

# Reimagining and Honoring the Ancient Practice of Rogation: Modern Reflections for Rogation Days

Episcopal Networks Collaborative 2021



Evans, Edwin, 1844-1923. *Grain Fields* from **Art in the Christian Tradition**, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville TN.



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Pictures Provided by Bill Robinson of Crazy Chile Farm

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**Misty West Gay** builds networks of beef lovers, moms, vendors, processors, and gorgeous babies with two feet and four. She handles Customer Service for [Freestone Ranch](#). She's a Member of the [Sonoma County Food System Alliance](#) and a serious home cook and gardener, having come to ranching from a career in software and consulting. Her garden is as wild and untenable as this big, beautiful life.

More publications by the Episcopal Networks Collaborative can be found at [enej.org](http://enej.org)

## Introduction

In recent years there have been some efforts around the Episcopal Church to revive and re-interpret for our times the old English practice of Rogation processions. Congregations have devised liturgies that include prayers for a good harvest and for those who labor to achieve it; blessings of farms, community gardens, and school gardens; and thanksgivings and intercessions for the whole planetary community of life.

As the Lectionary Project of the Episcopal Networks Collaborative, we saw an opportunity to offer reflections on some of the topics that might arise as church folk consider how to mark the time between the celebration of the Sixth Sunday in Easter and the Feast of the Ascension, a mini season within a season.

Historically in the Northern Hemisphere these days are particularly appropriate to pray for a good harvest and bless the land we depend on for it. Today many questions arise as we invoke God's blessing. What about the health of soils depleted by mono-cropping and overuse of synthetic fertilizers? Can how we farm and ranch contribute positively to the climate crisis?

What role does growing food play in preserving biodiversity? Have we reduced land to a possession and resource, or, As Robin Wall Kimmerer posed in a recent lecture for the Arnold Arboretum, "Land: Is it a source of belongings or a source of belonging?"<sup>1</sup>

Rogation processions in England where parishes are geographic were also used for settling boundary disputes and reconciling differences among neighbors. Today we ask all kinds of questions about resolving conflicts while seeking justice. How are the rights to and relationship with land of indigenous peoples being respected? In the United States, are we recognizing and naming those peoples on whose land we stand? Is there affordable access to land for underrepresented farmers: women, Blacks and other farmers of color, young farmers? What paths for racial reconciliation do the various facets of our food system offer? Where are our relationships with one another and with God in all of this?

As we begin to emerge from the restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic, it's a good time to consider the ancient practice of neighborliness, which was strengthened by Rogation processions. That is, reinforcing the positive connections among people. How can we seek more opportunities for relationship-building and reinvigorating the sharing ethic? Are community gardens and other practices of growing food together part of the picture? What hinders fuller participation in community, for example, transportation challenges?

Just as those ancient rogation processions paid particular attention to the needs of the poor and opportunities for being charitable, we realize it's a time not to forget that there are people with low or fixed incomes in our congregations as well as in our wider communities, and to ask how we can

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<sup>1</sup> Robin Wall Kimmerer, March 1, 2021. Director's Lecture Series, The Arnold Arboretum.  
<https://arboretum.harvard.edu/events/directors-lecture-series/>

be most respectful of them. How can we help remove the barriers to healthier lives which they experience?

Here you will find our attempts to explore some of these questions. If you have found our efforts helpful, or you have suggestions for themes we might explore for other church seasons, please be in touch. Our goal is to stimulate church conversations where ecological, economic, and racial justice issues intersect.

Deacon Phina Borgeson

## Pray for the Welfare of the City: Growing Food in Community

*Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.*

*Jeremiah 29:4-5,7*

These few verses from the Prophet Jeremiah echo loud in my ears these days. As the divide between urban and rural communities, the divide between socioeconomic classes, and racial tensions are on the rise throughout our land; what are we to do? In the face of a changing climate, how can we even begin to heal? There is no one solution to these wicked problems we are facing as a nation and as communities of faith, but Jeremiah gives us a framework of hope for the future.

I first began to see growing food as a way to build community in the small rural town of Unity, Maine. As a first-year student in undergrad, I was welcomed onto the farm crew of Veggies For All (VFA). VFA was a community-based food bank farm growing roughly 2.5 to 4 acres of vegetables depending on the year. Unlike many small family farms, this farm did not have one location or plot from year to year. Plots are scattered around town from the college campus to peoples' back yards. Numerous community partners from college students, the community center, seed companies, the food bank, and people with some extra lawn space were involved in planting, cultivating, and harvesting literal tons of food each season. This farm is where I began to feel God tugging me towards agricultural ministry in the Episcopal Church.

There are now numerous farming and urban gardening ministries across the Church. [Plainsong Farm](#), [Crazy Chile Farm](#), [Mission Farm](#), and [Good News Gardens](#) are just a few of the programs. [The Christian Food Movement](#) curates a list of organizations and projects around the nation. The seed was planted years ago and in 2020 COVID-19 kicked the growth into high gear. As congregations were looking to respond faithfully and communities were seeking and hungry for both food and community, gardens began to grow. That hunger for food and community will always be with us so there is still room to grow.

Food is the great equalizer; everyone needs to eat because we are incarnate creatures. While growing food may not be the one answer to all the issues mentioned above, it can be the seed which grows into greater change. By coming together in the garden, all people who show up have a role to play and a lesson to share. Urban parishes with lawns have an incredible opportunity for mission by creating spaces for these people to come together. In many of our communities, especially in New England where I come from, it is not uncommon for people living right next door to never have any interaction with the parish community. While there are more people living in a city, urban life can often be more isolating than rural life for some. By planting urban gardens, the Church can meet people where they are, outside of the doors of our buildings. In a garden, people of all walks of life can find community and grow foods that are culturally appropriate to their families and communities. Especially when it is not safe to gather indoors, and even after we return to our

sanctuaries, community gardens offer safe places to gather and celebrate important moments in the midst of community.

Community gardens also provide an incredible opportunity to shift from a model of charity to a model of partnership. By being present with members of the community, building authentic relationships, and offering space for individuals to have the choice in the foods they grow, the Church can be present in the world in ways that can be deeply healing. By using our land resources for the Missio Dei, we can respond to God's call of reconciliation in the forms of ecological restoration, the protection of biodiversity, and enhancement of mutual flourishing with our neighbors. As we seek the welfare of the city, the garden offers an invitation to slow down and be truly connected and rooted.

-Jimmy Pickett

## Walking Your Parish

One of the ways I encouraged my congregation to get to know their context was through an adaptation of a “Prayer Walk.” I first participated in a walk creating our new Good Friday Stations of the Cross where we would identify places in our community where Jesus is being denied, betrayed, or even crucified became a regular practice in an ecumenical Good Friday Pilgrimage. As I worked to increase people’s understanding of social injustice and how the local congregation might respond we adapted to conducting an exploration through “walking the parish.”

Walking the parish is an opportunity to understand the context in which “we” as a congregation practice discipleship. This exercise invites us to experience the neighborhood/community through our senses not just through our heads or our hearts. Take time to experience what one is seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, or tasting as one walks the neighborhoods. Who and where are those crying out for justice? Do I hear them? Who are those seeking a more human way of living? Do I see them? Where are the boundaries and barriers that inhibit a wholesome community? Can I touch them?

Rogation Days by tradition are a time to walk the boundaries of one’s parish usually in some kind of formal liturgical procession. In good liturgical practice we walk the context in which we live and move and have our being. It is an opportunity to know the place in which I am rooted, to taste the various cultures, to touch the diversity and varieties of our humanity. What can we celebrate or what do we mourn?

Suzanne Farnham, one of the authors of *Listening Hearts, Discerning Call in Community*, describes discernment as involving listening. “We must listen with open hearts and open minds, especially to what we do not want to hear. If discernment is to take place, we must let go of our preconceptions and expectations. We must be willing to hear the appealing and the unappealing, the familiar and the unfamiliar. If we become selective, we may turn a deaf ear to God.” This becomes another way to discern a call to the congregation by listening to the sounds of our communities.

One simple way to see the community through different eyes is to ask someone for directions to a particular place. Listen to what markings they identify to direct you. Is it go to 7th street and turn left... or is it go to the corner where the Hardware store is and turn left? What do people use to describe their communities? What are important landmarks? Similarly asking where one could go to get help might provide interesting responses.

Can we go out into our neighborhoods without our preconceived agendas of what we expect to see? Pretend to be a disabled person, how easy is it to navigate the community? Maybe you are a person without personal transportation, how easy is it to get from place to place? Can we look for how God’s agenda is being worked out in our context? If God’s agenda is an option for the poor, where is that happening? Are the poor within your community or how faraway are they? Do you have a relationship with them, that is more than just a program for them? Are there people who are working to challenge the economic injustices in your context? Do you know them? Support them?

“If it is love that you truly desire then set out at once on the task of Seeing. This requires calling things by their name, no matter how painful the discovery and the consequences. If you achieve this kind of honest awareness of the other and yourself, you are likely to experience terror. Think of the terror that comes to a rich man when he sets out to really see the pitiful condition of the poor, to a power-hungry dictator when he really looks at the plight of the people he oppresses, to a fanatic, a bigot, when he really sees the falsehood of his convictions when they do not fit the facts... That is why the most painful act the human being can perform, the act that he dreads the most is the act of seeing. It is in that act of seeing that love is born, or rather more accurately, that act of seeing is Love.” -Anthony de Mello, *The Way to Love*

Rogation Days were a time to get out of the physical building and walk and experience the boundaries of the parish. A prayer walk invites us to pay attention to what we are seeing, hearing, etc. and converse with God about it. It is an opportunity to discern what is happening in our context and consider the role of people of faith to address the community as it is. Have we made false assumptions about our context, can we hear or see the pain which might open us up to the Way of Love? Good luck and have fun. Let us know how it went. Geoff Curtiss, ENEJ network, [geoffcurtiss@gmail.com](mailto:geoffcurtiss@gmail.com).

-Rev. Geoff Curtiss

## God's Economy: Rediscovering Biblical Communal Priorities

“The God who spoke to Moses is tied to a particular history that is often overlooked... this history is that of ‘the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’, whose history is one of perseverance in the face of hardship and of resistance to the powers that be.”- Joerg Rieger *No Rising Tide* pg. 82

Is God interested in the Economy? During my college career as an economics and religion major it certainly seemed like both disciplines preferred to keep God out of the market and economics out of the theologizing. But let's assume God does take some interest in economic ongoings of the world. The step to do so is logical because God provides rules and guidelines for socioeconomic engagement throughout the biblical narrative.<sup>2</sup> If God weren't concerned with community and economy then God would not have acted in Exodus to release people from slavery. God actively participates in the economy through regulatory acts. God's liberative actions indicate God's interest in maintaining access to life for all the world/household.

God established the household through liberating Israel from slavery, which is a clear statement arguing for just resource distribution allowing for life to exist. The Torah establishes rules for distributing resources in community (i.e., people are not property, debt should be forgiven, Sabbath rest). Through Creation God establishes that the entirety of the community should have access to life and assigns humanity with distributing resources justly. Through Incarnation God becomes embodied in a poor man named Jesus. Through Jesus, God attempts to sustain a Household in which all of God's creatures have access to life. Through Resurrection God embraces the solidarity of being present with slaves and servants. The question remains how do we live into God's economy? That is, how are we to act to best exemplify the values and priorities of God's household arrangements?

I certainly don't have all the answers for addressing the massive injustices across the United States. The compiled impact of: our rampant resource depletion damaging our collective household we call Earth, wealth and resource hoarding, and insidious and overt systemic and systematic racism and classism throughout society is overwhelming when collectively considered. These realities are discordant with the vision of God's Economy laid out in the biblical narrative. What we need is to shift our worldview from that of scarcity to one of enough. Enough hoarding in fear that there will not be sufficient resources; particularly while the entirety of God's Household produces plenty. Enough economic growth for the sake of increasing GDP (Gross Domestic Product). Enough rugged individualism. Enough waste. Oxyronically, enough silence concerning the prison-industrial complex and its devastating impact on all our communities but particularly African American, Latin-X and Appalachian. Enough waiting.

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that the root *eco-* as in *economy* and *ecology* is derived from the Greek word *Oikos* meaning household. When talking about *economy and ecology* it can be helpful to keep the centrality of the household to these words to reframe and reshape our collective understanding.

One small, realistic step we can take collectively is to broaden our understanding of and participation in Sabbath. Meaningfully participating in sabbath must be more than attending a worship service. God rested in the Creation of the World; how foolhardy are we to neglect our communal need for rest. In God's economy Sabbath would require resource redistribution. The wealth of the top 1% is so mind-numbingly large that it often (in)directly prevents low-income, working class individuals from believing rest is truly an option. The modern economy with its express convenience makes practicing Sabbath seem irrelevant and anachronistic. In many cases our consumption behaviors only exacerbate ongoing socio(eco)nomiic injustice.

So, I invite you to consider taking breaks from your regular consumption habits. Some folks might refrain from buying new clothes for a year. Others might introduce a day of weekly fast. Others yet might commit to redirecting their consumption to supporting their local economy and financial institutions (i.e., farms, bookstores, minority owned businesses). Some might commit to using mass transit or bicycling for transportation needs. The list could go on; these practices might help us reconnect with our communal sense of belonging with God, neighbor, and environment. Portions of God's economy are being neglected. I invite you to open your ears and your heart to how God might be calling you to more actively participate in God's economy of justice.

-Steven Simpkins

## The Accessibility Gap

Those of us who are privileged and have an adequate income seem much more conscious of our food choices these days. What kind of diet is best for our health? How do our grocery shopping and restaurant patronage affect our local economy? How does what we eat relate to climate change and other environmental concerns?

When we become aware of a new issue or solution, we wonder why everyone doesn't embrace it. Eat more plants, especially kale. Buy takeaway from the little local place, not that national pizza chain. Cook less beef, but grass fed when you do, and pasture raised eggs. If we all did these things, we'd have less obesity, a healthier local economy, and cut down on cattle belches and avian incubated diseases.

But we can't all make these choices.

There's a deep accessibility gap between what middle class food movement participants practice, and what low-income Americans can do.

There have been many attempts to define what is involved in the human right to food. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food usually includes several components, emphasizing not just adequate calories, that is quantity, but the quality and cultural appropriateness of food. What are the primary reasons for lack of access to such food? People who study the food system usually point to two.

Geography is one. Food deserts are areas where retail outlets for wholesome food are severely limited. We often think of urban areas, where supermarkets with their greater variety of fresh produce moved to the suburbs decades ago. People who are transportation indigent or time poor then find access difficult. Segregation in cities, not simply demographic make-up, affects the number of healthful food outlets and the distances required to travel to them. There are also food deserts in rural America, on reservations and in other rural communities with low-income people and a lack of access to land suitable for growing one's own.

More recently, advocates of good nutrition have spoken of food swamps, urban areas saturated with fast food outlets and corner stores selling primarily salty, greasy, and sugary snacks.

Money, of course, is the other reason. Those pastured eggs and meat cost three times as much as the conventional sorts from confined animal feeding operations. If one is looking to fill hungry bellies on a budget, pasta, not fresh fruit, looks like a better buy. However you describe the more desirable choices in the produce section - *organic, local, seasonal* - they always cost more than those items that have made a distant journey from a conventional farm or orchard.

Programs like [Market Match](#), doubling the value of electronic benefit transfer dollars at a farmers' market, help. But market hours and locations don't always work for those working one or more hourly wage jobs just to put some food, any food, on the table.

There is, of course, a reason underlying the challenges of both geography and money. A lack of access to power. The voices of those struggling with food insecurity or lacking access to good food choices are rarely heard when decisions are made about their food system. Everyone eats, but not everyone has input to the decisions about food available to them. Food choices in charitable endeavors often reflect the preferences of the privileged giver. If one is working multiple jobs or facing transportation indigence, getting to a zoning hearing about a new retail outlet is not going to happen. Language skills can create barriers, as can lack of access to broadband internet, especially when staying informed about and commenting on state and national policy.

Narrowing the accessibility gap is critical to ensuring human health, ecological health, and animal health. What can you do?

- 1) Get a picture of what is happening in your community. Walk (or drive) around. Pay attention to the food environment. Where are the concentrations of fast-food outlets? Do corner stores carry at least some fresh produce? Where are the farmers' markets, and do they take SNAP? This resource from the United States Department of Agriculture will help with some statistics at the county level. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-environment-atlas/>
- 2) Find out who is making decisions about the food system in your area. Who has a strong influence on those decisions? If it takes a lot of questions and working through many layers of people to find the answers, that in itself will tell you something. Decisions about food policy tend to be scattered among a number of departments at every level of government, making it difficult to get a good picture of what is happening and to bring a diversity of voices to bear on positive change.
- 3) Consider the use of church resources for more than handouts. Use church lands for urban farms, community gardens, seed gardens and food forests. Host a farm stand or a community supported agriculture drop that accepts SNAP at your church. Host a produce swap for home gardeners in the neighborhood and donate the surplus to a food pantry. Partner with a congregation in a low-income neighborhood to do any of these things.
- 4) Advocate for a living wage for all workers.

-Dcn. Phina Borgeson

## Seed Sovereignty: Preservation and Piracy

The term “seed sovereignty” is virtually unknown in North America. Yet the term is very well-known and, in fact, has become a political rallying cry among Hispanic farming communities and Native Americans of the Rocky Mountain West, on a par with the term “social justice.”

[The First Nations Development Institute](#) defines seed sovereignty as “the right of a farmer to save, use, exchange and sell his own seeds. Seed Sovereignty is the ownership of ancient *indigenous* seeds.” Hispanic and small-scale Anglo farmers focus on the ownership and property rights aspect of this issue. Native Americans, however, view this subject more holistically. They are not concerned about property rights. According to Tyrone Thompson, a Diné who manages Chi’shie Farms on the Navajo Nation, “Most tribes regard their heritage seeds as being the source of their life and their spirituality.” In both cases, this ownership or relationship is now under attack, as a large majority of seeds are becoming the legal property of several major multi-national agriculture, seed, or chemical corporations.” As large commercial agricultural interests begin to claim proprietorship of heritage seeds, many farmers and Native American communities are experiencing difficulties in saving and replanting local seeds that have existed as part of their diet, religion, and cultural fabric for millennia.

I first became aware of seed piracy while working among the small Hispanic villages and Native American Pueblos on either side of the Rio Grande between Española and Taos. For all of them a large portion of their income relied on sales of chile peppers grown from landrace varieties. These chiles were descendants and iterations of a single Mesoamerican variety brought to northern Nuevo Mexico by the Spanish colonial expedition of 1598, under Juan de Oñate. Over the centuries, those chiles, known by various names (Chimayó, Jemez, Okey Owingeh, Valarde, Española Improved, etc.), became the economic lifeblood of the entire region. In the 1970s, several large chemical and seed companies were exploring the process of genetic engineering. Small farmers, many of whom spoke only an archaic dialect of 15<sup>th</sup> Century European Spanish, or Tewa or Tiwi, were growing a delicious product experiencing phenomenal growth in the burgeoning Southwestern food market. Corporate America believed they represented an easy mark. One of those chemical companies, came up with an innocent looking, yet totally vicious plan to acquire legal ownership of the landrace chiles of the entire region.

Each fall, for several years, locals hired by the chemical and seed companies, would visit the various small farms in the Native American Pueblos and Hispanic farming communities and purchase large quantities of ripe chiles. Each batch then underwent genetic analysis. When genes were identified that appeared to be the key contributors to the chile’s unique flavor, those genes were patented in the name of the commercial companies. Company reps then went back to the farmers and told them that they could no longer grow their own seed unless they paid a steep royalty to the commercial companies. The farmers fought back in the courts, arguing from a colonial perspective that the theft of genes was a violation of property rights. The farmers believed the seeds to be owned by the individual growers and the numerous cases dragged on in the courts until the mid-80s. Finally, in an act of extraordinary mercy and awareness, the legislature of the State of New Mexico declared the

landrace chiles to be a heritage crop and designated them to be the “State Vegetable.” Commercial corporate activities were limited to buying chiles at the current market price. In other words, “keep your hands off our chiles, corporate America.” This event is significant for another reason...it was the first legislative act in the United States where “Seed Sovereignty” was cited as a legal principal.

This said, it should be noted that the New Mexico experience was handled from a strictly western colonial perspective. The key legal issue was ownership, and that seeds and food were no different than nuts, bolts, and televisions. They could be bought and sold like any other commodity, and they could be owned. I am told, in no uncertain terms, by my Native American friends that seeds and the food grown from them are simply not merely commodities. When asked to explain, I have more than once been told the story of “The Three Sisters,” and that seeds and traditional foods have an overriding spiritual dimension.

Just this past year, Kristin Piestewa, one of our volunteers at the Crazy Chile Farm, told me her version of the story that was told to her by her Hopi father. “The Three Sisters are a triumvirate of indigenous comestibles that have long played a central role in the diets, legends and spirituality of most tribal cultures in North America. Maize, beans, and squash, the Three Sisters, were planted together. Mother Maize, the mother and sustainer of us all, was planted first. Then, when the maize had sprouted, Sister Bean was planted at the base of the sprouting maize. As they both grew, Mother Maize supported her sister. Sister Bean embraced her with her vines and fed her with the life force that dwelt in her roots. Next, Sister Squash was planted and quickly spread her large multi-lobed leaves around the base of the expanding hill, thus protecting everyone’s tender roots from the harsh summer sun. At the end of the summer the Three Sisters died in each other’s loving arms, leaving their fruits and seeds to become the substance of the bodies and spirits of The People who planted and sustained them.” Human life is bought with sacrifice and sealed by the lives of the Three Sisters. Garden and food researcher, Carol Buchanan, summarized it this way in her book, Brother Crow, Sister Corn:

*“When people eat the vegetables that grow in their gardens, the substance of the plants joins with the substance of the person in a way that is more than physical—more than the survival of the body. It is the survival of the spirit, also. The people’s spirits also meet the spirits of Mother Maize, or the Three Sisters, who give their flesh to ensure the survival of the people.” (Buchanan 1997: 7).*

Native Americans believe in seed sovereignty too, but in a very different sort of way. According to The Rev. Canon Debbie Royals, Pascua Yaqui from the Old Pascua settlement and an Episcopal Priest, “When we talk about Seed Sovereignty we talk about the preservation of language, culture, tradition and spirituality all which are at the heart of our identity as a Sovereign Nation. We do not relate the preservation of seeds as preserving seeds that were brought to us by a colonizer or food that was not traditional to us.” For Native Americans, protecting the health and genetic integrity of their traditional seeds is a matter of community responsibility. The seeds produce the plants that sustain their bodies and their spirits, and The People care for and sustain the plants.

For over 50 years, I have heard the story of the Three Sisters from indigenous friends representing many different Tribes and Pueblos all over the Southwest. Yet for most of those years I never connected the story with my own Western beliefs and values. Those beliefs and values have been undeniably conditioned by various branches of the Anglican Communion. I was born into the Anglican Church of India at the end of WWII and was later confirmed in the Episcopal Church of the United States. The farm I manage operates under the 501(c)3 of the Episcopal Diocese of Arizona. One Sunday morning, near the end of an Episcopal Eucharist, I was distractedly thinking about a recent conversation with an Akimel O’odham friend about the Three Sisters. At that moment, the Priest said these words that are always said during the Prayer of Consecration:

*“he took the bread, said the blessing, broke the bread, and gave it to his friends and said, “Take, eat this is my body which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me. After supper, he took the cup of wine, gave thanks, and said, “Drink this all of you: This is my Blood of the new Covenant which is shed for you and for many... Sanctify them by your Holy Spirit to be for your people the Body and Blood of your Son the holy food and drink of new and unending life in him.” (The Book of Common Prayer 1979: 363).*

For the first time, I heard the words and life-giving message of Mother Maize, Sister Bean, and Sister Squash in the words and message of my own Eucharist. I became aware that the connection between food and humans is more than just nutritional sustenance, and that our food also nourishes our spirits...a concept that is probably at the core of humanity, worldwide.

-Bill Robinson

Episcopal Church of the Transfiguration, Mesa AZ

## The Automobile's Effect on Disenfranchised Communities and What to Do About It

Modern life in America needs cars to function. Automobiles have become so ubiquitous to living in western society that every family is expected to at least have one or two on hand. This expectation was a boon for many. The need for cars was in some parts a positive, people were given complete autonomy to go when and where they wanted at any time. They were able to travel at speed that horses could only dream of and excelled in travelling to areas deemed too impractical to build railways. The rich white folks could also use one to avoid other minorities, who had prominence in streetcars and buses. At this time however, the gas guzzler has proved to be a destructive force for the environment, city planning, politics, and – ironically - the autonomy of those in low-income communities. Cars and the places that are contorted to fit the vehicles are wrecking the lives of the less fortunate and underserved who must spend thousands of dollars to maintain them.

Since the 1930's-1950's, America has become a haven for the personal automobile, building roads and cities in accordance with the vehicle. Spearheaded by Robert Moses and other urban planners of his ilk, the country's citizens ownership of cars is near essential for daily life. Important landmarks: schools, hospitals, grocery stores, and workplaces are spread along the city in mile long stretches, making transportation essential. Lack of access to transportation is an issue that people of low incomes are dealing with daily. Areas such as Atlanta and California, combined with their egregious traffic, are infected with the sickness of undistributed wealth, with much of it stemming from a lack of public transportation. The train and bus industry has been underfunded and understaffed for the past few decades in America, with most of the money being pulled towards building roads for cars and other infrastructure projects. In the article, [\*Why Did America Give Up on Mass Transit? \(Don't Blame Cars.\)\*](#), Jonathan English outlined how the bus and train industries shrank themselves due to fears of obsolescence, ironically dooming themselves to that fate. "...American transit systems almost universally cut service to restore their financial viability. But this drove more people away, producing a vicious cycle until just about everybody who could drive, drove. In the fastest-growing areas, little or no transit was provided at all, because it was deemed to be not economically viable."<sup>3</sup>

The lack of a working automobile can lock people away from opportunities and employment. Cars, as discussed, are needed in all parts of life in the United States, and without one, a person is effectively gridlocked from society. People can become trapped in cycles of disrepair and struggle that begins with a broken car. Depending on the condition and situation, car repairs can cost thousands of dollars, money that many in this situation will not be able to afford. They need to have a car to go work, go shopping, or take themselves or their children to and from schools or colleges; so, they have to pay the fee. The problem is if someone is living with a yearly paycheck of under forty thousand; the money used for bills, groceries, and other extremities might have to be used instead. That money can only appear in one of two ways: it is inherited or it is gained through work, the latter is impossible for a low-income citizen without proper transportation. This self-fulfilling prophecy can hamper the efforts of those trying to better their and their families lives. Without

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<sup>3</sup><https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2018-08-31/why-is-american-mass-transit-so-bad-it-s-a-long-story>

public transportation, the needs of the lower class cannot be achieved. This can be incredibly egregious in the realm of Healthcare and hospital visits.

Access to healthcare is a human right and essential for a livable society; but this something many Americans lack. As mentioned previously, without cars, people become trapped in a concrete world with little autonomy without walking for multiple hours a day. Where I live for example, the hospitals are tens of miles away from the rural areas of the town, making the chances grim for those in poverty to obtain the care they need. This is terrible considering the global pandemic plaguing the globe, especially in the disorderly United States. The elderly poor have it the worst with many not being able to travel without someone transporting them.<sup>4</sup> People must choose between going to the doctor or risk losing valuable job hours. Combined with a lack of adequate healthcare, lack of transit worsens the ever-growing health crisis in America. These problems can never be solved without political and social change.

Without proper transportation, democracy cannot occur. Political events over the last seventy years have been terrible towards the underserved, with bills such as Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 (H.R.3355) and the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956 (Public Law 84-627) have proved detrimental to these groups. Like every Olympic Games in the last one hundred years, the disenfranchised are given no chance to speak or corroborate when bills are created and deployed and are left to clean up the inevitable mess the legislation creates while those at the top of the economic ladder gorge in excess. To that end, the low-income have no voice in politics, partly because they cannot attend the meetings for local and state government. This is terrible because a crucial part of environmental justice is that everyone, no matter who they are, has to be involved in the discussion of decisions that will directly affect their neighborhood, state, and country. Everyone must be involved to make the environment safe and healthy for everyone, without it, places like the coal ash dumping sites in Georgia can never be solved and city and state legislators will never know the true harm wrought.

City council and state meetings occur during the middle of the work weeks, times when average citizens cannot occur without taking time off work, something they cannot do lightly when funds are low, and everyone is divided. Many are dissuaded from being involved in politics due to the lack of free time accustomed with 9-5 jobs, leaving them without the ability to make their voices be heard. Another reason could be down to a sheer lack of interest. City councils cannot change things outside of their perimeter and while states can do more, they still lack crucial monetary power to build and enforce new ordinances alone.

The National circuit in all honesty are the only ones who can make things better for the disenfranchised and they have proved apathetic to their plight. They make millions of dollars for creating new highways and roads for cars and many are lobbied by car companies and satiated to go against their sponsors wishes. This has created an uphill battle for all environmental activists fighting the rampant inclusion of cars in the country. This has caused many potential activists to surrender

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.staradvertiser.com/2021/02/23/live-well/many-seniors-lack-the-resources-or-social-connections-to-help-them-get-a-covid-19-vaccine/>

in front of this monolith of a problem. The Episcopal Church's Task Force for Care of Creation and Environmental Racism was charged in 2018 with considering, among other things, the ramifications of transportation on the environment; The Episcopal Church is aware of the need for change. But the church needs broad societal buy-in for their recommendations to work. We belong to one community and need each other to overturn these harmful systems.

To make meaningful change with transportation, and any other pressing societal problem, one must understand that alone, monumental change cannot be made, but together, is where true power lies. Those who go alone to fight the monolith of federal government and impossibly ginormous multinational companies, will surely fail, or at least burn out long before the true battle begins. Together however, strategizing and unionizing with people from all walks of life in one's community or a place of worship is where amazing things can occur that break the boundaries set by those in charge. Together, no firm nor government can halt the changes needed for the country.

Presently, cars are as ubiquitous as the burger or firearms in American culture. They are everywhere and essential to living a productive life, much to the detriment of those who do not have the money, ability, or time to maintain it. Cars cost families thousands of dollars a year, money that could be used for fruitful endeavors but are instead siphoned to vehicles that are an unfortunate and irreplaceable need for daily life. Without one, people are locked away from life without mentally and physically exerting themselves for hours every single day to go to work, school, or to obtain healthcare and groceries. The lack of a vehicle on hand is detrimental to anyone but the brunt of the hardship is directed to the unfortunate. Without free transportation, another burden is thrust onto the backs of minorities and low-income citizens. The only way to cease this endless cycle is to fight, fight for what is unjust. One could lobby, organize, plan, or even take office, anything available at one's disposal to help turn the ship of unsustainable progress.

-Mick Etchison

## The Everydayness of Stewardship

The better part of a lifetime ago, I was an exchange student. Between adventures, a friendship grew with an Evangelical Christian fellow traveler. She was funny and smart, and her faith was deep. But one comment she made troubled me: *I don't need to recycle. This is all in God's plan.*

Later, during my time in San Francisco tech, there was only one among us who wore his faith proudly. I asked him about her comment, and he went purple with fury.

*She said WHAT? And this person is a Christian? And she's your friend? NO! Stewardship. It's in the Bible.*

The walls rise around us — the same chasms of misunderstanding — as species and entire biomes disappear. What does Stewardship mean, and what is my role in it? It is so much bigger than I am. But the seasons turn, and we live and die and eat and drink, every day.

My husband and I own and run [Freestone Ranch](#), tending the land with the help of a herd of grass fed, grass finished beef cows in Sonoma County, CA. We love and care for the land, and we are part of groups like a Fibershed cohort of [Climate Beneficial Farmers](#) and Ranchers and the American Grass-fed Association. We are a third party verified carbon sequestering entity. We are Agrarians, again. That means we root in place, and we frame our choices with a sense of the sacred in our soil.

[Fiber shed](#) is a nonprofit seeking to rebuild viable local markets for textiles, dyes, and clothing. Beyond fiber, Fibershed also supports small regenerative ranchers like us in building deeper, more viable businesses, which in turn build deeper, more viable markets for locally grown fiber and food.

We think deeply about what Stewardship means, and what we are called to do. Ranchers live in a false duality, either liberators of cloistered imaginations yearning for wide open spaces, or tormentors of cow and soil and watershed, starving the first nations tribes to boot. Agrarians will not chase illusions of elsewhere, nor will we destroy in misplaced hatred of the body, our earth. Reality is ever more nuanced than that, calling us to remember the megafauna that died out before our ancestors arrived here, and to learn the sacred patterns of ecosystems tended by indigenous human hands for thousands of years. God was there then too.

Stewardship is similarly nuanced, not just a to-do list for the garden or its revolutionary inverse. Even so, there is a clear path of speaking truth to power in it, and our current ecological state owes a lot of our willingness to forsake it. How can we possibly forsake our earth and our literal harvest for visions of lab generated food and trips to Mars? How can that possibly be easier, more modern, relevant, or simply more exciting? What have we come to believe that leads us down this path of devastation and ruin? It's madness.

Paracelsus was at pains to express the error of seeking something very dramatic and wondrous to call sacred. That yearning for drama separates us from the reality of God. Again and again, he exhorted anyone who would listen to find the sacred in the everyday, everything and everyone all around us, in every moment. The need for the sacred to be different and special blinds us to its presence all around us. The Agrarian ideal resettles the soul in the here and now in the same way.

Stewardship is in the sacred every day. It is tending the garden, the mundane necessity of knowing the land in an intimate way. You don't need to be a Climate Beneficial Rancher to live this intimacy. Sometimes I lose sight of this sacred responsibility in the mundane immensity of my to-do list. But it's always there, waiting for me to remember.

Deacon Phina Borgeson and Deacon Kate Sefton of Sonoma County, CA, have both preached beautifully about the idea of Enough in this unsettled season. In the false duality of feast or famine, Enough is the Trinitarian bridge. Our culture often asks us to lose ourselves in the pursuit of too much, and in those moments, resting in Enough is a revolutionary act. Drama can be wondrous, but it can be used against us, and it can distract us. Resting in Enough is sacred smallness, and it's always available, waiting for us to find it again.

In these crazy times, I can take refuge in my smallness, and the refuge and the smallness give me strength. I can be very small and sequester carbon by enriching the soil around me. I can be very small and move aloe cuttings to a better spot in my garden. I can be very small and take a bouquet of cuttings and seeds to a friend; helping to build each other's gardens. I can grow food and beauty, both literal and metaphorical, and God will be with me both literally and metaphorically.

-Misty West Gay

## For Your Consideration

[Rogation Days: Holy Neighborliness](#)- Brian Sellers-Petersen

[Harvesting Abundance](#) – Brian Sellers-Petersen

[Wealth Inequality to scale Graph](#)

[Plainsong Farm](#)

[Crazy Chile Farm](#)

[Mission Farm](#)

[Good News Gardens](#)

[Faithlands](#)

[Churchlands](#)

[The Christian Food Movement](#)

[Fibershed](#)

[Freestone Ranch](#)

[USDA Food Environment Atlas](#)

[Advancing Racial Equity in Regional Economies](#)-Brookings Institute

[Activity Centers as Building Blocks to Local Economies](#)-Brookings Institute

[The Souls of Poor Folk](#) – Institute for Policy Studies

[Poor People’s Moral Budget: Everybody has the Right to Live](#) – Poor People’s Campaign

[The Rise of Income and Wealth Inequality in America](#) -National Bureau of Economic Research

[Evidence of Rising Income Inequality](#) – National Bureau of Economic Research

[The Double Gap and the Bottom Line](#) – Roosevelt Institute

[Unintended Consequences of Rubber](#) – Center for Public Integrity

[Dangerous Heat, Unequal Consequences](#) – Center for Public Integrity

Kiss the Ground (2020). Available on Netflix

[Civil Eats](#)

[The Hidden Resilience of Food Desert Neighborhoods](#) – Sapiens Anthropology Magazine

[Market Match Program](#)

[National Black Food and Justice Alliance](#)

[Celebrating Women's Leadership in Food](#)

[Sacred Ground](#) – Interfaith Power and Light 2021 Action Kit



Photos Provided by Bill Robinson of Crazy Chile Farm