

The scientific journal *Nature Climate Change* reported that the amount of carbon dioxide human beings are responsible for generating worldwide fell by 17% from April 2019 to April 2020 -- gee, I wonder why. ;) A similar drop was reported in May of this neverending year. Meanwhile, people across our planet are giving anecdotal evidence of being able to see mountains for the first time in generations during 2020, their skies no longer blighted by our love of all things greenhouse gases.

I've been thinking a lot about the fact that our species may be the worst thing to ever happen to this planet. And I've been looking to young voices, those growing up right now who will live in and through this upcoming...unstable future, on the only home we've ever known. Rose Whipple is one of them -- she's a teenage climate activist of the Santee Dakota people. In what is now Minnesota in 2019, Rose said, "The climate is a spiritual crisis for our entire world. Our solutions must weave science and spirituality and traditional ecological knowledge with technology."

There are so many young people speaking wisdom today that is both ancient and relevant -- *not unlike the prophets of our own biblical tradition* -- and I think it's time we started to listen.

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On a bright, cloudless day over two millennia (20 centuries!) ago, a brown Palestinian Jew leaves the house where he's staying and continues to teach his spunky band of followers -- but, the Bible tells us, *more* crowds begin to gather and the people just keep on gathering, and so Jesus ends up getting in a boat on the water (the Sea of Galilee), and he sits down, in the ancient posture of teachers, while his pupils, these enormous crowds, stand on the shore.

He then tells them parables -- complicated, tricky sorts of stories that sometimes makes sense, and sometimes very much don't. Even though we heard Sir William our Bishop preach on the Parable of the Sower just a week ago, it's important to remember that Jesus goes *right* into this story. No time passes -- we spend two weeks on these parables, but they likely happened within two minutes.

Here, the empire that God brings is like someone who sowed good seed in her field and then everyone goes to sleep (the Greek word here doesn't indicate laziness at all, this is normal sleep for even the most dedicated farmer); and during this sleep, the enemy comes in and sows weeds among the wheat, and, then, disappears.

So when the plants come up and bear grain, the weeds appear as well (probably a grass native to that piece occupied Roman land called Judea, possibly darnel, which is often indistinguishable from stalks of wheat). So the servants of the farmer check in: "didn't you sow good seed in your field?" She says, simply: "an enemy has done this." Anndddd okay the servants keep pushing, "Do you want us to...go out and gather the weeds?" And she says: "No; you can't. You'd pull out wheat along with it." (I'd assume at this point, the servants might have something to say in response, but Matthew doesn't focus on it) The farmer keeps going: "Let both grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time, I'll get my reapers to collect the weeds first, and then gather the wheat."

I'm absolutely in love with the way theologian Robert Farrar Capon writes about this parable:

[I specifically love reading Capon because he *also* seems to love completely random asides, and so I don't feel as judged when I do it...anyways. :)]

"Farmers and gardeners, of course, may raise an eyebrow at the story's strictly agricultural aspects. The practice of not pulling out weeds until harvest time is no way to run a farm. All that such neglect insures is two undesirable results. First, it contributes to the choking out of the good plants that Jesus deplored in the [Parable of the] Sower; second, it guarantees a bumper crop of unwanted weed seeds to plague the next season's planting. Nevertheless, the parable as told simply flouts these truths of agronomy in order to make its theological point. Maybe Jesus was just not as good a gardener as he was a carpenter (his comments about building houses on proper foundations [Matthew chapter 7] sound a lot like the words of an expert). In any case, [Jesus'] real trade was Messiah-ing, about which, fittingly enough, he wrote the book."

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In her recent book, *Parable of the Brown Girl: The Sacred Lives of Girls of Color*, theologian Khristi Lauren Adams gets to the root of parables right away in her intro: "I often imagine," she says, "how any number of the girls I meet [through her career of ministry and youth advocacy] could find themselves in one of Jesus' parables...he frequently focused them on the neglected and the unnoticed, highlighting wisdom and strength where they had previously been ignored."

That comes through in the Parable of the Angry Brown Girl with Ashley, a Black teenager who, early on, was thrown into that harmful stereotype – and yet Adams encourages us to see her anger as something much more nuanced. Ashley herself speaks a word into her reality of trauma: “I think I’m always going to have to fight for myself, regardless if people are fighting with me.”

In a world characterized by our nation’s original sin of racism backed by white supremacist ideology, Ashley proclaims her right to exist by any means necessary. It’s a wisdom that might be hard to hear, but I strongly believe we as the church must listen.

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Jesus’ teaching on the Sea of Galilee continues into the afternoon – although the Revised Common Lectionary, in its infinite wisdom, skips over several verses of shorter parables that are left to stand on their own, but whatever, I’m over it – all so that we can arrive at the moment when the prophet from Nazareth explains the parable (to his disciples only, PS, not the crowd).

And here...Aesop shows up, or at the very least Plato, as the explanation assumes a nicely ordered universe where everything stands for something. The one who sows is the Son of Humanity and the field is the world. The good seed are the children of God’s empire, you can guess who the weeds are. The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. ... With the players set and the drama about to begin, we can guess what’s gonna happen.

Except. Except for one very important rabbit hole, a rabbit hole I shall now quickly and merrily lead you down in the spirit of Father Capon.

New Testament scholar and pioneer Tom Boomershine argues that we cannot simply bypass the phrase: *the end of the age*. Modern ears, like ours, often assume this means ‘this is the end of the world as we know it’ and we will *not* be fine (Capon says we Christians are “hooked” on biblical end-times; “give us one drag on it, and we proceed to party away our entire forgiven life in fantasies about a final score-settling that none of us, except for forgiveness, could possibly survive”; for Jesus’ audience, however, this phrase *the end of the age* more likely meant exactly that: the end of a single age, the end of a period of time. (We get a portrait of what such an end of an age might look like in the Revelation to John, through densely-coded language, we witness the fall of Roman might and Roman oppression and Roman persecution...the [hopeful] end to that particular age.)

One more thing before we exit the rabbit hole. This distinction remains important – Jesus, in this parable, might be referring to something a bit less cosmic in its scope than *the end of the world* makes this parable read less like Michael Bay’s pompous late nineties embarrassment of a film, *Armageddon*, and more like the languid Brad Pitt movie *Ad Astra*, which focuses on the real-life consequences of humanity’s actions today, set in the near future, where Earth has shifted – and climate has changed – to such a degree that human beings can no longer call it home.

In other words, **actions have consequences**. That’s what a harvest at the end of an age looks like, according to Jesus: those who wrought evil in the parable would not escape justice in the end. Their actions would have consequences. This is a parable that begins with Jesus essentially comparing the kin-dom of heaven to *doing nothing and letting weeds and wheat grow together only until the end of an age that may or may not be coming soon*. But by the end, the point is clear: justice is coming, and it’s far more encompassing -- and far more *total* – than we might think.

It’s essentially what I was taught by my culturally conservative father: my choices and my actions will lead to consequences in the future – and I must face those consequences. That’s what adults do.

It’s one of the few times I’ll quote Proverbs (chapter 22 verse 8 for those following at home): *Those who sow injustice will harvest evil; the rod of their fury will come to an end*. This, from several different translations, morphed into the *you reap what you sow* we have today.

This image has deep roots in the movements of resistance in our own country. The Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Wright used this precise verse to correctly identify that, when it comes to violent nationalism mixed with a careless, systematic disregard for God’s people on the margins, you do indeed ‘reap what you sow.’ Pastor Wright said that God doesn’t always bless this country; indeed, just like in the biblical tradition, sometimes, God damns it.

A few decades earlier, a 20th-century farmer named César Chavez would have felt right at home with Jesus’ agricultural parables: “Our sweat and our blood have fallen on this land to make others rich. The chickens are coming home to roost. And the time to account for past sins is approaching.”

That time of accounting – literally the *settling of accounts* – is the end, the lesson, of Jesus’ parable. That moment is also called a *reckoning*. ...To be honest with you, It’s not what we usually focus on in our church, this time of

It’s not unlike the vision of a world that Jesus invokes just a few chapters later in Matthew 25 – there, the reckoning occurs based on how one treated the ‘least of these,’ those on the margins, those crushed by systemic oppression, those on the front lines of climate change, those pinned under the knee of police brutality. “As you did to the least of these,” Jesus says, “you did it to me.”

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Growing up outside what is now Mexico City, Otomi-Toltec activist Xiya Bastida channels anger not unlike Ashley’s from the Parable of the Angry Brown Girl and speaks a word that echoes the passion and promise of the biblical prophets: “We are Gen Z and who chose that name for us?” She asks on a recent documentary. “Z is the last letter of the alphabet. It represents the end of something. I know my generation didn’t pick that name. The adults did. And so we are reframing what Gen Z means and saying it’s going to be the start of something new.”

Something brand-new like that, like a clean slate, the ability to start fresh, only happens when we settle our accounts and move into a future of justice, true justice, unencumbered with that which festers inside us; not simply putting bandaids but injecting antibiotics to treat what’s underneath.

From standing up at Standing Rock to protesting our new Jim Crow of mass incarceration to publicly shaming our leaders over decades of climate inaction in the face of overwhelming evidence, Gen Z often recognizes that the actions of our past will demand a reckoning, and that might be the only way we’ll truly have a future.

That sounds like the Jesus movement to me.