

## After Epiphany: Baptismal Waters as Boundary Waters

David R. Weiss – January 14, 2019

The Gospel in Transition #7 – **Subscribe at [www.davidrweiss.com](http://www.davidrweiss.com)**

I have *too much* on my mind this week. Where to start? Maybe with baptism, since we recall Jesus' baptism on the second Sunday of Epiphany. The water in the River Jordan in which Jesus was immersed is (more or less) *the same water* that fills the baptismal fonts in our churches today. Earth's water, formed almost contemporaneously with the planet itself and circulating non-stop through cycles of ice-water-vapor and salty-fresh ever since, is a pretty fixed amount. Who's to say where the water molecules that covered Jesus that day have been since then?

*Water is one.* The water in our baptismal fonts is one tiny part of that same grand seamless cycle that nourishes, sustains, renews, and sanctifies creation across the globe (and across many different religious traditions). In our tradition, baptismal waters are *boundary waters*. Even for Jesus (whose baptism is perhaps not quite identical to ours), when he came up out of the waters, *everything changed*. The story goes that a Voice from heaven affirms Jesus as chosen by God. It's likely that the inner journey that prepared Jesus for his ministry commenced long before that day at the Jordan, nonetheless on the far side of those waters and that Voice lay ... *everything else*.

While we won't read the passage about it until the first week of Lent, the gospels tell us that *immediately* after his baptism Jesus went out into the wilderness to be tempted. And from there he began his public ministry. So baptism truly is the doorway into everything. If you think about the common wisdom, "look before you leap," that day, as Jesus approached John standing in the River Jordan, *that* was Jesus' look. And baptism was his leap.

For us, too, baptismal waters are boundary waters. Not at all (if you ask me) that before we're baptized we're unsaved. Rather, baptism marks the moment when the truth of who we have *always* been—beloved child of God—is publicly affirmed by the community gathered around us and on our behalf. Something *does* change with baptism: the reference point of our whole lives. From here on out, whether as infant (with the help of family and sponsors), youth, or adult, we join the community of those who are "walking wet": who now encounter the whole of creation bathed in grace. Sadly, for most of us these boundary waters "evaporate" almost immediately beneath the drying winds of our dominant culture (winds often felt even *within* the Christian tradition). We learn to meet the world under the tutelage of forces far more pervasive than our faith. That's simply honest. It's also tragic. And if it doesn't change, we're lost. Nonetheless the headwaters of our faith *are* boundary waters and deep within our tradition there remain bubbling springs of radical grace capable of re-wetting the whole of our lives.

*Water is one.* (Part Two.) It's one thing—perhaps evocative, alluring, and inspiring—to acknowledge the kinship between the water in our fonts and the River Jordan that Jesus stepped into. And that affinity is both hydrologically and theologically real. But move in another (equally real!) direction and the kinship is more sobering. For at least the past decade the Jordan River itself has been so polluted that tourist-pilgrims are actually warned against getting baptized in its now dangerously fouled waters.<sup>27</sup> And the Jordan's fate is echoed in rivers, lakes, wetlands, and seas around the globe; in acidifying oceans and melting glaciers as well. Water is one and it bears witness against us for having thought ourselves—our dys-connected\* desires and interests—as having more value than the rest of creation in which (no less than in Christ! Cf. Acts 17:28) we live and move and have our being.

\*By "dys-connected" I mean to convey that we *cannot* in truth be disconnected from the rest of creation. We *are* connected: either well-connected or dys-connected. We may have been existentially dys-connected at least since the rise of patriarchy, but since the scientific and industrial revolutions we've been dys-connected ... with a devastating vengeance.

From this perspective the water we christen as holy in our fonts cries out to God like Abel's blood, while we stammer in reply, "Are *we* the water's keeper?" (Gen. 4:9-10) Our Native American siblings know that

---

<sup>27</sup> [www.seeker.com/jordan-river-too-polluted-for-baptisms-1765079616.html](http://www.seeker.com/jordan-river-too-polluted-for-baptisms-1765079616.html).

YES, *we are*. Perhaps when we dip our fingers in the font to trace a wet cross on our foreheads or cup our hand to catch water to splash on the head of an infant, we'd do well to imagine this holy water reminding us, "whatsoever you do to the least of the water on the planet you do also to me." Really, *how do we dare invoke God's presence in our baptismal water while we quite literally damn it in countless toxic ways at other places where it is only momentarily outside the sanctuary of our fonts?!*

That last haunting question is why the hairs on the back of my neck bristle in alarm when I hear Governor Tim Walz offer tacit support to copper mining initiatives in northern Minnesota or suggest there's more science yet to review around the Line 3 pipeline that would bring more of the *worst type* of fossil fuel through fragile wetlands to market in a world where the only life-giving direction for energy production is anything-but-fossil-fuel.<sup>28</sup> Should either mining project or the pipeline run awry they'll irreparably harm the already beleaguered waters of Minnesota. And both the mines and the pipeline echo the assumption that the only healthy economy with an extractive relationship to the earth. I say if we can protect Minnesota's water as though it were (it is!) the water with which we baptize our children, we will insist on better options for a thriving future in our state.

*Water is one.* (Part Three.) One final thought, since seeing baptismal waters *as* boundary waters signifies *transition*. The Transition Movement intentionally focuses on positive tangible steps; it wants to invest energy in being "for" rather than "against." It says life guided by Transition is more meaningful and rewarding than life as we've known it. *I say, YES: this is gospel truth.* But there is a quieter theme in Transition as well, and with the governor's decisions likely to be a lightning rod for environmentalist hopes in the months ahead, I'm going to say it a bit louder than Transition usually does. *Transition recognizes that the likelihood of political will—whether by leaders or by voters—coalescing in time to stem climate disaster ... is not high.* It is, in fact, more likely that even well-meaning governors committed to "progressive values" will find their political choices twisted by industry forces until they make peace with policy decisions that promulgate war on the narrowing path to a livable future.

Thus, part of Transition's emphasis on localizing energy, resources, and skills within smaller communities is in line with the recognition that *we are presently maintaining course on a path that threatens to collapse every centralized system on which we depend.* Holding a quiet skepticism about the capacity of our politics to turn back from that calamity, Transition principles<sup>29</sup> offer a way to move forward even if/when industry and politicians betray us. That isn't defeatism. It is the hard wisdom that the only force that *may* persuade the governor (or any political leader) to do the right thing is that held by people who empower themselves and their communities to survive even if betrayed, whose political pressure is not hope pinned on the actions of someone else, but the force of truth already being birthed in our midst.

Baptism, boundary water, Transition: *they change everything.* Nothing less will be enough.

*PS: I've set up a Patreon site to help fund my work in this area. I hope you'll invest in my thinking and writing. You can learn more about how to support me here: [www.patreon.com/fullfrontalfaith](http://www.patreon.com/fullfrontalfaith)*

\* \* \*

**The Gospel in Transition** by David R. Weiss is a year of reflections on facing climate change, finding hope, and the alchemy of Christian community. My weekly essays consider climate change, Transition, and faith—using biblical images, liturgical seasons, science, and theology, as conversation partners. Writing in a voice a bit too restless to call "devotional," I aim to be insightfully evocative and usefully provocative. I'd be delighted to have you join me on this journey. **Subscribe at [www.davidrweiss.com](http://www.davidrweiss.com).** Thanks for reading and see you next week! [drw59mn@gmail.com](mailto:drw59mn@gmail.com)

<sup>28</sup> [www.cbs3duluth.com/news/eye-on-mining/2019/01/08/eye-on-mining-gov-walz-talks-copper-nickel-mining](http://www.cbs3duluth.com/news/eye-on-mining/2019/01/08/eye-on-mining-gov-walz-talks-copper-nickel-mining).  
[www.minnpost.com/environment/2019/01/walz-administration-reconsidering-lawsuit-against-enbridge-pipeline-project/](http://www.minnpost.com/environment/2019/01/walz-administration-reconsidering-lawsuit-against-enbridge-pipeline-project/).

<sup>29</sup> [www.transitionus.org/initiatives/7-principles](http://www.transitionus.org/initiatives/7-principles).

## MLK Holiday: A Deeper Shade of Green

David R. Weiss – January 20, 2019

The Gospel in Transition #8 – **Subscribe at [www.davidrweiss.com](http://www.davidrweiss.com)**

“... as purple is to lavender.” So Alice Walker described womanism in relationship to feminism: more vivid, more nuanced, more demanding, more inclusive, and more liberating. When [Christopher Carter](#) coined the phrase “a deeper shade of green” for seminar he led last July at the Methodist Theological School in Ohio (MTSO) he wanted to evoke Alice Walker’s metaphorical palette. What happens when (“green”) eco-theology and ethics intersect with Black theology and womanist theology? You get a decidedly “deeper shade of green.” *An earth ethic that’s more vivid, more nuanced, more demanding, more inclusive, and more liberating.*

One guiding principle of Transition is “Inclusion and Openness,” reaching across “the broad diversity of society” and transcending “them and us” thinking.<sup>30</sup> Yes, but until we acknowledge the extent to which us-them thinking is not merely a distraction from our ecological work, but represents the *primal cause* of our current crisis, the *central threat* globally to communities of color, and the *absolute core* of the inner transition that must occur—until then, we have not yet known that deeper shade of green. And we must. Here’s a bit of what I wrestled with in that seminar—and what continue to *wrestle with me*. (This deserves *much more* than a 1000-word essay. I’ll be offering more reflections from it in the future!)

Twenty years ago James Cone (1936-2018), the father of black liberation theology, asserted that environmental activists who are not also engaged “in a disciplined and sustained fight against white supremacy are racists.” Period. (He also calls anti-racist activists who fail to champion the earth “anti-ecological,” but it hardly has the same sting as “racist.”) But for Cone the jarring label is merited because he sees the same logic driving both white supremacy/racism and earth exploitation. Not parallel logics operating side-by-side. Cone sees the *exact same* “mechanistic and instrumental” logic responsible for reducing creatures, eco-systems, and whole categories of people to resources—then rendered morally available to be used, abused, sold, sacrificed, or worse at the whim of whiteness.<sup>31</sup>

Several sociologists/race theorists we read affirmed Cone’s claim, showing how race and racism have been the (im)moral infrastructure of the modern world. As categories without any scientific basis created by human societies, race functions as a way of “making up people,” but inevitably serves—except in the case of whiteness—to make them up ... *in order to put them down*. Bluntly put: *race has no practical existence apart from racism*. As the animating force of “white colonial logic” it drew lines between humanity and animality in order to justify the dehumanizing exploitation of colonized peoples across the globe.<sup>32</sup>

But here’s where these readings in theory hit me hardest and left me feeling—with an anguished sense that my entire life to this moment has been complicit in a lie—as *though modernity itself has always and only ever(!) rested upon wreaking havoc on other-ed lives and lands*. Omi and Winant argue (113), “Modern capitalism could not have come into being without this grand infusion of stolen wealth [i.e., the “discovery” of the “New World].” They go on to say that this plundering (seizure of territories ... slavery ... native labor ... genocide) “all presupposed a worldview which distinguished Europeans ... from ‘others.’”

But did these economic-activities-moral-atrocities *presuppose* that worldview—or did they INVENT it? I suspect race/racism, as it unfolded with European expansion, is an instance of *knowledge misshapen by greed*. If modern capitalism was “birthed” by stolen wealth, *capitalism required racism as its midwife*. While the discovery of such “different” peoples (i.e., in terms of outward appearance, culture, etc.) required an

---

<sup>30</sup> [www.transitionus.org/initiatives/7-principles](http://www.transitionus.org/initiatives/7-principles).

<sup>31</sup> James H. Cone, “Whose Earth Is It Anyway?,” *Cross Currents*, Spring/Summer 2000.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2015, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., orig. 1986), pp. 105-136; Joe R. Feagin, *The White Racial Frame: Centuries of Racial Framing and Counter-Framing* (New York: Routledge, 2010, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., orig. 2009), pp. 1-22.

accounting—both scientifically and religiously—the *shape of that accounting was given by the need to justify how horrifically we treated them.* (Did the Hebrews “hear” God tell them to exterminate the Canaanites *before* or *after* they did so? I suspect their hands were dripping with blood before they “heard” anything.)

There is a *fundamental mutual entanglement* between racism and the exploitation of nature. This *un-thou-ing of the wondrous world* (reducing it in all direction from its God-given “thou-ness” to mere “it-ness,” to use Martin Buber’s terms) is so much part of the all-encompassing worldview we’re born into that (like the earth’s spin, for instance) we’re entirely oblivious to it ... as it perniciously shapes our perspectives, the bounds of our moral community, the choices we make, and even the limits of our imagination. Modern capitalism *demand*s this relentless un-thou-ing for its ongoing expansion. Especially in its unbridled neoliberal globalized expression, capitalism will consume everything it can until entire economies, societies, species, or the livable ecosystem itself collapses. And capitalism runs on racism and ecocide.

Humanity has always been a precarious project. Vulnerable to outside threats and just as often undone by its own worst impulses, no era of human civilization has been without instances of barbarism. But under modernity something has qualitatively shifted. Economies, science-technology, globalized finance, and the way markets have colonized the human mind—these forces (I’d name them “principalities and powers” per Eph. 6:12; see Essay #6: “Home by Another Route”) now hold inertia over the very destiny of our species. To think we can “invent” or “legislate” our way to survival is foolhardy. Not that science, innovation, and public policy have no role to play—they do. But the elemental forces that conspire against us ... lie *within us* and *between us*. In how we understand ourselves, others, and our place as humans in the larger world.

This is the work of *Inner Transition*, and it, too, needs to embrace a deeper shade of green. The fracture between racial justice and environmental concern runs right through communities poisoned by runaway capitalism’s toxic wake (most often those of color) and nations/communities most imperiled by and least responsible for global warming (again, most often those of color). To presume we can address systemic racism without taking up environmental violence is to pretend that we’ve simply (and unforgivably!) mis-measured the humanity of our kin without reckoning as well the extent to which we have *weaponized the environment against their flourishing*. Similarly, to imagine we can teach care for creation by taking the edge of capitalism’s appetite misses not only the reach of that appetite into our souls, but the way it has *always* been entangled with an impulse toward othering our fellow humans.

As King wrote from the Birmingham jail, “All life is inter-related. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.” The route toward Inner Transition for the sake of Earth and humanity cannot sidestep race or relegate it to a second-order concern. These are not separate or even complimentary struggles—they are *wholly interwoven*. The *only* sustainable future in front of us will necessarily be a Beloved Community—one reflecting the liberatory wisdom of a decidedly deeper shade of green.

*PS: I’ve set up a Patreon site to help fund my work in this area. I hope you’ll invest in my thinking and writing. You can learn more about how to support me here: [www.patreon.com/fullfrontalfaith](http://www.patreon.com/fullfrontalfaith)*

\* \* \*

**The Gospel in Transition** by David R. Weiss is a year of reflections on facing climate change, finding hope, and the alchemy of Christian community. My weekly essays consider climate change, Transition, and faith—using biblical images, liturgical seasons, science, and theology, as conversation partners. Writing in a voice a bit too restless to call “devotional,” I aim to be insightfully evocative and usefully provocative. I’d be delighted to have you join me on this journey. **Subscribe at [www.davidrweiss.com](http://www.davidrweiss.com).** Thanks for reading and see you next week! **[drw59mn@gmail.com](mailto:drw59mn@gmail.com)**

## Epiphany: Bitter Cold while the House is on Fire

David R. Weiss – February 5, 2019

The Gospel in Transition #9 – [Subscribe at www.davidrweiss.com](http://www.davidrweiss.com)

The Feast of Epiphany commemorates the arrival of the Magi to see the baby Jesus. It marks the end (the Twelfth Day) of Christmas and ushers in the beginning of the season of Epiphany, which runs until the start of Lent on Ash Wednesday. Because the visit of the Magi is usually seen as representing the revelation (i.e., the “epiphany,” the “showing”) of the Christ child to the nations, during the rest of the season in the church year we consider other ways Jesus is revealed from baptism to transfiguration.

But right now I’m thinking and writing about climate change and how it’s being “revealed” in this season as well. Right after Christmas I wrote about “shouting ‘Fire’ in church.”<sup>33</sup> Then just last week 16 year-old climate activist, Greta Thunberg, in a powerful speech delivered to some of the world’s wealthiest at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, declared, “I want you to act as you would in a crisis. I want you to act as if our house is on fire. Because it is.”<sup>34</sup> I couldn’t agree more.

And yet, as the memes on my Facebook page and the headlines in multiple news stories announce, it will be colder in many places here in the Midwest these next few days than in Antarctica. Not surprisingly, President Trump weighed in on this via Twitter: “In the beautiful Midwest, wind chill temperatures are reaching minus 60 degrees, the coldest ever recorded. In coming days, expected to get even colder. People can’t last outside even for minutes. What the hell is going on with Global Warming [sic]? Please come back fast, we need you!”

Well, what gives? On one level this is simply a matter of confusing *weather* (immediate, short-term atmospheric conditions) with *climate* (weather considered as a pattern over a long period of time). A short spell of intense cold weather does not cancel global warming any more than one cloudburst undoes a months long drought. Weather will *always* show much more variability than climate. And certainly, our perceptions register weather far more easily than climate, but to confuse the two as our president likes to do, becomes increasingly inexcusable as the stakes of climate change escalate. The man tweets the way Nero fiddled while Rome burned. (Irony: while the tale of Nero fiddling as his capital city went up in flames is almost certainly fictional, the image aptly describes *exactly what our president is—in fact—doing.*)

But there’s more than mere misunderstanding at work here. This bitter cold spell is quite likely related to global warming.<sup>35</sup> It provides all the more evidence that, as Greta puts it, “our house is on fire.” The polar vortex is the more or less disc-shaped swirl of cold air that typically sits atop the arctic. The polar vortex *always* demonstrates variability in both its strength and position; the stronger it is, the more it remains centered above the pole. When it weakens, it allows the cold air gathered at the top of the planet to roll southward in a *much* colder than usual blast of winter air. And the accelerating loss of arctic sea ice—and the general warming of arctic land and water—weakens the polar vortex. The result is that cold arctic air is held much less “secure” at the pole ... and is much more likely to be drawn down into the Midwest—exactly as we’re experiencing this week.

So, while we shiver under dangerously cold temperatures this week (although just for several days) the planet overall continues to *warm*—dangerously and unabated. Indeed much of the rest of the world is rather wilting as we alternately boast-bemoan our January temperature plunge. Some parts of the arctic have warmed so much overall that there are places on Baffin Island in northern Canada where the ground is now exposed—free of ice—for the first time *in at least 40,000 years (over 100,000 years by some*

---

<sup>33</sup> [www.davidrweiss.com/2019/01/03/christmas-and-the-holy-innocents-on-shouting-fire-in-church](http://www.davidrweiss.com/2019/01/03/christmas-and-the-holy-innocents-on-shouting-fire-in-church)

<sup>34</sup> [www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/jan/25/our-house-is-on-fire-greta-thunberg16-urges-leaders-to-act-on-climate](http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/jan/25/our-house-is-on-fire-greta-thunberg16-urges-leaders-to-act-on-climate)

<sup>35</sup> [www.blog.ucsusa.org/brenda-ekwurzle/winter-storm-jayden-the-polar-vortex-and-climate-change-3-factors-that-matter](http://www.blog.ucsusa.org/brenda-ekwurzle/winter-storm-jayden-the-polar-vortex-and-climate-change-3-factors-that-matter)

*estimates*).<sup>36</sup> And since the arctic is warming at a rate two to three times the rest of the planet, it's quite possible that as we lurch toward a *much* hotter future, we'll also be visited more frequently by the frigid air of a polar vortex knocked off balance on a warming planet.

As a recent piece in the Atlantic reported, “2018 was hotter than any year in the 19th century. It was hotter than any year in the 20th century. It was hotter than any year in the first decade of this century. In fact, with only three exceptions, it was the hottest year on Earth since 1850. Those three exceptions: 2018 was slightly cooler than 2015, 2016, and 2017. The past four years, in other words, have been the four hottest years ever reliably measured.”<sup>37</sup> Let that sink in. Of the past 168 years, *the four hottest have just happened. Right in a row.* And—because our current polar vortex spill across the Midwest is little more than a blip on a big planet across an entire year—odds are good (read: bad) that 2019 will make it five in a row. How's that for an epiphany?

We like to see an epiphany as the revelation of something good, as a cause for hope. But sometimes epiphany signals a truth that must be grasped—even when it shatters the world you prefer. Greta Thunberg, prophet of a climate epiphany and kindred spirit to my restless soul, concluded her comments at the World Economic Forum like this: “Adults keep saying: ‘We owe it to the young people to give them hope.’ But I don’t want your hope. I don’t want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. And then I want you to act.”

For those committed to denial—whether because of economic interests, the lure of first world comforts (read: developing world theft), or the sheer enormity of cataclysm aimed our way—fear and panic are going to hit at some point. But the Transition Movement is about reckoning with the reality of climate change without waiting for politicians or the wealthy to reach the point of fear and panic. It's about choosing a different path, as individuals and (more importantly) as local communities right now. Not because that different path will “save” us. No. Rather, because that different path may allow us to build a bridge forward into a future altogether different than any of us dreamed of.

I'm convinced there is joy to be had both in making this transition and in the life that awaits us beyond it. But it's epiphany right now. And both the bitter cold and the burning house are trying to show us something. I suggest we stop and see.

*PS: I've set up a Patreon site to help fund my work in this area. I hope you'll invest in my thinking and writing. You can learn more about how to support me here: [www.patreon.com/fullfrontalfait](http://www.patreon.com/fullfrontalfait)*

\* \* \*

**The Gospel in Transition** by David R. Weiss is a year of reflections on facing climate change, finding hope, and the alchemy of Christian community. My weekly essays consider climate change, Transition, and faith—using biblical images, liturgical seasons, science, and theology, as conversation partners. Writing in a voice a bit too restless to call “devotional,” I aim to be insightfully evocative and usefully provocative. I'd be delighted to have you join me on this journey. **Subscribe at [www.davidrweiss.com](http://www.davidrweiss.com).** Thanks for reading and see you next week! **drw59mn@gmail.com**

---

<sup>36</sup> [www.grist.org/article/the-melting-arctic-is-revealing-caveman-era-landscapes](http://www.grist.org/article/the-melting-arctic-is-revealing-caveman-era-landscapes)

<sup>37</sup> [www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2019/01/nasa-noaa-shutdown-2018-warmest-climate-record/581221](http://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2019/01/nasa-noaa-shutdown-2018-warmest-climate-record/581221)

## Epiphany: Ice Out on the Himalayas

David R. Weiss – February 5, 2019

The Gospel in Transition #10 – **Subscribe at [www.davidrweiss.com](http://www.davidrweiss.com)**

As I noted last week, Epiphany, the feast that marks the arrival of the Magi, is about “Aha!” moments of insight. For the Magi, their epiphany was evident both in the faith that led them to follow the star and in finding the Christ child; their tale symbolic of the universal reach of God. The season of Epiphany lifts up other “Aha!” moments for Jesus leading up to his transfiguration, a classic mountaintop epiphany. This week’s news offered another mountaintop epiphany, which is my focus today.

Sometimes referred to as Earth’s “third pole” because more ice is found here than anywhere else on the planet except for the Arctic and Antarctic, the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) mountain region spans eight countries. Moving roughly west to east these glacier-capped peaks are found in Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, Nepal, Bhutan, India, Bangladesh, and Myanmar. The fresh water in these mountains—rainfall, but especially the water stored in ice and snowpack—feeds ten major rivers, including the Indus and the Ganges. And this region is headed for “ice out.”<sup>38</sup>

According to a report just released (February 4, 2019) by the International Center for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), *even under a best case scenario* (one researcher refers to it as the “miracle” scenario) in which we actually stop global warming at the “ideal” 1.5°C, more than a third of the region’s ice and snow will be gone by 2100. Fully half of it will be lost if we only manage the more realistic (but still increasingly difficult) target of 2°C in warming. And if we go on pumping carbon into the system at present rates, over two-thirds of the HKH region’s ice will be gone in less than a century.

Writing from Minnesota’s mid-winter deep freeze, with streets and sidewalks coated with ice—ice now covered with several inches of fresh snow (and more on the way), maybe ice-out isn’t such a bad idea. *But it is.* The glaciers in these mountains store water and release it seasonally. Besides being essential to the immediate ecosystem—home to 240 million people and a range of wildlife—the water that flows down from these mountains is critical for the agriculture, energy, sanitation, and water needs of close to two billion people.

The ICIMOD report hardly represents an extreme view. It was five years in the making, with more than 200 scientists representing 22 countries contributing research, and another 125 peer reviewers cross-checking it. It offers very much a “middle-of-the-road” consensus *epiphany*. And it is alarming—and unforgiving: climate change is driving temperature rise faster at higher elevation—and the impacts in the report are *already* “loaded” into the system.

If this is a facet of the climate crisis you haven’t heard of yet, that’s partly economic. 80 million of the region’s inhabitants live on less than \$750 *per year*. Nearly all of the impacted areas would be considered parts of “developing” regions, thus rarely worth screen time or print space in our news cycle. Especially because right now it’s merely a *dawning* disaster. But wait until the dawn hits.

As the glaciers melt—which is a matter of *when*, not *if*—the melt will first dramatically increase river flows and threaten mountain lakes to overflow their banks in never-before-seen floods. But eventually—and that’s not a geological “eventually” spread over eons, that’s a generational “eventually” that will play out within single lifetimes—the decreased water levels will leave lakes and springs and streams starved for water. And along the way the only thing truly predictable about the lurch between flooding and barren rivers will be the ensuing chaos. Drinking water, hydro-electric power, agricultural production, human

---

<sup>38</sup> All the background data in this essay comes from these three news reports:

[www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/feb/04/a-third-of-himalayan-ice-cap-doomed-finds-shocking-report](http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/feb/04/a-third-of-himalayan-ice-cap-doomed-finds-shocking-report)

[www.commondreams.org/news/2019/02/04/climate-crisis-you-havent-heard-even-if-carbon-emissions-fall-third-himalayan-ice](http://www.commondreams.org/news/2019/02/04/climate-crisis-you-havent-heard-even-if-carbon-emissions-fall-third-himalayan-ice)

[www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/2019/02/himalaya-mountain-climate-change-report](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/2019/02/himalaya-mountain-climate-change-report)

This YouTube video offers a very brief overview as well: <https://youtu.be/8bPFAEdRp8o>

sanitation, and all the natural flora and fauna in the region will be upended. Of course, the people living in this area are among those least driving climate change, yet also among those most vulnerable to its effects. It's an unfortunate and unjust double-membership that will be common in the coming decades.

Ultimately, when ice-out hits—whether one-third, one-half, or more—the ripple effects will reach well beyond the HKH region producing inevitable waves of migration and rounds of conflict. By then the waning of the world's "third pole" will be rippling toward all of us.

How does this hard icy-cold, then rushing-wet, then parched-dry epiphany *shape us*? I suggest its primary meaning for us as individuals—as persons with limited political-corporate power—and as communities of faith is as a *summons to grief*. The most significant aspect of the consequences related by this study is their inevitability. We don't know just how bad it will get, but the adjectives will range from terrible to devastating, from catastrophic to unimaginable. *There is no near-miss happy ending available.*

I do believe "hope" has a role to play in our response to climate change, but it is hope in a stark form that we are rarely comfortable with. Hope in the form that Václav Havel describes as "the certainty that something is worth doing no matter how it turns out." It is hope in the form that remembers that the Jesus who says to us, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28) is the same Jesus who ends up crucified and is pointedly clear that following him involves a cross of our own. *That form of hope.*

Whatever we do to lessen the impact of climate change at this point—and there is *much*, both personally and politically that must be done—it should be done "hope-free," so to speak.<sup>39</sup> Not because we imagine ourselves heroes at the last minute (after decades of denial), but because we are determined to move toward tomorrow, whatever it brings, with more integrity than we had yesterday.

And this is the least popular and most important word of wisdom I carry: *we need to tap into grief to find that form of hope*. The Transition Movement is paradoxical in extreme—like Luther's theology of the cross, which asserts that the clearest vision is that which peers *through suffering* not around it. In a world determined to look ever on the bright side of things (even when it's the *false* side) or, at worst, to distract itself from that which we'd rather not see—in *that world, the capacity to see suffering, to grieve loss (and not simply our own, but that of others—and of Earth itself), to give voice to lament—these capacities will be existentially essential*. We will not survive without grief.

It need not have the last word, but like a sustained note, it will need to color all the other notes we sing for a long, long time. And so long as we avoid the soul-deep lament that the world asks of us, we are not yet singing the song that must be sung. And that's today's epiphany.

*PS: I've set up a Patreon site to help fund my work in this area. I hope you'll invest in my thinking and writing. You can learn more about how to support me here: [www.patreon.com/fullfrontalfaith](http://www.patreon.com/fullfrontalfaith)*

\* \* \*

**The Gospel in Transition by David R. Weiss** is a year of reflections on facing climate change, finding hope, and the alchemy of Christian community. My weekly essays consider climate change, Transition, and faith—using biblical images, liturgical seasons, science, and theology, as conversation partners. Writing in a voice a bit too restless to call "devotional," I aim to be insightfully evocative and usefully provocative. I'd be delighted to have you join me on this journey. **Subscribe at [www.davidrweiss.com](http://www.davidrweiss.com)**. Thanks for reading and see you next week! **[drw59mn@gmail.com](mailto:drw59mn@gmail.com)**

---

<sup>39</sup> The phrase is Dahr Jamail's (who also references the Václav Havel quote) in an excerpt from his book, *The End of Ice: Bearing Witness and Finding Meaning in the Path of Climate Destruction*. <https://truthout.org/articles/in-facing-mass-extinction-we-dont-need-hope-we-need-to-grieve>

## Epiphany: Extinguishing the Alphabet ... of Bens and Bugs

David R. Weiss – February 15, 2019

The Gospel in Transition #11 – [Subscribe at www.davidrweiss.com](http://www.davidrweiss.com)

I encountered the Jewish legend decades ago in a book by Gail Ramshaw, *Letters for God's Name*. The tale goes that a Jewish peasant is hurrying to finish his fieldwork to make it to the Passover service. But the sun sets, he cannot travel, and so he must spend the holy night in the field. Unable even to remember the words to the prayers, he decides in serene desperation to simply recite the alphabet and trust God to arrange the letters into their proper places.<sup>40</sup>

The image is one of faith and grace. Faith, that even our most meager efforts might somehow be sufficient—and grace, that God will not fail to work with what we sincerely offer. I affirm this as truth. And yet I want to push the story one bit further. *What if the alphabet itself could not be found? What then?* And before we rush forward to claim grace even in that extreme, I want to dwell for a moment in the terror ... of an extinguished alphabet.

Because that's what we're facing ecologically. This past week, in the first global scientific review of the health of insects worldwide, we learned their precipitous decline is nothing short of damning.<sup>41</sup> Based on 73 different studies assessing insect populations, the review found that one third of all insects are now endangered. They're presently going extinct *eight times faster* than mammals, birds, and reptiles (none of whom are exactly thriving!). We've lost 2.5% of the total biomass of insects *each year* for the past 25-30 years. With no recovery. Sit down and sit with that for a long quiet moment: compared to 1990, the year my now 31 year-old son turned three—over the course of his still young life—we've lost 80% of the total biomass of insects across the globe.

In words particularly strident in a peer-reviewed scientific paper (meaning that the phrasing had to pass by the watchful eyes of scientific peers not connected to the review itself) the study declares the very real possibility that “insects as a whole will go down the path of extinction in a few decades. The repercussions this will have for the planet's ecosystems are catastrophic to say the least.” *To say the least.*

As Professor Dave Goulson at the University of Sussex in the UK explains, “Insects are at the heart of every food web, they pollinate the large majority of plant species, keep the soil healthy, recycle nutrients, control pests, and much more.” When the Psalmist says, “Let all creation praise the Lord,” (Psalm 148 and elsewhere)—well, in earth's praise, *insects are the alphabet*. And we're extinguishing the alphabet.

The cause is not a mystery. Broadly speaking it is the direct result of agricultural intensification coupled with the use of pesticides. “Intensification” describes the practice of eliminating all “wild areas” around farm fields: every bit of land is either left entirely bare or is treated with synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. Together these forces have turned insects into a largely unseen population of refugees in their own lands—and have unleashed a planetary-scale genocide of these least of God's creatures ... with cascading consequences that threaten not only our survival, but the well-being of the rest of creation. In Germany, for instance, insect losses of 75% were recorded even in protected nature reserves. The web of being does not follow the boundaries we set for field and nation. And the holes we rip in that web run far afield.

Light pollution and urbanization add to the assault on insects, encroaching on the land and darkness that are essential for insect habitat. For its part, climate change is an “entangled” factor. In some places where industrial agriculture has not yet remade landscapes and farming practices climate change is still clearly taking a toll on insect populations. But even apart from this, the rise of fossil-fuel intensive

---

<sup>40</sup> Gail Ramshaw, *Letters for God's Name*, Seabury Press, 1984, p. i.

<sup>41</sup> All the background data in this essay comes from:

[www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/feb/10/plummeting-insect-numbers-threaten-collapse-of-nature](http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/feb/10/plummeting-insect-numbers-threaten-collapse-of-nature)

agriculture (which is what industrial agriculture is) has been a primary contributor to climate change. The warming climate and the approaching end of insects are both linked to the oil that drips through the way we eat, from farmland to grocery store to kitchen table.

Is there no way forward? Which is really to ask, is there any way *backward*? Because backward is the direction we need to move. There *are* less oily ways to eat. But they presume skills, tastes, patience, and priorities that have been crowded out of our customs and character by the twin idols of “cheap” and “convenient. The stark imperative is to change the ways we grow, deliver, process, and consume food. These are daunting systemic changes. But they are probably the only changes that can save the bugs ... and the world into which they are wholly (and graciously!) interwoven. There are, as well, small scale ways to harness empowerment through the pursuit of personal accountability and integrity.

For instance, organic farms continue to “host” far more insects, even as their farmers battle the worst plant pests in ways that protect produce without devastating entire insect populations. So now we know that *buying organic is perhaps an essential spiritual practice*, one that aims to honor the place of bugs in God’s creation choir. Similarly, ending our love affair with the grassy lawn may prove to be a revolutionary act. On The Rachel Carson Center’s blog one post invites us to “Make Meadows not Lawns.”<sup>42</sup> In so doing, we not only reclaim the ground around our homes as a sacred sanctuary space, we might also come to *love* our tiniest and most necessary fellow earthlings. (The word “love” is not gross overstatement; it actually hearkens to E.O. Wilson’s notion of *biophilia*, the demonstrable psychic and emotional benefits that accrue in a deep relationship with the natural world.) We might even remember that in our own mythic origins we were christened “humus beings”—fashioned from dirt and beckoned to tend the ground beneath our feet.

Re-thinking—re-making—our food choices and our yard choices also provides opportunities to build community (share ideas, trade/teach skills) within churches and neighborhoods. In fact, the alchemy of honest grief, passionate conviction, imaginative sharing, and communal bonding may be the only combination that carries us *backward* in a way that can also carry us forward. If God is to arrange the remaining letters of the alphabet into a prayer that might still heal the earth, we will need to embrace insects before they are lost.

The hard data in the scientific review is hard even for me (and I have a pretty close kinship with melancholy most days). Unless we make dramatic changes, of the 20% (of the 1990) insect biomass remaining from my son Benjamin’s childhood, only 10% will be left by the time he reaches eighty. By the time my grandson, who turns three *this* year and is also named Benjamin, reaches *his* eightieth birthday ... insects may well be a memory. If they are, the odds of my grandson making it to eighty aren’t much better.

Climate change is not finally about reason or profit. It is about grief and love. And, right now, dammit, it’s also about the bugs.

*PS: I’ve set up a Patreon site to help fund my work in this area. I hope you’ll invest in my thinking and writing. You can learn more about how to support me here: [www.patreon.com/fullfrontalfaith](http://www.patreon.com/fullfrontalfaith)*

\* \* \*

**The Gospel in Transition by David R. Weiss** is a year of reflections on facing climate change, finding hope, and the alchemy of Christian community. My weekly essays consider climate change, Transition, and faith—using biblical images, liturgical seasons, science, and theology, as conversation partners. Writing in a voice a bit too restless to call “devotional,” I aim to be insightfully evocative and usefully provocative. I’d be delighted to have you join me on this journey. **Subscribe at [www.davidrweiss.com](http://www.davidrweiss.com)**. Thanks for reading and see you next week! **[drv59mn@gmail.com](mailto:drv59mn@gmail.com)**

---

<sup>42</sup> [www.seeingthewoods.org/2018/12/20/make-meadows-not-lawns](http://www.seeingthewoods.org/2018/12/20/make-meadows-not-lawns)

## Not Even Kansas ...

David R. Weiss – February 21, 2019

The Gospel in Transition #12 – **Subscribe at [www.davidrweiss.com](http://www.davidrweiss.com)**

Never mind about Toto or Dorothy, before long *not even Kansas will be in Kansas anymore*. According to a recent report in the journal *Nature Communications* (2/12/2019) one result of climate change is that Minnesota's climate will eventually\* feel like Kansas.<sup>43</sup>

\*It's the "eventually" that the problem. We're not talking a couple hundred years. We're talking several decades. At the current rate of climate change, for instance, in *just three or four decades* the southern Minnesota city of Faribault will have a climate that matches areas in Kansas—500 miles to the south. To put that in even starker perspective, it's as though the city's climate is moving south at 315 feet *per day*.

There's nothing wrong with Kansas. Still, as University of Minnesota forest ecologist, Lee Frelich, recently remarked in testimony at a state legislative hearing, "I don't know about you, but I *didn't* move to Kansas for a reason." Frelich's bias, no doubt a matter of both preference and profession, is bound up with the absence of *forest* in Kansas. An absence looming for Minnesota as well.

As a Kansas climate creeps northward into Minnesota we may keep our 10,000 lakes, but in other ways our landscape will get an extreme makeover. The temperate broadleaf forests that now shade large swaths of central and southern Minnesota will give way to savannah grassland. Minnesota's boreal forest—the two million acres of pine and spruce in our northern reaches—will be overtaken by maple and other deciduous trees as the evergreens "retreat" to Canada. That's a polite way of saying they'll die off because they can't adapt to the damn heat. When my grandchildren reach my age (fifty years out), from the headwaters of the Mississippi across to the scenic North Shore they'll more likely be met with sprawling prairie than towering pines.

Multiply those effects across all of Minnesota's flora and fauna and the impact becomes staggering. We'll lose up to a third of our native species. Moose, lynx, walleye, and Minnesota's magical bird, the loon—all gone. Ticks and mosquitos? Not so much. Their range will *expand*, as will the range of various agriculture pests (in part because their late fall eggs will have a better chance of surviving warmer winters and then replenishing populations earlier in the spring). From withering drought to torrential downpour, from unrelenting heat to catastrophic flood, extreme weather, so called because it's outside the norm, will become ... almost normal. But no less extreme in the mark it makes on Minnesotans themselves.

Asthma, allergies, heat-related illnesses, and insect-borne diseases will all see a boom. Because of the way that poor air quality intersects with poor neighborhoods—and the way race intersects with both—communities of color will be hit hardest. The general upheaval wrought by climate change, plus the specific disasters it will unleash—will mean an uptick in mental health issues ranging from anxiety and depression to post traumatic stress and suicide.

Remember, the key word is "eventually," and the problem is that, with climate change, Kansas is coming to Minnesota (so to speak) *way too quickly*. When "eventually" is compressed into a single generation there's simply no time for ecosystems, animals, farmland, cities, or people to adapt. I support the Green New Deal. I'm all for Minnesota setting out a pathway to 100% renewable energy. These are good—even critical goals. But the carbon *already* loaded (and still loading!) into our atmosphere means that a Kansas climate has *already* packed its bags for Minnesota. Whether it arrives in two decades or ten, and whether it reaches all the way to the Arrowhead or slows down mid-state, these are variables. But whether Kansas comes? *That ticket is already bought and paid for*.

---

<sup>43</sup> The information in this essay comes from these three news stories: [Minnesota Public Radio News, February 12, 2019](#), [City Pages, February 20, 2019](#), and [Rochester Post-Bulletin, January 18, 2019](#).

Which brings me to resilience. As we're *getting* that extreme makeover courtesy of climate change—and that “getting” will stretch on for decades; Kansas won't show up overnight but over years and years; its arrival will be at once far too fast for our comfort and yet also interminably slow until it finally settles in—during that “getting,” what we will need more than anything else is *resilience*.

Rob Hopkins, co-founder of the Transition movement, describes resilience as “the ability of a system, such as a local economy or community, to withstand shock and then adapt to that shock. It's the ability to flex, adapt and to change, and think on its feet in any given situation.” Resilience will be a real virtue while Kansas seems to be clobbering us from south to north. But Hopkins goes on to say, “The twist which we try to put on resilience in the Transition Network is that the ability to react to those threats shouldn't just be a process to avoid the worst possible outcome, but should be seen as an opportunity to engage ... in a positive and creative way. Resilience is *an opportunity and a step forward* [my emphasis], rather than purely a disaster avoidance strategy.”<sup>44</sup>

You hear an inkling of (perhaps begrudging) resilience when Lee Frelich—the *forest* ecologist—says of his beloved boreal forest, “We'll just have to make sure it's the best savannah it can be. Not a bunch of invasive species. We'll have to move some of the plants from our little tiny savannah remnants in southern Minnesota up there. We'll just have to do the best we can.”

I happen to think Christian communities have unique resources to foster resilience, although I certainly *don't* claim resilience as a uniquely Christian virtue. Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, heck, even—maybe *especially*—Pagans and atheists have their own unique resources for resilience (and that's hardly an exhaustive list). But I'm writing for Christians right now and my message is that *we* have largely untapped resources for resilience in our tradition. And in the face of climate change *that's good news*. Maybe not exactly of the sort we'd hoped for, but precisely the sort we need. I'll unpack that more in my next post, but here's a short teaser.

Within the Transition movement resilience is not a top-down program of specified responses. Among its core insights are these: we need to enliven imagination in a political-economic-cultural system designed to shut it down; we need to tap into deep agency, both as individuals and as local communities; we need to reclaim and share the very earthbound skills required in this moment; and we need to do these things without waiting for permission from the “governing” (political, corporate, and cultural) forces around us.<sup>45</sup>

There are surprising resonances between these Transition insights and the Jesus story and the early church as glimpsed in Acts and Paul's epistles. Surprising, because as a whole from Constantine onward the church has sought to be *entwined* with political-economic power and dominant cultures rather than to challenge (even subvert) them for the sake of the Gospel. But there are hints we were redeemed ... for resilience. Next week we'll start there.

*PS: I've set up a Patreon site to help fund my work in this area. I hope you'll invest in my thinking and writing. You can learn more about how to support me here: [www.patreon.com/fullfrontalfaitb](http://www.patreon.com/fullfrontalfaitb)*

\* \* \*

**The Gospel in Transition** by David R. Weiss is a year of reflections on facing climate change, finding hope, and the alchemy of Christian community. My weekly essays consider climate change, Transition, and faith—using biblical images, liturgical seasons, science, and theology, as conversation partners. Writing in a voice a bit too restless to call “devotional,” I aim to be insightfully evocative and usefully provocative. I'd be delighted to have you join me on this journey. **Subscribe at [www.davidrweiss.com](http://www.davidrweiss.com).** Thanks for reading and see you next week! **drw59mn@gmail.com**

---

<sup>44</sup> [www.transitionnetwork.org/news-and-blog/building-resilience](http://www.transitionnetwork.org/news-and-blog/building-resilience)

<sup>45</sup> These insights are called out by Rob Hopkins and Sarah McAdams in “The Transition Movement: Past, Present, and Future,” a keynote roundtable discussion during the 2018 Transition US Tenth Anniversary Online Summit: [www.transitiongathering.org/videos](http://www.transitiongathering.org/videos).

## Redeemed for Resilience

David R. Weiss – March 2, 2019

The Gospel in Transition #13 – **Subscribe at [www.davidrweiss.com](http://www.davidrweiss.com)**

This week's post further introduces the notion of being “redeemed for resilience,” but before we turn to that I need explain a bit about why both parts of that claim might catch many who identify with the Christian tradition off guard. I ended my last post asserting that there are surprising resonances between key insights of the Transition movement and the Jesus story and the early church as glimpsed in Acts and Paul's epistles. I called these touch points “surprising” because the church that nearly all of us know is on *this side* of Constantine.

Although Constantine's “conversion” to Christianity and the subsequent “conversion” of Christianity to the imperial religion of the Roman Empire makes for a complicated tale, the basic shift is pretty clear. Over the course of the fourth century, Christianity transformed itself from a faith that lived at the edges of society—and quite set off from political power (at times persecuted by it)—to a religion at ease with ... and entangled with the dominant political power ... and invested in its preservation and expansion.

It's hard to overstate this shift. Both the initial pitch and dynamic of the gospel message are aimed at those who live—and die—at the edge of power. In the wake of Jesus' historical ministry, the early church, while clearly beset by its own internal struggles over the role of women, the embrace of the Gentiles, and a host of other topics, nevertheless distinguished itself as a Spirit-driven movement. From Constantine onward the Spirit was increasingly domesticated—*hobbled* would be accurate.

Those with political power typically regard religion as an asset to be used to their benefit. And from Emperor Constantine to President Trump this has most often meant using “Christianity” to unite nations and baptize patriotism (often alongside colonizing or otherwise suppressing “others”). The unity and the patriotism are shaped by the values of the dominant powers of the day and rarely reflect the gospel values of Jesus. And the more thoroughly such “Christianity” is interwoven with the dominant culture that supports that dominant political power, the more we all become ... docile. And while you likely won't find “docile” listed as an antonym to “resilient” in your thesaurus (I checked mine), it's close enough. If resilience is what we need, docility is what we can't afford.

This isn't to say that threads of the initial Jesus' movement haven't found their way forward past Constantine. They have. But post-Constantine the most authentic expressions of the gospel dynamic are often relegated to the exceptional. Reserved for the domain of personal piety, “radical” communities (whether convent, monastery, commune, or even cult), or, in moderation, congregations.

But what if we were *redeemed ... for resilience*? What if the commission to carry the gospel to the ends of the Earth was less (*or not at all!*) about saving souls for Jesus and more (*or entirely!*) about helping to unleash the power of the gospel to humanize societies and to harmonize them with ecosystems around the globe? Hint: that's where I'm putting all my chips.

Redeemed. Christian vocabulary is loaded with land mines. And while the twin attics of Christian history and theology display remarkable diversity, common understandings are often unhelpfully narrow. I *don't* mean, “redeemed from our sins”—especially not where “sins” is reduced to rule-breaking that buys us a one-way ticket to damnation unless we're somehow “redeemed.” No. When I say, “redeemed,” I mean something much less and much more.

*Much less* in that I'm not talking about some supernatural transaction that plays out across the scope of eternity; I'm talking about having our worldview “bought back,” re-directed at the rather mundane level of daily life. *Much more* in that I actually believe *THIS* is what Jesus intended: a “re-purchasing” of our imagination and our actions such that we honor the image of God in our neighbors and the dignity of

creation all around us. *Much more* in that this is redemption that bears fruit here and now, which happens to be not only where we most need it, but also where God most desires it.

Resilience. Recall that Rob Hopkins, co-founder of the Transition movement, describes resilience as the capacity “to withstand shock and then adapt ... to think on one’s feet in any given situation.” But he adds that even more than this, resilience is able to meet shock/threat “as an opportunity to step forward and engage ... in a positive and creative way.”<sup>46</sup>

I have sometimes described “faith” to my students as NOT the set of beliefs we hold but the internal-intuitive *posture* (trusting, fearful, cynical, judgmental, etc.) *with which we lean into life*. That faith/posture is both birthed and fostered by the beliefs, practices, biases, and experiences at play around us. In this sense, *resilience is a faith/posture cultivated to meet the world in the midst of its acknowledged threats nonetheless grounded in trust*. Not a naïve trust that everything will just somehow work out, but a more gritty trust that somehow—as a community of people (beginning at the most local levels) we can make choices that move us in the direction of living harmoniously on a finite planet. That’s resilience.

And at its authentic heart, Christianity is a story with the power to redeem us for resilience, to reshape our worldview decisively—*redemptively*—such that (among other things) we turn from living *off* the world to living *in/with* the world. And we make this “turn” with such vitality and joy that words like “born again” (John 3:1-8) or “new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:16-20) are legitimate hyperbole.

Last fall, on the tenth anniversary of its arrival in the U.S., two Transition movement leaders identified several of its core insights as these: (1) to enliven imagination in a political-economic-cultural system designed to shut it down; (2) to tap into deep agency, both as individuals and as local communities; (3) to reclaim and share the very earthbound skills required in this moment; and (4) to do these things without waiting for permission from the “governing” (political, corporate, and cultural) forces around us.<sup>47</sup>

In the coming weeks I’ll explore each insight as it has echoes in Christianity. I’ll argue that not only Jesus’ parables and teaching but also the early church’s use of language, imagery, and ritual are precisely efforts *to enliven imagination in a political-economic-cultural system designed to shut it down*. I’ll assert that Jesus’ commissioning of disciples and Paul’s call to exercise “bold speech” on behalf of the gospel both seek *to tap into deep agency, both as individuals and as local communities*. I’ll suggest that Jesus’ teaching about “the least of these” (among others) as well as the portrait of the early church found in both Acts and Paul’s letters in a certain sense anticipate *the need to reclaim and share the very earthbound skills required in this moment*. And I’ll propose that both Jesus’ ministry and Paul’s vision for the church are rife with invitations *to do these things without waiting for permission from the “governing” (political, corporate, and cultural) forces around us*.

Next week we begin by looking at Jesus and the early church as an exercise in enlivening our imagination. I hope you’ll be back.

*PS: I’ve set up a Patreon site to help fund my work in this area. I hope you’ll invest in my thinking and writing. You can learn more about how to support me here: [www.patreon.com/fullfrontalfaith](http://www.patreon.com/fullfrontalfaith)*

\* \* \*

**The Gospel in Transition** by David R. Weiss is a year of reflections on facing climate change, finding hope, and the alchemy of Christian community. My weekly essays consider climate change, Transition, and faith—using biblical images, liturgical seasons, science, and theology, as conversation partners. Writing in a voice a bit too restless to call “devotional,” I aim to be insightfully evocative and usefully provocative. I’d be delighted to have you join me on this journey. **Subscribe at [www.davidrweiss.com](http://www.davidrweiss.com)**. Thanks for reading and see you next week! **[drw59mn@gmail.com](mailto:drw59mn@gmail.com)**

---

<sup>46</sup> [www.transitionnetwork.org/news-and-blog/building-resilience](http://www.transitionnetwork.org/news-and-blog/building-resilience)

<sup>47</sup> Rob Hopkins and Sarah McAdams in “The Transition Movement: Past, Present, and Future,” roundtable discussion, 2018 Transition US Tenth Anniversary Online Summit: [www.transitiongathering.org/videos](http://www.transitiongathering.org/videos).