

"Cooperate or perish," United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told dozens of leaders gathered Monday for the annual U.N. climate conference, warning us that "[the world] is on a highway to climate hell with our foot on the accelerator."

I'm not really sure how to preach about climate change this morning. If all that we have heard and all that we know hasn't been enough to significantly change our ways of living, what could I possibly say that would? I feel this way about climate change. About white supremacy, economic inequality, gun violence.

We *know* things are not as they should be.

We can dig into the details and nuances of these injustices so that we know more. But all evidence points to a serious disconnect between knowing more and doing more.

The truth is: we know better. And it doesn't seem to matter.

When we start to talk about social justice issues, especially when we name our failure to effectively change them, the whole enterprise can turn to shame. And it can happen in the blink of an eye.

So let's pause and slow it down. The truth is: we know better. And it doesn't seem to matter.

What do you feel hearing that?

It's a gut punch for me. I feel distraught. And also this impulse to act. When I asked Roger for his response, he said, "You sound a little preachy." Maybe. Comes with the territory. But that's not *his* feeling, is it? Sitting with that, he said, "I feel...defensive." Distraught. Defensive.

Maybe you feel yourself withdrawing, which may sound like, "Oh, not this kind of sermon again." Or maybe, "I don't think I can handle one more thing."

All of these feelings are responses to shame. And there are others, I'm sure. Quite simply, shame is when we feel bad about ourselves.

Those responses – I call them the shame posse – seek to protect us from our shame, and that’s pretty amazing. How creatively we come up with ways to protect ourselves from pain.

And yet, when shame controls us, protecting our shame becomes the most important thing. We center our feelings above all else. We center ourselves in the story of God’s creation. Somehow our shame about climate change becomes more important than climate change.

In centering our shame, we’ve really just buried it, and the deeper fear or longing it is holding. All the while, moving ourselves farther away from a groaning creation. From our own desires for change and justice and peace. We cut off ourselves from God – from inviting God into our inner lives, from seeing God in the world, from living as if God cares about any of it.

As we watch the planet warm and our resources dwindle, we cannot deny that we know better. And it doesn’t seem to matter.

Shame can control how we show up at this moment, but it doesn’t have to.

What I invite us to do this morning is to name and affirm your feelings. Whether or not your neighbor shares them. Whether or not I agree with them. Our feelings are real because we are feeling them and because they affect and inform what we do next. They are not inherently bad and function from a place of protecting us. But. Or better: *And*. *And* when we are led by feelings that belong to the shame posse, these feelings prevent us from hearing the truth of how things are as well as God’s promise of how they should and could be.

My orienting question this morning is: Is this what you want? If, like me, your answer is no. How else could we live?

There is a piece of art by Scott Erickson, an artist who explores themes of faith. In the center is a circle of yellow - a burst of light - and two hands, one above and one below. The one above says, “Fear hates adventure” and the one below says, “Love is adventure.”

What strikes me about the image is the cupped hand above and then the open hand below. That open hand - a gesture of vulnerability – captures the posture of God’s very self.

As Christians, we live according to Jesus the Christ. The Word made flesh. The Son of God born as a baby into the world. A desire born of love. Incarnate, not separate, not away from. We, too, are called to ground ourselves in this world.

Living in the world, Jesus saw and named things as they were. Even when it was difficult and disruptive. Even when it wasn’t always clear what, if anything, he could do about it. He continued the prophetic tradition we heard in Isaiah this morning. We often talk about Jesus’ teachings with a focus on his sophistication and savviness. Going toe-to-toe with Pharisees and other genius debaters of his time. But don’t forget that most of the time, Jesus’ witness was much simpler: These people are hungry, feed them. This person is sick, heal them. That person is lonely, comfort them. Jesus’ ministry was defined by meeting people where they were. We, too, are called to witness and name: These people don’t have clean water. Those companies make profits off of pollution. This species no longer exists. We are destroying God’s creation.

In doing so, Jesus shows that those who live on the margins suffer more than those in the center. And Jesus aligns himself with them. Not because they are the only ones who need healing, but that they are the ones willing to say so. For them, the deepest fears that shame tries to protect have come true at the hands of a world that casts them aside. Instead of centering that shame, they seek change we all know is needed. Jesus teaches us that, at the margins, there is more than just need, there are those who can lead us in wisdom and power and love. At the margins, we can discover there is enough. More than enough.

Finally, there are no stories in the Bible where Jesus feels or acts from shame. I can’t imagine that’s the one part of the human condition where he was like, “pass”. So how did he stop himself from sending in a member of the shame posse, when experiencing the pain of the world or the annoyance of preachy preachers?

Jesus knew he was loved by God.

Shame, this feeling bad about ourselves, covers up deeper fears, perhaps the deepest: That we aren't good enough. That we are alone. That we are unlovable.

Jesus knew he was loved by God. In each gospel, Jesus talks about his relationship with God, using the intimate language of father and son. Perhaps this is less about how Jesus claims authority and more that Jesus establishes himself in the knowledge that God loves him. I don't think that made his shame disappear. I think it made it so his shame did not oppress others. I think it meant Jesus could invite his shame and those deeper doubts to sit at the same table to which he invited his friends, his enemies, and all of us. The table of God's love.

After his death and resurrection, Jesus meets his disciples on the beach. The gospel says the disciples knew it was Jesus, and that he is the savior. That the love he proclaimed has changed the world. And so, in the midst of a still suffering world and the own fears and longings they surely still had, the disciples choose to take their seats with Christ. They stay, and Christ says, "I am with you. Come and eat."

There, at this banquet prepared from the foundation of the world, God does not protect or push down our shame. God cares for and comforts our shame, draws it – draws us – into God's very self. And in doing so, God frees us to live and love with abandon, just as Christ does.

Yes, continue to learn about climate change. I urge you to follow the rest of the public sessions at the UN Climate Conference through the 18th. To bear witness to a groaning creation. To obey God's call for us to heal and reconcile. To change.

But, as Christians, if hearing and knowing this truth of God's love for you is not enough to change us, then I'm not sure what else will.

"Of course you are afraid," Scott Erickson said when describing that image of the open hands [fear hates adventure, love is adventure]. "Of course you are afraid. You are about to be transformed. The goal of a human life is to transform. Not to transform out of a human life but to transform fully into it. ..Surely you have felt this invitation. ..The move from Fear to Love is to allow the mysterious unknown before you to be the way in which you come to know Love. And love is constantly orchestrating your homecoming." Amen.