

Say What? | G-5: Climate Emergency-Fossil Fuel Reduction | Part 2

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Climate emergency, renewable energy, fossil fuel reduction, renewable infrastructure, climate impact fund, non-proliferation treaty, responsible choices, youth climate movements, moral crisis, spiritual challenge.

SPEAKERS

Kassie Ripsam, Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam, Paul Bethel, Laurie Gordon, Blake Smith

Blake Smith 00:29

Hey Project Zion Podcast listeners. Blake Smith again. In this episode of Say What?, we pick up where we left off in part one of the conversation between Kassie and Mary Anne and their guests, Paul Bethel and Laurie Gordon regarding resolution G-5 Climate Emergency: Fossil Fuel Reduction. If you missed part one, be sure to go back and listen. Now let's continue with the conversation.

Kassie Ripsam 00:56

So, I have to ask, What do you mean when you say we should transition to renewable energy in a fair and inclusive manner? What? What does it mean? What does that phrasing mean?

Paul Bethel 01:11

Well, there's, there's two aspects of that. And you know, when we, when we talk to people about this, the first thing that people come up is, oh, well, you can't do this, because what about taxi drivers? They're going to be out of work. It's like we're not saying to stop gas entirely. We're not saying to turn it off right now. We're saying number one, to stop adding more. That's the first step. And then we have to transition. So, the transition is, we need to take the people that are dependent on fossil fuel and find ways to incorporate them into that transition. So, you know, taxi drivers, I don't know the last several times I've been on an Uber, they've been Toyota Priuses. So, you know, some of those people are already transitioning themselves. But you know, in areas where they're you know, coal is driving the economy, or oil is driving the economy, that's where we have to put the money to retrain, to put in new, new businesses and the new renewable energy infrastructure. Because if you talk to any coal miner, especially when dying of black lung, they don't want their kids to be coal miners. They want them to do something different. They would much rather they were working on a wind farm than following their father into the coal mines. And some of these places that are just totally disgusting because of the oil production, you know, down cancer alley, down in Louisiana, those people don't want their kids to be sucking in all those toxins for the rest of their lives and then generations. They would much rather have renewable energy. That's where we need to put the put the infrastructure. And then the other side of it is fossil fuel is a monopoly. There's just a handful of people in the world that benefit from the profits of fossil fuel. So, when we you know when a country is building out their infrastructure for energy, if they

do it based on oil, they're, they're stuck under the power of that monopoly. If we instead invest that energy in renewable energy, the sun, the wind, they have that in spades, and it's free. That are some people right now, the people that are saying, 'drill, baby, drill.' Those are the people have vested financial interest in that monopoly, even people within our church, a lot of times they say, 'Oh no, we can't afford to do that.' Maybe they have a vested interest, or, if not, they're supporting people that have a vested interest in keeping that monopoly intact. So that's, those are the two areas. We have to take care of the people whose lives are dependent now, but we also have to increase the renewable energy that everybody can benefit in because it's free.

Kassie Ripsam 04:08

I think you got something important, like the solar panels and the electric cars and stuff like that. They are great resources, and they're and we're all glad they're there, but they're not cheap, and we're, what we're trying to figure out while we're here is to, people who have limited financial resources, how are they going to help when they can't necessarily afford some of the resources given out.

Paul Bethel 04:48

Well, you know, I don't know about you, but when I was your age, and then probably the next 10 or 15 years, every vehicle I had I bought used and I didn't buy an. New car until, well, it's kind of embarrassing, but, you know, the electric vehicles that are out being bought now, those are going to become used vehicles. In fact, the used vehicle market for EVs is booming right now, so you know that's all going to trickle on down. You know, the price of solar panels has come down like, like 90% or something over the last 10 to 15 years. Same thing with batteries. All the technology is increasing, and that trend is going to continue. The, you know, power from renewables is the cheapest power now. There's no, there's no debate, really, on that. So, in the long run, granted, there are upfront costs, and I think we, we should push to have our government help, help us with that transition. You know, we had several, several programs. I took advantage of one. I bought a used electric vehicle because there was a \$4,000 credit, tax credit on that. So, you know anything, it had to be over three years old. Had to be under \$25,000 but then you got \$4,000 back. That's a huge chunk, and that's a huge incentive. So, you know, when it's time for you to buy your cars, there may be an electric vehicle, but we have to be investing in the infrastructure so you have some place to plug them in. Don't put in more gas stations. Put in more electric charging stations.

Laurie Gordon 06:49

Yeah, and as Paul was saying, you know, we it's, this is a two-part question. There's this question of, we're not talking about it's all going to be gone overnight. It's going to be a transition. So how do you prioritize? Oh, where the energy that is being produced goes in the meantime. What is the just use? What is a just transition that leaves no one behind? Talk about an onion with a lot of layers to it, because there is the issue of, how do we do that here in North America, but then how do we also allow countries that are still developing bring up their standards of living? How do we prioritize the the way in which we use energy? So, the case of the matter is, is that renewables are growing much faster now than fossil fuel, but what it's doing is not taking carbon out of the atmosphere because it's just meeting increased demand for energy. So, do you prioritize food production, or do you prioritize cryptocurrency? You know the huge amount of energy that's going into some of these uses of energy that are just going up because there's more renewable energy to be used. There are people talking about putting coal fire

plants back online in order to run some of these huge, gigantic data centers. How do we prioritize getting energy and allowing those in countries who have even less than nothing? How do we allow? How do we prioritize? And so, this is a global issue. It's not just an issue within a single country. It's an international issue that requires global policies as well. And the hardest part of it is the just part of it, you could mandate a transition and just say, this is what we're going to do. We're going to take your land, we're going to do this, we're going to do this, we're going to do this, but we just don't seem to want to give up what's comfortable and convenient to make space for the other to be able to thrive. And so really, what does it mean to leave no one behind when the infrastructure in our country is predicated on putting the dirtiest of renewables in areas that are economically and racially impoverished, economically impoverished, And that just takes advantage of those who have been traditionally oppressed in our in our country,

Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 09:48

Yeah, yeah. So what are some of those steps that you hope Church takes to help support the countries that you were talking about that are most vulnerable to the climate emergency? Right?

Laurie Gordon 10:02

The church has just established a Climate Impact Fund. So in addition to all of the work that we're trying to do to keep the church going, there is now a way to do your contributions and direct them towards climate impact. It's probably that needs to get up and running and off the ground. But even more than that, I want to come back to just this blessings of community, part of enduring principles. I need to know the stories of people around the world. I need, again, to not be blind and dead to what's happening to them. I need to open my heart and my eyes and my in my entire spirit to receive the truth and the wisdom that the rest of the church has to bring, because we are just blinded by our wealth and by our privilege, in a way that it's a really amazing when we hear the stories, when we receive the truth from those who are our brothers and sisters, it changes the heart. The first thing we have to do is change hearts. We have to change our hearts to say, I'm willing for less comfort and a little bit of inconvenience, so that this amazing person who told me this story from living in Africa at World Conference last time has more resources for his Community. This is a moral crisis and a spiritual challenge. That's, again, the place where faith community comes into. It is that this is the place where we have to receive each other somehow and not look away. Because I can't do anything about it. I can do anything about I can do something about it. We can do something about it. We're all interconnected. So does it matter if I put solar panels on, on my on the church, and leave more energy for for those who need it? Yeah, it's gonna matter. Every little bit matters. We just have to see each other.

Kassie Ripsam 12:27

In the resolution you mentioned wanting the church to support a Non-Proliferation Treaty. What is that? Exactly?

Paul Bethel 12:40

Well, you know, non-proliferation means to stop the growth. And when I was your age, the big move was nuclear weapons and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. Back in my day, you know, you don't remember, you have active shooter drills. We used to have nuclear attack drills. And we would, you know, climb under our desk as if that was going to do any good in a nuclear attack. But, you know, we

there was a movement to stop, for all countries to sign on to an agreement to stop increasing nuclear weapons, and that was successful. And you guys probably don't remember, there was a time when our ozone was deteriorating because of the Freon we were using in our cars, our cars air conditioners. So the countries the world got together and signed a treaty agreeing to phase out the use of this particular type of Freon that was destroying our ozone, which would eventually kill us. So go ahead.

Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 13:50

It also had to do with, I can't remember what it was called exactly, but it was used in pressurized cans, like sprayers and things like that. Yeah, aerosol. That's what it's called.

Paul Bethel 14:04

Yeah. So, so there's, there's been times when the countries of the world got together and said, Yes, this is bad. Let's all agree. We're going to do something about it. We're going to phase it out, or we're going to eliminate it, we're going to stop it. And that's what the fossil fuel non-proliferation movement. I think it was started by some of the countries in the South Pacific that were slowly sinking, you know, the water. They're making some of their islands uninhabitable, and so they have an initiative. And you know, there's only maybe, out of the, what, roughly 200 countries of the world, there's like, maybe 30 or 40 that have signed up to support it. But there's a lot of organizations. There's probably 30 or 40 faith groups that have signed on, saying, We support this as an organization, you know, the probably the most common, is that, you know the Catholic Laudato Si movement from the Pope's, I don't know when it was 10 years ago I guess. Latin American Catholic bishops have signed on. The Quakers have signed on. I would like to see our church, guys. I'd like to see Community of Christ sign on to that, saying that we support the stopping the increase of fossil fuels. That's what that is.

Kassie Ripsam 15:34

So, you said that the Enduring Principles call us to make responsible choices, not convenient choices. Would you please elaborate on that?

Paul Bethel 15:48

I think that actually originally came from Ron Harmon when he did one of our webinars. For me, it's, you know, when you say, oh, you know, well, we can't, we can't transition to renewables because we can't afford to. You know, the convenient thing to do is to stay the way it is with all the inherent injustices and extractive policies. But to make responsible choices is to make decisions based on the good of the commonwealth, not just me or not just my clan, or not just our country or our state, being responsible for the world that we've been assigned to be stewards of. And sometimes that's unpopular, sometimes that's more expensive, sometimes it's ridiculously inconvenient, but that would be the responsible choice, and our goal is to make it affordable. Figure out ways to make it affordable.

Kassie Ripsam 16:56

I do get where you're going, and I will admit when, although we're trying as a family to transition, although I will admit we're not perfect in our attempts. We are. We are trying, and that's at least a good place to start. And we're it's been a slow but climbing process.

Laurie Gordon 17:19

It is an important thing to recognize that that this is a process, and that when we talk about inconvenient and come uncomfortable choices, we need to talk to a broader swath of those who are unwilling to be uncomfortable or to be inconvenienced. Dean White, who's a member of our team, likes to say that if we make uncomfortable choices now, will that is the road to avoiding catastrophic consequences and choices that would need to be made in the future that, he said, at one point, there are two kinds of disruption. There's the kind of climate disruption that is in the future if we don't make responsible choices now and work towards a just transition. And there's the kind of disruption that can be spread over time, that can be taken on more fairly across a lot of different communities. And if we can share fairly the things that are disruptive, like maybe choosing a simpler lifestyle, you know, buying buying fewer things I don't really need. If we can share fairly this disruption, and we're all more disrupted, in the end, there is going to be a pulling back from the catastrophic kind of disruption that happens if we're unwilling to be uncomfortable and inconvenienced until we get right to the to the end of the crisis, and then it's too late. So, I like reading spreading, spreading the willingness to give up some things I really don't need in their welfare is my welfare. We're all interconnected. So what, what do I have too much of? What, can I just simply ask the question, what is enough and then not need more? That's what you're, you get to ask that question, what is enough so that there is more left for those who don't have enough, or for those, all of us who are going to be without anything if we hit 3.2 or four degrees centigrade of global warming, which is some predictions are, we're on track by, you know, by the next century, to be closer to three. I do think we're drawing it down. I don't think that, I'm hoping that that's not what's going to happen, but...

Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 19:59

Kind of like having to have the small discomfort of having a vaccine so you don't get the flu or something like that.

Laurie Gordon 20:09

Amen, yeah, yeah.

Kassie Ripsam 20:12

So, as a young person, I'm curious what is something that I could personally do in my life to help the environment?

Laurie Gordon 20:24

Honestly, I would like to ask that question back from you, is, what do you need from us? But I will say this, I think that young people, I what I would like to offer you is to say you are not alone. You cannot do this alone. You have to do this in community. We would, no single person of us can do it alone. But what we do know is that the voice of young people penetrates through climate denial far faster than our voices do. So, they've actually done studies and where there is climate denial or climate dismissal. Grandchildren talking to grandparents are one of the the surest ways to penetrate through that

unwillingness to look at climate change so believing in the voice that you have. I was reading an interview with two young women who organized the climate strike in 2019 both of them said that in a world without, you know, without the climate catastrophe, they would be free to do different things with their lives than what they feel called to do now. And what they also are recognizing is that anything that you are interested in as a young person, any major you want might want to do in college, any place that you might want to go, can find intersection with sustainable living conditions. We all have to bring our own gift, and so that's the thing I want to just say, is bring the gifts that you have of your wisdom and your joy and your passion and your caring for this, and let that, you can do so much by just letting your voice be heard and be shared exactly what the two of you are doing by hosting this podcast.

Kassie Ripsam 22:31

And I think you just said something extremely important, although it wasn't the kind of answer I was expecting to get, because I I, I've asked people before and what I can do, and they, and a lot of the answers I've just been getting are reusing things and recycling and stuff like that. And I was wondering if there's any kind of different answer, and you just gave it. And honestly, those two women you mentioned, I don't know who they are, but I do relate to their sentiment, because it, it is so important to me. I can't speak for her as well, but I think it is important to her as well, that we speak up and do things for whatever is going on in the world. And you said that whatever you want to major in college in can be used. I am actually trying to find ways to major in college and things that will be used for the for the world. It is, it's was a lot easier than I thought.

Laurie Gordon 23:58

It is a lot easier, and I'd be really interested in hearing those stories and having those stories shared. I read this article a couple years ago that interviewed Gen Z members of Gen Z folks who were choosing their college careers, and one of them said, I cannot imagine a career that isn't connected to even just being a small part of the of a just solution anymore. And another one who said, once you learn how badly damaged the ecosystems are, you can't unsee it, and there's no point in pursuing a career or life for that matter, in any other area, that said there are universities now who are really trying to go into this intersectional space and say, we need artists. An artist can can move the needle about how they deploy their art to speak the truth of their heart around how they feel about their future and about the about climate, so that people can see what needs to be said. For the person who's got an engineering bent, there's so much in to create the future we want, whether if you're if it's interested in civil engineering, there's so much infrastructure development that needs to be done, that needs to be done from a sustainable perspective. And young people, yeah, sorry, yeah. I want to hear from you, but this [modern] you, what you have to offer, is needed.

Kassie Ripsam 25:29

Modern art is used so often for these kinds of things, and modern art is beautiful. It's political, but it's beautiful, because it it gives, whoever the artist is, a way to speak out toward the masses and to throw right in the faces the truth of what's happening to whomever will listen.

Laurie Gordon 26:02

Yeah, yeah. One of these two young women was a poet, is a poet, and she wrote this incredible poem about following love to the end, end of the earth, even if we even if things go south, that that she was willing to give her life, you know, for love. Her name is Aisha Sadika. I can, if you're interested, I could probably find the poem, but, and the other one, Shia Bastida, said she wanted to be a veterinarian, but she changed her major because she felt like there was nothing, the things that she wanted to do the climate crisis had to be addressed first, but, but both of them bring all of what their passion and giftedness and in terms of organizing young people so that they know that they're not alone, and so that they're doing something that doesn't exacerbate the climate grief that so many young people are feeling. And just, I want to acknowledge that, and then really, we're kind of interested in just knowing what you would like from us, as the old ...

Paul Bethel 27:10

I'd like to make one comment on that, and number one, do what you're doing now, keep doing that, but I would get involved in, there's a lot of Youth Climate movements. And the Sunrise Movement is youth led. There's the, I think it's youth, youth climate, the one that Greta started, Greta Thunberg, but there's, there's and there's probably some local groups, but get involved with those, because those are some, some avenues where you can learn more about different issues. And then I would counsel you to bring that back to your church and become an annoyance to your mission center.

Kassie Ripsam 27:51

We don't have a whole lot of questions left, but we have a few important ones. One is What is the most important things you would want our listeners to hear about this resolution.

Paul Bethel 28:04

A lot of people will point out that there's a whole laundry list of issues that need to be addressed, food, water, but I think that reducing fossil fuels is the biggest elephant in the room, and, you know, and we need to call it out. And we, no matter what else we do, if we don't stop burning things for energy, nothing else is going to matter. It is the most important thing that we have to do first, right now, and I'd like to get that concept across. And there's still a lot of other things we need to do, but that's the first thing we've gotta do. What's the immediate, immediate thing that's going to affect us the most.

Laurie Gordon 28:57

And the thing I would really like, like us to understand that this is part of our prophetic calling. You know, we talked about the enduring principles. The way if we want social change, climate change to happen, if we want a just transition, it comes down to shared values and a shared world view. And the, and the way we change the that worldview is by the stories we tell. I just read this in this excellent new book called *What if We Get it Right?* by Ayanna Elizabeth Johnson that envisions the future we might want to be creating. We have to be able to tell these stories that recognize that this is all interconnected and the and then, as Paul said, I would just really kind of come back to that everything else, every other issue and thing that we're struggling with requires us to have a planet that's healthy enough to keep on supporting life. And to, and it needs a humanity whose hearts have discovered what's really true about who we are in the way that Jesus taught, which begins and ends with recognizing that what we do unto one of the least of these our brothers and sisters we are doing to Christ, to the whole. I want us to understand that this is not a peripheral issue. This is the quintessential existential threat that if we can

address it, I just have this feeling because it's all combined, we can create this vision of a peaceable kingdom. It's going to require all of us to give up all of our prejudices and our resistance that just goes up when I think, Oh, I'm not going to have enough gasoline to run my lawn, or if, if and as we manage to meet this challenge, we will be meeting all of these other challenges that matter so much that we're so passionate about. Because underneath it all, this is about the way God's creation and God's presence in the world that we're aligning ourself with.

Kassie Ripsam 31:44

So, is there anything we haven't asked about the resolution you'd like to add?

Paul Bethel 31:51

I'll add one thing, which is the financial aspect. One of the, you know, we always talk about our carbon footprint, how much, and we think in terms of how much I drive or or that our number one, our largest carbon footprint are, is our money and where and how we use it. So, you know, there's, there are four banks in the United States that are the biggest fossil fuel investment banks. They're giving out the loans to increase fossil fuel exploration and production. Bank of America. Where's Fargo, Citibank and chase so if people have those banks, I would tell them, call your bank and say, hey, you've gotta stop supporting fossil fuels that are killing us. And if enough people do that, maybe they'll stop or move our money to a bank that doesn't do that, and it's a it's a major pain.

Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 33:11

It would avoid all the really scary phone calls.

Paul Bethel 33:16

So you know, ask your parents, 'what's in your wallet?'

Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 33:22

even just like not buying it, if you're still buying the giant packs of water bottles for emergencies, you know, stop, don't, don't buy the one that's, you know, taking the water from these places and redirecting rivers and, you know, things like that.

Kassie Ripsam 33:42

Laurie, is there anything you want to say?

Laurie Gordon 33:44

And I will just to add that, even as we focus on divestment, you know, from things that promote fossil fuels, it's also a matter of what we do buy, you know, where we do invest, where we choose to spend our resources and our time. And then I think I just really want to to reiterate that this is a challenge for us as a faith community with this, with this quote from a Mary Evelyn Tucker, who is part head of the Yale forum on ecology and religion, she says, "it may be the case that, as with the abolitionist movement in the 19th century, in the civil rights movement in the 20th century, we will not respond at the scale and speed required until we see climate disruption as a moral issue and a spiritual challenge," and the, and that, yeah, this, this is going to require something of us.

Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 34:49

I like that. I really like that.

Laurie Gordon 34:54

Can we love big enough as a as a faith community? I. We have these amazing, Enduring Principles. If you want a shared value in a worldview that seeks a peaceable kingdom of of God, we have something to offer the world if we'll live our way into it. That's That's how I feel about it.

Kassie Ripsam 35:19

That's really cool. Alright. So last question, if a few have coffee with anyone alive [MA: or tea] or tea, whichever you prefer. If anyone alive or dead, who would it be, and what would you ask them or say to them?

Paul Bethel 35:40

Lori, you go first, you swim in the deep end of the spiritual pool.

Laurie Gordon 35:45

Well, I was, I was glad that you said you were going to ask this, but I would actually like to have a conversation with Mother Earth herself, so that she knows, so I could really understand what she she wants of me in response to the climate emergency and in lieu of her presence and my ability to communicate with her directly. I don't know if you're familiar with Robin Wall-Kimmerer. She's an indigenous botanist who has written this book, *Braving Sweet Grass*. I would love to sit down with her and have a cup of organic coffee that's been shade grown, but because that is the natural way that coffee should be grown, yeah, yeah. Or else the coffee tree. Maybe, maybe, just, maybe just sit down with the coffee tree and talk to the tree. That'd be fine, too.

Paul Bethel 36:40

I think I'd like to sit down with a gentleman named Bill McKibben, and he, he's been doing he, he's founded an organization called Third Act, which is a climate and democracy movement for people over 60. And he calls it third act because his first act, he was one of the players and movers and shakers from the original earth, the original Earth Day, which was 1970 something, 72 I think so. He's been a climate advocate that long. But he's a very eloquent, vocal speaker, and he's, he's very much a proponent of faith based groups being involved in this, this fight to to save what we can. So I'd like to sit down with him and see how we could get more people within our faith denomination activated.

Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 37:37

Yeah, that would be cool.

Kassie Ripsam 37:40

So I'd like to thank you all for coming, and I'd like to thank my listeners for, our listeners for listening.

Mary Anne Bennett-Ripsam 37:49

What am I, cold turkey?

Kassie Ripsam 37:51

I'd like to thank our listeners for listening. I'd like to remind you all to put on your full armor of God and just walk in peace. Thank you.