

New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario

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Climate: Fiddling while the planet burns!

Text: “Now let Pharaoh select a man who is discerning and wise and set him over the land of Egypt. Set up overseers and take one fifth of the produce of the land during the 7 prosperous years and under the authority of Pharaoh keep it in granaries against the 7 years of famine.”

It was December the 13th 2009. The locale was Copenhagen Lutheran Cathedral. Mardi Tindal, past Moderator of the United Church of Canada at that time, wrote these words: “ I gasped as worship began, I stood alongside other church leaders from every region of the planet. Exposed glacier stones from Greenland, dried up maize from Africa and bleached coral from the Pacific Ocean captured my attention as they called us – dramatically – into worship. As these three ‘members’ of the procession found their way slowly through the packed congregation, my eyes brimmed with tears. I wasn’t alone. These silent three – symbols of global climate change – spoke loudly. They led us into soul-deep lament over what we are doing, into high praise of our Creator, and into a wide hope that we might be revealed as Children of God.”

Today one of the great enemies regarding what we do about climate is making the fact- checked real news, into fake news, and fake conspiracy theory into so-called ‘real’ news. Fake news has been used to downplay the urgency of climate change and derail legislation primarily by advocates for the fossil fuel industries.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn once said this about Russia:

“In our country the lie has become not just a moral category, but a pillar of the state.”

By withdrawing the United States from the Paris Climate accords, by making anti environmentalist Scott Pruitt the director of the EPA; and by reducing the standards for carbon emissions for the auto industry, the current White House has copied Russia and made conspiracy theory and lies a very pillar of the State.

Fortunately, there are folks who are educated to discern fact from fiction, who are very concerned at the direction that America is taking. Many of the States of the union deplore the exit from the Paris accords and the attempt to get rid of restrictions on emissions.

Governor Jerry Brown of California, a strong advocate of the Paris accords, is governing over the State in a period of unprecedented climate change: This is the worst Fire season ever with the Mendocino Complex fire as the largest fire ever in the State’s history. He said this past week that the fire situation in California is the ‘new normal’. This is the hottest the State has been so far in history.

Perhaps a more accurate assessment was made this week by Professor Michael Mann, a leading climate scientist, who took issue with the ‘new normal’ phrase and described climate change as not normal at all, but was more like walking into a minefield. He said the argument that it is too late to do something would be like saying; “I’m just going to keep walking.” That would be absurd- you reverse course and get off that minefield as quick as you can. It is really a question of how bad it is going to get.”

Today it is much worse than it was in 2009 when faith leaders met in Copenhagen. Today the planet is on fire across much of the US and in the Canadian North and Europe. Australia is experiencing the worst continuous drought in fifty years. Kangaroos and livestock have had to be slaughtered because they cannot keep them alive.

In the summer of 2018, a large number of wildfires (primarily forest fires) occurred throughout much of Sweden. According to the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, they are the most serious in the country in modern history. The summer has been unusually warm and dry, significantly raising the risk of fire.

In Spain, “firefighters battled a total of 11 separate wildfires which erupted in the space of just six hours in the Spanish region of Valencia, with thousands evacuated and nine dead nationwide in a further illustration of continent-wide tinderbox conditions...”

In Greece “Wildfires raging near Athens Greece, have killed dozens of people, in one of the deadliest blazes in recent history. High winds and extreme temperatures have pushed the fires further than most believed possible, catching tourists and residents off guard. Officials say that so far, at least 49 people have been killed, with at least 172 injured and 15 missing.

“Unfortunately, at this stage, we do not expect to find more people injured, only more dead,” said Miltiades Milonas, vice president of the Greek ambulance service.

Catastrophic climate change is not unknown in the Bible. The longest story in the Bible is the story of Joseph dealing with a Middle East famine.

There are distinct similarities between the great Famine in the time of Joseph and climate change today.

It is interesting to me that it begins with a **prediction**: 7 years of plenty are to give way to 7 years of severe famine. Our Nobel laureates and climate scientists have long **predicted** that there will be catastrophic adverse effects as the planet warms. They say we are now definitely in climate change. Even the rains this summer in London Ontario are attributed to climate change. There was a sudden flash flood in Toronto this past week.

In the story of Joseph, the highest power in the land, the Pharaoh, dreams two nightmare dreams and wants them interpreted. Joseph, a resident alien, who is actually in prison at the time, but not forgotten by God, steps up to the plate and interprets the dreams saying they are one and the same dream...there is to be plenty and then a severe famine.

But Joseph does not stop there. He develops a strategy to combat the challenge and resolve it successfully. He says: “Now let Pharaoh select a man who is discerning and wise and set him over the land of Egypt. Set up overseers and take one fifth of the produce of the land during the 7 prosperous years and under the authority of Pharaoh keep it in graneries against the 7 years of famine.”

So, the Pharaoh appoints Joseph as second in command and the system is set up.

I am quite sure that there would have been complaints in the good years about the fifth of the produce being stored. There would be little or no awareness during the 7 good years. But the Pharaoh was absolute and so preparation was made.

Then the famine began to bite in the 8th year and complaints came to the Pharaoh that there was no food and he sent them to Joseph. Even Jacob in Canaan heard that there was food in Egypt and sent Joseph’s brothers to get some.

At the time of the second world war Churchill had long been warning about the rise of Nazi Germany. People had laughed him to scorn, but when the gathering storm burst there was only one man to turn to...Churchill. So, it was in Egypt. Who do we turn to in the modern world?

In today’s world we need to take Joseph’s advice and turn to those who are **discerning and wise** among us, the climate scientists...those who have warned us for so long as the icecaps melt and the tundra releases methane and the great jet streams slow and the weather stays put, either for floods or drought or fire as the planet warms.

The solution, although easy to talk about, will not be easy to implement.

But the cause is known. As climate scientist Michael Mann says “It’s not rocket science. The problems we are experiencing are **all caused by fossil fuels**. Unlike trees and plants which are carbon neutral, fossil fuels long buried and then released across the planet add to the carbon build up. They are creating a greenhouse warming effect. As the planet warms, more moisture

is taken up into the atmosphere, the jet streams slow and extreme weather results. Extreme weather is the face of Climate Change today.

On the Titanic there were those who denied that icebergs were a problem for the Titanic. So, the great ship steamed at full speed towards the ice filled waters. They were the deniers. And their words prevailed until the great ship struck the berg.

Don't believe the climate change deniers, even if one of two of them are Nobel laureates. There are 36 Nobel Laureates who think that Climate change is just as serious a threat as the unleashing of nuclear weapons. Believe the consensus seekers not the deniers. A true skeptic talks to other researchers and looks at the data. But if you are in denial you simply reject everything that is being published...

Lesson? Follow the Josephs, listen to what they say to do and then do it!

What do we do?

The solution is breathtakingly simple again. **We switch out of fossil fuels into electric power generated by the wind and the sun.** This is the parallel to what Joseph did in Egypt. He stored grain against the famine. He had a strategy and he followed it and when the time came he was ready.

As people who vote, we need to vote for politicians who will respect our climate scientists and their strategies that will move us forward. Pharaoh, the government of the day, stepped back and got out of the way and listened to a **discerning and wise man** and gave him his head to run with the problem.

We need to turn around and leave the minefield of fossil fuels. The Trans Mountain Pipeline and the Ontario Government's abandonment of the carbon tax with no strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, would be classic examples of Pharaoh getting in the way of the Josephs. These unfortunate decisions will not keep Canada working as the websites suggest, it will merely take the world deeper into the minefield.

Our investment in Canada, and indeed in the whole world, needs to be into benign energy sources such as the wind, geothermal and the sun. We have made some progress here, but quite obviously it is not enough. For too long we have danced to the tunes of the oil companies. We have not heeded the warnings and now we are in the years of heat, drought, famine and fire and floods.

So where is the hope?

What would Joseph do?

Joseph developed his strategy in the years before the famine. He was, under God, early out of the starting gate. Joseph put his faith in God. Joseph trusted God and then acted.

But God was a player too!

God prepared Joseph for a long time; Joseph was a dreamer and an interpreter of dreams, and when he did that for his brothers, they took offence and sent him to Egypt as a slave. He did well as a slave until Potiphar's wife took a shine to him which he did not return out of loyalty to Potiphar and with a lie he was sent to jail. But under the watchful eye of God the person in the jail beside him was the cup bearer to the Pharaoh. Joseph interpreted a dream of his and the servant of Pharaoh promised to remember him. But he forgot Joseph who lay in prison until Pharaoh had a dream that needed interpretation and then the cupbearer to the Pharaoh spoke up. Joseph suddenly was interpreting Pharaoh's dreams and was catapulted into a Supreme position in the land of Egypt. So now he was finally in a position to deal with a change in the climate- a Middle Eastern Famine. What a long careful preparation by God!

Today people often say what would Jesus do? Today am going to try to channel Joseph by asking what would he do?

Here goes! I think he would think like this:

- Appoint climate scientists and our best problems solvers as overseers who have gifts of discernment to be today's wise people to oversee a world-wide climate strategy.
- Replace fossil fuels with electricity generated from benign sources
- Give the overseers the funding to get it done and then get out of their way. Let the Pharaohs trust and step back.
- There would be no Pharaoh directed environmental roll backs of needed strategies to combat climate change
Instead Joseph would initiate whole cost accounting instead of arguments based on sector economics
- There would be systematic preparation for drought, fire, temperature rise, floods and sea level rise
- The capacity of the world food Bank would be enlarged
- Innovation would be encouraged to fix carbon through technologies
- Massive programs would be instituted to replant trees that can endure heat and fire better than conifers
- Permanent sprinkler systems would be placed into forests to extinguish fires, especially when replanting forests

Will this be hard to do? Not if we place our faith in the God who created the planet and asked us to look after it. Not for the God of Joseph. Is anything too hard for God?

One last word of hope:

Back in May 2015, Portugal made history by running for four days in a row on renewable energy alone. The entire country was powered by wind, solar, and hydro-generated electricity from 7th to 11th May.

"This is a significant achievement for a European country, but what seems extraordinary today will be commonplace in Europe in just a few years," says James Watson, the CEO of SolarPower Europe.

Renewable energy production in Scotland reached record levels last year, with the country sourcing more than two-thirds of its electricity from green schemes.

The country got 68.1 per cent of its electricity from renewable sources, a rise of 14.1 percentage points from the 54 per cent reached in 2016.

What is happening here?

The Modern Pharaohs, the rulers, and the modern Josephs are getting together to change the world.

So, can we!

In the name of the Father Creator of all things, in the name of Jesus Christ sustainer of the universe and the Holy Spirit who promised us to lead us into the truth that shall set us free.

Amen.