

Resilience Means Reframing, Reforming, and Reviving.

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Resilience is the ability to withstand or bounce back after crisis events. Resilient individuals or entities have a built-in response of elasticity or flexibility to challenges, threats, and attacks upon their integrity.

Moreover, there is a narrative shift among many in the climate movement. Instead of simply focusing on reducing emissions, attention is directed to cultivating resilience against the consequences of climate change. This shift acknowledges that we have already reached 1.2 of the 1.5 degrees Celsius temperature rise that scientists have warned we should avoid. The climate is changing, and repeated destructive severe weather events are now a part of climate change drivers. These events make the impact of climate change stronger and are the cause of cyclical chain reactions. These are called climate or weather “feedback loops.” These feedback loops are intensifying the consequences.

One example of this phenomenon is the water vapor cycle. We know that surface water transforms into a vapor through evaporation into the atmosphere. As greenhouse gases are emitted, the atmosphere heats. The warmer the atmosphere, the more surface water evaporates from oceans, rivers, and lakes. Warmer air holds more vapor, and the vapor traps more heat, amplifying the warming and leading to even more evaporation. Once these heavier, warmer vapor cycles form, they lead to atmospheric rivers. When these rivers are released, we experience what meteorologists call “wet microbursts” or rain bombs. We saw this phenomenon in southeast Florida in April. The Fort Lauderdale area reported 25.6 inches of rainfall within 12 hours. These “microburst” events have occurred around the globe over the past few years in Southeast Asia, Australia, and Africa. Our neighbors in the northeast experienced a microburst in the form of 56 inches of lake-effect snow this past December. Communities in California

experienced a constant barrage of “rain bombs” from December 2022 until March 2023, costing billions in property and habitat loss. Eventually, this cycle of intensified evaporation will spiral out of control and reach a “tipping point” that scientists believe cannot be undone by mitigation efforts.

These weather events require immediate action from governments and non-governmental agencies. They destroy lives, livelihoods, dreams, and social systems that uphold communities. Yes, we need to double down on severely reducing greenhouse gases from burning fossil fuels. It is time to demand severe reductions in fossil fuel use in energy production. However, even if we manage to interrupt the current production and emissions cycles, we will still have the baked-in consequences of 50% more carbon dioxide emissions in our atmosphere since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution.

We will need to be resilient to survive the impacts of climate change. How do we withstand and bounce back quickly in the face of repeated destructive events like rain bombs, monster hurricanes and tornadoes, global pandemics, habitat loss, and so much more? What factors, values, and solutions must we cultivate to survive and thrive? How do we ensure we do justice to our neighbors at home and around the globe as we face this crisis?

The need to become resilient suggests we reframe the climate change narrative from a science and technological challenge for scientists and engineers to resolve. Instead, we should contextualize it as a moral and justice issue. One that we all have a stake in solving. Many have advocated a simpler lifestyle, reducing consumption and production. But it has not sufficiently reframed the entire issue. The climate crisis is upon us. Every single person and every creature living on this planet is currently experiencing the impacts. We are all vulnerable to severe weather events. In Virginia, we have been incredibly fortunate. We have thus far dodged the most

severe consequences of a direct hit from a hurricane surge. Yet, the coastal regions have sunny day flooding, sediment, and water salinization in their wells, and watermen who have harvested oysters since the end of slavery are losing their livelihoods. “Heat island effect” across the commonwealth, with recorded temperatures 15 degrees higher for areas where black, brown, and low to moderate-income communities are located, is a reality. These are the daily impacts many of our neighbors experience. Our historic injustices support disproportionate effects on those same communities.

Reframing the narrative prioritizes climate change as our time's most important political, economic, and socio-religious issue. It is not one issue to be addressed; it is **the** issue we must solve to save ourselves and the planet. It is connected to every other ill we currently face. We are reaping the outcomes of over five centuries of what M. Shawn Copeland calls “colonialist’s impulse.” This impulse shapes contemporary corporate interests in the fossil fuel (and other) industries; it is an insatiable quest for profit enmeshed with a materialized and racialized vision of the Earth and its creatures. The impulse is “fueled by greed and the false belief in religious and biological superiority, which remains operative today in our globalized economy. These interests are so deeply enmeshed that even in the face of scientific data, almost daily severe weather events, and the threat of global devastation, our political and corporate leaders continue with a business-as-usual relationship with the fossil fuel industry. Virginia’s Air Pollution Board just voted to remove us from the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, which is our only practical and successful method to incentivize the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from our energy sector. The Supreme Court recently ruled against the EPA’s authority to regulate wetlands, and Congress just fast-tracked permitting for more fossil fuel infrastructure like the Mountain Valley Pipeline. Our leaders are not taking the climate crisis seriously as their responsibility.

Reframing the narrative means we understand that we cannot solve the climate crisis by simply reducing carbon and other greenhouse gas emissions. We must address the historic systemic exploitation of the earth's resources, creatures, and peoples. We must dismantle and undo the interconnected evil ideologies of racism, economic exploitation, and militarism that Martin Luther King, Jr. warned against in 1967, for they are fueling the current crisis.

In order to reframe the narrative from simply a technical and scientific problem to be solved, we need to reform our values. We must put into proper context how we talk about and understand the climate crisis as a justice issue. Put another way, the ills we face, racism, gun violence, record inflation, an exploding homeless population, and mass migration, are intricately related to the climate crisis. When we reform the values of greed and exploitation that shaped the crises we face, we will also directly address the climate crisis. Reforming our values calls for correcting how we see ourselves in relationship to other living creatures and our neighbors. We are creatures. Like all other creatures, we depend on Earth's resources for survival. We need water, oxygen, and nutrients to live. We may have invented machines, computing, virtual reality, and AI, but when it comes down to it, none of these inventions can create or sustain our actual lives. We are part of the interconnected web of life. We are dependent, co-dependent, and vulnerable to the Earth's systems. What we do to the Earth, we do to ourselves.

Reforming our values means we need to be converted. While we may not often use terms like conversion when discussing the climate crisis, I believe it is vital for people of faith to experience a theological conversion. Many theological ideas coming out of Europe about five centuries ago were dangerous for the Earth and humans. As the scholar Willie James Jennings suggests, "When early Europeans explored the rest of the world, they decided they had "come into possession" of the land. They operated with a bizarre idea about the land: The land was

something that could be “owned” by individuals forever. The strangeness and absurdity of this notion – that individuals can own the earth – became normalized with the earth as a thing. The idea that God gave certain folk dominion over the planet, the right to exploit it, extract from it, at will, also became the norm.” This idea of individual land ownership was foreign, strange, and anti-spiritual to the indigenous peoples they encountered on every continent. Individuals did not own the land; instead, the land was understood to have life, spirit, and character. The Enlightenment idea of individual land ownership and individualism has made us oblivious to a sense of place and landscape. We talk about the earth in the language of possession, property, real estate, price point, borders, the boundaries of my land versus yours.” This view of the earth led to corrupted behaviors toward non-Christians, non-whites, and the Earth itself, and it continues to fuel the climate crisis.

In religious terms, these behaviors were evil and sinful because they disoriented humans from their rightful place as part of creature life and led to the crisis we now face. To reform our values, we need to recognize the harm done by these strange and false beliefs. Humans, in many ways, are possessed by the land. We will only survive with its gifts. Our course of action, therefore, is to replace greed with generosity and reject false beliefs of human superiority over the rest of life and biological supremacy based on race. We must accept human life's creatureliness and call ourselves into a community with Earth and all life. We begin by aligning ourselves with Earth's rhythms and seasons.

So, we must revive the cultural practices, perspectives, and lifestyles that restore balance to our narrative and what we value. Our staff and board discussed the book *The Seven Circles: Indigenous Teachings for Living Well* for Earth Month. The book is written by an Indigenous couple who describe their journey to reconnect to their cultural heritage and practices. They

discuss the importance of indigenous cultural wisdom with movement, land, community, ceremony, sacred space, sleep, and food. The central organizing themes of the book are knowing one's history, incorporating simplicity, and embracing balance. While none of our staff or board have Indigenous heritage, we found important insights throughout the book. The authors highlight the spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical benefits of each of the seven teachings. The wisdom and cultural practices stress flexibility and strength, which are necessary for resilience.

Reading this book made me imagine what life in North America was like for the indigenous populations before the colonial period. Life was tough for them in many ways, but they formed great societies by adopting and adapting to the seasons, ecosystems, and rhythms of Earth's cycles. The revived practices of Indigenous peoples worldwide can help us become more resilient and sustainable in the face of climate change or the next pandemic. We will need to learn from these cultures and our ancestors how to live in harmony with our planet and not against it. It will require sacrifice and lifestyle changes.

Each of the seven wisdom areas in the book had a communal component. The lifestyle Thosh and Chelsey cultivated was either with their community or for their community. While their practices always benefitted their family, they also incorporated a benefit for the community as a whole. How many of us think about how our practices and lifestyle impact the communities around us? Teaching the cultural way to the youth, sharing in communal ceremonies, growing, hunting, and foraging for food to be shared with the community, owning little, and being ready to give away possessions to those in need are a few of their ways to honor communal relationships. I think this might be one of the hardest lessons for many of us. The idea of “rugged

individualism” is a romanticized ideal in our national psyche. But to be resilient, we will need more profound, more engaged communal relationships.

We do not live in a communal system similar to a reservation, but we have neighborhoods, cul de sacs, and subdivisions where we can cultivate a communal lifestyle. We can share food from our gardens with neighbors. We can strengthen our relationships at work and church and honor the people whose paths we cross as gifts. We can show up for the school board, PTA, city council, and general assembly to ensure that the policies and laws enacted are free from the triple evils of racism, exploitation, and militarism against our neighbors and that they help us strengthen our community connections.

Resilience means we can recover quickly from a crisis. It means we are flexible but tough enough to bounce back from disaster. It also means we are connected to a community that can reframe the narrative to shift our thinking when reality dictates. Resilient people recognize that the threats are sometimes embedded in our deepest values and are willing to dismantle and replace harmful values with healing ones. To cultivate resilient communities, we must revive some ancient and pre-technical practices and values to help us survive and thrive after the crisis. We can reframe, reform, and revive what is necessary to develop a resilient community. Strong communities are resilient. They are the hubs of healing, comfort, and support when a crisis strikes. We all have a stake in this movement. After all, what are you doing that is more important than saving our planet and saving ourselves?