

The Green Junction

The reality of our changing climate and the need for earthly healing are playing out in full force in the midst of this year's Season of Creation's theme of *Jubilee for the Earth*. The enormous devastation caused by wildfires and hurricanes, in addition to other extreme weather events, likely generates feelings of despair, instead of a celebratory mood. Current major news outlets are reporting "American West has the world's most polluted air," and "The world is burning and drowning." People in the midst of the catastrophes describe their experiences. "It burns your chest" and farm workers in California say "it is if you can't breathe."

The enormity of ashes and air pollution created by the fires in the western US extended across the country, and the devastation to nature is difficult to comprehend. An expert on wildfires has used radar data to create three dimensional maps that depict fire tornadoes, huge smoke plumes that are indicators of extreme fire behavior. According to the scientist, fire tornadoes have rarely occurred, but were identified in some of the recent wildfires and cannot be fought by firefighters. Unprecedented weather events are part of the reality of climate change. It is here and it requires significant action. Climate change solutions necessitate numerous factors, including international governmental leadership and cooperation, scientific innovation, mass education and behavioral changes, and long-term planning.

During these times, it is still possible to celebrate the earth's grandeur; nature is powerful and has an astounding ability to regenerate. Here are two examples: 1) the Australian fires, where in the 2019-2020 fire season, 21% of Australia's forested area burned, and 2) the 2020 expansive world lockdown at the beginning of the pandemic. While experts describe the Australian wildfires as "globally unprecedented," there are now many wondrous signs of regrowth, but also concern that future severe wildfires may lead to conditions beyond nature's capacity to revive. When the pandemic forced societies to slow down, there was reduced urban and industrial activity, and less fossil fuel burning. As a result, air and water cleared up in many regions around the globe. Nature's positive responses offer society a unique view of the stress put on the earth by human activities and also insight into what can happen if healing the earth is made a priority.

The earth's pains are constantly felt around the world and will continue to manifest, especially if people are slow to respond. From Pope Francis's *Laudato Si* (2015) "Doomsday predictions can no longer be met with irony or disdain. We may well be leaving to coming generations debris, desolation and filth. The pace of consumption, waste and environmental change has so stretched the planet's capacity that our contemporary lifestyle, unsustainable as it is, can only precipitate catastrophes. The effects of the present imbalance can only be reduced by our decisive action here and now."

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