

On Climate Change
Preacher: Rev. Lauren Lorincz
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This week I watched the moving documentary *Chasing Ice*, which follows the work of photographer James Balog as he studies glaciers with his team in Iceland, Greenland, Alaska, and Montana. Balog has long been fascinated by the interactions of humanity and nature and wanted to photograph the effects of climate change. He wondered what he could even use to tell the story and realized that ice—glaciers really, would be the perfect subject for the public to witness the staggering effects of humanity wreaking havoc on our earth. He observed a glacier breaking apart and falling into the ocean in Alaska and thought that the glacier was like an old man falling into the earth and dying. After observing that stark occurrence, he knew he had to tell the story—a story he hoped would hit humanity in the gut and call us to consciousness.

Chasing Ice is about Balog's process and founding the Extreme Ice Survey to document glaciers calving (breaking off into the ocean.) In Greenland, glaciers are dumping more ice into the ocean than ever before. In fact, Balog's team caught on film a section of the Store Glacier in Greenland cracking and falling apart into the Atlantic—the section was 1500 feet wide, that's 5 football fields of ice that fell into the ocean from one glacier in Greenland alone. The sea levels are rising as a result of all this ice and the meltwater from these glaciers rushing into the ocean and could even be three feet higher in the not too distant future. This would mean that 150 million people could be displaced from their homes, and hurricanes and typhoons will only get more severe.[1] In fact, many U.S. coastal areas are already experiencing erosion and flooding based on rising sea levels from climate change.[2]

Balog uses timelapse photography to chart the glaciers' shrinking we see today. Glaciers have natural occurrences of shrinking and growing over time, of course. But what *Chasing Ice* documents is geologists looking at the chemistry of the ice and dating glaciers, looking for climate patterns. In the past, the air temperature and carbon dioxide levels would go up and down together, that's how it's supposed to occur in nature. Now, carbon dioxide is 40 times higher than it should be. The air is changing too fast due to Greenhouse Gas elements, which explains the extreme rate of the glaciers shrinking. Balog pointed to the Columbia Glacier in Alaska, relating that it's an unhealthy glacier. The cameras documenting that glacier had to even be repositioned every few months to look further and further upstream to document the retreat.[3]

As part of our participation in today's Interfaith Power and Light National Preach-in on Climate Change, we received a copy of *Chasing Ice* which is on our environmental table, and there's always Balog's website extremeicesurvey.org. While it's not exactly uplifting material, it's important to read and see. And if he could explain climate change to someone who has sometimes struggled with math and science, then we can all take heart, trust me. It's important to listen to what folks like James Balog have to teach us.

When we do consider environmental issues like climate change, it's easy to feel overwhelmed. We know hopefully by now some ways we can address the problem: reduce and recycle, control our gadgets, eat locally grown food, drink tap water, use LED light bulbs, wash your clothes in cold water, plant some trees, and the like. Balog advises, "Use your voice. Use your skills. Use your power. Use your money." [4] But sometimes all of this reminds me of my comic buddies Calvin and Hobbes again. Calvin has the hiccups and asks Hobbes to scare him to help get rid of this annoyance. Hobbes says, "Our oceans are filled with garbage, we've created a hole in the ozone that's frying the planet, nuclear waste is piling up without any safe way to get rid of it." Calvin says in exasperation, "I mean surprise me!" To which Hobbes

responds, "That doesn't?! Boy, you're cynical." [5] We may all have moments of feeling cynical or pondering if our individual actions can really make an impact on our planet.

But we can look to someone like photographer James Balog and his insistence on getting the climate change message out there by capturing powerful images of glaciers and ice, and his individual work raising awareness. That's something. What can we do in our own lives to fight for change? First and foremost, as Christians we should care about what happens to our earth, which can certainly give us courage. We heard in Psalm 24, "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; for he has founded it on the seas and established it on the rivers." [6] We're part of this world, belonging to God, and we are connected to the seas and the rivers and those glaciers breaking apart. When the Psalmist asks, "Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? Those who have clean hands and pure hearts." [7] That means you and me—standing before God with clean hands and pure hearts. Maybe that means, in part, doing what we can to help make our planet better for our children's children. Remember, "Use your voice. Use your skills. Use your power. Use your money." At the end of Chasing Ice, Baolg stands on a beach and reflects that he wants to face his two daughters in 20 years and be able to say that he was doing all he knew how to do.

For too long, we Christians have been obsessive with individual sins, but what about societal sins? What about systemic issues like climate change? This summer at our United Church of Christ General Synod 29, our denomination passed several resolutions to address climate change and environmental issues. We called for making church buildings more carbon neutral and condemned mountaintop removal coal mining in Appalachia. We called attention to the wonderful opportunities for falling in love with nature that our members can discover at Outdoor Ministry sites and encouraged UCC members to use these beautiful camps to experience God in nature.

We made national headlines when we voted to explore divesting from fossil fuel companies—which is a rather controversial method to address climate change. The vote was to investigate fossil fuel companies by our next General Synod in 2015 and to identify best in class companies along with a plan whereby the Pension Boards and our United Church Funds will not hold assets in any fossil fuel company that does not meet those standards of excellence.

The final resolved clause is worth sharing, "BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the Twenty-ninth General Synod of the United Church of Christ remains profoundly concerned about the disproportionate impact climate change is already having on those living in poverty and in the least developed countries, the elderly and children and those least responsible for the emissions of greenhouse gases, and recognizes the moral mandate for humanity to shift to a sustainable energy plan in a way that is both just and compassionate." [8]

We hear voices like the Psalmist calling on us to recognize that the earth is God's and all that is in it and that we need to stand before God with clean hands and pure hearts. We also have our own denomination calling on us to recognize that there is a moral mandate here and now for humanity to shift the way we are part of God's creation. It's expressed well by many Native American tribes who have long advocated that humanity must walk on the earth lightly. Truthfully, I don't know if divestment is the answer, and we'll see what we find out at General Synod 30 in Cleveland, Ohio in 2015! But what we hear expressed often in the struggle to address climate change is that we have to speak up and make our voices heard, and we have to push for action.

Part of that action is political; it's telling our elected representatives where we stand on environmental issues just as much as we might speak our minds on other political issues. You will have the opportunity to make your voice heard today by filling out postcards to send to Senators Elizabeth Warren and Ed Markey if you wish after church, urging them to do their part

by supporting the Environmental Protection Agency's Carbon Pollution Standards for new and existing Power Plants. Again, the very air we breathe affects our planet in more ways than we often imagine—including putting too much carbon dioxide in the air that leads to unhealthy glaciers and ocean levels rising and all those warnings James Balog sounds in *Chasing Ice*.

So we can play a part in this struggle for sustainability. We can address climate change. As Balog advises, "Use your voice. Use your skills. Use your power. Use your money." Our United Church of Christ is a leading religious voice in the environmental movement on a national level, which can simultaneously make us proud and inspire us.

In the end, it's like Mary Oliver says as only she can, "Said the river: I am part of holiness. And I too, said the stone. And I too, whispered the moss beneath the water . . . If God exists he isn't just churches and mathematics. He's the forest, He's the desert. He's the ice caps, that are dying . . . Yes, it could be that I am a tiny piece of God, and each of you too, or at least of his intention and his hope. Which is delight beyond measure . . . I pray for the desperate earth. I pray for the desperate world." [9] Amen.

[1] James Balog, *Chasing Ice*, 2012.

[2] "The Facts about Climate Change," *Interfaith Power and Light: A Religious Response to Global Warming*

[3] James Balog, *Chasing Ice*, 2012.

[4] James Balog, "Take Action: What You Can Do about Climate Change," *Extreme Ice Survey*, 2012, <http://extremeicesurvey.org/take-action/>

[5] Bill Watterson, *The Indispensible Calvin and Hobbes: A Calvin and Hobbes Treasury*, 67.

[6] Psalm 24:1-2, NRSV.

[7] Psalm 24:3-4, NRSV.

[8] General Synod 29 Resolution "Resolution Urging Divestment—Along with other Strategies— from Fossil Fuel Companies to Address Climate Change," July 2013, <http://www.ucc.org/synod/resolutions/>

[9] Mary Oliver, "At the River Clarion," in *Evidence*, 51-54.