



Christian Witness in an Age of Change and Collapse

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He (Mordecai) sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:4)

He said to the crowd: "When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, 'It's going to rain,' and it does. And when the south wind blows, you say, 'It's going to be hot,' and it is. Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky. How is it that you don't know how to interpret this present time?" (Luke 12:54–56)

As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you" (Luke 19:41–44)

See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. (Ephesians 5:15–17)

Discerning the Time

“Would you happen to know the time?” or “Do you know what time it is?”—these are questions from a bygone era of wall clocks and wristwatches. Yet today, they carry a deeper, more urgent significance. I am not speaking of time in the hourly or calendar sense, but of a profound awareness—socially and spiritually—of the times in which we live. This is a question of discernment: of recognizing the moment we are in, understanding its meaning, and responding with faithfulness and clarity.

Discerning the times is a biblical and theological imperative. Scripture consistently calls God's people not only to know what is right but to recognize when, how, and why to act. It is one thing to understand what should be done in general; it is quite another to perceive the *kairos*—the divinely appointed moment that gives urgency, shape, and meaning to action. For years, I have conducted workshops, delivered lectures, preached sermons, written op-eds, and participated in panels exploring these very issues. This piece is not merely social commentary; it is theology in service of clarity—a way of interpreting and responding to the times in which we live.

There is a context to faithful ministry and social advocacy. This context is not static but constantly shifting under

the pressures of global, regional, and local change. As we minister in our own communities, we are simultaneously navigating the ripple effects of global crises—climate change, economic inequality, geopolitical instability, technological transformation, and ideological polarization. There is a delicate interplay between the global forest and the local trees, and Christian witness must be attentive to both.

Discerning this interplay is essential for authentic and effective ministry in our time. It means asking deep and practical questions:

- What do these global and local dynamics mean for preaching?
- What do they mean for congregational ministry and pastoral care?
- What do they mean for denominational and organizational leadership, leadership development, and congregational support?
- What implications do they have for our public witness—through community, regional, and national initiatives, partnerships, and prophetic advocacy?

- What do they mean for our families and careers, our private lives and public commitments?
- What do they mean for life in local communities across cultural, economic, and generational divides?
- What do they mean as we attempt to plan faithfully for the future?

We must be like the “children of Issachar” in 1 Chronicles 12:32, who “understood the times and knew what Israel should do.” Without this spiritual and historical awareness, we risk misapplying our efforts or missing critical opportunities for witness and transformation.

The urgency of this discernment is underscored in Jesus’ rebuke in Luke 12. He expresses disappointment — even indignation — that people could predict the weather but could not discern the spiritual significance of their own moment. This was no ordinary season; it was, as Paul puts it in *Galatians 4:4*, “the fullness of time,” when God sent forth His Son. That phrase is rich with theological meaning: God does not act arbitrarily but with precision and intentionality within the framework of time and history. Time matters to God. Moments matter. And some moments are ripe for divine breakthrough — or judgment. In *Luke 19*, we see Jesus weeping over Jerusalem, foreseeing the destruction that would come as a result of their present blindness. His lament is a sobering reminder: missing the spiritual significance of a moment can carry grave consequences — not just for individuals, but for entire nations.

We see this throughout Scripture. God moves in history through what I call *breakthroughs* or *culminating moments* — those special seasons when God acts decisively to answer long-standing prayers, to protect the oppressed, to realign

nations, or to summon the church to repentance and renewal. These moments call for more than good intentions; they demand spiritual perception, moral clarity, and courageous response. When these opportunities are missed — because of blindness, complacency, or fear — God is not pleased. We see an aspect of this in Jesus’ lament over Jerusalem in *Luke 19*: “If you had only known...” Divine grief follows human misrecognition.

The prophet Amos, who ministered “two years before the earthquake” (*Amos 1:1*), also illustrates this point. He grounded his vision in a concrete historical moment. His words teach us that prophetic insight is never abstract — it is always tied to real events and real people in real time. So, I ask, Do you know the time?

We are living in a time of change on a global scale that impacts our regional and local lives in profound ways. In this age of change, there are also new opportunities for ministry and advocacy that can revitalize our communities and our lives. We cannot afford to go about ministry as if it were still 1995 or even 2015. The tectonic plates of our world have shifted. Christian leaders, preachers, and congregations must awaken to the reality that discernment of the times is not a luxury — it is a necessity. You cannot devote your best energies without it. Discernment is the gateway to awareness. Awareness leads to understanding. And understanding prepares us to participate in the will and work of God.

To ignore the broader socio-political and spiritual forces that shape our time is to render ourselves unfit for proactive leadership and faithful response. It is to risk becoming the very hypocrites Jesus warned about — those who can read the skies but miss the signs of God’s movement in history.

Discerning the Moment: The Shape of Our Present Age

To discern the times rightly, we must open our eyes to the realities shaping life in this present age. We are living through a time of profound disruption — a cascading series of crises and transformations that touch every aspect of human life. This is more than social unrest or political dysfunction. We are witnessing a tectonic shift in the very structures of society, communication, identity, and survival.

Technological breakthroughs like artificial intelligence, algorithms, and synthetic media (deepfakes, chatbots, disinformation) are revolutionizing how we communicate and what we believe to be true. At the same time, we are navigating waves of social fragmentation marked by mass shootings, hate crimes, political extremism, and the erosion of trust in institutions. Climate disasters, wars, inflation, and housing crises intensify an already widespread sense of unease. Across the globe, people feel the weight of uncertainty, and many wonder whether we are nearing a breaking point.

(1) *We live in an era of conflict and change.*

To understand the broader context, we must attend to voices that have studied these global shifts. One such voice

is the National Intelligence Council, whose *Global Trends 2024: A More Contested World* (2021) maps a world grappling with cascading challenges and institutional fatigue:

In coming years and decades, the world will face more intense and cascading global challenges ranging from disease to climate change to the disruptions from new technologies and financial crises... This looming disequilibrium between existing and future challenges and the ability of institutions and systems to respond is likely to grow and produce greater contestation at every level (National Intelligence Council 2021).

This report warns of a growing gap between the challenges confronting humanity and our systems’ ability to meet them. It anticipates a future marked by fractured communities, struggling states, and an increasingly volatile international order. But it also suggests that this future is not inevitable. The choices we make in this season — our collective discernment — will shape the world to come.

A contested world for decades to come has profound implications for leaders across every sector — religious, civic, academic, and beyond. It requires us to examine the roles we play in fractured communities and struggling states, and

to reflect on how our institutions are shaping the social fabric. Educational institutions, churches, and other community pillars are not exempt from this scrutiny. Leadership in these contexts demands more than administrative competence; it calls for moral imagination, institutional courage, and a commitment to the common good. We must ask: Do our organizations foster healing, cultivate belonging, and equip people to flourish together — or do they, however unintentionally, reinforce the fragmentation and disequilibrium that define our time? As the *Global Trends 2040* report notes, "...communities are increasingly fractured as people seek security with like-minded groups based on established and newly prominent identities." In such a moment, the challenge is clear: leaders and institutions must resist retreating into ideological or institutional silos and instead become agents of understanding, change, and healing.

(2) We live in an era of rupture and restlessness.

The United Nations' *Human Development Report (2021/2022)* adds a critical psychological and emotional dimension to our understanding of this moment. Titled *Uncertain Times and Unsettled Lives*, the report captures a growing global atmosphere of anxiety, disorientation, and existential vulnerability:

We live in a world of worry. The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, which has driven reversals in human development in almost every country and continues to spinoff variants unpredictably. War in Ukraine and elsewhere, more human suffering amid a shifting geopolitical order and strained multilateral system. Record-breaking temperatures, fires and storms, each an alarm bell from planetary systems increasingly out of whack. Acute crises are giving way to chronic, layered, interacting uncertainties at a global scale, painting a picture of uncertain times and unsettled lives (United Nations Development Programme 2022).

The report highlights the compounding nature of the modern crisis enveloping us — what it calls the "layering and interactions of multidimensional risks" and the overlapping threats that exceed the capacity of our social and ecological systems to absorb them. Contributing factors include intensifying planetary pressures, widening inequalities, and deepening societal polarization — all of which obstruct meaningful social transformation. These dynamics are not abstract; they affect our neighborhoods, institutions, and daily relationships. This helps explain, in part, why the United States alone consumes nearly two-thirds of the world's antidepressants.

Although the UN report speaks to global trends of anxiety and upheaval, the United States presents a particularly striking case. Despite its immense wealth and resources, the nation faces a deepening crisis of well-being — marked by rising depression, political polarization, and a widespread sense of purposelessness. A recent *New York Times* article reporting on Gallup data notes that America is among the wealthiest nations in the world—and yet it ranks as one of the most unhappy. The paradox of prosperity without peace continues to define American life. Senator Ben Sasse, in his book *Them: Why We Hate Each Other—and How to Heal*, underscores this paradox with sobering clarity:

We're the richest, most comfortable, most connected people in human history. And yet. In the midst of extraordinary prosperity, we're also living through a crisis. Our communities are collapsing, and people are feeling more isolated, adrift, and purposeless than ever before (Sasse 2018).

Together, these insights reveal that the current moment is not simply marked by political tension or economic imbalance — but by a deeper spiritual and social dislocation. Daily we witness a growing shroud of social nihilism. The rise in global anxiety and the growing crisis of nihilism are not just anecdotal — they are measurable. Language reflecting fear, despair, and confusion is increasing in literature, media, and public discourse. The human spirit is bearing the cost of instability, and we are in desperate need of moral clarity, communal resilience, and spiritual grounding in the face of a full-scale crisis of meaning enveloping us.

(3) We live in an era where extreme weather events are no longer rare — they are defining features of our environment.

A 2022 *Time* Magazine cover story, *Superstorms: The New Face of Extreme Weather*, cataloged the devastating toll of climate-related disasters in the United States. The scale and frequency of these events are staggering:

In 2021, [superstorms] battered practically every part of the U.S....A winter freeze crippled Texas, killing more than 200 people...California endured another brutal wildfire season...A heat wave killed hundreds in the Pacific Northwest...Tornadoes carved up Kentucky and Tennessee...In all, the year witnessed 20 different weather and climate disasters where damage exceeded \$1 billion, claiming 688 lives (Walsh 2022).

This is not a future scenario — it is the lived reality of millions. We live and work in communities that have endured devastating weather events that have taken lives, displaced families, and disrupted economies. And we know that future events are not only possible but inevitable. Our lives and livelihoods are increasingly threatened by tornadoes, hurricanes, wildfires, floods, extreme winds, and severe snowstorms. The climate crisis is not just a scientific or political issue — it is a theological issue because it is fundamentally a human issue. It threatens the most vulnerable, undermines the fabric of communities, and calls into question our stewardship of God's creation. It also demands a serious reckoning with how we live, lead, and serve. How do we prepare for and respond to inevitable catastrophic weather events? How do we structure ministry, resource communities, and raise a prophetic voice in the face of accelerating climate instability? These are the questions of our time.

(4) We are living in an age of profound socio-economic fragmentation and injustice.

As political polarization deepens, wealth consolidates in the hands of a few, and the nation remains unable to reckon honestly with its legacy of racism, the social contract

itself appears to be unraveling. Protest movements, street violence, and institutional dysfunction are symptoms of a deeper sickness. The moral foundations of society — truth, justice, compassion, solidarity — are eroding under the weight of greed, lies, and indifference.

This unraveling has not gone unnoticed. A 2017 report by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty in the United States observed:

But its immense wealth and expertise stand in shocking contrast with the conditions in which vast numbers of its citizens live. About 40 million live in poverty, 18.5 million in extreme poverty, and 5.3 million live in Third World conditions of absolute poverty." These numbers are not abstract — they represent families, workers, and children caught in a system that was not built for their flourishing (Alston 2018).

Popular media have begun to name this decline, from Rolling Stone's 2019 cover 'The Unraveling of America' to The Atlantic's 'How to Stop a Civil War.' Books such as *Why Nations Fail* by Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson, *End Times* by Peter Turchin, and Eddie Glaude's *Democracy in Black: How Race Still Enslaves the American Soul* analyze the structural and moral roots of this unraveling — warning of what happens when inequality, racial injustice, corruption, and social distrust grow unchecked.

Nations fail today because their extractive economic institutions do not create the incentives needed for people to save, invest and innovate. Extractive political institutions support these economic institutions by cementing the power of those who benefit from the extraction. Extractive economic and political institutions, though their details vary under different circumstances, are always at the root of this failure...The result is economic stagnation and... civil wars, mass displacements, famines and epidemics, making many of these countries poorer today (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012).

When the equilibrium between the ruling elites and the majority tips too far in favor of elites, political instability is all but inevitable. As income inequality surges and prosperity flows disproportionately into the hands of the elites, the common people suffer, and society-wide efforts to become an elite grow ever more frenzied...when this state has been reached, societies become locked in a death spiral from which it's very hard to recover (Turchin 2023).

As inequality grows and public trust erodes, the result is not just stagnation but social breakdown. These authors argue that societies caught in cycles of elite dominance and mass dispossession eventually face collapse — unless corrective, courageous actions are taken.

The Urgency of Discernment

Taken together, these insights compel us to see this moment not just as a crisis but as a crossroads. The church, as the body of Christ in the world, cannot afford to be silent or disengaged. We are called to understand the times and know what ought to be done — not just theologically, but practically, prophetically, and pastorally. We must see these challenges not only as threats, but as calls to deeper spiritual discernment and bolder Christian witness. This is not the time for business-as-usual ministry. This is the time for faithful presence, moral courage, and prophetic clarity. And so, I ask again, Do you know the time?

Prophetic Echoes: Wisdom from Dr. King and the Challenge of Our Time

In discerning the present moment, it is crucial to listen to those who have walked this road before us — those who saw clearly, spoke courageously, and paid the price for their truth-telling. Among these is Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a modern-day prophet whose warnings, offered more than fifty years ago, continue to speak with startling relevance.

In his final book, *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community*, Dr. King called for nothing less than a revolution of values. He wrote with urgency about the dangerous gap between our technological capacity and our moral maturity:

We must work passionately to bridge the gulf between

our scientific progress and our moral progress... Without this spiritual and moral reawakening, we shall destroy ourselves in the misuse of our own instruments (King 1967).

King foresaw the unraveling of society when vast inequities — poverty, racism, exclusion — go unaddressed. He understood that a people locked out of economic security and social belonging will not remain passive forever. Their discontent will either find channels of justice or ignite revolutionary upheaval:

One cannot hope to keep people locked out of the earthly kingdom of wealth, health, and happiness. Either they share in the blessings of the world or they organize to break down and overthrow those structures or governments which stand in the way of their goals. This is a treacherous foundation for a world house. Racism can well be that corrosive evil that will bring down the curtain on Western civilization (King 1967).

These were not merely sociological predictions — they were theological and moral judgments. King understood that societies built on exploitation and sustained by deception will eventually collapse under the weight of their own injustice. And we see this playing out in America today. The gap between technological advancement and moral progress is vast, and far too many Americans remain locked out of a life marked by dignity and opportunity.

In his sermon “The Three Evils of Society” (August 31, 1967), Dr. King gave name to the principalities behind the American dilemma:

I wish that I could say this is just a passing phase... but I suspect that we are now experiencing the coming to the surface of a triple-prong sickness... the sickness of racism, excessive materialism, and militarism. Not only is this our nation's dilemma, it is the plague of Western civilization.

These three forces—racism, materialism, and militarism — are not simply social problems; they are spiritual pathologies. They distort our loves, fracture our communities, and poison the soul of a nation. And they endure, not merely because of bad policy or poor governance, but because they are protected by entrenched power and cultural amnesia.

To underscore his point, King invoked the British historian Arnold Toynbee, whose sweeping *Study of History* examined the rise and fall of twenty-six civilizations. Toynbee concluded that the downfall of civilizations was seldom the result of external invasion. Instead, collapse came from within:

The decline and fall of these civilizations... was not caused by external invasion but by internal decay. They failed to respond creatively to the challenges impinging upon them (Toynbee 1922).

Toynbee argued that civilizations rise when a creative minority — ethical and visionary leaders — responds constructively to crises. They fall when these leaders become rigid, self-serving, or disconnected from the needs of the people.

This is what makes King’s appropriation of Toynbee so powerful. King was not simply lamenting American decline — he was calling the nation to moral renewal. He was urging the church and society to become that creative minority: a people of courage and conscience who can respond faithfully to the profound challenges of our time.

King’s words have a special meaning for me today because I worry the church is not the creative minority it needs to be. The decline, inequities, and social chaos now well documented by scholars, activists, and communities alike are not anomalies. **They are signs of systemic crisis — and evidence that America stands on the verge of collapse.** Signs abound that America is an empire in serious decline, an empire deteriorating from within. Dr. King warned that entrenched evil may well be our undoing. In 1967, he warned of three giant triplets threatening the soul of America: racism, militarism, and poverty. Today, I see a fourth evil—intertwined with and reinforcing the others — an evil I call the narcotic of distraction. This insidious force embeds itself deep within our culture, dulling our moral awareness and numbing our urgency for justice.

This fourth evil is more insidious than it first appears. It operates through the miseducation of our citizenry, the glossy seduction of mass entertainment, and the ceaseless busyness of consumer culture. Together, they function as a kind of social opium — dulling our collective conscience, blinding us to reality, and numbing us to the suffering of

others.

This narcotic prevents us from facing the full truth of our situation. We are pacified by curated news cycles, addicted to digital amusement, and misinformed by educational systems that distort or erase entire chapters of our national history. We are so inundated with content and entertainment that we forget how to think critically, feel deeply, or act decisively. We are amused to death, as Neil Postman once said.

This is not accidental. These systems of distraction are cultivated and maintained. The pushers of this cultural opium are found in places both sacred and secular: pulpits that prioritize self-help over justice, classrooms that tell half-truths about our national story, streaming services that entertain but never challenge, and economic systems that glorify hustle while discouraging reflection.

And so we fail to respond to the crises before us — not because we lack information, but because we are anesthetized. We are too high on the narcotics of convenience, comfort, and consumption to recognize the urgency of the moment.

This kind of societal intoxication has historical precedent. The parallels between modern America and ancient Rome are striking. Edward Gibbon, in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, identified the very forces that hollowed out Roman society: military overreach, political corruption, economic instability, public apathy, and the rising cost of circuses and spectacle. Rome fell not from external invasion alone, but from internal collapse — a people distracted by bloodsport and blind to moral decay.

Likewise, we are now a nation addicted to digital coliseums and ideological echo chambers, more concerned with celebrity gossip than systemic injustice, more moved by entertainment than empathy. And tragically, many churches and religious leaders remain oblivious to the spiritual and social death spiral we are in. If we do not sober up — if we fail to awaken to the gravity of this moment — there may be no stopping the collapse of this new Roman Empire.

Make no mistake: America is teetering more with each passing day. The “Make America Great Again” movement under President Donald Trump — in spite of its grandiose claims — is not a redemptive project, but a desperate attempt to resuscitate an empire on life support. It is animated by the very evils Dr. King warned us about: racism, militarism, materialism, and what we might now add — the narcotic of distraction. These forces have hollowed out the soul of the nation.

Jesus warned in Matthew 7:15–20, “You will know them by their fruits.” Though He was speaking about false prophets, the principle applies to all who claim to speak and act in God’s name — including nations and institutions. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. And the fruit of American life in 2025 is telling: widening inequality, political extremism, partisan vitriol, violent rhetoric, and actual violence — from attempted assassinations to mob insurrections. We are a house divided and, by all appearances, built on sand.

Our economic systems are strained. Inflation, unmanageable interest rates, and a broken healthcare system have made life unaffordable for many Americans. The looming debt crisis threatens the financial future of generations.

Political discourse has become warfare, and opportunistic, unprincipled, even unfit leaders have been elevated to power — not despite their character, but because of it. When entire sectors of the electorate reward cruelty, corruption, or incompetence, we are not only witnessing a political crisis, but a moral and spiritual one.

The weaponization of the justice system, the erosion of public trust in government, and the abandonment of a shared commitment to the common good are not just policy concerns — they are symptoms of something deeper. They are signs of a society bearing the fruit of bad roots.

Jesus closes Matthew 7 not only by identifying bad fruit but by describing two houses — one built on rock, the other on sand. One withstands the storm; the other collapses. The foundation matters. America's foundation — for all its talk of faith — was not built on the Sermon on the Mount, nor the ethics of Jesus. Instead of humbly seeking to embody the kingdom of God, we have too often substituted the label "Christian nation" for the substance of Christ-centered living.

There is growing concern that Christian nationalism is the greatest threat to both American democracy and the witness of the church. That may be true. But perhaps an even deeper threat is Christian nominalism — claiming the name without

living the call. Nominalism is the seedbed of nationalism. It blinds us to our condition and lulls us into false security in the face of divine judgment and societal collapse.

Don't let the rhetoric of Christian identity blind you to the reality of rotten fruit. This is a time for sober discernment, moral reckoning, and spiritual clarity. The storm is not coming — it is here. And only what is built on the rock will stand.

We must awaken from our stupor. We must resist the narcotics of distraction and reclaim a prophetic, historically honest, and morally grounded imagination. The church must be more than a chaplain to culture — it must become again a conscience, a teacher, and a witness.

Today, King's warnings ring louder than ever. The triple sickness of racism, materialism, and militarism is not only still with us — it has mutated and intensified in new forms. In the face of ecological destruction, economic inequity, political violence, and technological disruption, we must ask with fresh urgency: Where do we go from here — chaos or community? Or should we now ask: Where do we go from here? Collapse or Community? This is the question of our time. And as Dr. King taught us, it is not simply a matter of politics or policy, but of spiritual discernment and moral courage.

Faithful Witness in an Age of Change and Collapse

As we think about the role of the church and people of faith today, there are two paths before us:

One Path:

- Churches that sanction the status quo
- Churches that are puppets of the state's mechanisms and vision
- Churches that remain silent in the face of injustice, moral blindness, and spiritual confusion
- Churches that lack compassion for the suffering of our neighbors, particularly the vulnerable
- Churches that remain blind to the ways we participate in the moral sickness destroying America

A Better Path:

- Churches that bear witness and be faithful to the gospel and the Kingdom of God
- Churches that guide—and when necessary, correct—the state's mechanisms and visions
- Churches that inspire and nurture what is good, holy, just, and righteous
- Churches that act with compassion, humility, generosity, and self-sacrificial love
- Churches that remain open to the Spirit's rebuke and correction and to be honest about how *we* are part of the problems we condemn

If we are to take the better path, we must grapple with two urgent questions: **Will we be prophets, priests, and pastors of the Kingdom of God — or of a bankrupt and collapsing social order?** And **how do we model leadership that is responsive to the winds of social change without becoming reactive — resisting the cultural impulsivity and volatility that drive social chaos?**

This is not a theoretical question. It is a deeply personal, communal, and urgent spiritual call. In a world unraveling from the weight of its own injustice and excess, we must decide what kind of leaders we will be, what kind of church we will embody, and what kind of witness we will leave behind. We are not called to be lone actors in pursuit of private fulfillment or spiritual self-help. Christian faith is not a solitary project but a communal vocation. We are the Body of Christ—not a scattered collection of isolated limbs, but a people bound together by covenantal love and shared responsibility.

Christian witness in an age of change and collapse requires us to reimagine how we do ministry. Sermon series, for instance, should stand at the intersection of scripture and world events—proclaiming a gospel that not only comforts but also confronts, informs, and interprets the times we are living in. Denominational and other gatherings of church leaders must go beyond inspirational preaching and empowering worship to include justice briefings and human rights updates. Incorporating images and video footage that reveal global suffering can help disrupt the comfort of distance and awaken moral awareness. After such gatherings, clergy leaders can hold non-partisan press conferences to advocate for just and equitable legislative bills, to encourage respect and civility from elected officials, and to hold them accountable for their voting records and

the well-being of those they represent. These public expressions of witness are also fitting following local, regional, or national tragedies. The public voice and influence of the church are not incidental — they are essential. They must be carefully stewarded and strategically utilized to speak truth, seek justice, and serve the common good.

But our public witness cannot stop with elected officials. Clergy leaders must also meet with business and corporate leaders to challenge unjust practices — such as unfair pricing structures, inadequate wages and benefits, and disproportionate profits that enrich top executives while working families struggle to survive. The church must not remain silent when economic systems are designed to extract rather than uplift. We must also confront the healthcare and insurance industries, where even those with coverage often cannot afford to get sick. Why is healthcare so expensive? Why are premiums high while coverage remains inadequate? These are not just policy issues — they are moral failures. Denominations and churches must be waging a sustained moral campaign against such structural injustice. If we do not, we must ask ourselves: **What kind of society have we become?** And more urgently: **What kind of society are we allowing to persist?**

Our calling demands more than the pursuit of personal interests, preferences, or privileges. It summons us to something deeper: to live, lead, and labor as a community rooted in moral courage, prophetic clarity, and gospel truth.

In this spirit, I offer four guiding commitments for those who would be faithful to the kingdom of God in this season of change and collapse:

1. Prophetic Witness

The church must not be the puppet of the state — it must be its conscience. As Dr. King declared in his sermon *A Knock at Midnight*:

The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state. It must be the guide and the critic of the state, and never its tool.

We cannot allow state and social power to co-opt or silence the prophetic voice of the church. We must reclaim our moral clarity and our sacred calling to speak truth, even when it is inconvenient, unpopular, or dangerous. Our voice is rooted in a calling not shaped by the values of this world. As Paul exhorted in Romans 12:2:

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds...”

Prophetic witness is anchored in resistance to conformity, to compromise, and to cowardice. It demands holy boldness.

2. Radical Honesty

If we are to be credible witnesses, we must be radically honest — with ourselves, with each other, and with the world. Confession and repentance are not merely private religious acts — they are public, social, and political acts. We must name injustice and acknowledge our complicity

in systems of oppression, exploitation, and exclusion.

We cannot merely call out others; we must also call out ourselves. We must repent not only of what we’ve done, but of what we’ve failed to do: our failure to support just systems, our failure to imagine or build alternatives, our failure to act when we had the chance. To follow Jesus is to say with courage and clarity: *We can do better*. And when we don’t, we must be honest about it.

3. Personal and Communal Sacrifice

There can be no Christian witness without sacrifice. In Mark 8:34–38, Jesus calls his followers to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow him. This is not just poetic — it is a summons to radical discipleship. The early church understood this. Zacchaeus, upon encountering Jesus, gave away half his wealth and repaid those he defrauded (Luke 19). The believers in Acts 4 sold their possessions, pooled their resources, and ensured that “*there was not a needy person among them*.”

These were not acts of charity. They were acts of liberation — rooted in justice, fueled by love, and marked by solidarity. We are not simply called to generosity. We are called to divest from greed, renounce hoarding, and give ourselves away for the good of others. This is what it means to live as the church in an age of collapse.

4. Compassionate Service

Finally, we are called to compassionate service. In Matthew 5:13–15, Jesus calls us to be salt and light. Our lives should bear witness to a goodness that awakens others to the presence of God:

Let your light so shine before others, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

In John 17, Jesus prays not that his disciples would be taken out of the world, but that they would remain in it—for its healing and redemption. To serve the world is not to conform to it, but to transform it through compassion, truth, and love.

Compassionate service is not about public performance or spiritual sentimentality. It is a way of life — a witness that makes God visible through acts of justice, mercy, and faithful presence. Our action — what others see us “doing” — should point them to God. Compassionate service must also be public, not only congregational. The church is more than a place of worship — it is a force for good in the world. Here are some ways churches can embody this:

- Establish and fund local and regional disaster relief ministries in response to climate emergencies.
- Advocate for fair insurance practices and provide financial support for people in high-risk or disaster-prone areas.
- Develop public theology initiatives and increase fluency in the impact of federal budgets, social policies, and legislation on vulnerable communities.
- Partner with nonprofits doing justice work—home construction, medical missions, anti-human trafficking efforts, and more.

Final Reflections

- Create local, regional, and national Trauma and Care Ministries to respond to mass shootings, terror attacks, and other public crises.
- Expand access to mental health care by offering counseling services, partnerships with therapists, support groups, and public education on emotional wellness.

Discerning the interplay of these global and local dynamics is not an abstract exercise — it is foundational for authentic and effective ministry today. It demands that we reimagine preaching as a form of moral clarity and hope in the midst of chaos. It calls us to shape congregational life and pastoral care in ways that foster resilience, justice, and communal solidarity. For denominational and organizational leaders, it challenges us to cultivate leaders who are both spiritually grounded and culturally astute, capable of supporting communities through complex terrain.

Our public witness must move beyond charity to courageous advocacy — through strategic partnerships and initiatives that embody the values of God’s kingdom. In our personal lives, it invites us to align our careers, families, and commitments with a deeper sense of purpose and responsibility. In our communities, it calls for bridge-building across divides, cultivating spaces of belonging and shared imagination. And in our planning, it presses us to seek not only what is strategic but what is faithful — anchored in hope, shaped by love, and directed toward the flourishing of all.

The question is not whether this world is in crisis — it is. The question is: Who will we be in the midst of it?

- Will we conform — or be transformed?
- Will we hoard comfort — or build community?
- Will we choose silence — or speak truth?
- Will we live for ourselves — or become vessels of grace, justice, and love?

The church is being sifted. The world is watching. History is unfolding. The Spirit is still moving.

- May we choose the narrow path.
- May we be prophets, priests, and pastors — not of empire, but of the Kingdom.
- May we lead not for applause, but for the sake of the gospel.
- And may we bear witness with our lives to the love that casts out fear, the justice that rolls down like a mighty river, and the hope that refuses to die.

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