

Imagine that we are in a movie. And in this movie, someone from the future has come back in time to this very moment in 2022 to avert a disaster in the future. They are here to make one change that will avert an environmental disaster in the future, and they have two hours to do it. There are many disasters that we can imagine but, in this movie, it's environmental collapse. The movie begins with a disastrous vision of what this future is like. In this future, people often die of heat exposure in India and in the American Southwest in the summertime. And even here in the North, summers are miserable. Private armies protect water sources for industrial farming, and that farming still doesn't produce enough food for all the earth's people. Fires burn year-round west of the Mississippi. Coastal areas have flooded, some of them permanently. Animals and plants are struggling to find habitat and resources. And, so knowing that, they must change something in the past in order to change this uninhabitable future. Our time traveler has come back here to 2022 and they have one mission: to make the change in 2022 that will stop these future disasters. Everything hangs in the balance. They have a list of crucial things they must do and also crucial things they must not do, because every action they take here in the past is going to have some effect on the future. They can't catch themselves in a time paradox where they undo their own existence, and they aren't coming back again. Every single thing they do matters.

You know what's funny is that if that is true for our time traveler in our movie, then it is true for every single one of us in what we do in our lives. If every single thing that that time traveler does back in 2022 could change the future, then every single thing that we do here, in our slow time machine that just carries us forward one second at a time, can change the future. We live in a world of food shortages, worsening droughts, wildfires, and sea level rise. So it is on us to do everything we can to change the future now. Our time travel hero has the benefit of a writing team and only two hours in which to accomplish their mission. They are facing what they know to be the most important problem of their lives. We, on the other hand, have no benefit of plot and we have our whole lives in front of us and many pressing problems. It's hard to get motivated by just a litany of the things that are wrong. Especially because we, many of us, gain spiritual nourishment from the earth and we see around us its beauty and generosity. And we don't necessarily see, in our everyday lives, the problems that the earth is facing. So I want to help us focus on what we love and treasure in the earth and find that thing that does help inspire us to work urgently for the improvement of the planet; to ensure that what we love is still here on earth for our children and our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren to adore.

Now, it's not easy to do this, to really focus on the thing we love the most that is most at risk. But it does help to inspire us to take action. And, I find in doing justice work, that it helps to think about one thing that really matters to each one of you, instead of thinking of the whole panoply of problems. And so, for me, the forest fires in the west just break my heart. My husband is from Portland, Oregon, and all of his family live in Oregon; some in the Columbia River Valley where Portland is, and some in Eastern Oregon, which is a beautiful land high desert country and juniper and sage bushes. I compliment Andy on being from such a good place, so that we get to go there and visit, and we go out west every other year to see his family. Last summer, we went on our post pandemic family visiting tours, and from the airplane flying out to a Portland, we could see the bootleg fire burning in the Oregon countryside. Just an orange angry mass out the plane window covering so much more land than I would have thought possible. In 2020, some of Andy's relatives were ready to evacuate even in rainy Salem, Oregon in the valley. The sky near their house was orange the air was dangerous to breathe. They were miles from the fire, but it might have come their way. So for me personally, when I think of why I need to do environmental work and why limiting environmental damage matters, I think about the Oregon fire season. I think of the landscapes and the people that I love. I think of the heat and smoke and ash pouring into the sky. It's painful but it focuses my attention on what needs to be done.

So, I invite you here for a moment to think about what it is for you. A species you love, a landscape that lives in your heart, a place you love to go outdoors - whatever that is for you. I invite you to let your love of that natural thing fill your heart. Feel the pain of losing it because this is your "why" - this is your focus, to focus your will toward action and our slow-moving disaster of climate change. So once we've grasped that

"why", each of us for ourselves, the question is: what can we do? There are personal changes that everyone can make that makes a difference. There are ways to reduce electricity usage in your own home. Here at First Unitarian church, you all voted at our annual meeting to convert all the remaining incandescent lights in the church into LED lights. The project is ongoing, most of the church has been done and we are working on the sanctuary, which is the last space in the church that still needs conversion. I'm grateful to the buildings and grounds committee for taking the lead on that project. Personally too, we can drive less. The inflating price of gas is another incentive to do this, as it nears \$5 a gallon; the difficulty of finding a good car, especially a used car; more people working from home. My

own older son is going to learn to drive this summer. And we briefly thought about maybe we would get a second car, because we are a one-car family right now. And just the price alone made me re-think that step. We have bikes. Worcester has buses. We can walk places. Even if we need to take a cab, the overall cost of a second car is so much more than those other ways of getting around, not just financially, but environmentally as well. Every little thing that we do in our lives adds up to make a difference.

And then there are policy decisions that are made at the state and regional and national levels. We are as a nation working to move towards natural gas instead of coal burning. We eventually need to move towards entirely renewable resources and next generation nuclear power. We need to support women's education and reproductive health care worldwide to slow population growth so that women have only the children they want to have. In New England, we're part of the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, which seeks to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from power plants. Yet perhaps the arena where we can make the most differences locally (personal change matters, national and regional policy matters) but here in Worcester, people can come together in local action to make a real difference in our lived experience. I want to thank our member

Paul Popinchalk, not only for his tree activism in Worcester, but for sharing with me the results of some studies that have been done on the tree canopy cover here in our city. So three years ago, on a hot clear day in August of 2019, volunteers tracked the temperature of the air all over Worcester: at six in the morning, at four in the afternoon, and at eight in the evening. They had established driving routes that would let their cars measure the temperature and they had specific instructions about how to drive so that their cars would capture the temperature. The difference that they found was striking between the parts of the city that have tree cover and the parts that don't. At 4pm on that hot August day, the maximum temperature in Worcester was over 90 degrees, whereas the minimum temperature was only 80. Which, as we are experiencing right now on this unusually hot day in May, the difference between 80 and 90 is the difference between having a great day and retreating into the air conditioning. At 8pm, the lowest temperature in the city was 68 degrees. And if the temperature gets below 70 for the night, then you have a comfortable night ahead of you. But the highest temperature at eight o'clock in the evening was 85 degrees - miserable. And think about those parts of the city that don't have trees. These are parts of the city with TRIPLE DECKERS with lots of people living in small spaces. So now these folks are inside of those apartments trying to stay cool. The difference is the trees, water, vegetation. The woody west side of Worcester is the coolest part of the city along with the Broad Meadowbrook

sanctuary, all the way in the southeast side of the city. Shrewsbury Street and Main South are the hottest.

Maintaining and planting trees is one of our best tools of local climate resiliency. A medium sized tree in Worcester - the example given in this research by WPI was a black locust with a six-inch diameter trunk at about chest level- intercepts 549 gallons of stormwater runoff and conserves 54 kilowatt hours a year, which is equivalent to running a refrigerator for a month - that much power in ONE tree. There was extensive tree removal several years ago in Burncoat to stop an infestation of the Asian Longhorn beetle, and a temperature differential of 10 degrees Fahrenheit was measured between places that had been clear cut and places that had not. Some of this research is from the WPI heat watch report. They did the survey of the heat around the city in August of 2019. Some of it is also from the group of citizen activists who came together to prevent covering Wetherell Park or Duffy Field in turf. Right now, the city is faced with a problem of how to make more sidewalks ADA accessible for wheelchairs, where old tree roots have come underneath the sidewalks and are pushing them up. And the first proposal of the city was to cut down those old trees so that the sidewalks could be regraded and made more accessible. But that same citizen activism, that helped preserve the grass at Duffy and the wetlands there, is working with the city to try to find another solution, a solution that will both allow accessibility and preserve the tree cover. This is real action that we can take - not alone in our personal lives and not just by voting or giving money, although all of that is important - but by getting together with other citizens and residents where we live to make decisions about the well-being and resiliency of our local climate.

I know the temptation to despair for the earth can be strong. Powerful interests have denied the truth in order to serve their own greed for so long. And here we are in the middle of May, on a 90-degree day, staring down another hot summer. And we've opened our hearts to our personal "why" for fighting climate change. We've allowed in all that sorrow of loss. We want to keep fighting with all the urgency of a time traveler, but sometimes we wonder what we can do. Yet as long as there is one being in the natural world whose existence and beauty inspires us, we can recenter ourselves and keep going. The spark of the divine and all living things reignites our own call to protect the Earth. Jewish theologian, Martin Buber, wrote that we needed to encounter all other living creatures as another "I". That they were just as much an "I" as we were, and we needed to see that self in that. And in his famous book, I and Thou, he even said that when we contemplate a tree, we need to see the self, the "I" of the tree - that the tree is not just a picture, not just

movement in the air as the wind blows through its leaves, not just one species, not just a form, not just a ratio of height to girth - but he said if will and grace are joined as I contemplate the tree, I am drawn into a relation and the tree ceases to be an IT - the tree becomes of a being with a self. Every tree is a being in itself worthy of our attention and regard. Every tree calls out from us our best selves to work on behalf of every species, every habitat, every tree, to see the Earth made fair again. It reaches out to what is truly fair and just and asks us to honor the whole-the sky in its beauty, trees in their rootedness, creatures in all their diversity - they call us to action and commitment for our shared future. Together we can make a difference. I love you all. Amen.

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