CHAPTER ONE

Economic Life as Spiritual Practice

Most of the things worth doing in the world had been declared impossible before they were done.

—Justice Louis D. Brandeis[1]

Avoiding the most dire damages of climate change "requires transforming the world economy at a speed and scale that has 'no documented historic precedent.'"

—Coral Davenport citing an IPCC report[2]

A different economy is not just a theoretical possibility, or a distant utopia, but something already under construction in the real world.

—Naomi Klein[3]

I am walking. The day is ordinary. The sky clear. My eyes drift upward. There, in the sky soars a flock of birds, resolutely heading together in one direction as though it is the only way to go. They seem bound on that path. Then, suddenly, with astounding grace, they shift and with a grand, unexpected swoop veer off in an utterly different direction! I gape. How did they do that?

Such a radical rapid shift is the challenge now facing humankind—or at least parts of it. Will we muster the moral courage to turn around and fly the other direction? Will we veer away from climate catastrophe and the stupefying economic and racial injustice that accompanies it? Will we soar instead toward a world in which all have the necessities for life with justice and joy and Earth's ecosystems flourish? This is the central moral and spiritual challenge of our time. This book and the subsequent series are one small response. You reading and engaging them is another.[4] "How," we ask, "do we catalyze and maintain a sweeping shift in direction?" Might the birds hold clues?

A splendid and vast worldwide movement to radically redirect economic life has unfolded largely unnoticed in the last three decades. Groups of people from all walks of life give rise to this creative and courageous undertaking. They are students, business leaders, fisherpeople, lawyers, peasants and other farmers, jobless people, scientists, nonprofit organizational leaders, artists, religious leaders, factory workers, healthcare professionals, retirees, engineers, homemakers, unhoused people, teachers, and more.

Earth's song of hope resounds around the globe in movements to build more equitable, ecological, and democratic economies at local, regional, national, and global levels.[5] These singers of hope say "no more" to economic practices that threaten Earth's livable climate. "No more" to economic practices and policies that drive some into anguished poverty so that a few can accumulate exorbitant wealth and many more can heedlessly overconsume.[6]

Like the birds, these ordinary economic changemakers fly in a life-giving redirection—from economies based on exploitation and extraction to economies that support flourishing for all, humans included. Hosts of people of all colors, creeds, continents, and cultures hunger for a world in which all people have food, water, homes, healthcare, and all that is necessary for flourishing and in which Earth's waters, air, soils, flora, and fauna once again sing a melody of life. In countless ways, ordinary people are living this vision into reality. In these pages—and in the subsequent book series and Web-based resources that accompany them—you will meet some of these people.

Perhaps you already are a part of this visionary and practical flock. If so, may this book strengthen your engagement. If not, then welcome! May your trip through these pages bring you joyfully into this community of hope.

I thank you for the moral courage to care and for the guts to wonder whether the "normal" practices of our economic lives—buying, borrowing, eating and drinking, investing, saving, selling, transporting and housing ourselves—and the public policies that structure those practices might be doing terrible harm to Earth, to others, and to ourselves. I ask you to dare to believe that more equitable, compassionate, and Earth-honoring ways of living are possible.

If you, like me, have glimpsed the dire realities of climate crisis or of economic violence and the strength of systems holding them in place, then you also may know the lure of despair or hopelessness. Its voice whispers seductively, "It is too late." Or "things will stay as they are, despite any efforts to build justice and save Earth's livable climate. The powers-that-be are too strong and devious. Let us just live as best we can and forget about matters too big for us to impact."

I know this voice. It is in me—seductively subtle and chillingly powerful. However, for reasons that will unfold in this chapter, that voice no longer has sway over me. Please join me as I share how I now live in the paradox of BOTH hope and despair, with hope leading and guiding my life. I must acknowledge the despair and not lie to myself. But it no longer has power; it gives way to active hope that energizes me.

Each of us may choose to live as though it is too late, as though what we do does not matter. Or we may choose to hope and *to embody that hope in our actions—to act with all the power that the Great Spirit has breathed into us for enacting good*. Which will we choose?

If you are one who, listening to the climate science, realizes that it already is too late to avoid some degree of climate catastrophe, then I ask you this: How will you answer some years from now, when our children, grandchildren, or other precious youngsters ask with their eyes gazing at us, "Grandma, Grandpa, auntie, elder friend, what did you do when my world was being destroyed?"

> *Well, dear young one, I gave up because I knew it was futile, and I am a realist.*

Or instead:

> *I—together with a whole host of people here and around the world—threw myself into building a future for you, even though many said it was impossible. "No," we said, "we will fight for life. We will embody a wild hope that we still can make a difference." And so it was; we built a regenerative relationship with God's garden Earth as creatures in it and of it; we forged new economic lives that enabled creation again to sing a song of life, and that enabled you, my dear one, to savor the glorious gift of life on Earth.*

Which will we choose?

It is a strange wonder to be alive *as human beings now*, at this turning point in history. Our young and dangerous—yet infinitely precious—species will determine which way we go. Our decisions and actions will shape the fate of life on Earth. None before us have borne this moral weight. What we do matters! *It is, therefore, a good time to be alive.*

All realms of human endeavor, all forms of knowledge and wisdom—be they moral, spiritual/religious, scientific, aesthetic, or practical—are called to bring their gifts to the great panhuman work of our time. It is perhaps the most radical and urgent reorientation of society ever undertaken. That "great work"[7] is to forge ways of being human and living together on this planet that (1) allow Earth's life systems and life-support systems to thrive; and (2) enable life-giving relationships among and within human societies. Considering climate change, this "great work" will require "transforming the world economy at a scale and speed that 'has no documented historic precedent.'"[8]

Flocks of birds can switch direction. So can we. Changing direction requires seeing differently.

Here is an important preview of that re-seeing as it emerges in this book and in the subsequent short companion volumes: We will re-see economies as webs of relationships. We will re-view economic life as spiritual practice. We will locate economic

life in the greatest love story ever told. And we will honor the collective work of economic transformation as a sacred journey—a journey of healing diseased and distorted relationships with Earth, with ourselves, with the Sacred Source whom some call God, and with neighbors far and near who are hurt by current economic systems. We will begin to understand our journey as one to freedom and toward claiming our right to live as we were created to live: that is, the right to live as beings in community—human community, geoplanetary community, community with the Sacred—contributing to the world's beauty and resilience. In reading and pondering these pages, we each embark or continue on this sacred journey.

Economies as Webs of Relationships

> *Imagine a different relationship in which people and land are good medicine for each other.*
>
> —Robin Wall Kimmerer[9]

"What if we saw the economy as a fabric of relationships?" What? I cocked my head. What? That is a profoundly biblical notion of economy, I thought with a smile. This proposal came from the New Economy Coalition, a network that claims no religious ties. Did they know that "economy" comes from the Greek *oikonomos*, the rules or guidelines (*nomos*) for how we are to organize and maintain the household (*oikos*), and that in biblical terms this household is the whole household of creation? Did they realize that God, according to the Hebrew Scriptures, gave two primary guidelines for ordering economic life—serve and preserve garden Earth (Gen 2:15) and love your neighbor with a love that seeks justice (Lev 19:18, later repeated by Jesus)—and that these two teachings are fundamentally guidelines for relationships? According to the biblical witness as well as the New Economy Coalition, *economic life is not just about numbers and money; economic life signifies actions within a web of relationships (many of them distant) that profoundly shape people's lives as well as the waters, air, soil, plants, and animals upon which life depends.*

I invite you to think of "economies" in this new way, a way that acknowledges a crucial reality generally ignored. It is that *our economic lives*—what we buy, consume, throw away, save, borrow, invest, sell, and how we feed, shelter, transport, and provide for ourselves and families—*are in essence about relationships*. These activities that make up daily economic life have tremendous indirect impact on other people and on Earth's other creatures. That impact may be damaging or life-giving.

For example, my savings account at a local cooperative bank that finances small-scale employee-owned businesses puts me in relationship with those employee-owners who now, perhaps for the first time in their lives, savor safe

working conditions and a share in the profit from their work. On the other hand, if I put my money in Chase or another large, corporate bank, it will be used to finance the fossil fuel industry and thus the climate change that is killing and displacing people through fierce storms, drought, and hunger. My relationship with those people, through my investment, would be damaging, even deadly.

Buying tomatoes harvested by people forced to work in toxic conditions for far too little pay and no benefits puts me in a harmful relationship with those farmworkers. But by asking my grocery store to purchase only tomatoes produced by workers who are protected by a Fair Food Agreement,[10] I enter a life-giving relationship with those workers. Just imagine the difference in their lives! Moreover, think of the difference it makes in my life and the grocer's.

The economic activity of *systems* in which we are players also puts us into relationships that may either damage others or serve their well-being. A story from my life as a churchworker in Honduras illustrates:

> *Her birth came at dawn. She emerged from the birth canal malnourished. Upon seeing Florita, I gasped. Was she too tiny to survive? Pale, frail, and eerily quiet, she lay with her mother, Floresmila. Four and a half pounds, said the midwife's scale. So unfair, my heart screamed. Florita was born malnourished because Floresmila and her husband were barred from access to land. They needed only* un pedacito de tierra *(a small plot of land) on which to grow food. But no—the land adjacent to the village had been taken over by global agribusiness to produce beef for Northern tables. International coffee companies owned other nearby lands. Floresmila and Juan Carlos—like many of the* campesinos *in this village—were forced to work other people's land for very poor wages. Oh, how they longed for their own land so that they could feed their children. The child born that morning did survive. But she entered toddlerhood frail and spindly, lacking the corn, beans, vegetables, and eggs that would have nourished her to strength and health had the villagers been able to plant their own crops. Economic policies—most notably trade agreements with the United States—had prioritized the interests of large agricultural corporations. I wondered, was my church invested in those companies? Was I paid from the profits of that investment and thus at the expense of Floresmila, her family, and other villagers who greeted me with smiles and* buenos dias *as I walked in the morning sun each day?*

Economic policies, actions, and structures can determine whether people live or die, flourish or decline. They dictate who will have food, health care, and adequate education. Hunger, for example, often is not the result of insufficient food supplies, but rather results primarily from maldistribution of food and income or from land being accumulated by large companies instead of reserved for people

who need it to grow food.[11] All who derive profit from those companies are in relationship with the people who need that land but no longer can use it—people like Floresmila, her child, and the other peasants of that area. The US citizens who ate the beef or whose mutual funds were invested in companies producing it were in relationship with these Honduran villagers. Did that include me?

Likewise, urban food deserts in the US are created by economic decisions of corporations and governments.[12] All who benefit from these decisions—investors, consumers, employees, and more—are in relationship with the people denied access to adequate food.

We human beings have the right, the calling, and the inner hunger to be in "right relationship" with human neighbors, far and near, and with the other creatures in this grand mystery called life on Earth. Right relationships enable both self and others to flourish, with particular attention to the well-being of marginalized people. *Reshaping economic life—as our journey through these pages will reveal—is a matter of reshaping relationships with neighbors far and near.* It is a matter of building new relationships, based not on exploitation and extraction but on mutual flourishing for self, others, and all of creation. Relationships are at the heart of spirituality. They manifest our spirituality and they shape it.[13] *Economy is a "fabric of relationships" and, thus, is a spiritual matter.*

Economic Life as Spiritual Practice—Enacting a Spiritualty of Neighbor-Love

In preparing to write this book, I have come to see economic life as a spiritual practice. This understanding seeped into me as I learned from revered spiritual leaders of the past and from courageous justice-seeking people in many lands. I hope that you too might come to see that economic activity and practices, by their very nature, enact a spirituality.

How odd—economic life as spiritual practice? *Spirituality* is a fluid, shimmering term. It has varied connotations to its users, and scholars define it in myriad ways. *Spirituality* as I use it here refers to an awareness and practice of being in relationship with something that transcends our material and constructed world but also flows within it, including within ourselves. That "something" is the sacred creating and energizing force or power that connects all things. Some call it *Yeshuvah*, God, Allah, Spirit, Creator, the Sacred, the Holy, the Divine, the Light, Ultimate Reality, a Higher Power, "Life Force of the universe . . . connective tissue/energy of the universe that is God,"[14] or many other names and metaphors.

Spirituality is inherent in religion but is not limited to religion. It does not refer to something exotic, esoteric, churchy, otherworldly, or paranormal. One's "spiritual life" is not limited to times of prayer or contemplation. Rather, spirituality is at the heart of ordinary everyday life to the extent that ordinary life is

lived with awareness of and in relationship with the Sacred. Spiritual practices—within religion and outside of religion—are practices that enable us to be more fully aware of and aligned with that sacred Spirit, to be nourished, encouraged, and guided by it. Thus, spiritual practices enable us to gain freedom *from* captivity by self-absorption, and gain freedom *to* align with something bigger than self. This astounding contribution of spirituality and religion will be central to our discussion in chapters 18 and 19.

From a Christian perspective, that spiritual "something" is the Spirit of the holy and intimate Mystery revealed in—but not only in—a first-century dark-skinned Palestinian Jew named Jesus and his people, the ancient Hebrews. Spirituality has to do with living in awareness of and in response to that Spirit, as it is flowing and pouring through and beyond all things. Spiritual practices help us align our lives with the ways and beckoning of this Spirit.

Of course, the nature of spiritual practice depends on what one understands that Spirit to be like. I believe that this Spirit is a force of Love that embraces all of creation, and each of us personally—a Love that will not desert us regardless of any evil we may do. This Love, according to the biblical witness, fiercely and tenderly seeks justice and well-being especially for the outcast, excluded, oppressed, and all on the margins of power and privilege. And *it calls people to live in accord with this Love.* Spiritual practices are what deepens our capacity to receive and trust this justice-seeking, Earth-treasuring Love and to live it into the world through activities of everyday life.

Thus we may see economic life as a spiritual practice, a way of either enacting a spirituality of neighbor-love or betraying it. Our economic practices, through the systems of which we are a part, may damage or destroy neighbors or they may serve neighbors' well-being. The latter aligns with the Spirit of God; the former betrays it. It is not by accident that religious institutions are the leading sector in divesting from fossil fuels; these religious institutions see investment in fossil fuels as dangerous to neighbors who are suffering from climate change, dangerous to nonhuman neighbors, and dangerous to ourselves.[15] Said differently, investment in fossil fuels (according to this perspective) betrays neighbor-love. Divesting is an effort to enact a spirituality of neighbor-love.

We have entered a "jungle of ambiguity" here, because so many words in the previous paragraph have multiple meanings. The most hazy and misleading may be *love*. As I use the word, it is not "love" according to common discourse. This distinction we take up later. It is crucial.

You will find spirituality and religious faith weaving through this book. Therefore, let me be clear. While I draw on some of the world's great faith traditions, I speak beyond the boundaries of religious traditions to all people of goodwill who hunger for more just and ecological economic lives. We take up the role of spirituality and religious faith more fully in part 4, but I want to note three points here.

First, I am painfully aware that religion, and particularly Christianity, has wielded vast power for terror and brutality throughout history and still today. It rests upon people of religious traditions to recognize and reckon with that reality. Doing so is integral to a life of faith, and particularly Christian faith, given its role in the atrocities of colonization—including genocide of Indigenous peoples, enslavement of African people, the Doctrine of Discovery—and other crimes against humanity such as the persecution of LGBTQIA+ people, the myth of white supremacy, and the Nazi reign of terror, to name just a few examples. We grapple with these crimes later in this book.

Second, I do not include religion for the purpose of convincing you to adopt a particular religious or spiritual practice, belief, or leaning. Rather, I appeal to religion because the forces lined up against economic transformation are monumental, and countering them calls for spiritual strength. Religious faith is one source of that strength, although not the only one. I believe that all of Earth's wisdom traditions—including the earth and biological sciences, behavioral sciences, religion, healing arts, and more—will be necessary to the great work of building economies that enable life to flourish. Religions indeed have many gifts of moral, spiritual, and practical power to offer. We explore them throughout these pages, especially in part 4.

Third, one of the most important gifts given by Jewish, Christian, and Muslim religious traditions is to situate economic life in a magnificent love story. This story is the foundation of my life, the motivating force behind this book, and—I believe—a light that cannot be overcome (John 1:5). Similar gifts are affirmed also in Dharmic traditions (using other terms such as compassion) as well as in many Indigenous spiritualities.

Let us take a closer look.

An Astounding Love Story

Some faith traditions offer a particularly precious gift to the work of economic transformation. This gift is to locate economic life—what we buy, consume, and throw away, as well as how we feed, shelter, and transport ourselves—in the greatest love story ever told. What do I mean by this?

Long ago, in my early teen years, I fell into self-loathing. I had learned that the economic systems providing food for people like me were preying on other people, using their lands and their bodies to make huge profits.[16] I had listened to survivors of that exploitation, and it made me despise myself for benefiting from those systems. I will reveal more of that story later. My point here is to share with you what helped to heal me from that dangerous self-degradation, and to nurture my power for responding to structural evil—such as economic exploitation and climate injustice—with self-love and neighbor-love.

Join me stepping back in time as I share with you from my personal journey.

I felt desperate, like I had no right to exist. Needing to confide in someone, I knocked on the dental office door of a former church youth-group leader whom I had not seen in years. He opened the door, saw my face, and closed his office. We walked to a nearby forest and sat down on a log by a creek. He read to me from the book of Romans (a book in the Christian Bible). I think that it was Romans 8:38–39. Suddenly, I was utterly engulfed by the love of the Great Spirit. My being was embraced by an unfathomable, radiant, and palpable reality that this Sacred Love would never leave me, regardless of whatever I might do or fail to do. I recall hearing my inner voice say, "I could sit like a bump on a log for the rest of my life and this One would love me no less."

That dazzling reality stayed with me with radiant intensity for some days. That knowing remains. It has become the bedrock of my faith, my life, and my calling to work toward a more just and compassionate economic order.

The love story is much bigger. It is cosmic. I realized with utter clarity that afternoon that not only I, but the entirety of creation, is enfolded by and imbued with a life-giving Force that ultimately will bring all to fullness of life in all of its beauty and goodness. Human creatures are created and called to embody this Force and to allow it to work in us to heal and liberate the world.

Monotheistic traditions call this Force "love"—the love given by the intimate Mystery that some call God. As revealed through the Hebrew Bible, what Christians call the First Testament or Old Testament, this Force is at work in humans as neighbor-love and is inherently both justice-seeking and Earth-honoring. In the life of the Palestinian Jew named Jesus of Nazareth, embodying this force meant resisting imperial Rome and experiencing death by torture at the hands of that imperial power. Oppressive power is threatened by justice-seeking love.

Whether you are situated in one of these religious traditions does not matter. What matters is to recognize this story of life-changing Love as one way of understanding economic life that could empower courage, wisdom, and spiritual strength for the great transition to economies of life for all. If you belong to another religious tradition, you might ask, "What are the life-giving claims that it offers for economic healing?"

Let us travel back further in time. Settle in for a story.

Imagine, if you will, a world of splendor and abundance beyond imagining . . . a dawn every twenty-four hours, sun called forth from deep indigo sky. Songbirds in myriad voices sing with abandon, the voice of beauty. Fragrance wafts from living beings in infinite shapes, colors,

and sizes from the tiniest, most delicate blossoms to voluptuous deep purple floral extravaganzas. Drops of glistening water powder the land at the birth of each day. The air shimmers with fluttering leaves. Light rays dance. Everywhere is breath. Life is birthing. Luscious fruits hang from trees. In the soil, hearty grains emerge. And then dusk. Indigo of yet another shade deepens.

In this glorious circle of life, all that dies becomes sustenance for other creatures and elements. The weaving of interdependence is breath-taking, beyond full comprehension: a radiant ball of energy from eons past issues power sufficient to meet the needs of all life forms. What one gives off sustains the other. Birth and death. Days and planets, creatures and colors are born and die and bring new life. Decaying log nurses her young. Complexity and simplicity unite. Cycles of death and resurrection. And the trees . . . the trees watch, hear, guide, shelter.

It is a wild, raucous, birthing, fire-spewing, earth-quaking, fecund communion of life, joined in the "hymn of all creation," praising the Source and Sustainer of being. The splendor of this world is exceeded by one thing only: the radiant love of its Creator embracing Her creation and coursing through it. This world is beloved with a "love as a burning fire that will never cease in all the endless ages to come."[17] This love is more powerful than any force in heaven or earth. It will not desert you or our planetary home. Were we to end human life on this planet, we would still be in the embrace of that Love. You might pause for a moment to let that promise flood over you, fill every cell of your body, embrace you. You are now and, in every moment, beloved. Nothing you do or fail to do will change that. It is who you are. Your primary identity. Thou art beloved.

In the world's most recent moments appear creatures of particular consciousness. Self-aware temporally and spatially, they are able to reflect on the world and their place in it, to wonder, and to create. As all other creatures and elements, these human "mud creatures"[18] are crafted from the dust of long-past stars, fashioned as community, in community, by community, and for community—for communion. They depend for life itself on a web of interrelated beings and elements: the trillions of unseen organisms living on and in their bodies, the thousands of organisms in a foot of soil, the trees of the Amazon rainforest who produce our oxygen, the bees who beget life in the plants that give us food.

The plot thickens. The Sacred Spirit of Love—this holy and intimate Mystery—is at play in the world, breathing life into it. This Spirit is present within, among, and beyond us.

But that is not all. The Holy Mystery reveals to the human ones their lifework. They are called to recognize, receive, relish, and revel in this gracious and indomitable love. And then, they are called to love—to live this mysterious and marvelous love into the world. Forever beloved, they are to be bearers of the Creator's justice-making, Earth-relishing Love in its steadfast commitment to gain fullness of life for all, within a communion of all.[19] Ah, yes, the Holy One—speaking through prophet and story—is clear: where injustice blights life, this Love will see the injustice and move human creatures to undo it!

According to some interpretations of the monotheistic traditions, this is our life's work, our "vocation," our calling as humans: to receive and trust God's healing and liberating love and then to live it into the world. We are given this reason for being. The human creatures are created to be lovers—offering to God, self, others, and the entire creation the love that they are fed by the One who gives them life. For so doing, they are given, in the image of the Holy One, hearts of infinite compassion and minds equipped to seek justice. And into them, as into all creatures, is breathed the *Ruach* (breath, Spirit, air) of the Holy One. What an awe-invoking, Spirit-drenched, communion-weaving reason for being.

We will not love perfectly; to the contrary, we are, in the words of Martin Luther, God's "*rusty* tools," utterly fallible and limited vessels of the Divine flame. In our efforts to love—including practicing neighbor-love as guide to economic life—our efforts will fall short. Knowing this can free us from despair at our own shortcomings and the shortcomings of the policies, institutions, and networks that we build.

Pause for a moment. Take a breath. Notice a danger. Though quiet as a whisper, it wreaks havoc. It is this: we (humans) tend to be miserable at authentic self-love. Authentic self-love is a deep affirmation of the infinite goodness, worth, and gift that is oneself. It frees us for loving others.[20] The journey to healing economic life, then, includes the journey toward embracing the true beauty and gift of oneself.

This is the *oikos*, the household of God. The Holy One, hungering for its well-being, gave to our species guidelines for household management, *oikonomia*, and the intelligence to develop those guidelines in multiple ways as the complexity of social life unfolds. The *oikonomia* (economy) was grounded in two rock-solid foundations: we are to love neighbor as self (Lev 19:18 and Matt 22:39) and we are to serve and preserve God's garden Earth (Gen 2:15). According to the first of these guidelines, Earth's bounty is to be shared. None should have too much where it cast others into want.

However, rejecting the *oikonomos* of God, some crafted contrary rules. Those new rules enable a few—largely descendants of the tribes of Europe—to use up most of Earth's bounty. The species created to love and to serve the garden now lives out the opposite. We live in strata. For those at the bottom, "poverty means death."[21] The wealthiest 10 percent of the world's people, which includes the middle class in rich countries, owns 76 percent of the world's wealth.[22] We "consume" Earth's wealth, eating it up before it can be replenished. The pathos of our situation stuns. Though we may long to heed God's call to love, we are complicit in ecocide and economic brutality, not by intent or will but by virtue of the political economy that shapes our lives. The Holy One "set before [the human ones] life and death, blessings and curses" and commanded us to "choose life so that you and your descendants may live" (Deut 30:19). We have chosen death. Unknowingly, unintentionally, unwittingly, a portion of humankind has chosen death for the living world. Under our weight, all "creation has been groaning" (Rom 8:22). We are at a turning point. "If trends continue, we will not."[23]

We can change direction. We can "choose life so that we and our descendants may live." We can heal from predatory economic life and create an economy of life abundant for all.

What a life-giving and encouraging story in which to live.

The sacred love story continues. You are in it. In a world writhing with injustice, with huge swaths of human earthlings threatening Earth's livable climate, we, dear readers, are daring to ask what it means to "love neighbor as self."

The Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Scriptures are clear. Relationships with neighbors are to be guided by this unwavering light. It is God's commandment, invitation, and calling to love neighbor as self. This is crucial: neighbor-love, according to these traditions, pertains not only to interpersonal relationships, but also to the social structures that determine our indirect relationships with neighbors. Moreover, neighbor-love is not principally an emotion, a feeling of affection or goodwill. While it may include such feelings, they are neither its centerpiece nor an essential component of it. At the heart of neighbor-love as a biblical reality is a steadfast commitment to serve the well-being of the one who is loved, empowered by the Spirit. *Nothing could be more important for glimpsing the world-changing power of the call to love neighbor as self.*

Two thousand years ago, the geographic scope of an ordinary person's impact was much smaller. A person living in North America did not have a life-giving or a life-threatening impact on a person living in Asia or Africa. Given the global

economy, that scope has exploded; it is planetary. The way I live my life impacts the communities from whose land comes the oil to produce my polyester bedsheets, fly my food from other continents, and fuel my car. My desire for a sweet beverage impacts countless people in India whose water has been taken or poisoned by a Coca-Cola plant. My greenhouse gas emissions impact those who now must flee their homelands in Central America as climate refugees.

What form, then, does neighbor-love take in this context? Certainly it involves seeking to transform our neighbor-relations so that my life does not harm or kill others nor threaten Earth's ability to sustain life. To transform neighbor-relations in the globalized world means to transform the economic policies, practices, and principles that shape those relations. *Avoiding the most dire damages of climate change "requires transforming the world economy at a speed and scale that has 'no documented historic precedent.'"*[24] This is the sacred healing journey on which we embark.

A necessary but truly uncomfortable step in that healing is facing what is beneath the surface of economic structures and practices assumed to be normal. If you are anything like me, you long to flee from such knowledge. However, James Baldwin's words ring true: "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced." So, let us muster the courage to face what most of us—me included—long to ignore. We do so in the next chapter.

* * *

Honoring Our Bodies

Pause. Breathe deeply. Ask yourself, How do I feel? What is my heart saying? Then notice from where in your body the answers emerge. Where are you tense? Allow the tense muscles to soften. Breathe a sigh of pleasure at that softening. Now rise and stretch as you are able. You might bend over slowly and, allowing your torso to incline forward, forward, forward . . . let your head sink down, hanging loosely. Breathe. Feel the sweetness of your back extending, unconstricting. When it feels right, lift again by pulling in your butt, keeping your back straight. Then draw back your shoulder blades deeply until the stretch feels rich and intense and let them slowly loose again. Now drink in a deep, slow, delicious lungful of air. Let it out slowly. Again. How beautifully ancient is that air. How sweet the drink of it.

Finally, you might thank the trees for giving you air to breathe. Thank the trillions of organisms that creep and crawl and swim around in your body—allowing your guts to work, your lungs to breathe, your eyes to see. What a miracle it is to be alive—alive as a teeming bustling communion of microorganisms "singing" together to keep your miraculous body animate.

Sacred Journey Journal

Please choose one of the following options that speaks to you:

- Return to the "astounding love story." Sit for a moment with it. Behold yourself with the eyes of "God" seeing you as primarily—first and foremost—precious, beloved. Imagine yourself embraced by this love. Perhaps it is a blue light, gentle wings, or a golden glow. Imagine knowing that it will never leave you, regardless of what you do or do not do. Imagine yourself at age ninety, still beloved. How do you feel? What images come to mind? Perhaps write or draw or hum the feeling.
- Imagine a precious young person in your life asking you some years from now, "Grandma/grandpa, auntie/uncle, elder friend, what did you do when my world was on the brink of destruction by climate catastrophe?" What do you hope you will say in response? Write it. What could you do now and in the future to make that response true?
- Listen for your inner voices. What are different parts of you saying? If there is a voice that you are not proud of, or even ashamed of, give yourself a break! Drop the shame. You are a human being. All of the following examples are within me. Is there a voice in you of powerlessness or hopelessness: "It is too late. We cannot really do anything to change the mess we are in." Is there a voice of avoidance: "Good grief, I just want to live my life. I don't have time for this. Let someone else handle these messes!" Is there a voice of fear? Confusion? Anger? Is there a voice of hope, determination, and courage? Write down some of the messages you hear within. All are important, especially the voices that could sabotage your power. Acknowledging them is the best first step to freedom from their influence.