The Mountain Vision

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Overcoming

This is the kind of fast day I’m after:
To break the chains of injustice,
Get rid of exploitation in the workplace,
Free the oppressed,
Cancel debts.

Isaiah 58:6

We shall overcome,
We shall overcome,
We shall overcome, some day.

Oh, deep in my heart,
I do believe
We shall overcome, some day.

“We Shall Overcome” is the best-known anthem and protest song of the Civil Rights Movement. Almost anybody reading this knows the melody and likely has sung it at gatherings for justice.

That song is thought to have been derived from an earlier hymn, I’ll Overcome Some Day, by the African-American Methodist-Episcopal preacher and songwriter, Charles Albert Tindley (1851-1933). Sometimes called “The Prince of Preachers,” Tindley founded a large congregation, wrote several hymns, and spoke and acted against socially-degrading depictions of his race that even led to his being beaten.

I’ll Overcome Some Day (vs. 1)

This world is one great battlefield
With forces all arrayed,
If in my heart I do not yield
I’ll overcome some day.

(vs. 2) Both seen and unseen powers join
To drive my soul astray,
But with His Word a sword of mine,
I’ll overcome some day.

(vs. 3) A thousand snares are set for me,
And mountains in my way,
If Jesus will my leader be,
I’ll overcome some day.

I’ll Overcome Some Day (vs. 3)

A Tale of Two Rich Men

Two wealthy men seek Jesus with contrasting outcomes. Forests and its trees reveal deep spiritual lessons for us. Researching and writing the Larry Gibson Biography is a story unto itself. An artist's photograph vividly portrays mountaintop removal as a blasphemous act against God's creation.

A congressional committee is finally moving the ACHE Act that would place a moratorium on mountaintop removal and restart the cancelled health studies. The National Religious Coalition on Creation Care authors a powerful declaration on the unprecedented climate emergency. Modern-day Noahs seek protection for threatened species. Lives that had been well-lived and loved are mourned as they pass. To love God who loves us, and then to love others is the meaning of life.

May this issue challenge, strengthen, encourage, and inspire you to love God and neighbor, friend and foe. (Luke 10: 25-37; 6:27)

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Being Overcomers  by Allen Johnson, Editor

I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world. [Jesus, speaking to his followers, John 16:33 CSB]

Jesus says an outrageous statement. He knows that in a short while he will be arrested, tortured, and crucified. Yet Jesus says that he has conquered the world! What?!!

John chapters 14-17 in the Bible narrate Jesus instructing his disciples on how they are to carry on his mission after shortly he would be leaving them. Carrying out his mission will involve followers being misunderstood, hated, even persecuted. Jesus promises to pray for them, and send an Advocate (The Holy Spirit) to guide and empower them to faithfulness to the mission.

A few decades later, the apostle Paul writes a letter to other followers of Jesus living in Rome.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written:
"For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.
No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. [Romans 8:35-39]

This, too, seems an outrageous statement. Although the followers of Jesus will face hardship, persecution, even death, yet Paul says that through all this, nevertheless they are conquerors!

This all begs the question, "Why would followers of Jesus suffer persecution?"

As a boy in Sunday School, my first memories of Jesus were pictures of him holding a child on his knee while kindly talking to a group of children. And Jesus, with flowing long brown hair and soft eyes, holding a lamb. Jesus performing a healing miracle on a lame man. Why would such a Jesus be such a threat as to him getting tortured and executed?

The above question applies even now to fellow Christians in some lands abroad who are kindly, moral, and generous, yet are marginalized and even persecuted.

I think the best clue is when Jesus overturns the moneychanger tables and drives out the merchandise flocks at the Jerusalem Temple. The religious elite were enriching themselves by overcharging the poor. It was a scam perpetrated in the supposed cause of God. Jesus was infuriated. "My devotion to your house, O God, burns in me like a fire." [John 2:17, GNT]

Despots manipulate economic, political, and religious power to control people. [consider the Three Temptations in Luke 4] Threats to their power, such as truth-telling and advocacy for the oppressed, provokes the Powers and Principalities to repress justice. Totalitarian political or religious regimes resort to brute force or exclusion, while here in the U.S.A. demeaning propaganda can defame truth.

Fast forward twenty centuries to Christianity in the United States and other western nations. Are we being deprived of food, imprisoned, tortured, executed for our faith? Not at all. Perhaps, in uncommon situations, some inconvenience, scorn, and social exclusion here and there.

Which begs the question, "Are we really fully following Jesus to not elicit strong reaction by the "Powers and Principalities"? [Ephesians 6:12]. Or in taming the society around us, "Christianizing it" so to speak, have we ourselves become tame?

We know or should know that Christians in many countries are severely persecuted for holding their faith. We should support them with prayer and aid. And if we look closely, we can see that some of those in our own lands who speak and act courageously for justice, truth, compassion, and freedom do suffer consequences. Some are Christian, some are not. Yet their courage, perseverance, and willingness to suffer hardship from unjust Powers should inspire all of us to come out of our protective shells to faithful action.

Looming threats such as of climate catastrophe, ocean collapse, species extinction, wars and displaced people, potential nuclear holocaust, call for prophetic truth and courageous action that expose evil and envision the good.

In all this, our Christian role is clear. Pray. Repent. Love. Obey Jesus. Act courageously and faithfully. And trust that somehow God will take all this up. Jesus has overcome the world, conquered death, and draws us into God's ultimate victory for all creation [John 3:16].
ONLINE DONATIONS ARE WELCOME at www.christiansforthemountains.org/
He was a man ahead of his time. Robert Carter III was a charter member of the America's colonial aristocracy. He lived next to George Washington and was a friend of Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry and other members of the Revolutionary War elite. However, he held one distinction: he was the richest of them all and held more slaves than Washington and Jefferson combined.

Carter enjoyed the privileges of great wealth. He owned some 20 plantations and 70,000 acres. He owned companies involved in shipping, manufacturing, banking and land. He was a politician, musician, writer, scientist and artist. And like most of his contemporaries he owned slaves—more than 500 of them.

Like Jefferson and Washington, Carter was first a Deist. Then in June 1777, while suffering from a fever caused by a smallpox inoculation, Carter experienced what he later called a “most gracious Illumination” of his Spirit.

This experience launched him on a religious quest in which he sought out preachers of every denomination sometimes traveling alone on horseback for hundreds of miles in order to hear Methodist, Baptist and Presbyterian preachers. He began attending a congregation in which blacks and whites worshipped side by side. It was also during this time that he discovered that he had a half-brother named Billy—a man who was also his slave.

These events and others brought about a remarkable conversion. On September 5, 1791 Carter began to put into practice what the signers of the Declaration of Independence only wrote about. He demonstrated his belief that “all men are created equal” by writing a “Deed of Gift” which freed all 500 of his slaves. Carter not only arranged for his slaves’ freedom, he also made provision for them during their transition to freedom, including giving them housing that had been built for whites and giving them their own shares on his plantations. In a number of cases, he evicted white tenants in order to accommodate newly freed blacks.

Carter’s “Deed of Gift” was the largest release of slaves in America by an individual. Only the number released in the Emancipation Proclamation exceeds.

Yet his conviction cost him dearly. Because slaves represented wealth in America’s plantation economy, Carter’s emancipation of his slaves cost him both financially and socially. Carter’s actions caused much concern among his white contemporaries. He was publicly ostracized, and his movements blocked at every turn. Some of his peers, including Thomas Jefferson, objected to Carter’s action for setting what they feared was a dangerous precedent. They feared that if slaves were free it would upset the social-balance and threaten young America’s economy.

Eventually to escape the derision of his peers, Carter moved to Baltimore where he died in a small house alone. In his lifetime, Carter did what the founding fathers only put into words. He laid the primitive groundwork for an inter-racial republic challenging the notion that young America would fall apart if blacks and whites were free at the same time. The cost of following Jesus cost Carter dearly………… but our nation is better for it.

Rich Man #2

There was another man also ahead of his time. If he lived today, he would be the kind of guy that would be gladly welcomed at any church in America. He was a model citizen: moral, humble, honest, well-spoken. He was a leader in his community. He was young with a promising life in front of him. Most importantly, he had the right beliefs “He believed correctly that Jesus was the way to eternal life.” In nearly every church today, he would have become a deacon or elder. Once it was discovered that he was a man of some means, he would be put on the finance committee and eventually on the Board of Trustees.

The Bible does not give his name. We only know him as the rich, young, ruler. We encounter the Rich Young Ruler in Mark chapter 10. It says here in verse 17 that “As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell at his feet before him.” The word “the way” here refers to a sort of highway between towns. The rich man then, upon discovering that Jesus has left town goes after Jesus in hot pursuit. I like to imagine it this way. Jesus is already merged onto the highway, set cruise control, when suddenly he glances in his rear-view mirror and sees this man running at full speed, his robes flying out behind him, his sandals smashing the dirt with each stride……

Finally, huffing and puffing the man catches up with Jesus and falls on the dirt in the middle of the highway. Catching his breath, he blurts out his burning question: “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

I like this guy. Even without my dramatization of the scene he appears to be an honest seeker.

Jesus asks him if he has kept the Ten Commandments. The rich young ruler says he has kept them since his youth. Jesus never challenges him on this point; instead the beginning of verse 21 says “Jesus looked at him and loved him.”

More than any other verse in this passage this verse stands out to me: “Jesus looked at him and loved him.” The world “love” here is the word Ag-ap-ah-o in Greek meaning, to be fond of, to love dearly, to be well pleased, to be contented with. The word only shows up four times in the entire book of Mark and this is the only time in Mark that agapao is directed towards a single person. Jesus sees the man and loves him.

I wonder what Jesus saw? Certainly, from the text, here is a moral, honest seeker, a man passionate about God's laws. The fact that he recognizes Jesus as the way to eternal life speaks volumes into his understanding and receptivity to God’s revelation. Even Jesus’ own disciples where having trouble grasping this one. Perhaps Jesus saw a true disciple in this man.

There was just one small thing that stood in his way of becoming Jesus’ disciple. (In the second half of verse 21) Jesus says “You lack one thing, go and sell what you own and give the money to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come follow me.”

You can almost see the man's face drop. He is shocked! He goes away grieving, because he had many possessions.

For once, Jesus seems rather lacking in financial vision. This man before him could have sponsored Jesus's ministry expanding the Kingdom work. Jesus missed a huge opportunity here. Instead Jesus says, “Give the money to the poor” This seems amazingly reckless, even financially irresponsible. I mean the poor are not known for being incredible stewards of money. Besides there is no tax deduction in just giving the money away. The money could have been far better set aside in a foundation, under the rich young ruler's care. Then the foundation could have sponsored the charitable acts of the early church, funded Paul’s voyages, perhaps even paid for that borrowed tomb Jesus used.

Perhaps I am reading between the lines here but Jesus seems more concerned with setting the rich man free from his money, than the money's destination. Robert Carter III and the Rich Young Ruler provide examples of men who encountered Jesus—and were invited into discipleship. Two responses. One man followed Jesus on the road of discipleship though it cost him much. The other man, ran to Jesus, even lay down on the highway before Jesus…… but could go no further. The challenge for us today is this: “How will we run?”

Robert Carter III (1728-1804)

Jesse Johnson is a congregational care pastor at Christ United Methodist Church in Memphis, Tennessee.

The above essay is excerpted from a sermon Johnson preached at Midway Mennonite Church in Columbiana, Ohio.
Reforesting Faith: What Trees Teach Us About the Nature of God and His Love for Us
by Matthew Sleeth, MD. (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook, 2019) 
Book Review by Allen Johnson

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the Tree of Life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month, and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. (Revelation 22:1-2)

Here’s a Bible trivia question for your friends: What living organism is most mentioned in the Bible other than humans? (answer: trees)

“Christianity is the only religion that weaves trees from one end of its sacred text to the other,” begins author Matthew Sleeth. “Every important character and every major event has a tree marking the spot.” (p. 5)

There is a tree on the first page of Genesis, in the first Psalm, on the first page of the New Testament, and on the last page of Revelation. Whether it is the Fall, the Flood, or the overthrow of Pharaoh, every major event in the Bible has a tree, branch, fruit, seed, or some part of a tree marking the spot. (p. 17)

“Every important character and every major event [in The Bible] has a tree marking the spot.”

In his new book, Reforesting Faith, Sleeth guides his readers through a wonder-struck nature walk through the Bible. Noah builds an ark out of wood, and later an olive leaf signals that the Flood is receding. Abraham is in the shade of an oak tree in Mamre when visitors announce his aged wife Sarah and he will bear their first son. Moses receives his mission at a burning bush to liberate his people from Egyptian enslavement. Jonah gets a lesson on forgiving grace as a tree gives him shade and then withholds it. Isaiah prophecies of God’s future shalom when [metaphorically] mountains burst into song and trees clap their hands for joy.

God commissions Moses through a burning bush

Trees are conspicuous in the New Testament as well. Socially-ostracized Zacchaeus climbs a tree to see Jesus who embraces him back into community. Jesus declares that He is a vine, and His followers are pruned branches. Jesus fervently prays in a garden of olive trees to accept His Father’s will be done. The following day, torturers execute Jesus upon a wooden cross, and a point not to be missed, Deuteronomy 21:22-23 says that anyone hung on a tree is accursed.

Reforesting Faith combines a mix of biblical teachings, nature insights, and the author’s personal anecdotes. Sleeth often brings the reader back to his own childhood remembrances playing among trees. In his mid-teens, he began work as a carpenter, taking special joy in working with wood. He writes, Nothing is quite as wonderful as building a house made of trees on a dry, breezy, blue autumn day.” (p. 10) It was while on the job as a carpenter that he met Nancy, now his wife and full partner in ministry. Shortly after marriage, Sleeth decided to become a physician, even though he was dyslexic and had done poorly in high school. A relative maneuvered him into West Virginia University where he earned his B.A., and then on to George Washington University School of Medicine. Then, with a young son and daughter, the family moved to New England where Matthew embarked on a medical career.

The book has several fascinating pages that regale the Sleeth’s conversion to Christ, and their consequent awakening to a natural world that in Matthew’s intuition “was dying.” The upshot is that Matthew resigns from his lucrative, prestigious job as hospital chief of staff and head of the emergency department, the family sells their home, and they move to Kentucky into a home the size of their previous garage. The Sleeth’s start up a ministry, Blessed Earth, travel extensively speaking to congregations, write books, and put into practice a lifestyle of conscientious earth-keeping.

I first met Matthew Sleeth in 2007 during a tour of mountaintop removal in eastern Kentucky. Fr. John Rausch had invited religious leaders to see mountaintop removal from the air and land, and listen to local community people affected by the onerous practice. Upon seeing from the air the massive destruction of God’s creation by mountaintop removal, the first word that came to Matthew Sleeth was “rape.” He was deeply moved hearing local people describe bathing their children in toxic water. A film crew followed our tour, which led to one of eight segments on The Renewal Project (www.renewalproject.net) that highlighted environmental service or advocacy from the perspective of several faith traditions including Evangelical, Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, and Interfaith.

In 2012, Matthew and Nancy Sleeth published a book on their discovery of the joy and freedom of Sabbath observance. 24/6 A Prescription For A Healthier, Happier Life ((Tyndale House Pub., Carol Stream, Il.), inspires readers to purposely slow down the frenetic pace of our modern society. The Sleeths show how Sabbath observance can be personally customized to fit one’s schedule. The book was so refreshing that my wife and I ordered copies for all of our grown children. My review of 24/6 is in our Fall, 2013 issue of The Mountain Vision, which can be downloaded online from a link on the front page of our website at www.christiansforthemountains.org

Reforesting Faith interplays science and theology curiosity like a musical concerto. The book is styled for popular readership, although I would venture most academics would find much to glean from Sleeth’s careful, thorough research. Matthew is an apt storyteller as he interperses personal anecdotes throughout, while teaching the reader Bible and science.

I would heartily recommend this book for Sunday school classes (high school and adult), devotional studies, as grist for sermons, and as a bridge to science-minded persons skeptical of the Bible. A well-thought out study guide is available as a free download along with many other resources on the Blessed Earth website at www.blessedeearth.org
The most beautiful, awesome place in the world is Appalachia in May. That is my honest but admittedly prejudiced opinion. If you want verification, come visit us then, when the lush hardwood forests teem with burgeoning life, lofty mountains stretch and inspire, and sparkling streams gurgle through rhododendron thickets. The air is fresh with the honeyed odors of blooming flowers. Myriad species of birds chortle their sweet songs and dash about with their nesting duties. Ah… Yet the scene I set is not the full story. The advent of heavy machinery, high-powered explosives, and complicit policymakers lured exploiters to blow up mountains to extract thin layers of coal. The vast acreage where this carnage has occurred (and, alas, still occurs), becomes an ugly ruined “moonscape.” The contrast between awesome beauty and ruined landscape is most sharply seen through a low-flying airplane.

Larry Gibson was one of the first to bewail this new form of surface mining, mountaintop removal (MTR). For most of three decades he courageously fought against the destruction of his homelands, and in doing so, inspired thousands of others to advocate for their homelands. In the months before he died in 2012, Larry asked that his story be written. The writing of his story is now underway.

Marybeth Lorbiecki, our biography writer, visited Larry’s treasured homeland this past May, reveling in the beauty of the landscape, heart-touched by the warm welcome of the numerous people she interviewed, and fully engaged in Larry’s life.

Starting out in Ohio, she visited Larry’s brother Gary. Family members have been especially gracious and forthcoming to Marybeth as she researches the biography, and Lawrence was no exception. She then traveled to Lexington, Kentucky, to meet with Dave Cooper, a frequent co-traveler with Larry on road trips across the nation giving presentations on mountaintop removal. The next stop was with Fr. John Rausch, a Glenmary priest who often gives tours of MTR. She followed up with an overnight visit with Janet Keating, who worked alongside Larry while she headed up OVEC. [both Fr. John and Janet are on the Steering Committee of Christians For The Mountains].

Janet Keating took Marybeth to a WV premier showing of the documentary film, Knock Down the House, which follows the campaigns of three women running for elected congressional office—Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Amy Vilela, Cori Bush, and Paula Jean Swearengin. Paula Jean, who was at the film premier, worked extensively with Larry Gibson. The film has clips of MTR on Kayford Mountain where Larry grew up, lived, and loved. At the film premier, Marybeth met a number of persons involved in anti-MTR activism, including Viv Stockman and Dustin White.

Janet then took Marybeth to Hinton to a planning meeting of the West Virginia Can’t Wait campaign, let by candidate for governor, Stephen Smith. This gave Marybeth an experience of grassroots politics. I also attended the meeting, and two days later caught up with her in Charleston for several days of on-the-road research, first with a delightful meeting with Mary Ellen O’Farrell at a guest house along the tree-brimmed banks of the Elk River. Prior to that, Marybeth had an insightful conversation with priest-activist Rev. Jim Lewis.

A trip to Larry’s home on Kayford Mountain is for me a holy experience. Next to his humble cabin is Larry’s humble grave, hewn out of the hard mountain rock. Sacred ground, although for Larry all ground should be sacred. Marybeth and I walked to the overlooks, visited the three concrete crosses above where a church once stood, and the overlooks of mountaintop removal that weeds of several types are trying to get a foothold in the rocky rubble that is supposedly reclaimed by the coal company. A number of cabins and other assorted dwellings are on Kayford due to the establishment of the Stanley Heirs Foundation. Any close relative of the Stanley family (Larry’s mother’s side) can have a place there. We talked with some of the relatives staying up there.
Gibson Story Highway  (continued from page 6)

We drove to Coal River Mountain Watch headquarters in Naoma, WV, to meet up with Junior Walk. Junior is a rugged, independent-minded young man who might fit a stereotype of an Appalachian mountain man. Junior, who once worked for the coal industry, is passionate against MTR. After an insightful interview in which he shared his reminiscences of Larry Gibson, he led us up to an active mountaintop removal operation.

During the next few days we met with a number of other persons close to Larry. We met up with Larry’s best friend, Chuck Nelson, at the Beckley hospital, where Chuck was closely his ailing wife, Linda (who passed three months later). Chuck’s love for his wife, and his love for Larry, his friends, the land, and God, touched our hearts. Among other people we met up with on the research trip were Larry’s Uncle Vernon (Hoot) and Aunt Zelda Gibson, who have been exceptionally supportive and insightful for the biography, and Elise Keaton, who as a college student was inspired by Larry to become an attorney, and is now active in environmental justice.

An interview highlight was meeting up with Maria Gunnoe at her home in Bob White, WV. Maria was most gracious in showing us around her home, explaining the local dynamics of living in a coal economy, and the social pressures of speaking out against coal industry abuses. More than anybody else we likely will interview, Maria has experienced the threats of violence and community rejection and misunderstanding that Larry also underwent. Maria, a former Goldman Environmental Prize award recipient (the environmental equivalent of a Nobel Prize), has difficulty getting a local job due to her courageous stand against mountaintop removal, though she does advocate for underground coal miners displaced by that method’s downturn.

Our most heart-touching experience was in retracing the place of a tragic incident in which a drunken driver plowed into a crowd of children, killing several including Larry’s beloved older ten-year old brother, Virgil Preston Gibson (1944-1954). This tragic manslaughter devastated the Gibson family, and forever scarred Larry. We had heard that Virgil Preston’s grave was in an overgrown, now wooded cemetery, so we embarked on what looked to be a search analogous to finding the proverbial needle in a haystack. After clamoring up and down the hillside on what was becoming a futile search, we prayed. Then, lo and behold, we stumbled upon the tombstone. Sacred ground, the premature resting place of a young, promising boy, whose death somehow has figured into the character and accomplishments of his brother, Larry Gibson. And from Larry, on to others, like ripples on a pond from the thrown stone.

The week flew by quickly. We ran out of time to personally talk with many others who have stories to tell about Larry. Since May, Marybeth has conducted numerous phone and email interviews with more to come. As she often says, “Each person I talk to leads me to several other leads.” Currently, she is focusing on writing draft chapters, which will lead to more research with more people.
An Artist’s Vision of Mountaintop-Removal Mining  

by Frances Lamberts

From time to time, Frances Lamberts sends me a letter with a copy of an accompanying article she has written for the Herald-Tribune newspaper in Jonesborough, Tennessee. With her permission, the Mountain Vision has reprinted some of these articles on ecology, nature, and related spiritual attunement.

Frances Lamberts was born in Germany near the Belgium border over eight decades ago. Her childhood was idyllic with family self-sufficiency in their several gardens, and forested hills to explore. She also experienced the oppressive atmosphere and danger of WWII. In 1962 she visited Washington, DC, to spend some time in an English-speaking country. Her time since then has extended over five decades.

Since 1979 she has lived in Jonesborough, Tennessee where she taught at East Tennessee University. Upon retirement, Frances has devoted her time to writing and volunteering to the establishment of the Ardinna Woods Arboretum and Butterfly Garden. Frances maintains an extensive array of native plants and accompanying wildlife on her one-acre property. Protecting the Monarch Butterfly is a passion.

In her accompanying article, Frances Lamberts writes about her local beloved Reece Museum, and particularly about a photography by Lyn Govette on a scene of mountaintop removal. Ms. Govette has graciously permitted to render her photograph in grayscale for our Mountain Vision. You can see it in color at our website at https://www.christiansforthemountains.org/site/Topics/Issues/MTR/Govette-Reclaimed-web.jpg.

--Allen Johnson

Frances Lamberts writes,

For a number of years, East Tennessee State University’s Reece Museum has held an international, juried exhibition of socially and politically engaged art, in commemoration of Fletcher Dyer. Fletcher had stated the wish that he could make a different by expressing, through art, “how I feel about serious issues in the world [and] help create a movement that others will follow.”

A “Rusted Tears” painting one year warned about wasteful or polluting use of our life-giving waters. Various works have highlighted human lack of concern for the loss of creatures with whom we share the planet, or of deserts following where our life-giving waters. Various works have highlighted human lack of concern for the loss of creatures with whom we share the planet, or of deserts following where our life-giving waters.

In her accompanying article, Frances Lamberts writes about her local beloved Reece Museum, and particularly about a photography by Lyn Govette on a scene of mountaintop removal. Ms. Govette has graciously permitted to render her photograph in grayscale for our Mountain Vision. You can see it in color at our website at https://www.christiansforthemountains.org/site/Topics/Issues/MTR/Govette-Reclaimed-web.jpg.

--Allen Johnson

Yet, in the foreground rubble, some coltsfoot perennials have taken root and are blooming. The artist has used hand- (and machine) embroidered stitchery to enlarge their golden flower impact. But their presence can highlight to the viewer that, where man has massively disturbed his homeland, foreign “invaders” will be the ones to occupy it, suppressing for a very long time a longed-for resurgence of its native vegetative beauty and wholesomeness.

In an Emily Dickinson poem, the mountain upon a plain sits “in his eternal chair.” The tragedy of its sudden removal through detonation is that – as Mary Ann Taylor-Hall notes in her essay in Missing Mountains – “of all the life that had been there not one thing remains.” The seasons which Dickinson has pray and play around the mountain’s knees, “like children round a sire,” no longer come. But these, in Taylor-Hall’s words, represent “all the earth’s small intricacies, the wild phlox growing in the root of the great bur oak, the unexpected bank of violets, the deer and squirrel and little creeks and waterfalls, the snakes and salamanders and tree frogs, all things that make the earth real.”

Dickinson’s eternal mountain knows all this. In “omnifold observation” it sees all the complexities of life, those of human communities included. Its “inquest everywhere” holds people accountable. After all, their relationship to its profundity and beneficence is one of utter dependence.

In the 2018 exhibit, a wrought-iron construction by Fletcher Dyer, “Tree of Life,” bore this inscription: “Nature is the beginning of man and man is the end of nature.”

In its stark contrast of tiny foregrounded coltsfoot flowers in the devastated landscape, the “Reclaimed” artist highlighted well the urgency of need to preserve our precious, remaining, intact forested mountains.
Mountain top removal is not only ugly and destructive of land and water, it is unhealthy for nearby communities. Yet Congress has ignored our introduced legislation and scientific studies for years, that is until a recent subcommittee took it up.

Below is an article by our friends at OVEC reporting on that committee hearing in April from their Summer 2019 issue.

In March, our friends at Earthjustice and Appalachian Voices reached out to us to see who we would recommend for testifying before Congress on April 9, when the U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources, Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources, would hold a hearing on the public health impacts of mountaintop removal coal mining. We are happy to say that one of the OVEC members we recommended was among those who ended up testifying.

Donna Branham’s powerful words were quoted in several news stories on the hearing. You can find a link to her entire testimony (in which she gives a shout-out to OVEC), as well as that of the other witnesses, at bit.ly/2KRJ8fp

In a story carried on multiple outlets, Ohio Valley ReSource reporter Jeff Young wrote:

"Late in the Obama administration, the National Academy of Sciences launched a study into the health effects for communities near mountaintop removal coal mines. Donna Branham of Lenore, West Virginia, was among the many residents with questions and concerns about effects on air and water quality. She was hopeful the National Academy study would bring some answers. But in the summer of 2017 the Trump administration's Interior Department abruptly cancelled funding and ordered the National Academy to halt the study.

"We felt abandoned, we felt as if our lives didn’t matter,” Branham told lawmakers. Branham was one of four witnesses from Kentucky and West Virginia who told members of the House Natural Resources Committee that the National Academy study should continue. Until such a study is complete, they argued, regulators should place a moratorium on mountaintop removal mining.

Former coal miner Carl Shoupe of Benham, Kentucky, organizes for the citizens’ action group Kentuckians for the Commonwealth. He said mining also threatens cultural and natural areas that could be part of the region’s new economy.

“As we speak, a coal company is seeking a permit to strip mine the ridge behind my home,” Shoupe said. “They plan to go up the entire valley.”

Arizona Rep. Raul Grijalva, the Arizona Democrat who chairs the committee, said in an interview with the ReSource that the Interior Department had declined to answer requests for information and declined to send a representative to answer lawmakers’ questions. Grijalva said his committee is considering using its subpoena power to get documents relevant to the department’s decision to cancel the National Academy study.

WVU scientist Dr. Michael McCawley also testified. He noted that previous studies have found higher rates of disease in MTR areas and exposure assessments that indicate a causal—not just correlative—relationship between MTR air pollution and increased rates of chronic disease.

McCawley was glad that Congress was once again introducing the Appalachian Communities Health Emergency (ACHE) Act, which over the years has been championed by our friends at Coal River Mountain Watch. He told the committee, “This act will allow a better understanding of the effects of mountaintop removal activities—not only from the air exposure but also from the water and the mining waste that are affecting the people in these areas. The coal miners working in, and the citizens living near, mountaintop removal operations have suffered the consequences of these operations for too long.”

Rep. John Yarmuth (D-KY) who first introduced the bill in 2013, said, “The federal government should not be approving mining permits until it can truthfully say to local residents that their health will not be jeopardized and their lives will not be put at risk.” He has unsuccessfully pressed the issue in the past.

Under H.R. 2050, no permits for new or expanded mountaintop removal could be issued until the Department of Health and Human Services conducts a comprehensive health study that finds no threat to public health.
§1. The climate change problem we face today is unlike any previous challenge confronted by society because it is largely irreversible “for 1,000 years after emissions stop” with “profound impacts on global climate, ecosystems and human societies for the next ten millennia and beyond.”

The shocking truth is that decisions we make now could, in the words of climate economist Ross Garnaut, “haunt humanity until the end of time.” Nuclear war, while also irreversible, is only a possibility. Human-induced climate change is underway now, and its impacts are greater and more extensive than scientific models predicted. We will significantly alter the future of civilization as we know it and may eventually cause its collapse if we continue down this path.

§2. As people of faith, we believe that our planet – which nurtures and sustains life – is a gift, and that we have a responsibility to cultivate a world in which all beings can thrive, physically and spiritually. We are committed to safeguarding the Earth entrusted to our care. Protecting God’s Creation is a spiritual and moral imperative, not an ideological or narrow partisan issue. We recognize that the National Council of Churches, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, National Association of Evangelicals, and the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops have all called on policymakers and elected officials to take strong action to address global climate change.

§3. We are seeing great suffering caused by extreme storms, heat waves, massive wildfires, floods and drought, crop failures, rising and acidifying seas, food and water shortages, the spread of vector-borne diseases, and conflicts over scarce resources. Climate migrants are already on the move—with millions more likely to be uprooted in the near future.

“Civilization requires energy, but energy use must not destroy civilization... [We] need to devise a long-term global strategy to provide energy security and... commitments to meet the problem of climate change.”

– Pope Francis, Statement to oil company executives, June 19, 2018

§4. Human civilization emerged during an extensive period of stable climactic conditions. Climate change caused by the burning of fossil fuels and the logging of forests could rapidly destabilize civilization as billions of people worldwide find themselves in an increasingly desperate struggle for survival. The multiple, simultaneous consequences of climate change could break down human societies and push them toward civil unrest, anarchy, tyranny, and war, including nuclear war. This is why more than one Secretary General of the United Nations has called the world’s present course “suicidal,” and why the Pentagon has classified climate change as a threat to national security.

§5. Scientists have been warning for decades, with increasing certainty and alarm, about the dire consequences of continuing to burn coal, gas, and oil and release methane. Nevertheless, the United States, responsible for 26% of cumulative fossil fuel greenhouse gas emissions despite being less than 5% of the world’s population, has failed to take these warnings seriously. Leadership in the United States has proposed inadequate solutions, has denied scientific and economic consensus and continues to promote fossil fuel extraction. Mainstream media has betrayed its role as the fourth estate by confusing the public. For instance, Fox News has made misleading statements about climate change 72% of the time, and CNN 30% of the time.

§6. Decades of delay on climate action have made small corrective measures and incremental approaches useless. Those who are invested in maintaining the status quo, or who put forth proposals that are clearly incompatible with what climate science demands, are condemning innocent young people – including their own children and generations to come – to a future of unimaginable suffering: the mass death of human populations and the extinction of species.

§7. Further delay in addressing climate change is a radical evil that as people of faith we vigorously oppose.

§8. We support the bold direction of the Green New Deal, or other similar science-based proposals, as an opportunity for this country to commit to stabilizing the climate while creating “unprecedented levels of prosperity and economic security for all people of the United States.” This specifically includes low-income communities, communities of color, and those that have historically been marginalized or underserved. The Green New Deal is the first resolution that addresses the climate crisis with the urgency, focus, and comprehensiveness that the situation requires. Our nation mobilized every part of society during World War II and the Great Depression. Like the Greatest Generation, we must rise to the occasion and commit to doing what science says it takes to avoid irreversible catastrophic climate chaos and make a rapid and just transition to a clean energy economy. Today, renewable- energy-with-storage technology is out-bidding all other energy options. Broadly and quickly implemented, this could provide an unequalled and sustainable economic boom.

§9. We believe that the primary strategies that will accomplish these goals include: carbon pricing; governmental intervention; divestment from fossil-fuel based industries and investment in sustainable alternatives; carbon sequestration by terminating logging in our national forests; extensive reforestation and native grass replanting; alternative energy incentives; methane leakage restrictions; increased renewable and battery research; and greenhouse gas targeted regulations. We strongly support bipartisan legislation that puts a price on carbon in a way that will reduce emissions quickly, accelerate the transition to a clean energy economy, and protect low-to-middle income communities from financial harm. While the means are open for debate, the end of preserving a stable climate is not.

“Climate change is one of the most pressing issues facing all of God’s creation.”

– Official Declaration of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2009

“We now face the unprecedented challenge of climate change due to greenhouse gas emissions, and the need for urgent action has never been clearer.

– Reform Judaism Statement on Climate Change and Energy, 2009

§10. We are committed to responding to the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor. The harsh and often deadly impacts of climate change increasingly weigh upon the human spirit. Therefore, we call upon elected officials, faith communities, and the public-at-large to combat climate change at the scale and pace this emergency requires. We demand that policy-makers work together to reach the science-based climate goals of the IPCC to cut greenhouse gas emissions to at least 45% below 2010 levels by 2030. We also urge policy-makers to work together to ensure a just transition that protects the safety, health, and dignity of low-income and historically under-served communities. We look forward to the spiritual, health, and economic benefits of living more simply, gently, and lovingly on God’s good Earth.

“We believe climate change to be a profoundly pro-life issue....”

– Florida Christians for Climate Action

Notes:


The National Religious Coalition for Creation gathered for its 20th annual prayer breakfast in Washington, DC. NRCCC is a group composed of members of major faith groups in America, including Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical, and Orthodox Christians, and Jews. After opening prayers, a lively presentation by Chad Hanson (Director of the John Muir Project) on forest protection as an essential aspect of addressing climate change, and the bestowal of the 2019 Steward of God’s Creation award to two outstanding climate champions – the Rev. Dr. Gerald L. Durley and the Rev. Dr. Jim Antal – we moved outside to announce the release of Religious Declaration of Unprecedented Climate Emergency.

Religious Declaration of Unprecedented Human Emergency [see Page 10] clarifies two essential facts: (1) humanity has an extremely short window of time in which to avert irreversible climate chaos, and (2) religions around the world consider protecting God’s Creation a moral and spiritual imperative.

An increasing numbers of citizens realizing that we need to address climate change with the same focus, fervor and self-sacrifice of a nation that mobilizes to change with the same focus, fervor and self-sacrifice of a nation that mobilizes to

The stakes are high. Climate change is unlike any other challenge that confronts humanity, “because it is largely irreversible ‘for 1,000 years after emissions stop’ with ‘profound impacts on global climate, ecosystems and human societies for the next ten millennia and beyond.’ The shocking truth is that decisions we make now could, in the words of climate economist Ross Garnaut, ‘haunt humanity until the end of time.’ Nuclear war, while also irreversible, is only a possibility. Human-induced climate change is underway now, and its impacts are greater and more extensive than scientific models predicted. We will significantly alter the future of civilization as we know it and may eventually cause its collapse if we continue down this path.”

The Declaration calls for bold, concerted action: “Decades of delay on climate action have made small corrective measures and incremental approaches useless. Those who are invested in maintaining the status quo, or who put forth proposals that are clearly incompatible with what climate science demands, are condemning innocent young people – including their own children and generations to come – to a future of unimaginable suffering: the mass death of human populations and the extinction of species.”

The Declaration places the climate crisis within a moral context: “Further delay in addressing climate change is a radical evil that as people of faith we vigorously oppose.”

One of the principal writers of the document, Dr. Richard W. Miller, Professor of Philosophical Theology and Sustainability Studies, Creighton University, reflected later on this last point. He commented: “The manufacturing of doubt and the sowing of confusion about climate change by fossil-fuel-industry-funded think tanks, the deceptive climate-change reporting by ideologically-driven media outlets, the investing in fossil fuel infrastructure by banks and high-profile investors, the expansion of pipelines, oil, and gas wells are all radically evil actions that continue to this day. The institutions that engage in these actions are enemies of humanity and the web of life. We will oppose these institutions from our churches and synagogues, from our pulpits and lecterns, and from our social halls and gathering spaces. We will fill the halls of power like the young people in the Sunrise Movement in their push for a Green New Deal; we will join school-aged children in the streets striking for climate action; and we will rebel with the young people in the Extinction Rebellion in the race to head off the destabilizing of the climate system within which civilization developed.”

Margaret Bullitt-Jonas as one of the principal authors of the Religious Declaration, commented: “God sent us into the world to bless and heal, not to ravage and destroy. But as a species we are hurling willy-nilly down a suicidal path that risks bringing down not only our own civilization but also the web of life as it has evolved for millennia. As people of faith, we stand with the Spirit of life, who calls us to build a more just society in which all people and all God’s creatures can thrive.”

The third lead author of the Religious Declaration, inventor and tech business entrepreneur David W. Carroll, asserted: “There is no moment more critical for all-out personal and cooperative action. Today’s environmental emergency demands we implement solar and wind with power storage immediately. It is ready, and it provides unequaled economic value. Let us not fail in our duty to serve and protect Planet Earth.”

The Declaration amplifies statements that major denominations have already issued on climate change. Religious groups across the United States, including the National Council of Churches, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Central Conference of American Rabbis, National Association of Evangelicals, and the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops, call upon policymakers and elected officials to take strong action to address global climate change.

For the past 20 years, the NRCCC has sponsored a Prayer Breakfast and week of public policy advocacy in Washington, DC. The following report is excerpted and revised from the website of Rev. Margaret Bullitt-Jonas, at https://revivingcreation.org

Margaret Bullitt-Jonas is an Episcopal priest, author, retreat leader, and climate activist. She serves as Missioner for Creation Care for both the Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts and Mass. Conference, United Church of Christ.

The preceding page 10 presents a major challenge to religious people and their groups to actively engage the very serious climate threat.

Rev. Margaret Bullitt-Jonas flanked by 2019 recipients of the Steward of God’s Creation award, Rev. Gerald Durley (L) and Rev. Jim Antal (R).
The Big Sandy Crayfish

The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy, along with the Sierra Club, the Center for Biological Diversity, and Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition have sent a notice of intent to sue to the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Office of Surface Mining and the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection informing those agencies of violations of the Endangered Species Act. The groups contend that the agencies are not doing enough to protect endangered species and that West Virginia is issuing mining permits that threaten endangered species.

The historical range of the Guyandotte River crayfish included streams throughout the Upper Guyandotte River basin in Wyoming County and parts of Logan and Mingo counties in West Virginia. The best available information indicates that this species now exists in two streams in Wyoming County.

Legal Background

Congress enacted the Endangered Species Act in 1973 to provide for the conservation of endangered and threatened fish, wildlife, plants and their natural habitats. Under the Act, agencies are required to insure that any action "is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any endangered species or threatened species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of habitat of such species which is determined ... to be critical."

The "actions" which the agencies have to make sure do not threaten or endangered species include permitting of, in this case, coal mines. When the agencies make decisions on, in this case, coal mining permits, it must meet its obligations under the Endangered Species Act.

The notice of intent to sue is a common part of environmental statutes. It embodies the assumption that agencies or violators of statutes only need have their failure to comply pointed out to them and they will make things right. No litigation needed. In practice, the violators know what they are. The notice of intent is just the lawyerly way of saying, "we're serious about this and if you don't change we will sue."

The Species Involved

The species directly involved are the Big Sandy crayfish and the Guyandotte River crayfish. Historically the Big Sandy crayfish's range included streams throughout the upper Big Sandy River basin, covering ten counties in Kentucky, Virginia and West Virginia. It is now restricted to six isolated subpopulations.

The historical range of the Guyandotte River crayfish included streams throughout the Upper Guyandotte River basin in Wyoming County and parts of Logan and Mingo counties in West Virginia. The best available information indicates that this species now exists in two streams in Wyoming County.

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Like most threatened and endangered species, these two are in peril because of loss of habitat. In discussing the loss of habitat, the Fish and Wildlife Service noted erosion and sedimentation from mining, timber harvesting, unpaved roads, and off-road vehicles. It also cited general water quality problems such as chemical drainage from mine lands, sewage discharges, and runoff from roads.

While both the range and number of individuals of the Big Sandy crayfish has been reduced, it is listed as a species that is threatened with extinction. The Guyandotte crayfish's range and the number of individualssis extremely restricted that it is listed as endangered.

Why We Care

With any litigation under the Endangered Species Act, someone always says, "It's just some little bird/bug/fish that nobody would miss were it to disappear." As a general matter, this is legally and factually irrelevant. The Act protects all species; it does not distinguish between popular and unpopular species. The natural world is a huge, complicated system. If it is to work properly, all the pieces must remain in place.

Crayfish are an extremely important component of aquatic ecosystems, in Appalachia and worldwide. They eat and get eaten. They eat smaller plants and animals, keeping streams and wetlands clean and harboring balanced populations. They sustain Hellbenders, raccoons, otters, Great-blue Herons, and, most importantly to fisher folk among us—smallmouth bass. Their creation of "chimneys" and tunnels, terrestrial and aquatic, is critical to survival of a very large number of invertebrates, as well as rodents, snakes, and frogs; so crayfish are a "keystone" species. They're also sensitive to environmental impacts, so their numbers are a good indication of the health of a waterway.

Cindy Rank explains it this way, "The practice of avoiding, ignoring, minimizing, altering or otherwise overriding the rules of the game — the laws and regulations meant to protect waters of West Virginia — has for years led to the ongoing demise of our most valuable headwater streams and harming the people who rely on those waters for personal use and recreation. Protecting tiny critters like the Guyandotte and Big Sandy crayfish may seem insignificant or silly to some, but what we do to the least of our fellow travelers we ultimately do to ourselves.

John McFerrin is the Editor of the Highlands Voice, the monthly publication of the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. He kindly gave permission to reprint this lead story from the June 2019 issue.

McFerrin, an attorney now based in Morgantown, WV, has long said he believed the cause of conservation in central Appalachia in a multitude of roles and causes. For instance, he was instrumental in forming coalitions including the West Virginia Environmental Council that coalesces numerous state organizations into lobbying advocacy for environmental causes.

McFerrin gave encouragement and advice to CFTM as we started up our Mountain Vision newspaper. Those who receive both the Highlands Voice and the Mountain Vision will notice similarity in format. Upon McFerrin's recommendation, we happily engaged Star Printing in Ravenswood, WV, as our publisher.

Our Winter 2017/2018 (vol. 5, issue 10) edition of our Mountain Vision newspaper featured a full page article on the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. The article can also be accessed on our website.

Our own CFTM co-founder and treasurer, Bob Marshall, continues his several decade long stint as treasurer of the West Virginia Highland Conservancy.

Our region is blessed with this venerable, effective organization that has now served this region for over fifty years. Carry on, with God's blessing!
The Endangered Species Act: A Modern Noah’s Ark
by Allen Johnson

"The Endangered Species Act is our Noah's Ark and Congress and special interests are trying to sink it!"

Cal DeWitt's angry words vaulted into the New York Times, triggering a conservative Christian countermovement that led to derailing a congressional bill to kill the Endangered Species Act (ESA) that had been signed into law by President Nixon two decades earlier.

In early 1996, DeWitt was a professor of environmental studies at the University of Wisconsin. As a boy growing up in Grand Rapids, Michigan, DeWitt had been steeped in the teachings of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC). He had also spent his childhood roaming his surrounding woods, fields, and wetlands.

The CRC holds to the Belgic Confession, which begins asserting that God is wise, just, and good, and who reveals Himself mainly through two means: "First, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe, since that universe is before our eyes like a beautiful book in which all creatures, great and small, are as letters to make us ponder the invisible things of God..." Second, "God makes himself known to us more clearly by his holy and divine Word [Bible]." These two books of revelation became DeWitt's life and witness.

Republican leadership sailed into a majority in the House of Representatives in 1994 with a promise-laden "Contract with America." By 1996, House Speaker Newt Gingrich had laid the framework for bipartisan legislation that would loosen regulations defining endangered species, protection of their habitats, and restrictions on land development.

I will mention in conclusion, yet with great emphasis, that increasing numbers of plant and animal species are passing into the forever night of extinction. Habitat destruction, overharvesting, and invasive species vectored through human agency are blasting holes in Noah's Ark. The consequences of human sin and hubris are consequential to all of creation. During the 1996 battle to save the Endangered Species Act, Cal DeWitt challenged Christians. "Where are the Noahs? Where are the courses and curricula in ark-building? The whole creation is standing on tippy toes, waiting...!"

Resisting Horizontal Fracking and Pipelines in Appalachia

As from Horizontal Fracking is spawning a plethora of serious health and environmental problems in Central Appalachia. Beginning in the 1990’s, new technology enabled drilling to plunge vertically up to 2 miles below the earth's surface into layers of shale, then drill horizontally up to a mile or more like spokes on a wagon wheel. Highly pressurized chemical-laden water mixed with sand injected into the drilled holes burst the shale, releasing large volumes of gas that is then piped to markets.

Christians For The Mountains (CFTM) continues to work closely with numerous groups resisting this scourge upon the health of our people (as studies show), the environmental wreckage from erosion due to construction on steep-sloped mountains, and the ever-present danger of catastrophic pipeline explosions. CFTM Coordinator Allen Johnson is on leadership teams with the Appalachian Gas Working Group and the 50 coalition member Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance (ABRA), and the Citizen Surveillance Initiative (CSI) that utilizes state-of-the-art mapping technology and citizen monitors for environmental compliance.

Our coalition legal teams have brought successful suits in federal court to stop the further building of the 600 mile Atlantic Coast Pipeline (ACP) from West Virginia to southeast Virginia and coastal North Carolina. The projected cost of the ACP has soared from the original $4 billion to $7.5 billion, as the corporation has tried regulatory shortcuts that the court has seen through. However, the ACP has now used political pressure to finagle the U.S. Supreme Court to take up the case.

Meanwhile, China has on hold an $84 billion investment in an energy hub in West Virginia to make gas by-products such as ethylene for plastics. Other sources of money are also involved in making the Ohio River region of Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, and eastern Kentucky an energy hub that would rival that of the Louisiana-Texas hub, bringing in associated pollution and community health problems.

It is difficult to delve into these multiple intertwined issues without taking up many pages in the Mountain Vision. There are numerous sources online. Just to say, we are deeply involved in this serious assault to our Appalachian future. And locking into carbon-spewing fossil fuel infrastructure threatens the entire world with increased climate change.
In Memory of Linda Nelson (1960-2019)

Linda Nelson died August 29 following a long bout of respiratory illness. Funeral services were held September 4 in Whitesville, followed by burial by her home in Glen Daniel.

Linda’s husband, Chuck Nelson, is a well-beloved and highly respected friend of Christians For The Mountains, a retired union coal miner, and an articulate opponent of mountaintop removal.

Chuck and Linda’s devotion for each other was exemplary. Back when Chuck was experiencing serious heart and kidney trouble that led to the loss of a kidney, Linda encouraged and helped him through the difficulties. Then Linda became ill, desperate for breath, and more recently compounded by the pain of an injury when an intoxicated driver rear-ended them. Chuck stayed by her with compassionate, loving care.

During her eulogy, film documentarian Mari-lynn Evans praised Linda’s loving kindness to any and all, a sentiment acknowledged by all who had the privilege to know Linda. Chuck Nelson takes comfort in Linda’s and his shared hope and faith that the resurrected Jesus will reunite them. Our love-sent prayers go with Chuck through this time of mourning.

---Job 19:25-27

I know my Redeemer lives.

The very same God
That spins things in orbit
Runs to the weary
The worn and the weak
And the same gentle hands
That hold me when I’m broken
They conquer death to bring me victory

Now I know my Redeemer lives
I know my Redeemer lives
Let all creation testify
Let this life within me cry
I know my Redeemer lives.

---from, “I Know My Redeemer Lives”
by Nicole C. Mullen

WV Activist Par Excellence April Keating Dies

Shockwaves shuddered through West Virginia and outward on Saturday September 28. “April Keating died today!” My wife informed me that someone had left the sad news on our telephone answering machine. Soon, my email inbox began to light up as April’s friends and activist colleagues began to express with failing words their love for April.

It should not have been a surprise, although it was. April had been fighting metastatic breast cancer for years. Yet I never heard her complain. As one person commented, “April was the never ending Ever Ready battery that just kept on ticking.”

The expressions of sorrow paired with accolades poured in. “April will go down in history as one of the female fighters that led the brigade of freedom from fracking and destruction of our environment. She was a very intelligent, forthright and dedicated woman to her family, her many causes and her life from the start had a purpose on this Earth.”

“Our prophet. Our voice in the wilderness. Our voice FOR the wilderness. Our voice for the WATER. May all waters be free.”

“My heart is broken. She was a beautiful person, inside and out, and so committed to preserving the environment and caring for others. Thomas Campbell said, “To live in hearts we leave behind is not to die.” She will always be with me.”

“She truly laid the foundation for everything we’re currently doing. She’s been such a remarkable light in an otherwise often dim world.”

“I am so thankful to have known April. I am so thankful to have witnessed an example of steadfast, powerful, and relentless love for place and people. I was also so impressed with April’s relentless hope. She believed in and could see the world, community, place that she wanted and knew we all deserved and she never gave up on that mission.”

I first met April as we and others shouldered up to combat a tidal wave of fracking and pipelines. April worked with amazing energy and passion for our causes as she pressed local and state policymakers, wrote pointed Op Eds, organized and guided tours, and founded the Mountain Lakes Preservation Alliance. On several occasions, April traveled a considerable distance to meet with the local organization in my home area. She was a savvy and perceptive organizer, cheerleader for right causes, and a friend to all in our movements.

Six weeks prior to her death, I talked with April at a Sustainability Fair in Sweet Springs, WV. She asked me not to hug her as we greeted, explaining she was sore from radiation therapy. Two weeks later, I was an invited speaker at the RiverFest she organized and emceed in her home town of Buckhannon, WV. April was her bouncy self, running to and fro keeping things on track. This would be the last time I would see April, yet I and many others heard from her often over the next several weeks as she poured out emails on pipeline battles and the like. That is, while dealing with a fast approaching death, April never seemed to slow down. She sprinted even in her final lap in life. God blessed us with April. ---Allen Johnson

This is my West Virginia, the home of all my family,
And the faces of her people ever glow with loyalty;
The honest sweat born of honest toil is the only way they know
Here in my West Virginia, the home that I love so.

This is my West Virginia, her beauty makes my spirit whole,
In the times of dread and anguish it calms my fervor soul;
I lift mine eyes unto these hills and they give me power to go on
Here in my West Virginia, where I was born.

April’s mother, Iris Bell, wrote these in 1961 to become the official WV Centennial Song in 1963.
What Do I Love When I Love God?  Jurgen Moltmann

Editor’s Note:

“Where is God?”
“How do we have relationship with God?”
...and how to we rightly relate to the world about us?”

St. Augustine (354-430) is unquestionably the most influential theologian in Western Christianity. His impact still resonates in the mindset of Western culture.

In the two sidebars to the left, renowned German theologian Jurgen Moltmann enters into a heart-felt dialogue with Augustine on “loving God.”

This is not to say one statement is right and the other is wrong. The question for each of us is to respond to God’s invitation to fully love God.

Moltmann ends his dialogue with the following comment:

The experience of God deepens the experiences of life. It does not reduce them. For it awakens the unconditional Yes to life. The more I love God, the more gladly I exist. The more immediately and wholly I exist, the more I sense the living God, the inexhaustible source of life and eternal livingness.

The Source of Life: The Holy Spirit and the Theology of Life. (SCM Press (Augsburg/Fortress), 1997) (permission granted to publish this excerpt)

One evening I read the following passage in Augustine’s Confessions. Augustine says"

‘But what do I love when I love you? Not the beauty of any body or the rhythm of time in its movement; not the radiance of light, so dear to our eyes; not the sweet melodies in the world of manifold sounds; not the perfume of flowers, ointments and spices; not manna and not honey; not the limbs so delightful to the body’s embrace; it is none of these things that I love when I love my God. And yet when I love my God I do indeed love a light and a sound and a perfume and a food and an embrace—a light and sound and perfume and food and embrace in my inward self. There my soul is flooded with a radiance which no space can contain; there a music which time never bears away; there I smell a perfume which no wind disperses; there I taste a food that no surfet embitters; there is an embrace which no satiety severs It is this that I love when I love my God’ (X.6,8).

And that night I answered him:

When I love God I love the beauty of bodies, the rhythm of movements, the shining of eyes, the embraces, the feelings, the scents, the sounds of this protean creation. When I love you, my God, I want to embrace it all, for I love you with all my senses in the creations of your love. In all the things that encounter me, you are waiting for me.

For a long time I looked for you within myself and crept into the shell of my soul, shielding myself with an armor of inapproachability. But you were outside—outside myself—and enticed my out of the narrowness of my heart and into the broad place of love for life. So I came out of myself and found my soul in my senses, and my own self in others.

Sunrise Surprise  by Marybeth Lorbiecki

This certainly was as a good reason as any to share a morning conversation. The bearded twenty-eight-year-old from Michigan, Will Lawrence, sat near the window at our table, with the sun appropriately shining at his back. He looked ordinary, slight build, reddish slightly curly beard, and glasses; yet his smile and eyes exuded an inner confidence and welcoming energy, like a grown-up Harry Potter.

As our small group introduced ourselves, my colleague Allen Johnson said, “I’m from West Virginia.”

Instantly animated, Will responded, “I’ve been to West Virginia. I went there as part of Mountain Justice.”

“Did you know Larry Gibson?” Allen asked.

“He changed my life,” Will beamed. “He’s why I’m here. We went to visit his mountain, and he said, ‘I’m not giving you a tour because I like you, even though I do. If I show you my mountain and you don’t do something, then I’ve wasted my time. You have to go back and figure out what you can do.’”

“Larry Gibson changed my life. That’s why I’m here.”
---Will Lawrence, Sunrise Movement

“So my friends and I went back to Swathmore and started the [fossil fuel] divestment movement. Once that got going and Bill McKibben at 350.org picked up on it, we said, what else can we do? We spent nine months in a visioning process and then drafted a planned set of principles to move the nation forward. We spoke to Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and she gave it the name the Green New Deal. But it all started with Larry Gibson.”

What was the chance of this? That a young man from Michigan began his work with a walk atop Kayford Mountain with Larry.

But then it kept happening, over and over. Out of the blue, I’d run into people of all ages working in organizations and movements to improve dire situations, and their stories would tie back to Larry.

Larry, the boy and man treated as if he were too backward and slow to move himself or anyone else forward. He became the David who took on the Goliath Coal in battles that endangered his life on a constant basis. He became the bold man who spoke truth to power and was hauled into jail over and over for standing his ground.

Sunrise Surprise

This was so unexpected. I was in Washington DC attending a coffee meeting to hear about the Sunrise Movement. This is a dynamic group run by millennials dedicated “to stop climate change and create millions of good jobs in the process.” Their website proclaims: “We are not looking to the right or left. We look forward. Together, we will change creation. When I love you, my God, I want to embrace it all, for I love you with all my senses in the creations of your love. In all the things that encounter me, you are waiting for me.

For a long time I looked for you within myself and crept into the shell of my soul, shielding myself with an armor of inapproachability. But you were outside—outside myself—and enticed my out of the narrowness of my heart and into the broad place of love for life. So I came out of myself and found my soul in my senses, and my own self in others.

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The prophet's word is a scream in the night. While the world is at ease and asleep, the prophet feels the blast from heaven.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

We are all welcome
To enter God's calm, loving
Presence every where

Crucifixion of
Nature continues today
By each one of us

We try our sincere
Offer at everything
Then leave all to God

Just sit and be still
In God's holy presence for
Purest nourishment

Vic Hummert, in Fourth-Quarter Haiku

“Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!”  [Psalm 46:10 ESV]

For The Beauty Of The Earth
(Music by C. Kocher; Text by F. Pierpoint)

For the beauty of the earth, For the glory of the skies,
For the love which from our birth,Over and around us lies;
Lord of all, to Thee we raise, This our hymn of grateful praise.

Upcoming for The Mountain Vision
CFTM is planning its fourteenth edition for spring 2020 as our schedule permits. Please let us know if your friends would like a sample copy.

We invite you to send your own personal stories of your conversions to “Kingdom of God” life with emphasis on environmental justice.

Mountain Vision is an outreach ministry of Christians For The Mountains. Copies are sent free of charge to advocates for God’s “will to be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt. 6:10).

O world, I cannot hold thee close enough!
Thy winds, thy wide grey skies!
Thy mists, that roll and rise!
Thy woods, this autumn day; that ache and sag
And all but cry with color! That gaunt crag
To crush! To lift the lean of that black bluff!
World, World, I cannot get thee close enough!
Long have I known a glory in it all,
But never knew I this;
Here such a passion is
As stretcheth me apart, – Lord, I do fear
Thou'ist made the world too beautiful this year;
My soul is all but out of me, – let fall
No burning leaf; prithee, let no bird call.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

My mother gave me birth, but this land gave me life.
Larry Gibson

You don't listen to the science because you are only interested in solutions that will enable you to carry on like before...And those answers don't exist anymore. Because you did not act in time.”

Greta Thunberg, 16-year-old climate activist

Holy, Holy, Holy!
(Music by J. Dykes,
Text by R. Heber)

Fourth Stanza
Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
All Thy works shall praise Thy name in earth and sky and sea;
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty!
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

For The Beauty Of The Earth
(Music by J. Dykes,
Text by R. Heber)

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