

Custodians of the earth

by Emma Ghazarian



(AEST TESTIMONY)

Many years ago, it was at Tafe studying Horticulture where I first watched the documentary "An Inconvenient Truth" The documentary followed former US Vice President Al Gore's campaign educating people about global warming. To this day I remember the panic I felt after watching it. I instantly felt overwhelmed by the urgency needed to reverse the damage humans had caused. Yet the problem also seemed too gigantic for me to comprehend, I didn't know where to even begin, and it was easier to simply ignore the information I had learnt, and pretend I hadn't seen it.

But I could only avoid it for so long, as year after year, the climate crisis was becoming increasingly impossible to ignore. I was now a parent, and I couldn't help fearing the world we will be leaving behind for our children and the generations afterwards. I knew I couldn't change the big world issues but perhaps I could change certain things in my life. So, I chose to be more aware of my consumer and lifestyle habits. Some changes were easier than others. Changing from disposable to reusable, fixing things I would normally throw out, and composting food waste. I loved challenging myself by making things from scratch and rejecting convenient easier options for the sake of the environment. I joined Facebook groups to share ideas and get advice and I fell in love with the simple minimalistic look that comes with a low waste lifestyle. Making these changes in my life helped me feel empowered.

Sadly, there can be an ugly side to the low waste living movement. This can include emotions of shame, guilt, blame and competitiveness. I found myself so passionate and dedicated to making a difference that I became frustrated when it didn't appear that others were making the same sacrifices. I never intended to put others down or to shame them, and looking back now I'm afraid that I did. I think I was also just as hard on myself, pushing myself too hard to make changes that were just not possible. I felt guilty and bullied myself because I thought our family still produced too much landfill rubbish. I was tired and frustrated that I couldn't meet my unrealistic goals.

A critical point in my life occurred during the Summer of 2019-20. There were visions of the Amazon and California Wildfires, and our own 2019-20 Summer Bushfires. It seemed like everyday I was seeing evidence of habitat and species loss, droughts, floods, rising seawater and photos of plastic covered beaches making news headlines around the world. I was overwhelmed. I experienced a mixture of feelings including anxiety, despair, anger, grief and hopelessness. I doubted the impact of my changes and told myself "It's not enough. There's no point. The damage is done. The problem is too big. We deserve this. We did it to ourselves." As custodians of the earth I felt we failed, and dreaded what the future would look like for my children, let alone if I had grandchildren.

I had lost all motivation and I lost hope.

It was during this time that my faith was also called into question; my head filled with concerns. Where is God amongst all this? Is this our punishment? Can God manipulate nature? Was this part of Gods plan? What even is God? I tried to pray, but with all these unanswered questions, I didn't know who I was talking to anymore.

Thankfully I had people in my life I could talk to about the "God" questions. Even though it didn't give me all the answers, I become comfortable in not knowing. Through new understanding, I've been able to recognise where God had been helping us and guiding us. I had just been so focused on the bad I was unable to see the good. I sensed the Spirit among the millions of climate strike protesters around the globe who felt so passionately about protecting the sacredness of creation and its resources they chose to sacrifice their time to, and demanded change and action. I recognised God's wisdom and courage in the climate scientist who spoke out, raising the alarm of the inconvenient truths no one wants to hear but needs too. I can see God's creative energy helping young innovators who are redesigning and creating sustainable concepts. I felt God's presence motivating the people in my permaculture design course where a passionate diverse group of individuals from different

backgrounds felt so determined to learn how to change the way we currently live into a lifestyle that is more intune with nature.

Reflecting back, I've learnt a lot about myself throughout all this. I'm able to recognise what triggers my anxiety. I know fear has a paralysing effect on me. I was too self-focused. When what I thought I needed to do to make a difference, started to feel impossible, I lost motivation. My passion evolved into anger and my anger wasn't solving anything.

I wish I had been kinder to myself and others. I don't know why I put so much responsibility on myself. My efforts weren't for nothing, they only felt insignificant because I felt alone. Anxiety only allowed me to see the doom and gloom.

Recently I was sharing all my concerns about the future to a church friend and she said something that will stick with me: "No one will be able to predict what the future will look like in 10 or even 50 years, but one thing I am certain of is that God will still be around". Hearing that gave me hope.

I have learnt now that hope is what motivates me. Without hope I lose faith. Why sacrifice or leave my comfort zone if I have no faith it will change anything?

The problem we are facing is a gigantic one. By sharing the responsibilities with everyone else on the planet, making small or large changes to the best of our ability, this is what is going to turn things around.

I would like to share some things I have learnt throughout my journey when I have felt overwhelmed, anxious, losing hope or struggling with a lack of motivation.

- Be proud of the changes you have made, no matter how small or insignificant they might seem. Avoid comparing your changes with the changes others are making.
- Perfectionism doesn't exist and a completely zero waste lifestyle is unrealistic.
- "We don't need a handful of people doing zero waste perfectly. We need millions of people doing it imperfectly." - Anne Marie Bonneau ; *Zero Waste Chef*
- Be respective of the life season you find yourself in. Changes and actions single people living alone will look different compared to a single parent trying to raise young children. If you find yourself entering a difficult season, grant yourself permission to pull back to avoid burnout or unnecessary guilt.
- Ignore the temptation to attack other people's lack of action or care. Attacking people, whether intentional or not does not motivate them to become more like their attackers.
- Don't be afraid of the conversation, these conversations need to happen.
- Find some time and space to go and spend time in nature.

Emma Ghazarian

ONE LIFE

Words and Music by Anne Bonnefin

Have we bound the earth in chains?
Have we thrown away the keys?
Have we tied her hands behind her, stripped her bare?
Have we stolen all her joy,
And not stopped to count the cost?
Will she cry her tears until there's no more there?

One Life, One Love , One Planet
Why can't it be our love that binds?
One Life, One Love, One Planet.
Can't we treat the earth good and kind?

Will we ever understand
That we reap just what we sow?
Do we have to bind in fear all that we hold?
The hours go so fast
Use each one as your last.
Do to others as yourself, or so we're told.

One Life, One Love , One Planet
Why can't it be our love that binds?
One Life, One Love, One Planet.
Can't we treat the earth good and kind?

One Life, One Love, One Planet.
ooh, ooh, ooh.
One Life, One Love, One Planet.
ooh, ooh, ooh.

One Life, One Love, One Planet
Why can't it be our love that binds?
One Life, One Love, One Planet.
Can't we treat the earth good and kind?

Have we bound the earth in chains?
Have we thrown away the keys?
Have we tied her hands behind her, stripped her bare?
Have we stolen all her joy,
And not stopped to count the cost?
Will she cry her tears until there's no more there?

One Life, One Love , One Planet
Why can't it be our love that binds?
One Life, One Love, One Planet.
Can't we treat the earth good and kind?
One Life, One Love , One Planet
Why can't it be our love that binds?
One Life, One Love , One Planet
(What you do comes back to you).
Can't we treat the earth good and kind?

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