

## **01/03/10 Sermon**

“350 – Climate Change”

Rev. Paul D. Daniel, Minister

We live in perilous times. The earth stands on the precipice of disaster. If we do not take meaningful, sustainable and legally binding action right now to stop global warming, we will unleash a disaster of dislocation, mass starvation, and loss of life and bio-diversity that will lead to war over the use and control of shrinking resources – especially water supplies.

The ice caps are melting right now and islands are being submerged by rising sea levels. Both the Maldives and Malta will soon be gone. Coastal cities around the globe, like New York and Miami, will be inundated. Massive flooding will make Katrina look like a sun shower as it finally destroys New Orleans for all eternity. The runoff of the Himalayan ice pack that nourishes and supports the entire India sub-continent will dry up, resulting in massive drought and starvation as crops fail. World economies will crash and a depression of unimaginable dimensions will cause worldwide misery and war.

This is no longer the stuff of science fiction, but a looming man-made reality. The Copenhagen Global Warming conference last month ended with only a scientific consensus that the earth's climate is changing due to human action and the use of fossil fuels and not much else. The conference was a sham of indefinite action with goals in 2050 to cut emissions by 80 percent. In the meantime, the planet continues to warm and the major polluting nations continue to disagree as disaster inches closer. National political interests have trumped global needs for concerted action. We may have made some incremental improvements, but at a losing rate to avert disaster. Individual nations can and will take action on their own to make some differences, but verifiable mandatory multi-national action has slipped away in the battle between the industrialized world and poorer nations. It would seem that we must experience a disaster fueled by special interests before we finally act for the common good.

Once carbon dioxide in the atmosphere rises above 350 ppm (parts per million), sea levels can be expected to rise two meters within a century. Under such conditions, we cannot sustain a planet similar to the one we know and to which life on earth is adapted. Hope for a better world is going down a bottomless sinkhole. Our way of life will be lost if we do not act right now. The tipping point is upon us and the science supports this.

Currently, CO<sub>2</sub> stands at 385 ppm. Anything above 350 ppm can and will lead to irreversible damage to our earth home. China and India, Brazil and

other major polluters cannot agree on how to save this planet. The U.S. and China resist making substantial changes. Their intransigence will lead us all to suffer the consequences of inaction. Carbon emissions do not stop at national borders. If we do not protect the world's rain forests, we will choke on the resulting increased levels of pollution.

Carbon emissions must be reduced enough to keep the increase in average global temperature below 3.6 degrees since pre-industrial times. Average temperature has already risen 1.3 degrees since then. Scientists maintain that we are on track to see a rise in temperature of 7 degrees above pre-industrial levels.

Our Congress must ultimately act to make real progress within our own country. Frankly, with those who still deny that global warming is reality, I am not hopeful that Congress will act in a meaningful way any time soon. Just throwing money at the problem will mitigate the need for mandatory action.

There is also a deep moral and spiritual dimension to getting back to 350 ppm. The UU Statement of Conscience on the threat of global warming begins:

*"Earth is our home. We are part of this world and its destiny is our own. Life on this planet will be gravely affected unless we embrace new practices, ethics, and values to guide our lives on a warming planet. As Unitarian Universalists, how can our faith inform our actions to remedy and mitigate global warming/climate change? We declare that we will not acquiesce to the ongoing degradation and destruction of life that human actions are leaving to our children and grandchildren. As UUs, we are called to join with others to halt practices that fuel global warming/climate change, to instigate sustainable alternatives, and to mitigate the impending effects of global warming/climate change with just and ethical responses. As a people of faith, we must commit to a renewed reverence for life and respect for the interdependent web of all existence."*

For our own sakes and that of our children, we must work at a grassroots level to save the earth. For example, our Sustainability Committee is doing such good work by encouraging us to eat and serve energy efficient food. They encourage the use natural, less polluting products. These and other self-help and survival practices can begin right here at UUMAN. By uniting with other UU Congregations, we can show a reverence for the earth by upholding our Seventh Principle by setting a bold target of 350 ppm and, by working for that goal, we can reduce and mitigate climate disruptions immediately. We can think globally by acting locally. We can plant trees at

our homes and here at UUMAN. We can publicize our concern and actions by writing letters and working with other faith communities on common goals we can agree on.

This is like a final exam for the human spirit. Can we come together to work for the common good, muster the courage to act, make a commitment to save ourselves and our planet and to set this world on a steady course before it is too late?

350 ppm of CO<sub>2</sub> is the tipping point, the upper limit for a stable and safe environment for the world's people, creatures and future generations. We must rethink our relationship to the earth as part of our spiritual discipline and make a commitment to do more on behalf of all who suffer today from global warming and on behalf of future generations. As UU's, we must humbly live in balance with our individual needs and the needs of all other organisms. The health and well-being of life on this earth depends on what we do here today.

If we are to survive as a species, there is no turning back. Let us move forward boldly and with courage.