

worship that destroys
(and saves) the world

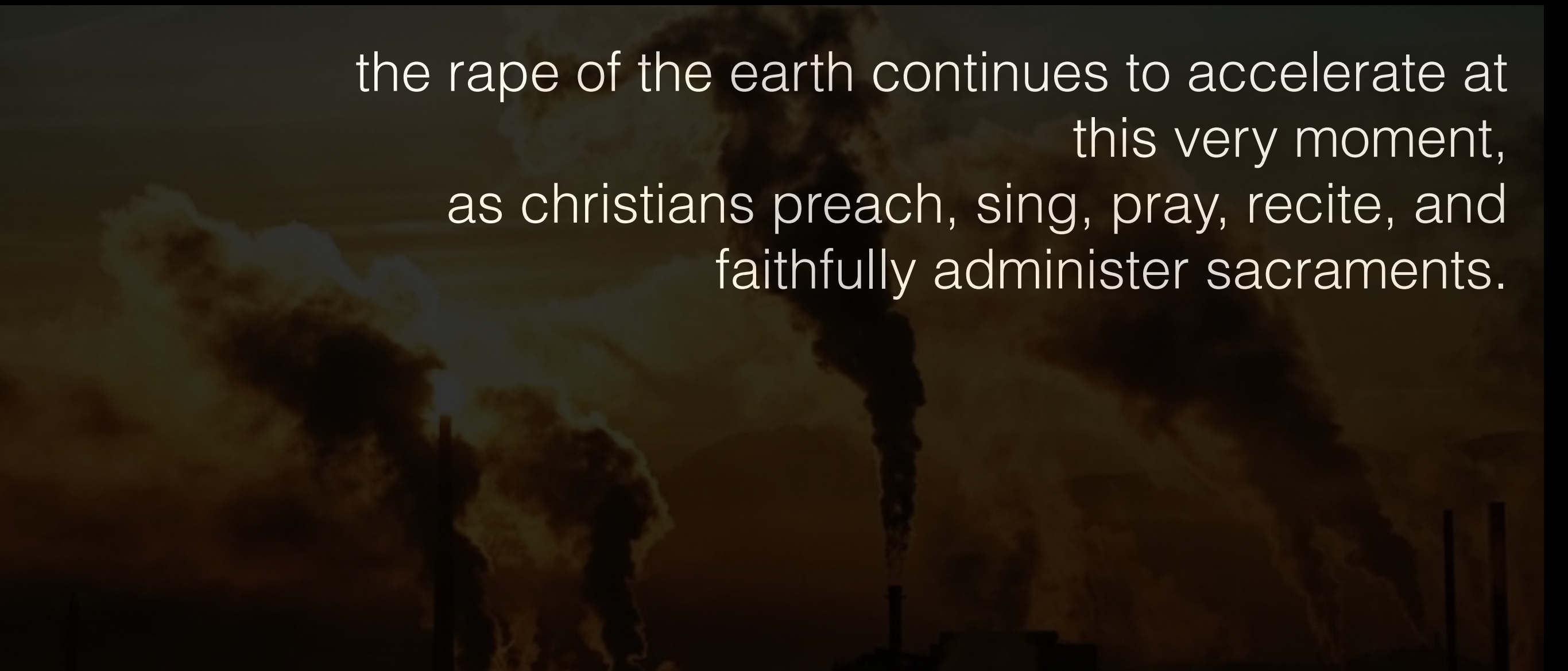
slides will be available at
brianmclaren.net

for the last 500 years

while we've been happily worshipping ...

this beautiful planet has been plundered and
raped, treated like a stolen bank account or a
trash dump or a sewer,
while churches worship on, obliviously.

the rape of the earth continues to accelerate at
this very moment,
as christians preach, sing, pray, recite, and
faithfully administer sacraments.



while we've been happily worshipping ...

euro-American empires have colonized the world,
exploiting its labor and extracting its wealth;
the cries of the poor have gone unheard, the power of
the super-rich has multiplied rapidly;
the gap between the rich and powerful minority and a
poor and vulnerable majority has become a widening
chasm.



while we've been happily worshipping ...

racism resurges,
antisemitism and islamophobia intensify,
ethno-nationalism spreads,
more and more people live by the gun and die by the gun,
and church members pray for peace in theory but know
nothing of what makes for peace in practice. So they buy
more bombs, drones, and guns, and use them in jesus'
name.



while we've been conducting "worship wars" and arguing organs vs. guitars, charismatic vs. Calvinist, traditional vs. contemporary ... and while we've been spending billions on worship buildings, worship conferences and concerts, worship music, and a worship industry ...

our world speeds toward a cluster of catastrophes ...

a planet being exploited, poisoned, and destabilized,
a crisis of poverty and obscene economic inequality,
unprecedented existential threats of violence, war, and civilizational
collapse,
and twin failures of our political and religious leadership to adapt.



our system is perfectly designed
to yield the results we are now getting.
— Dallas Willard



how worship can
destroy the world:

just keep worshipping exactly as we've
been worshipping since 1452.

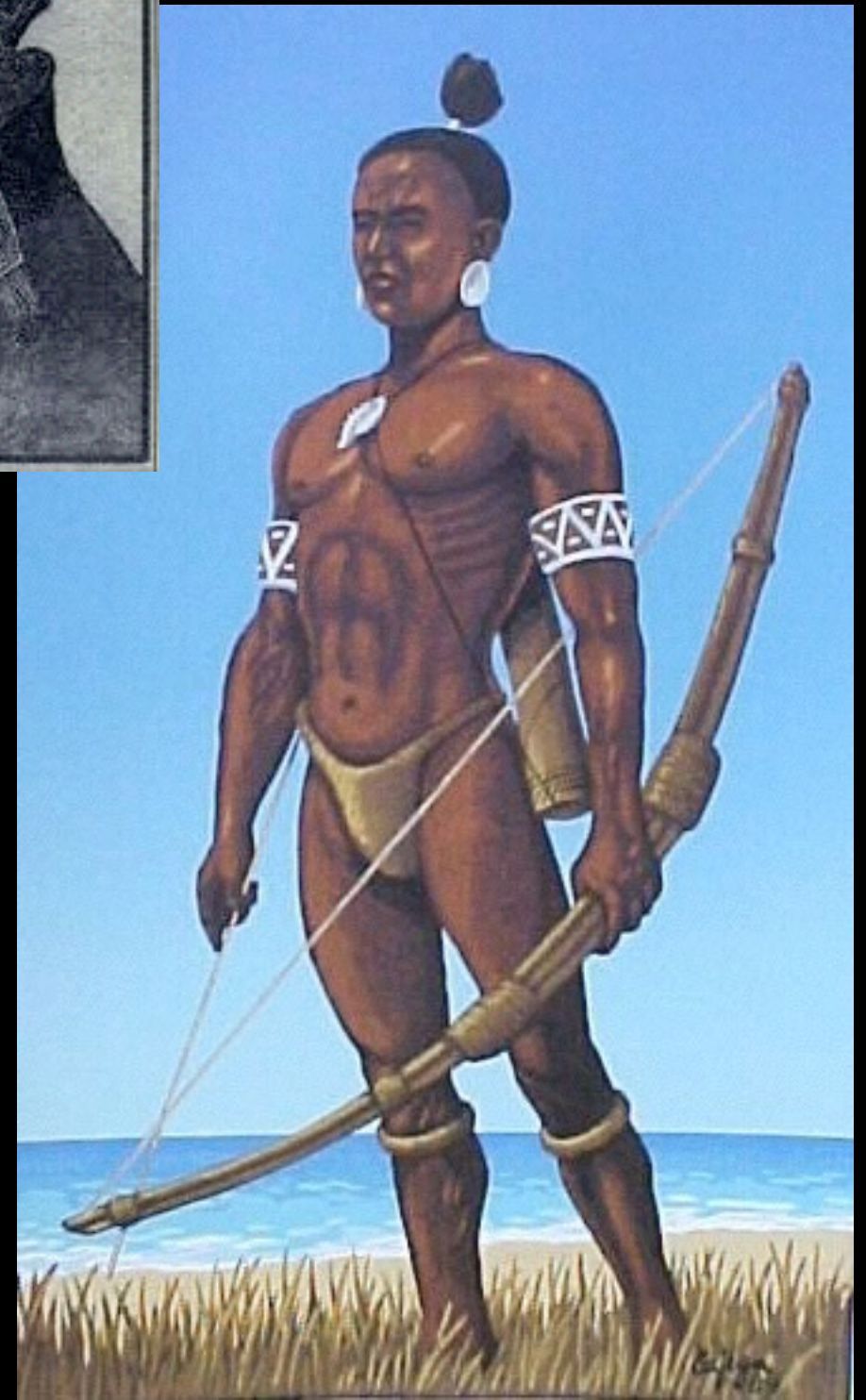
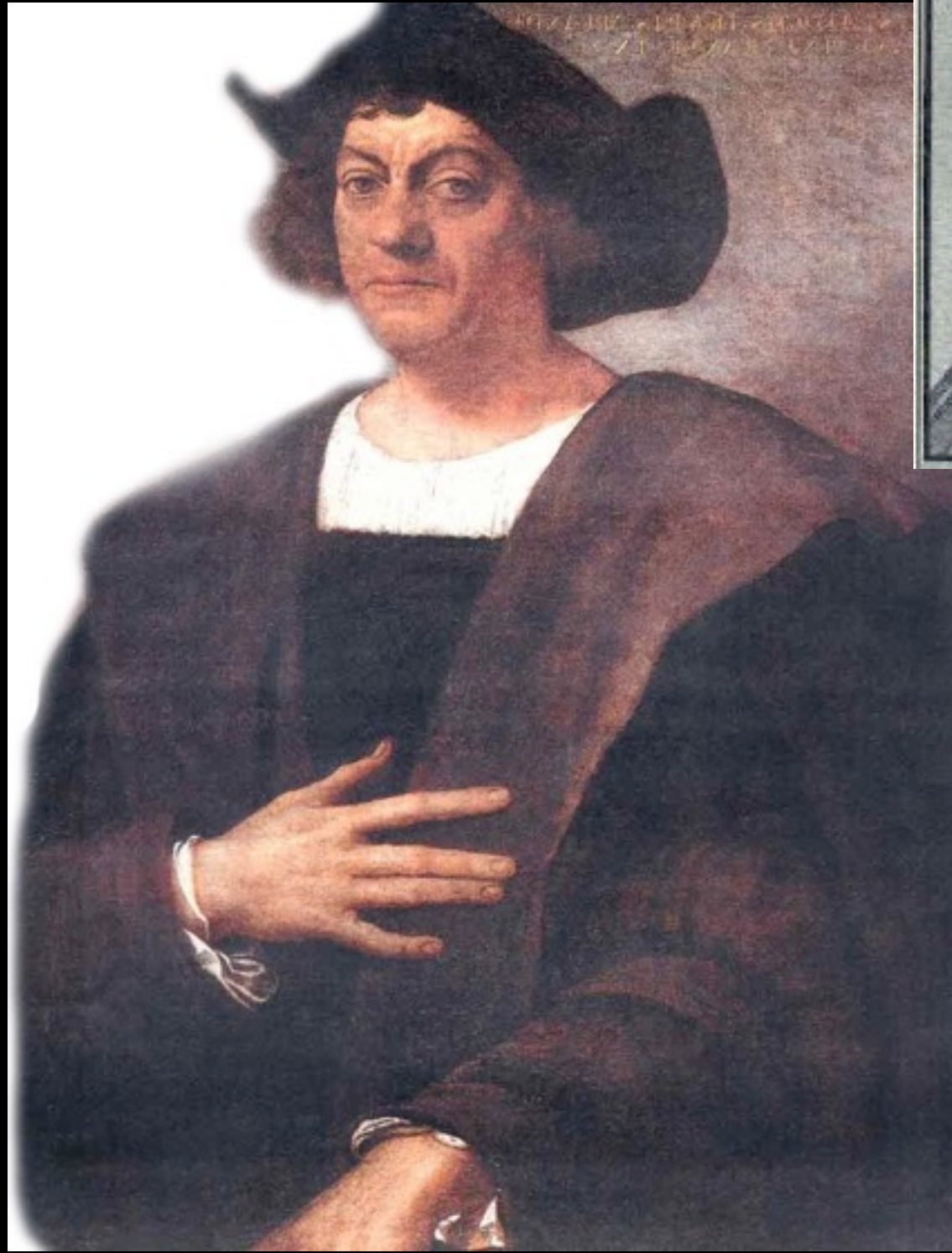
In Fourteen Hundred and Ninety-Two, Columbus sailed the ocean blue.



In Fourteen Hundred and Fifty-Two, Pope Nicholas told European Christians what to do.

“...invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue all Saracens and pagans whatsoever, and other enemies of Christ wheresoever placed, and the kingdoms, dukedoms, principalities, dominions, possessions, and all movable and immovable goods whatsoever held and possessed by them and to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery, and to apply and appropriate to himself and his successors the kingdoms, dukedoms, counties, principalities, dominions, possessions, and goods, and to convert them to his and their use and profit.” - Pope Nicolas V, Romanus Pontifex, 1452-4, Doctrine of Discovery





1495

2nd Voyage Return Cargo: 1600
male and female Taino slaves for
Spain

“It is possible, with the name
of the Holy Trinity, to sell all
the slaves which it is possible
to sell ... Here there are so many
of these slaves ... although they
are living things they are as
good as gold.”



The people of Hispaniola had their lives unjustly and savagely taken by, as de Las Casas repeatedly notes, professed Jesus followers, and they were not, as we all know, the only ones to meet such a fate. Millions of their indigenous sisters and brothers on Turtle Island were killed at the hands of other Europeans, as nation after imperial nation, bearing Christ on their lips and crosses on their military standards, followed suit. - Waziyatawin



From this vantage point, Christianity has nothing – absolutely nothing – to teach Indigenous people about how to live in a good way on this land. In fact, Christians have only demonstrated that there is something profoundly wrong with the cosmology and worldview behind more than five centuries of carnage—carnage that has yet to even slow down. Christians have so much negative history and dogma to overcome within their own tradition, I do not believe the religion is even salvageable. The world is deep in the throes of an ecological crisis based in Western economies of hyper-exploitation. The planet will not survive another 500 years of Christian domination.

- Waziyatawin, PhD, 2012



The history we don't tell ourselves

1st - 2nd Century: Anti-semitism begins

2nd - 3rd Century: Suppression of women

4th Century: Conversion of/by Constantine - torture, banishment, execution

Multiple Centuries: Burning of witches

Multiple Centuries: Crusades

15th Century: Doctrine of Discovery

16th - 19th Centuries: Global Conquest/ African Slave Trade/White European Empires/Supremacy

20th Century - the relationship between Christianity & Hitler, Christianity & Capitalism/Militarism

21st Century - resurgence of "Christian" ethno-nationalism in US, UK, Russia, Brazil, etc.

let's get specific.

1. worship that celebrates an evacuation plan for “us” and leaves the earth and “them” to destruction ... destroys the world.

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because it teaches us to seek first our own “eternal security” and personal well-being (aka salvation) - breaking solidarity with our neighbors and selling out the earth to the highest bidder.

2. worship that puts God on our side as “the chosen people,” and therefore creates a sense of spiritual elitism, religious supremacy, and excessive, unreflective confidence ... destroys the world.

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because it gives us permission to dominate, exclude, and seek our own interests, even to the harm of other humans and other living creatures.

3. worship that frames the story of the universe as a cosmic war that ends in eternal conscious bliss for us winners and eternal conscious torment for the losers ... destroys the world.

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because it leads to colonialism, torture, cruelty, and offense/defense rather than dialogue.

4. worship that renders “us” clean and
“them” unclean ... destroys the world.

4. worship that renders “us” clean and
“them” unclean ... destroys the world.

because it leads to “ethnic cleansing”
and genocide, not to mention
scapegoating and racism/nativism/
nationalism.

5. worship that empowers toxic masculinity, bureaucratic or charismatic patriarchy, and the suppression/stigmatization of women and LGBTQ people ... destroys the world.

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because it denies what the gospel makes clear: God's way subverts patriarchy, so that in Christ, there is neither male nor female, Jew nor Greek, slave nor free.

6. worship that reduces jesus to a variable in a cosmic damnation/salvation equation, or demotes Jesus to the level of “personal savior” ... destroys the world.

6. worship that reduces jesus to a variable in a spiritual damnation/salvation equation, or demotes Jesus to the level of “personal savior” ... destroys the world.

because it shrinks the gospel to a consumer product and detaches the life and ministry of Jesus from a God who created the cosmos, loves the cosmos, and inhabits the cosmos in embodied solidarity.

7. worship that celebrates magical skyhooks and a predetermined future, while guaranteeing that the “everything is under control” right now ... destroys the world.

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because it allows us to be piously, naively, and irresponsibly complacent about injustice, and therefore complicit in it.

we are not only saved by grace. we are also
paralyzed by it.

— Dallas Willard



8. worship that requires us to say & sing “lord, lord” but doesn’t equip us to do what Christ taught and modeled, or to believe things about him and even worship him but not follow him and be formed in his mind/spirit... destroys the world.

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because jesus said we are the salt of the earth and light of the world, just as he is, and that we would do greater things than he had done ...

9. worship that tries to make us feel good
rather than be good so we can do good
... destroys the world.

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rather than be good so we can do good
... destroys the world.

because it renders us fans (or “worship
addicts”) rather than followers and
embodiments of Christ.

10. worship that teaches us to seek forgiveness without seeking repentance, and to seek forgiveness without spreading forgiveness, and to evade justice without seeking first God's commonwealth and justice ... destroys the world.

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because it allows us to do the unthinkable and gain instant, free, convenient, easy absolution, and it is focused on evading justice (defined as punishment) without seeking first God's commonwealth and justice (defined as making wrongs right).

11. worship that relies on authoritarian
(even quasi-inerrant) leaders and
compliant (even quasi-cultic) members ...
destroys the world.

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(even quasi-inerrant) leaders and
compliant (even quasi-cultic) members ...
destroys the world.

because it renders us susceptible to
demagogues and con artists who demand
trust and obedience under threat of
banishment, punishment, and death.

12. worship that motivates primarily through fear, guilt, and shame ... destroys the world.

12. worship that motivates primarily through fear, guilt, and shame ... destroys the world.

because it renders us easy to manipulate with fear, guilt, and shame, rather than alive and free in the Spirit of empowerment, love, and a sound mind.

13. worship that serves as a chaplaincy to an extractive and exploitive economy and a covert white & human supremacist ideology, all the while boasting in its correctness of doctrine, hierarchy, liturgy, and polity ... destroys the world.

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because it teaches us to strain at gnats
and swallow camels.

14. worship that spiritualizes poverty, slavery, sickness, and hunger ... but never addresses actual poverty, slavery, sickness, and hunger ... destroys the world.

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slavery, sickness, and hunger ... but never
addresses actual poverty, slavery,
sickness, and hunger ... destroys the world

because it raptures us into an alt reality
rather than deploying us for mission in this
actual reality.

15. worship that lives by the donor and therefore dies by the donor because it is afraid to challenge or confront the donor ... destroys the world.

15. worship that lives by the donor and
therefore dies by the donor because it is
afraid to challenge or confront the donor
... destroys the world.

because it is held hostage by its donors
and the values of the destructive
economic and political systems that have
made them wealthy.

16. worship that claims to be divinely
sanctioned in form and content ...
destroys the world

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sanctioned in form and content ...
destroys the world

because it is blind to its ethnic origins, incapable of
being changed, and bound to the cultures and
conditions of its sacred texts, rendering it incapable
of adapting to address the emergencies of our
current (and constantly changing) world.

can you see how worship ...

can destroy the world?

if your image of God is unhealthy, the more you
worship, the less healthy you will be.

— Dallas Willard



And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit. - 2 Corinthians 3:18



what is the image reflected in a mirror that
we are worshipping?

in light of our history, is unquestioned
fidelity/consistency without sober,
prayerful reassessment
really something to be proud of?

but what happens if we give up worship
entirely?

will that save the world?

can we imagine worship

that can save the world?

Imagine if every experience of worship -
every element of worship - transformed us
more fully in the Spirit of justice, joy, and
peace ...

helping us celebrate the God who made and
loves **all creation**, who loves **all people** (no
exceptions), and who empowers and deploys
us as **spiritual activists** who work for peace
and justice in all dimensions of our lives.

The very practice that has effectively pacified people and lulled them to sleep could awaken, inspire, activate, and empower them to become agents of change ...

filled with the Spirit of justice, joy, and peace ... as lifelong spiritual activists in a growing spiritual movement, following the way of life modeled by Jesus, our liberator and leader.

Your mission, should you choose to
accept it, is to boldly imagine and
experiment with worship that can save the
world ...

every sermon
every prayer
every litany and liturgy
every sacrament
every song
every welcome and benediction
every day, every week, every year,
starting today.

imagine worship as “the workout of the people”



every sermon
every prayer
every litany and liturgy
every sacrament
every song
every welcome and benediction
every day, every week, every year,
starting today.

what kind of formation do we intend?

what strengths?

what values?

what virtues?

what qualities of character?

what “orthopraxy” and “orthopathy?”

for what purpose?

every sermon

every prayer

every litany and liturgy

every sacrament

every song

every welcome and benediction

every day, every week, every year,

starting today.



You say you love
your children above
all else, and yet you
are stealing their
future in front of
their very eyes.

Greta
Thunberg





"People tell me I should study to become a climate scientist so I can solve the climate crisis. But the climate crisis has already been solved. We already have all the facts and solutions. All we have to do is to wake up and change." Greta Thunberg

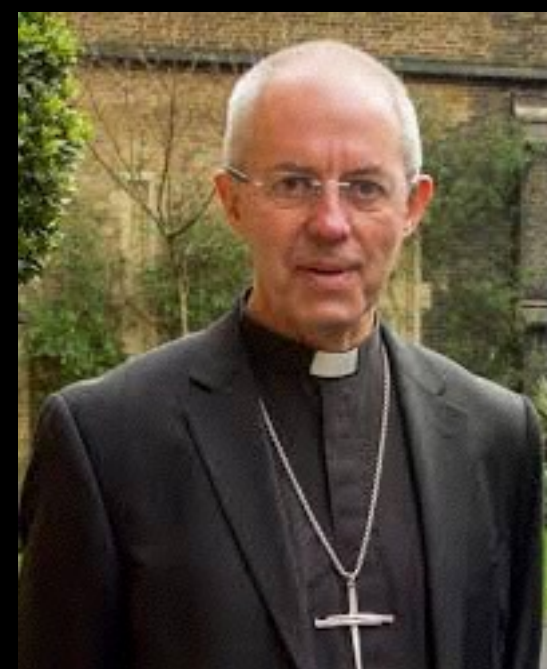


“I don’t want your hope. I don’t want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic ... and act as if the house was on fire. ”

Greta Thunberg
Environmental Activist







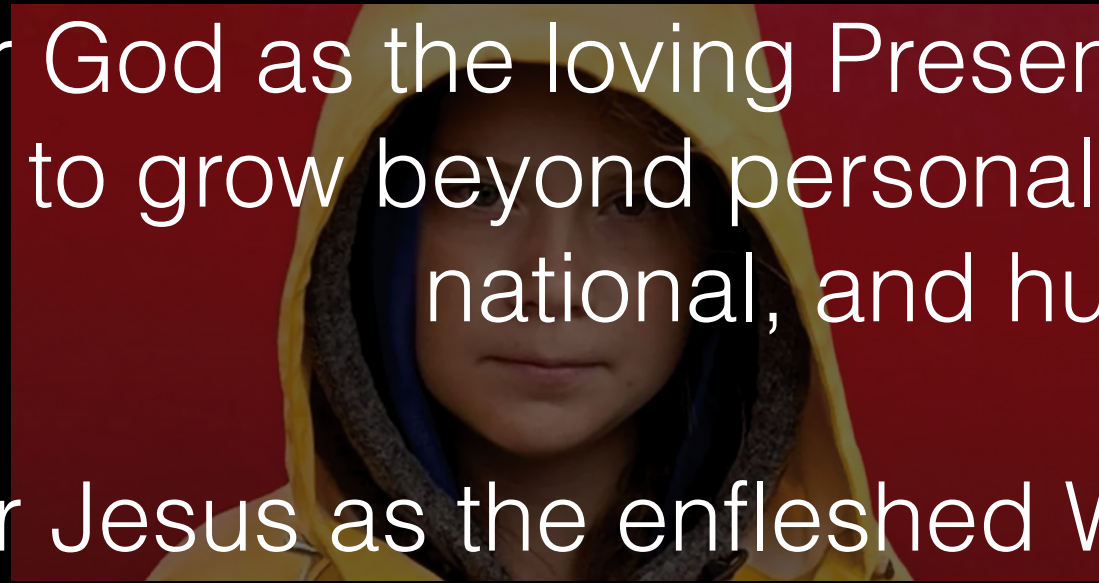


In light of our current global emergency,
we hereby call on the Christians of the
world to refuse to conduct worship as
usual, and instead, we call for a time of
creative disruption and liturgical and
missional innovation.

We urge every Christian around the world
to ...



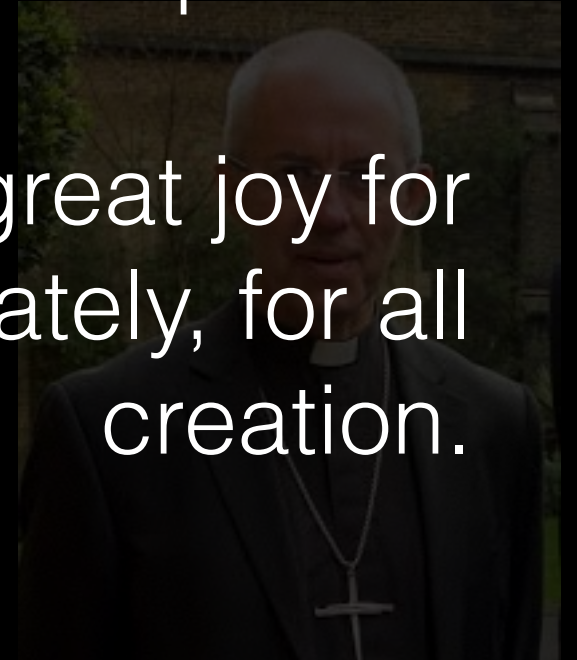
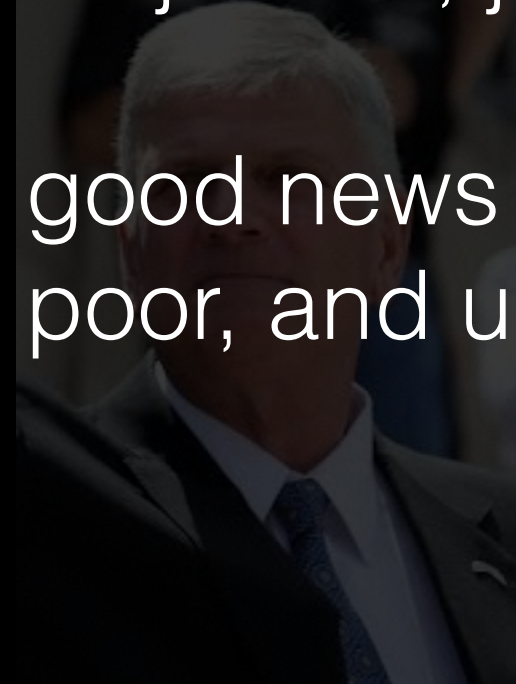
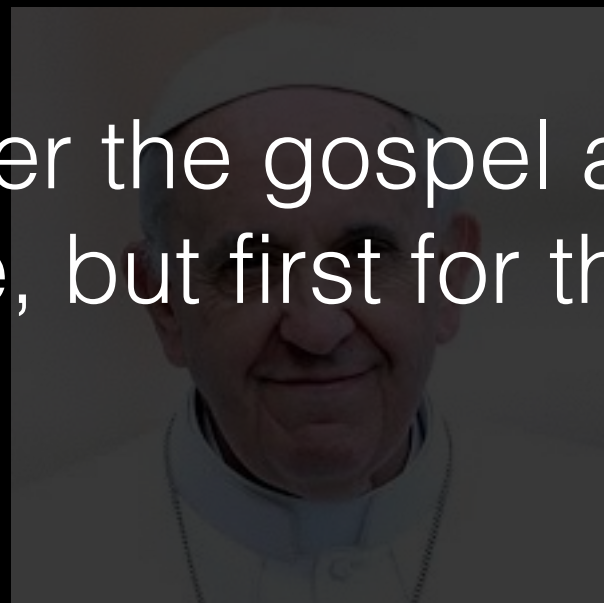
Rediscover God as the loving Presence who beckons us to grow beyond personal, racial, religious, national, and human selfishness.



Rediscover Jesus as the enfleshed Word who reveals God's embodied solidarity with all creation.

Rediscover the Spirit as God's creative breath hovering over and moving through all of creation to foment justice, joy, and peace.

Rediscover the gospel as good news of great joy for all people, but first for the poor, and ultimately, for all creation.



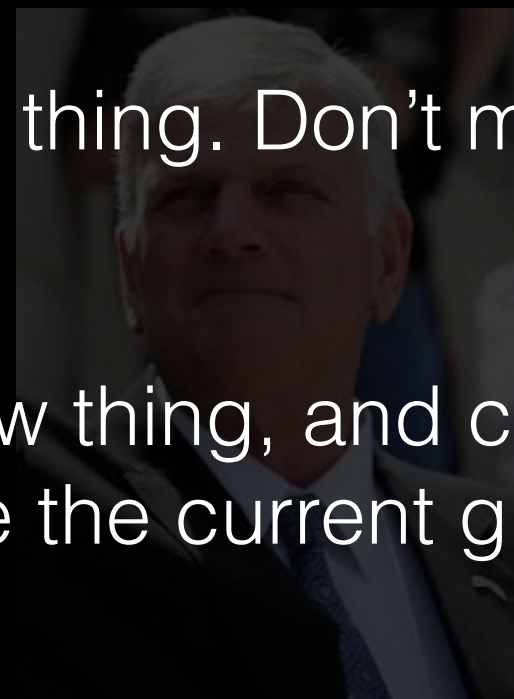
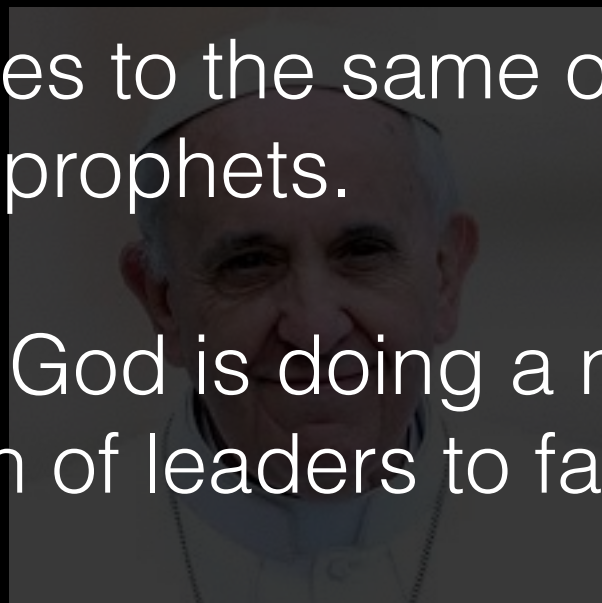
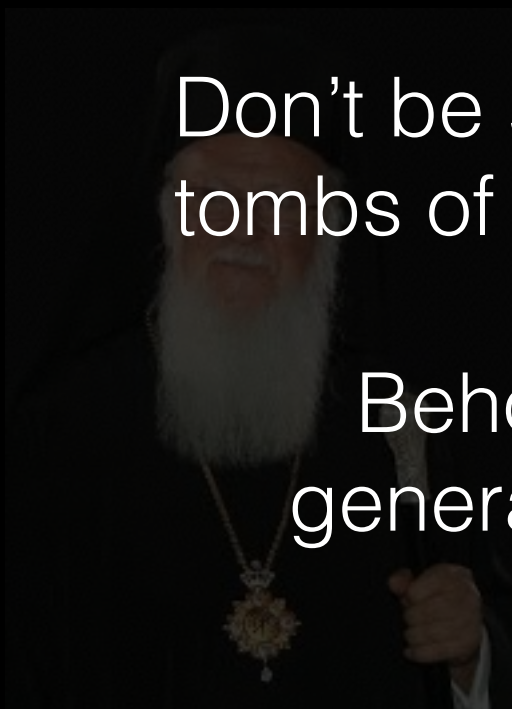
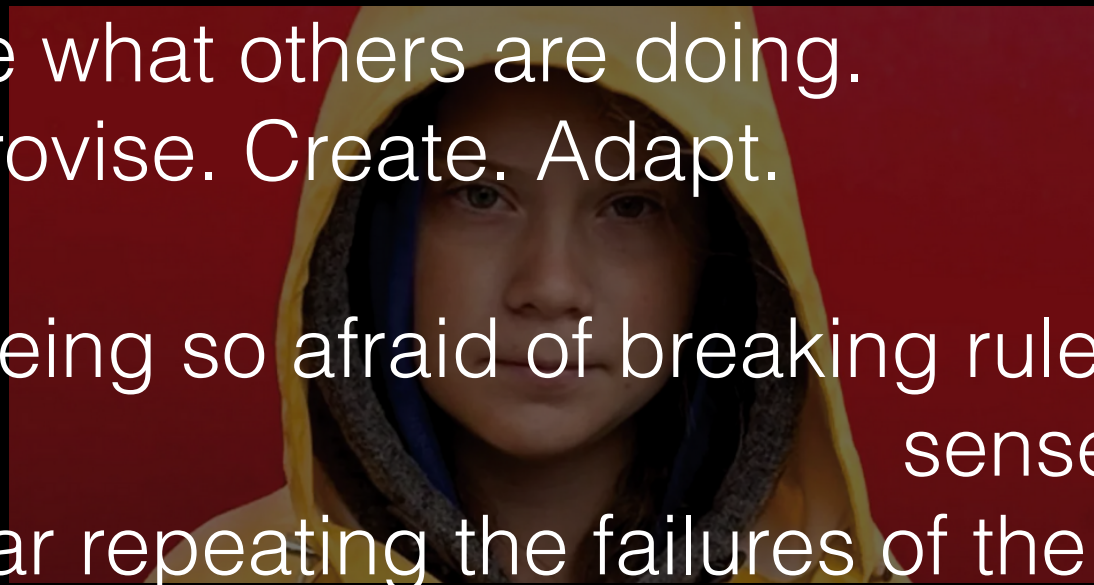
Don't criticize what others are doing.
Instead, improvise. Create. Adapt.

Stop being so afraid of breaking rules that made perfect sense in the distant past.
Instead, fear repeating the failures of the past and present in the uncertain future.

Show the same creativity, freshness, and boldness in your time as your ancestors did in theirs. Dare to say, "You have heard it said, but ..."

Don't be slaves to the same old thing. Don't merely tend the tombs of the prophets.

Behold, God is doing a new thing, and calling forth a new generation of leaders to face the current global emergency.





your
face
here

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