

There's an old song from back in the 1960's. It was a song about a love that was lost. I found myself singing that song today, only instead of a song about losing someone who was my lover, I hear it as a song about the earth we love and the loss we face—

Once there were green fields kissed by the sun.

Once there were valleys where rivers used to run.

Once there was blue sky with white clouds high above.

Once they were part of an everlasting love,.

We were the lovers who strolled through green fields.

Green fields are gone now, parched by the sun;

Gone from the valleys where rivers used to run;

Gone with the cold wind that swept into my heart;

...Where are the green fields that we used to roam?

In the course of the last fifty years, the planet has warmed up everywhere. The forests know it, as they are devastated around the world by clear-cutting, drought and wildfires. The wild birds know it, as a third of their species have vanished with the loss of water and the dying off of the insects they feed upon. The oceans know it, as they warm and become more acidic, so their coral reefs bleach to death and the sea creatures lose their homes and die away. Storms of a strength never before recorded swirl over islands and beaches and seaside towns and coastal cities.

These storms take their power from the warmth of sea and air. The coastlands of the world know it, as hurricanes strike, and as the seas rise, inch by inch, soon foot by foot.

What we know now is that everywhere around our planet, the snow and ice, that once balanced the heat of spring and summer with its winter frost, are vanishing, as they turn to liquid and run off into the seas. The arctic and the Antarctic ice are melting away, faster and faster as the earth warms. The thousands upon thousands of glaciers that adorned the mountains of our world and stored our life-sustaining fresh water are also melting away, faster and faster.

And that dwindling Polar ice and melting permafrost—the layer of ground that's been frozen for two years or more—will release more and more massive amounts of carbon dioxide and methane into the atmosphere—the greenhouse gases that trap the sun's heat. The degraded forests of the Amazon, instead of absorbing carbon emissions, are now releasing more carbon each year than all of the traffic in the United States.

There's something far more like fiction than truth in our public discourse, that by reducing our carbon dioxide levels, and keeping the rise in global temperature to just one more degree Celsius [sell-see-us], we can avoid catastrophe.

It would take 25,000 years for just three-quarters of the CO₂ already in our atmosphere to be absorbed into the oceans. Even if we kept earth to the limit of a 2 degree Celsius temperature rise, global sea levels will likely rise by as much as ten feet by the year 2050. Yet we are much more likely to see a 4 degree or higher temperature rise by 2100—with unimaginable consequences for human civilization, and biodiversity everywhere.

Are we scared? We should be. Already more than 40 million people worldwide are struggling with hunger due to drought, with thirst due to the lack of pure, fresh water.

More than three **billion people**—40% of the world’s population—live in coastal areas under the increasing threat of sea level rise and the monstrous storm surges that come with hurricanes, typhoons and cyclones.

It seems such a small story, given the numbers of those who suffer all over our earth. But we have to begin with stories that are close to us, about people we know.

Hurricane Dorian slammed the Bahamas, leaving about fifty known dead but at least 1300 people still missing. Swaths of land were left uninhabitable, entire neighborhoods were submerged in water. Thirteen thousand people were left without homes or shelter.

In this crisis, 100 survivors who had boarded a ferry headed towards Florida were told to get off the ferry because they did not have US visas. Our Department of Homeland Security put out this statement:

Bahamians arriving to the United States by vessel must begin possession of a valid passport AND travel visa. The bottom line is that all travelers must possess government-issued identity documents, such as passports. All travelers who arrive directly to a U.S. Port of Entry by air or sea must possess a U. S. visitor’s visa.

President Donald Trump explained: there are “very bad gang members...and drug dealers...” so the U. S. must be careful when processing Bahamian refugees.

All over this world, billions of people will find themselves wiped out of their homes by flood or fire or famine. They will not find their identity papers and passports and tourist visas in their packs as they flee.

Yes, of course we are scared. Joanna Macy told us, “Climate is everything now.” But we don’t have to let this fear stop us. We can find the power within ourselves.

The message we have always carried within us is pretty clear.

“Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.”

Does that sound familiar? Any of you heard that before?

Yes, it’s the Golden Rule. Jesus voiced it in his Sermon on the Mount. But we don’t have to be a Jesus-freak to live by that Golden Rule.

Suppose your neighborhood explodes into a wildfire with the horror like the Camp Fire that destroyed the town of Paradise and left 86 dead. You got out just in time—but your home is a pile of ashes, and you couldn’t get hold of your passport or visas or your birth certificate or even your credit cards.

What would you have others do unto you?

What will you do for your neighbors, for your fellow citizens, for the refugees from far off places, whose homes are left in ashes by the next wildfires?

Suppose your home sits on the coast, facing the sea. Suppose, like most people, your property is your main asset. And now you know and the mortgage companies know and future buyers know how much the ocean has risen—so within a decade your home will be swept away at high tide. You won’t find the money to buy a new home that’s safe, miles inland.

What would you have others do unto you?

What will you do for your neighbors, for your fellow citizens, for refugees from around the world whose homes have been swamped by tidal waves or the severe storm surges of ever more frequent hurricanes and cyclones?

If not ourselves, then our children and our children's children will find themselves within the century rationing fresh water, and we haven't a clue how we'll provide drinking water for the earth two centuries from now.

What would you have others do unto your children and grandchildren and great grandchildren?

We can live by the Golden Rule. Yes, we can do the small things to help our planet—stop the use of fossil fuels, fight to save our forests, join the young people in the wonderful global climate strike. And yes, we can take on that huge calling, to reach out with compassion to all those who suffer. We can plan ahead to save our sisters and brothers of the world—even as we guess and fear that suffering that all of us may face. Namaste.