

By Another Road: Averting Environmental Disaster

by Brooks Berndt
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According to the Gospel of Matthew, both the wise men and Joseph received dreams that gave instructions for evasive maneuvers. To escape the clutches of King Herod, we are told the wise men departed “by another road,” while the holy family fled to Egypt. So often, the story of those seeking a more just and peaceable world is one of taking “another road.” It is a story of leaving the manger behind in search of a dreamed-about land. It is a story of risk and daring born of desperate hope and dwindling options. It is precisely this kind of story that is unfolding now as the world addresses the dire damage that has been done to our climate by rising CO2 emissions.

With the international climate accord that was reached in Paris earlier this month, many now realize that humanity must make a rapid exit from the fossil fuel era. The pathways of old are treacherous. “Another road” is needed. To avert the worst case scenarios that come with a 1.5-degrees Celsius temperature rise from pre-industrial levels, we need to dream of other routes to reach a safer, more secure common home for all of us, but especially for those forced into more vulnerable circumstances by factors such as poverty, race, and geography. To live in a world that avoids the drowning of island nations, the overheating of Africa, and the onslaught of more severe weather events like Hurricane Katrina, we have no other option.

Fortunately, the key to alternative pathways is not to be found in halls of power far away but, rather, closer to home. In fact, those seeking to get plugged into a solution might want to first look across the room to their own electrical outlet. Do you know where your electricity comes from? Do you know how much of it comes from renewable sources such as solar or wind? Even if you are among the fortunate few who have solar panels on their roofs, most of us live in communities that are heavily dependent upon dirty energy from fossil fuels. As people of faith and as moral citizens, we can demand better, and we must.

The national offices of the United Church of Christ have been fortunate enough to be part of a local effort to take another road. Along with other leaders in the Cleveland area, we are calling upon local utilities to achieve 30 percent renewable energy within 5 years and then continually increase target goals in five-year increments until 100 percent renewable energy is achieved. One does not have to be in Cleveland to take this kind of action. You can be almost anywhere. And if it is not a utility company that garners your advocacy attention, then perhaps it is a nearby coal plant, oil terminal, or fracking operation. If one starts looking, there are many ways to take action.

Humanity does not need to stay stuck in the ways of the past as disaster encroaches upon us. We can find a way out. Another road is possible.

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