



## Hard Realities and the Way of Faith February 23, 2021

Dear Member of the JustFaith Network,

We are grateful that you are a part of our JustFaith community. Whether you are a graduate of one of our programs or you are just getting to know us, we hope this offering will help sustain you spiritually and equip you to work for justice.

In 2021, our bi-monthly resources will typically appear in your inbox on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month, and you can access an archive of past resources by logging into your JustFaith account. You can use these resources for personal reflection, or you can invite your friends, family, Sunday School class, or current or past JFM small group to join you in-person or via videoconferencing. If you are new to video conferencing, Zoom tutorials are available on our YouTube page. [Click here to access.](#)

This week's resource discusses a short but challenging *New York Times* article, entitled "I've Said Goodbye to 'Normal.' You Should, Too," which you can find [here](#). If you have trouble accessing the webpage, click [here](#) for a PDF version. Please forward to your group in advance so that everyone can read it prior to gathering and be ready to discuss.

While we hope that these twice-monthly resources will inspire and sustain your community while distancing, now is also the perfect time to start one of our [regular programs](#). Today's resource speaks to care for creation, which is highlighted in our new eco-justice program, "Sacred Land: Food & Farming" (the first of three eco-justice programs being created by JustFaith Ministries; second one to be released soon). The call to care for creation is more important than ever! We offer tips and tools for facilitating all our current programs virtually.

Last but not least, all of our work is a collaboration with people like you. When you donate, your gift helps us sustain and equip individuals committed to making the world better. [Click here to help out.](#) Also, please feel free to forward this resource to friends and family!

With gratitude,

The JustFaith Ministries Staff



## Welcome and Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

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When everyone has dialed in, begin your time together with these or similar words:

Welcome, friends! It's so good to be with all of you, despite that we can't be together in person. Today we'll begin with a reflection and spend a few minutes checking in with each other. Then we'll have some conversation around a short article before closing in prayer. Most importantly, though, this will be a time to care for one another and to be the community we're called to be.

Let's take a few seconds of silence to pause, to listen to our breathing, and to be present in this space.

*Pause for 30 seconds before beginning the opening prayer.*

When despair for the world grows in me  
and I wake in the night at the least sound  
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,  
I go and lie down where the wood drake  
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.  
I come into the peace of wild things  
who do not tax their lives with forethought  
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.  
And I feel above me the day-blind stars  
waiting with their light. For a time  
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

Wendell Berry, from *Earth Prayers*, p. 102

## Check-In Time (10 minutes or so)

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Ask these open-ended questions. If you are by yourself, journal about them.

*Note: If you're with a group, these questions have the potential to take up a lot of time. Some weeks may require more check-in time than others, depending on the needs of the group. To provide a shorter yet meaningful check-in time, choose ONE of the questions below, and ask participants to share a ONE sentence response.*

- **Before we begin this week's reflection, let's take a few minutes to check in. How is everyone feeling?** (It will be a bit more difficult via phone to know if someone is

being talked over or is trying to get a word in.... Be sure everyone has a chance to speak).

- **What is something you're struggling with this week?**
- **Where have you seen a sign of hope this week?**

*Other optional questions include: What is something you've learned about yourself during this time of social distancing? Where have you experienced a "thin place" in the last week? Where have you seen beauty this week? What is one new behavior you'd like to continue doing when the virus has passed us by?*

## Reflection (15 minutes or so)

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Refer people to the *New York Times* article, "I've Said Goodbye to 'Normal.' You Should, Too," found [here](#). If those you are meeting with did not read the article in advance, you could allow five minutes for everyone to read it before continuing.

To start the conversation, first acknowledge that the author's observations are difficult to digest; these are hard words to read.

Then invite responses to one or more of the questions below:

1. The author's point, punctuated by the title of the article, is that climate change will cause increasing upheaval on a massive scale, period; any belief that suggests otherwise is unhelpful. Assuming he's right, where does our faith then steer us?
2. Some faithful people have insisted that the very suggestion of a climate crisis is a repudiation of Christianity and the belief that God loves us: how dare we suggest that God would allow the world to be destroyed! What do you think? How do you integrate your faith in a God of love with a sobering possible future?
3. The author writes near the end of the article, "we need to face the fact that the world we live in is changing into something else, and that coping with the consequences of global warming demands immediate, widespread, radical action." What steps can you imagine taking soon?
4. The author observes, "The first thing we need to do is let go of the idea that life will ever be normal again – elsewhere, I've called this "learning how to die." This sounds not unlike being baptized "in the death of Christ." How do we go forward having let go of the "old normal"?
5. Have someone read aloud the final sentence. Invite the group to dream and share.



## Announcements (5-10 minutes)

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- Remind participants that today's conversation offered only a brief insight into a huge topic. If they would like to take a deeper dive into this subject matter, they should consider the eight-week program, *Sacred Land: Food & Farming*.
- Let participants know that the materials for this gathering were free, put together by the JustFaith Ministries staff in order to equip more people for the work of peace and justice. In order to support the creation of more resources and programs, participants are encouraged to donate to JustFaith Ministries through [justfaith.org](http://justfaith.org).
- JustFaith Ministries is currently hosting a monthly webinar series called "Acting for Justice While Sheltering in Place," in which an expert on a justice-related topic will offer tips for taking action during COVID-19. On Thursday, March 18, at 7:00 p.m. Eastern Time, Jill Rauh, Director of Education and Outreach for the Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development of the USCCB, joins us to give an overview of the call to justice and universal love in Pope Francis' new encyclical, *Fratelli tutti*.
- Are there any opportunities for action or advocacy happening in your community this week? Invite participants to share ways to support the work of local groups working for justice or care for the environment.

## Closing Prayer (10 minutes-ish)

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Then say: Before we join in the closing prayer, let us pause to acknowledge the presence of the Holy Spirit, who is as close as our very breath.

*Pause for 30 seconds*

Let us pray.

O Gracious God, hear my cry, my plea, my words of worry.

My soul is troubled and my spirit aches.

The heavens are damaged; the waters are angry.

The air is foul. All of creation groans in pain.

It rains too little, and then too much.

It is too hot, and then too cold, and then even hotter.

The fires burn, the tornadoes multiply, the hurricanes grow larger.

The trees die. The frogs die. The coral dies. The elephants die.



What have we done, O Lord? What havoc have we unleashed?  
What can we do? What can our children do? Will they rise up against us?

Speak, O Lord. Speak even the hardest words, and we will heed.  
Speak judgement that we surely deserve,  
and we will bear the price of our ignorance.

Do not abandon us in silence. Give us a way, a sign, a hope.  
We long only for the simplest of life's givings:  
daily bread; each other; a world at peace with itself and us.

Speak, O Lord. We long to hear your voice. We long to be your people. We long to  
fulfill your justice. We live only by your words.

Speak, O Lord, speak.

Amen.

“A Psalm for the Century Ahead” by Jack Jezreel

Then, in these words, invite any participants who have a prayer, a concern, or a request to  
briefly share it:

**We are disciples on a journey.**

**We are the body of Christ, broken for the world.**

**We hold one another as we carry the concerns of our neighbors.**

**If you feel moved, please share your prayer aloud.**

Leader: We pray also for the members of the JustFaith community across the country.  
Unite us through the power of your Holy Spirit, that together we might  
participate with you in the building of your Kingdom, in order to create a more  
just and peaceful world. Amen.