titus 2:11-14, Luke 2:1-20

Part VI of VI in the sermon series “What Can’t Wait”

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December 24, 2019, 11:00 p.m. service

From the Pulpit

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A Christmas Communion Meditation delivered by The Rev. Dr. Timothy C. Ahrens, Sr. Minister, The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, December 24, 2019, Christmas Eve, 11:00pm service dedicated to Greta Thunberg, 2019 Time Magazine Person of the Year and young inspirational leader of children and youth who are fighting for the life of the planet and all earth's inhabitants, our Moderator, Dr. Lynn Wallich in gratitude for her leadership throughout the year, our 2019 Church Council members, Deacons, Trustees, Commission and committee members, liturgists, guest preachers, co-celebrants, acolytes, crucifers, bell choir members, choir members, staff team, members, friends and guests who visited and worshiped with us in 2019 and always to the glory of God!

“Delivering New Life”

Isaiah 9:2-7; Titus 2:11-14, Luke 2:1-20

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation.

Amen.

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High above us, the darkened “Days of Creation” Clerestory windows have a story to tell tonight. They tell of God’s first incarnation - the story of God creating the earth at the beginning of time. They tell us the truth – that God’s first way of visibly manifesting life was through all of creation. God grants light and dark; life, water and substance and then God commands humanity to care for this incarnational creation.

In its roots, incarnation can be more than human form. “Incarnare” means in the Latin, “*to be made flesh.*” It can also be translated, “*to take on bodily form*” – so incarnation can be human or of another created form.

Roughly 2,000 years ago, God chooses a second incarnation. God becomes manifest once again – this time as a visible being whom we have come to know as Jesus. In the birth of Jesus, we experience, in a real sense, two ways of God being very visible among us: the Christ being in all creation, and Christ, the person being Jesus, who dies and rises. We are blessed by two incarnation stories – one in Genesis and one in Luke. Each a birth story. Each a story of delivering new life.

Through the years, we have held tight to the story of Jesus’ birth – nurturing, holding, exclaiming with hymns and poetry great praise for the child of Bethlehem. We have dedicated two seasons of our church year to this powerful incarnation story – Advent and Christmas. This is good and right. God’s beloved Son and our Savior deserves this and more.

When Paul writes to the church at Colossae, *“Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation”* (Col. 1:15), we sing “alleluias.” But in our singing, we cannot forget God’s first incarnation, **“the invisible God”** – whose life is found in the air, the water, and land. This Incarnation cries out to us: *“Save Us! We are also the children of incarnation. We are also God’s beautiful and blessed ones, too!”* We need to hear earth’s cries for help and participate fully in the salvation of God’s first incarnation. It will take more than a few seasons of each church year. It will take the balance of our lives. It will take all of us to make this planetary incarnational movement work.

You see, our newborn baby in Bethlehem’s stable is not the only one crying tonight. All of Creation is crying tonight. If we don’t hear the cries of Creation, we will not survive to sing Alleluias to the second Incarnate One in a few generations.

Fortunately, God doesn’t leave alone. God is sending us young prophets and old sages to follow. Like John the Baptist crying out in the wilderness; a 16-year-old Swede, Greta Thunberg has grabbed the world’s attention. She is not alone. Greta has also grabbed the attention of other teenagers across the globe. All they are saying is “Give Earth a Chance.”

Sixteen months ago, Greta began a global movement by skipping school. In August 2018, she spent her days camped out in front of the Swedish Parliament, holding a sign painted in black letters on a white background that read Skolstrejk för klimatet: **“School Strike for Climate.”** In the early days she was all alone. Then

one man joined her. Then ten, then 100, then 1000 and within 15 months, 4 million people had joined the “School strike for Climate.” On September 20, 2019, 4 million people joined the Global Climate Strike in what was the largest climate demonstration in human history. In the 16 months since the homemade sign was held up outside the Swedish Parliament, she has addressed heads of state at the U.N., met with the Pope, and sparred with the President of the United States.

Her image has been celebrated in murals and Halloween costumes, and her name has been attached to everything from bike shares to beetles. Margaret Atwood compared her to Joan of Arc. After noticing a hundredfold increase in its usage, lexicographers at Collins Dictionary named Thunberg’s pioneering idea, *climate strike*, the word of the year. In early December, Time Magazine named Greta Thunberg The Person of the Year.

Greta has said, “*We can’t just continue living as if there was no tomorrow, because there is a tomorrow. That is all we are saying.*” But she and the other dynamic young leaders in this movement are saying much more to us.

The young prophets of Climate Change are right. Time is running out for earth. Unless the nations of the world agree to address deadlines set in the Paris Agreement signed on Earth Day 2016, in an attempt to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the world’s temperature rise since the Industrial Revolution will hit the 1.5°C mark. This eventuality, scientists warn, will expose

some 350 million additional people to drought and push roughly 120 million people into extreme poverty by 2030. For every fraction of a degree that temperatures increase, these problems will worsen. This is not fearmongering; this is science.

For decades, researchers and activists have struggled to get world leaders to take the climate threat seriously. Greta and others have awakened the world. *“I want you to panic,”* she told the annual convention of CEOs and world leaders at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, last January. *“I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. And then I want you to act.”*

Greta’s transformation began when she was 11 years old. More than a century after the science was known about the changes in the earth, Greta saw a video in primary school about starving polar bears, extreme weather and flooding. While all of her classmates felt sad, they eventually shook it off. Greta did not shake it off. She sunk into a deep depression. She felt alone in the universe. She stopped speaking. She stopped eating. Her lack of nutrition actually stunted her growth. She couldn’t focus on anything but the confusion she felt knowing the world’s politicians knew this science was true, but weren’t doing anything about it. In time, Greta began to speak and eat again. Now her voice embodies hope.

But I wonder about us. We, as people of faith, could be and should be far ahead of others in responding to Greta’s cries and questions. Scripture gives us the connection between creation and its protection and care in one verse after another. For

centuries cosmology and theology were connected. Christian theologians beginning with Bonaventure, a 13th Century Franciscan, all the way to Protestant and Catholic theologians in our 21st Century, have shown clear connections between the cosmos and our Christ. They have pointed us to this truth: *“in Jesus Christ, it is as if the whole universe becomes one human person.”* “The Cosmic Christ” shouldn’t be an odd reality held by a few mystic theologians. It should be our truth spoken with clarity. We should see the unfolding of the Universe, as we know it, as God’s self-expression, creating all this amazing beauty which lives and forms and connects interactions between the inner and outer world.

Tonight, of all nights, we can see how God has woven this entire universe so beautifully together. God is about the work of delivering new life. Tonight, we see it in birth of our newborn Savior. Tonight, may we also see God working with us to deliver us and all creation to new life and new hope.

We are called by God to deliver hope for the earth. It has come to us. And now it must come from us. We can’t wait for it to come from the next generation. It is the least we can do to give thanks to God for all the beauty of the earth, sky and stars God has made for us.

High above us, the darkened “Days of Creation” Clerestory windows are listening and watching us to see what story we will tell of the creation’s glorious future. I pray that we feel as

passionately about God's first incarnation as we do about God's second incarnation whom we to welcome tonight. Amen.

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