

**How to Survive the End of the World (A Climate Strike Sermon)**  
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To survive the end of the world:

- Stockpile seeds, water purifying tablets, and essential drugs.
- Learn first aid and how to shoot a gun or crossbow.
- Relearn the skills your ancestors had, like building shelters and starting fires.
- Travel with a diverse group with many varied skills, perspectives, hopes, memories. You need the children and the elders too.
- Find a defensible location with an adequate supply of water and good soil. Use the landscape that is left.
- And for God's sake, check the back seat for zombies before you get in the car.

I think this may be a generational thing, but my friends and I have been half-jokingly, half-seriously plotting how to survive the zombie apocalypse for as long as I can remember, over board games, over potluck dinners, over strong drinks.

We're halfway serious because we saw when we were young kids that nobody was going to save the rainforest, or any of the rest of it.

We're halfway joking because we understand instinctively what TS Eliot wrote at the end of his poem "The Hollow Men," which some of us read in AP English: "This is the way the world ends. Not with a bang but a whimper."

It's not going to be as cataclysmic as total breakdown all at once. Apocalypse moves more slowly than that. It's always less obvious. In every zombie movie, only the truly alarmist notice what is happening before it's too late. Surviving is more like rooting down in community over years and decades, less like a mad dash to a remote castle.

We're halfway joking about the end of the world because in some ways what we face isn't new. The world is always ending somewhere, and another always being born. It ended on September 11, 2001 during my last year of high school, and a new one began September 12. It ended and began in your generation too.

There have been worlds ending since humans could first conceive of a world. The world has been ending since the moment it began, and it has ended and begun in every age. Here is one good true thing about that: we each hold personal and ancestral wisdom about how to survive the end of the world, because we've already been doing it.

We're halfway serious about the end of the world because now when we say the world is ending, we mean something a bit more universal. We mean an actual crisis in the existence of life on the earth. We mean the 6th great extinction, which is more rapid and more complete than any in the ancient history of the earth, and which this time might include us.

We mean that the climate catastrophe we learned about before we were old enough to doubt science is here. It's worse than we thought. It's happening faster than we imagined and it is accelerating.

And so yes we're serious about surviving the end of the world, but only as serious as we can afford to be while staying emotionally and spiritually intact. The world needs us to stay emotionally and spiritually intact. Our children's children's children need us to stay emotionally and spiritually intact.

I stand before you the mother of two babies who will inherit the work we do in this moment, and so I want to tell you that I have no interest in despair and no time for fatalism.

I am here to grieve and feel my way through this with you, and I am here to talk about adaptation and survival.

Because the apocalypse is already unfolding, in a hundred different ways, and it has been, and what we do to build community and adapt and find beauty and joy matters for how it all continues to unfold.

One of the things I find myself doing most often in ministry is being present to the grief humans encounter when we truly understand that we cannot save the people we love - from addiction, from disease, from a hundred ways the world hurts.

And one of the beautiful truths I often witness, is that when we own the truth of our helplessness and turn toward our grief, new possibilities always seem to open up.

In these times, we need to apply that productive grief to our relationship with the world. We cannot save the world. But we can find transforming ways to spend our soul on and with it. And that may make all the difference to our survival.

To remain emotionally and spiritually intact in these times, we need to turn and face all that is being destroyed. We need to grieve and lament it in the depths of community. We need to sit in the rubble of it and pick up the pebbles and watch them fall through our fingers.

AND we need to turn our face toward the sun, late in the the sky though it may be. We need to attend to the beauty that is still here, the connection that never left, and the new life that springs up even in the midst of death, because the breakdown and the rebuilding are happening all at the same time, and must.

Last week local activist Rachel Taylor riffed on TS Eliot on facebook in a reflection that I've been thinking about ever since, because it resonates so profoundly with my experience in this

time of climate breakdown while the forces of white supremacy and patriarchy and global capitalism are at once quietly crumbling and loudly re-asserting themselves all around us.

“The real secret of the apocalypse is not that it comes with a bang, or a whimper, but that it comes while you're doing other things. Taking the kids to school, paying the bills, going to see your friend's play . . . all the stuff of normal life happens, until it doesn't. For you. But your neighbor still has to do the laundry and schlep his mom to the grocery store.

So you try to keep going and take care of the things that are still working, while also trying to fight injustice and stop genocide. You do what you can. Some days it's just surviving, other days you can put your body between the machine and those more vulnerable than you are. But you can't do that every day. Until you have to.

The secret is that you don't get a break to build a better world. You have to do it while still surviving in this one. You have to do it like a secret obsession, like a shameful hobby. You have to do it because it's exciting and dangerous and subversive and necessary. You have to share it with other kinksters like yourself because you're not alone in this wanting, this desire. But you still have to do the dishes.”

Life as we know it isn't ending, exactly. Not for those of us in this wealthy country. It's changing dramatically, but not entirely, and not for everyone, and not all at once.

And perhaps that is part of the problem. Because it's life as we know it that got us here.

Like a zombie virus, the apocalypse was planted like a seed in everything about the extractive economy that shaped our world and lives. It's been cropping up here and there. It's been lying dormant. But it's been riddling the whole world ever since someone first decided on the lifestyle of plunder.

And we have to live in that world, fighting the zombie virus (In case it's not clear, the zombie virus is white supremacist, hetero-patriarchal capitalism. It is the worldview that steals worth instead of respecting and multiplying it). We have to fight it in us and in everything that we love about our lives. We have to heal from it while living in it. We have to grow something new while we cut it back from its chokehold on our lives.

This morning's sermon takes its title from a podcast created by liberation activists Adrienne and Autumn Brown. Inspired by the scary-prescient dystopian work of black science fiction writer Octavia Butler, the Brown sisters set out to create a podcast that “learns from apocalypse with grace and rigor.” It takes seriously all of the things that are painfully ending and must end in our world. But it takes equally seriously the things that we are birthing and growing to take their place. They have episodes on creating restorative justice practices in the midst of the apocalypse that is mass incarceration, embodied healing in the midst of the apocalypse of white supremacy, rest and pleasure in the apocalyptic grind of capitalism, growing and preserving food in the midst of climate apocalypse, and more.

Their point, and mine, is that if we are to survive, the world as we know it must end, and is ending, and we are surviving its end and building and birthing the new all at once.

Joanna Macy identifies this moment as a decision point, when we will either enter the Great Unravelling, or choose a Great Turning, back to the earth and one another. Or as the climate justice collective Movement Generation puts it: “The transition is happening. The question now is will it be just?”

The world as we know it, the one that is ending and must end if we are to survive, is structured around what the climate justice collective Movement Generation calls the extractive economy. This economy describes not just how money moves, but how our society is structured - around extracting and controlling value, worth, and wealth from the earth’s resources, including her people.

All of the big systems of domination are built around this ethic. And after millennia of its perfection, we have no idea what a world without it would look like.

There is a saying attributed to both philosophers Frederic Jameson and Slavoz Zizek: “It is easier to imagine an end to the world than an end to capitalism.” Our leaders seem to take them at their word.

But to survive the end of the world, we must not only imagine but actually survive the end of capitalism. The trouble, of course, is that we have no idea how to do that. It is too big to fail, too assumed in our lives to even understand. It is, simply, reality.

And so we must live in unreality.

We don’t know how, but we must do it anyway, or consent to a bigger, badder end to the world than we have ever known. Greta Thunberg tells us: “Avoiding climate breakdown will require cathedral thinking. We must lay the foundation while we may not know exactly how to build the ceiling. Sometimes we just simply have to find a way.”

According to the Movement Generation collective, a just transition will be one that moves us from an extractive economy to a regenerative economy. Movement Generation suggests we make this transition by divesting from the extractive economy - starving and stopping its power by removing our cooperation, while simultaneously investing in the regenerative economy, feeding and growing its power.

The decision point we see unfolding now is the question of whether a few will succeed in doubling down on extracting wealth and worth from the earth and its peoples, or whether the many will awaken together into the work of shift, starving the structures of the extractive economy by investing in a regenerative economy focused toward sacredness and mutual thriving.

As our fellow Columbian Rachel Taylor pointed out: “The secret is that you don't get a break to build a better world. You have to do it while still surviving in this one.” But here is another secret, from the Movement Generation. The way we truly survive is by investing in all of the

alternatives that starve the extractive economy. The way we truly survive is by demanding big change AND finding small daily ways to live the world we seek to create.

It is as simple and as difficult as that. Wherever you can, fight the extractive economy. Demand its dismantlement at the seats of power, and find ways to starve it where you live.

And then, wherever you can, opt in to deep community. That is how we survive. It is how life survives. We tear down the walls. We grow roots for another way inside the world that is crumbling.

So here is my not at all joking, totally serious list of how to survive the end of the world:

- Get to know your neighbors. Feed them. Let them feed you. Watch each others' kids, grandkids, pets.
- Develop the muscle of generosity like you are training for a giving ultra-marathon. Share everything you can with anyone who asks, and ask for what you need.
- Get in touch with your body. You will need it, and it knows things. Pay attention to what is happening below your neck.
- Tell the truth. Tell it to yourself first.
- Sit at the feet of your most vulnerable neighbors and your own most vulnerable places. They have the most to teach you about survival. Listen.
- Remember your ancestors, and the things they survived. Find the resilience that is your birthright and the courage that made way for your life.
- Practice taking risks. Show up in every struggle where someone is fighting for their dignity, because that is how we will all survive.
- Learn about reparations, and native sovereignty. Double down on exorcising supremacy systems from your soul.
- Learn to be tender. Refuse to be hardened. Let your heart be moved. Every damn time.
- Root in the place you are. Learn its history. Learn its geography. Learn its seasons.
- Sing. A lot. And dance. Make art. Make love. Rest luxuriously. Eat pie.

The world is ending and beginning now. We are surviving now. Let us love, let us connect, let us fight like hell for the dignity of each and all.