

Sermon: Trinity Episcopal Church, Santa Barbara May 4, 2025

I'm very honored to be here today. I'm Kate Varley Alonso and I'm a life long Episcopalian. I grew up going to the Episcopal Church in Winnetka Illinois. And now I'm a parishioner at St. Martin in-the-Fields – the Episcopal Church in Winnetka California.

How's that for a coincidence?!

Except it's probably not. It's probably God at work in my life.

Which is also no doubt the reason why I became aware of the climate crisis in 2016..... and why I'm on the Bishop's Commission on Climate Change for the diocese of Los Angeles..... and what led me here to Trinity. Grace-filled stepping stones.

And before I go on, I'd like to express how grateful I am for our Climate Connections at Trinity forum. We had a wonderful time together yesterday – sharing prayers and lament for the earth, discussing how faith and climate are intertwined, writing our climate stories and walking the labyrinth, enjoying a delicious plant based lunch – complete with homemade cookies – and hearing from the youth group who prepared a special presentation. They also created these incredible haikus that they handed out – like this one: As the slope goes up / so will our fear of the world / many steps make change. Pretty great.

Endless thanks go to Bill, Sarah, Jean, Rowena, Theo, Patsy, and Stephanie – just an awesome team. And a huge shout out to The Rev. Paula Walker and Payton Hoegh who are on the Bishop's Commission with me, and who made the drive from LA. Amazing folks, beautiful spirits.

So we're planning the forum, the topic is climate change. Sarah graciously sends me the readings in advance... and the gospel is Do Not Worry.

Do not worry about climate change?

I'm maybe, if I really think about it, a little worried. I see one or two others as well.

Our beautiful blue blanket of atmosphere is designed to hold in or trap heat – and that keeps us at habitable temperatures. But all the decades of spewing into that blanket billions and billions of tons of polluting emissions – from fossil fuels (coal, oil, natural gas) – have caught up to us.

Because that accumulation of polluting emissions is *measured* every day, we know it's now up to 429 parts per million. (When I was born the level of CO2 was about 320.) Our one thin blanket of atmosphere has changed from being, say, a light cotton, to a heavy thick down comforter; and it's trapping in more and more heat.

The 10 hottest years ever on record have been the last 10 years. Not only were 2023 and 2024 the warmest, but they were the warmest by far.

These record breaking land and ocean temperatures are the ingredients that are fueling the extreme weather we're witnessing around the world. Yes it's Global Warming. But renowned climate scientist Dr. Katharine Hayhoe may have a better term. She calls it *Global Weirding*.

These aren't natural disasters. They are un-natural. Yes we've always had them, but never like this. Much more intense, much more frequent, much more unpredictable.

Heat waves that are longer
Droughts that are deeper
Storms that are more severe and causing massive flooding
Hurricanes that are moving over warmer water and gaining super strength
Wildfires that are ever larger and fanned by higher winds...

... which LA certainly experienced in January with the Palisades and Eaton Fires. And I know you know what I'm talking about. Many extreme disasters have struck this area - including the Thomas Fire in 2017, as well as the mudslide that followed it.

These disasters are costing us more and more. In precious lives. And of course dollars.

In the 1980s there used to be a billion dollar disaster - every 4 months. Now it's every two weeks on average. Since 1980, there have been 403 billion dollar disasters totalling over \$2.9 trillion dollars.

That's just the U.S. The same types of extreme weather catastrophes are happening all over the world.

So getting back to today's gospel scripture - it could not have come at a better time for me.

As I read it, I kept picturing the people in the crowd that day, who had come to hear Jesus, and what they were going through in their lives that they needed this message. Clearly having enough food, water and clothing - the basics - was all consuming. But

Jesus must have seen something else. That the people were getting off track and lost and overwhelmed. So he pulls them back and refocuses them by saying, over and over in slightly different ways, do not worry. God's got this. God's got us. The anxiety causing the sleepless nights and knots in the stomach – nooo, it's not doing any good. And actually all it's proving is that more time is going into worrying than in trusting God.

Flash forward to today, with the climate crisis on our doorstep and that is something we need to hear loud and clear. God's got this just like He's always had everything.

Knowing that, believing that, living into that can really help us I think to lift a weight off and enable us to beat back the doom and gloom and downright paralysis of inaction, and get going on fixing the mess we've made.

How do we start? First by understanding that human-caused climate change = human-solved climate change.

The solutions we need ARE at hand and the transition away from fossil fuel use to clean energy IS underway.

The International Energy Agency – says we have all the technology we need to reduce emissions 50% by 2030.

Solar power has become the cheapest electricity in the history of the world and wind power and battery storage are scaling up fast to join it.

And how about this! RewiringAmerica.Org – which is helping lead the charge to electrification – has a counter on its website that's up to over 109 million machines installed in households across the country. The rise of the machines... in a good way! Americans are making the switch to heat pumps, heat pump water heaters, electric stoves, EVs and rooftop solar. The rate at which the counter is ticking up is 500 machines an hour.

This is happening. So don't listen to the naysayers and please disregard the disinformation.

So..... we know we have solar power. We know we have wind power. We know we have battery power and EVs on the rise.

What we need to do now is rev up the PEOPLE power. Because through the ages, no matter the threat or the injustice, it has ALWAYS been people power, NOT political power, that has turned wrong into right.

And the time is right to reach out and connect with people. 89% of Americans (and folks around the world for that matter) WANT ACTION on climate change. They want their governments to engage on the issue and are supportive of solutions.

So let's be a catalyst to the change we want to see as the Easter and Earth Day People that we are.

You all right here at Trinity and congregations all over the diocese are already doing so much – forming green teams, becoming cooling centers, planting native gardens, doing away with single use plastic, learning to compost, serving plant based meals, changing to LED lighting, switching to heat pumps, installing solar, the list goes on and on.

It is truly inspiring and uplifting.

It's such a great example of starting with one thing, then going from there. Throwing the pebble into the pond and seeing the ripples widen out.

Let's stay in community. Let's join our voices. Let's rev up the people power. Let's put faith and love in action.

The reality we face is serious and there are obstacles in the way as we all know. But we know what Jesus would say to that. Do not worry.