



**NEIGHBORHOOD UNITARIAN
UNIVERSALIST CHURCH**

**The Good Green News of the
Disruptive UUs**

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Before I sat down to write this sermon I listened to Arvid's sermon last week. If you missed it, you should go to our web site and have a listen. He helped kick off our pledge drive with the best sermon about money I've ever heard – he gave very compelling reasons to support the values our church stands for by supporting the church financially. Today I want to expound on what those values are and how we embody them in our larger community, and share some of my dreams for this church.

This involves talking about the only thing more uncomfortable to talk about in a sermon than money, and that's climate change. Although, I'm getting less and less *uncomfortable* with both these topics because I see how related they are, and how we can't afford to be afraid to talk about them anymore. They are both anxiety producing, but where there is anxiety, and especially where there is crisis, there is opportunity.

There is a small but economically influential group of people in this country making sure that we are unable to progress on climate change. They are manufacturing dissent. You may have heard about a film that was just released Friday called *Merchants of Doubt*, which documents the climate change denying movement – I plan to see it at my earliest opportunity, so I can learn where our enemy is weakest.

This has been the busiest week for pastoral care in my memory of serving this fine church, and I don't consider it a bother at all, I consider it a privilege to have interacted with many people in emotional need. One of the sentiments expressed this week was how, when we come to this church on Sunday mornings, we hold a special-feeling kind of space here. Everyone tries to be open and kind to one another. Together, we do our best to make sure all people feel welcome here, regardless of ability to support the church.

I explained to one of you, who said maybe she should find a church where people are poor like she is, that no, we are your people. We would miss you if you left. People come to Neighborhood Church to rub elbows with people from all walks of life, to be blessed by the commonality we hold amongst a richness of socio-economic diversity. It is something we strive for. This woman went on to tell me how proud she was that she raised her pledge for next year, and I almost wept I was so moved.

I know a lot of us, perhaps most of us, love Neighborhood for these kinds of relational reasons, and Jim Nelson always thought that was just fine, if the purpose of this church was that alone; and I agree, it is beautiful, our brand of creating beloved community is like no other I've encountered in my life. And I wish so much that that could be our exclusive focus at all times.

The last line of Arvid's sermon last week was so compelling, he asked, "What is home worth?" Relationally alone, this church is priceless, and worthy of bold generosity, bold giving.

However, Neighborhood Church can't only be about that, because, and I know this sounds extreme, but there are people trying to kill us, if by us, I mean the whole of humanity to which we are inextricably connected: those living in low-lying areas, those living near the train-tracks of three oil train derailments in just the past three weeks alone wreaking toxic disaster, and worst of all, my children, for many of you here your grandchildren, who may spend much of their adult lives fleeing and recovering from ever stronger storms and natural disasters caused by climate change.

These people trying to kill us, among them are our politicians, in ever greater positions of power, of the like who bring a snowball into congress and say there is no global warming – these are our elected leaders! So if I sound like I'm out of bounds today with what a preacher should sound like, I'm ok with that – I am *trying* to be disruptive.

Back in September when I went to the People's Climate March in Manhattan, on the eve of the march, I sneaked in to the big panel event at All Souls UU Church (by the way, I can boast that never in my life have I not gotten into a show I wanted to see – this is my favorite thing about being a little person). I got in while hundreds were turned away outside, who wanted to hear what Bill McKibben, Naomi Klein, Chris Hedges and other leaders had to say about the movement to keep the earth from heating any more than it already will be, and I can say that Naomi Klein and Chris Hedges specifically called for nothing short of a people's revolution.

While I encourage you to do your own investigating of these ideologues representing the non-denying side of climate change, I'm not going to get in to all that in my sermon. I agonized over what readings to share with you from Naomi Klein's book, or the many thoughtful essays and articles out there on the internet, for example framing climate change as a weapon that is orchestrated. There is so much to confront and disrupt, and like Naomi Klein urges us, please try not to look away, please don't fall into the remembering and forgetting mode that anxiety so often produces. I beg that of myself, too. Let's let this faith community be our strength to confront this overwhelming challenge together.

I want to focus instead on my good news, about how Unitarian Universalists have been successfully disruptive in the past, and will be disruptive again, and how this church in particular, our Neighborhood Church, is a power player in our community – we hold that kind of stature among the community of non-profit, activist, city council, and interfaith leaders. It's because we've been involved in such significant friendship-building with the local Muslim community in recent years; it's because we are an in-person presence in the Pasadenans for a Livable Wage movement – back in January, I got 20 of you at that community forum attended by 150, which can be watched in its entirety on our coalition's website, <https://livablewagepasadena.wordpress.com/>.

It's because we are the leaders of green and environmental works and foci as part of our living tradition of faith; we are a certified Green Sanctuary, a prize-winning church that serves as a role model for every house of faith in our community. So much so that we're hosting the very first Green Summit of the Arroyo Interfaith Environmental Coalition, formed under the lay-

leadership of our church, All Saints Church, and the local chapter of Interfaith Power & Light, a national organization. Unfortunately, it will be taking place at the same time of Arvid's workshop next Sunday, but this sermon is meant to honor the purpose of the summit happening in the first place.

I'm not done listing all the reasons why we are a power player in our community. It's because of Jericho Road of Pasadena, which I can hardly believe will celebrate five years this spring. I'll never forget talking to Brian Biery of the Flintridge Center, a highly respected non-profit leader in Pasadena, about 7 years ago, when I was explaining the Jericho Road concept to him, and asking him for help in the feasibility study process. Now it's the Flintridge Center who comes to Jericho Road for help and collaboration. But back then Brian said, "This is an excellent idea that will make a real difference in our community and we will do whatever we can to help you get it off the ground."

Flintridge helped, but it was the power of this church's generosity that really got it off the ground. In this church alone, well over \$75,000 was raised for the seed money. And that generosity that raises our stature in the community is also seen in all our Special Offerings, that Jim brilliantly decreed to have twice every month just before his tenure concluded.

A few days ago I received an email from the Flintridge Center, announcing a retraction of their services, which have been so crucial in addressing the needs of at-risk youth in Pasadena. I wrote to Brian and the director how sorry I was to hear that, and that Neighborhood Church stands by their organization because we know what a difference they have made, and that they were about to be the recipients of our Special Offering next month. They both wrote back expressing how much my words meant to them, and how excited they were about the event we are going to sponsor on April 30, marking the 6 month anniversary of a gang murder at Fair Oaks Burger in Altadena. They are 100% on board to collaborate. So now you know *that* event is definitely going to be happening, and you'll be hearing more about it in the next six weeks.

What is the point of all this testifying and what has it to do with addressing climate change? Isn't it obvious? We have cache in this community; we have power; we have influence. And it's time to step up that influence in the terrifying but necessary effort to address climate change, in ways that counter the dominant, ideological world view that is killing us.

The worldview in control now is spinning our world out of control. Naomi Klein writes, "The culture that triumphed in our corporate age pits us against the natural world. The three policy pillars of the neoliberal age – privatization of the public sphere, deregulation of the corporate sector, and the lowering of income and corporate taxes, paid for with cuts to public spending – are each incompatible with many of the actions we must take to bring our emissions to safe levels. And together these pillars form an ideological wall that has blocked a serious response to climate change for decades."

We have asked you to share your dreams about Neighborhood – what dreams have come true and what dreams do you still have. All of the relationships and connections to our community I've listed are related to the dreams that have come true for me in my time at Neighborhood. And my dreaming for this church is far from over.

I'm so excited because these dreams are within reach. Let me riff on my dreams for a bit here. What if we added staff to step up our on-line presence? Lord knows I need a personal assistant to manage my on-line presence and so will Lissa. I'm too busy doing my important face-time work, forging connections in our community, to have time to craft the additional on-line content that can change hearts and minds on a larger scale. But through that kind of effort, and through continuing our grass-roots antics in the community – such as being the next American city to pass a livable wage, or any other green initiatives we pass on the municipal level – what we start to do is embody the workable world-view that lives on earth's terms, not climate change-denying, greedy corporate profits' terms.

If a small group of people can orchestrate making profits off of climate change, so can a small group change our culture and worldview. We cannot let the climate change deniers, and the ideological movement from which they sprang, keep winning the battle over which values should govern our societies.ⁱ

What if Neighborhood Church was a leader in this country, in the world, for articulating and embodying that sustaining and sustainable world view? I don't think that's such a crazy idea. I think, with enough financial backing, with the kind of bold giving that supports these kinds of bold values our world so desperately needs at this critical juncture in human history, I think we could be a power player in the ultimate fight to save humanity. What is really stopping us from modeling real world solutions toward our livability on this earth, toward actual human salvation?

I can think of some forces that might stop us, but let's not let one of those be our reticence to give what we can give financially, so that we can build on a solid financial foundation, to make our biggest dreams come true.

In other words, when you invest in the values of a UU church as powerful as this one, you are supporting a worldview that has the best chance of saving us. One of my dreams is to be very intentional about articulating and embodying that worldview in the coming years – and taking you with me.

We have heroes among us who are already doing so, through Citizens' Climate Lobby, through our Green Council, and now the interfaith coalition. Join us. If you can't increase your giving this year, increase your time and energy given.

Our pledge drive ask this year is to raise overall giving at least 10% and there's a certain reason why. In recent years, the pledge amount we put in our annual budget is a number of faith –

thankfully, our sharp Director of Administration has always been able to pull a bunny rabbit out at the end of the fiscal year, and we more or less break even. But it's looking like we could be running out of bunny rabbits. The reason we are asking for an increase with no sexy and exciting thing to say you'll be getting additionally for it, is because we need to catch up, just in order to honor our current commitments. I can't stress enough how important it is to pay off your current pledge, please, if you can, and to please commit as boldly as you can for your next year's pledge.

I have a dream that this church, thanks to increased financial giving over the next few years, due to a wonderful surge of exciting ministerial vision, due to a new partnership in ministry with the incredibly talented Reverend Lissa Gundlach, will afford the expansion of our vision in ways that truly transform our community and our world.

I have a dream that one day Lissa will be able to share the good news with our custodians that, regardless of what happens on the city level, Neighborhood Church has decided to be a leader in our community and show that it *is* possible to pay our custodians a livable wage. It's not that they are poorly paid now, in fact, we pay better than All Saints does – but it's still not enough.

And speaking of, the next step of the Pasadenans for a Livable Wage movement will be taking place at the Jackie Robinson Center on Saturday, March 22. I will be blogging and outreaching about that after next weekend. And it's no accident that I'm bringing up a livable wage in a sermon that raises climate change. Naomi Klein makes the connection between the two very clearly in her book. Many of the solutions to climate change will have the added bonus of addressing poverty and stagnant wages. And if you want evidence that raising the minimum wage is great for the economy, look at the shining example of the state of Minnesota, who just boasted a budgetary surplus, because they erred on the side of generosity. It is a worldview of commonwealth generosity that transforms our world.

It is no accident that those heavy-hitters of the climate change movement were content to present at a Unitarian Universalist church back in September. We are known to have a history of disrupting business as usual on the federal level. Let us not forget the role Unitarian Universalist people of faith played in exposing the Pentagon Papers after the Vietnam War ended. And let us applaud more recently and closer to home, that First UU Church of Los Angeles has a lawsuit against the NSA, the National Security Agency for spying on their parishioners. Perhaps we should think about joining that law suit, because heaven knows, with our reputation as one of the churches with the most Muslim friends in America, you know *we're* being watched.

I hope I am full of it, but what if I'm not. NSA, if you're listening, your surveillance will not stop us from being disruptive, and I am not afraid of your power. Because I have good, green news. Because I serve one of the best Unitarian Universalist churches in the world, and we will

continue to disrupt and dismantle the worldview that is killing us. It is the fight of our lifetime, and we are just getting started.

May all our good, green dreams come to pass. Amen.

ⁱ Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything*, 2014.