



**Julia Lillie, a summer intern in the ELCA Washington Office and student at the University of Arizona, offers this reflection.**

*"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Matthew 6:21*

This verse from Matthew has been burning in my mind like a glowing ember since it was relayed during a meeting a few weeks ago. I had heard it before -- in church, Sunday school, youth group -- however some recent events brought new meaning to what Matthew was saying.

Over the past few weeks, much has happened -- for some people good things, for others bad, and for some, the past few weeks have been terrible. A good friend of mine was just offered a wonderful job after weeks of waiting, a former roommate moved into a new house, and a coworker got married to the love of her life; good things. During one of the worst heat waves Washington, D.C., has known, my sister, her boyfriend and I were the brunt of a bad joke made by Mother Nature after a [derecho](#) (or violent windstorm) swept through the D.C. area and took out our power and that of millions of others in our area; bad things. A raging [Colorado wildfire](#) displaced hundreds of families, and television cameras brought us images of people visiting the destroyed sites of their beloved homes, which just weeks ago stood unharmed; terrible things.

A range of emotions, but it was sorrow and worry that led me to this reflection. The bad and terrible occurrences happened because of nature. I wondered, was this lightning strike in the forest and the extreme heat wave in the city "normal" weather occurrences?

Our weather patterns are changing. On a monthly basis, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) reports through the

National Climatic Data Center on the state of the climate. In June 2012, the report stated, “During the June 2011-June 2012 period, each of the 13 consecutive months ranked among the warmest third of their historical distribution for the first time in the 1895-present record. The odds of this occurring randomly are 1 in 1,594,323” (<http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/sotc/>).

Climate change has been an on-going debate for years, but in light of the destructive events this summer, we need to take very seriously its devastating effects.

I wonder if we have been numbed to these shocking things, to the harm and destruction they cause, by ignorance and by the relative slowness of change. These things that have happened are not normal, yet they are accepted as such because we are denying our role in climate change. As the earth rises in temperature due to our continuing use of fossil fuels, [droughts](#) become more common, extreme storms cause great damage, and heat waves become a summer norm. Our denial helps us avoid the truth that the future will likely bring more drought, more wildfires, fiercer storms and oppressive heat. Will we continue to let millions of people be affected by these natural disasters that are not so natural?

When examining climate change, it is hard to ignore the part we play. Human contributions to the greenhouse effect, including driving gasoline-powered cars, wasting energy and cutting down trees, are slowly yet gravely affecting millions around the world without us even realizing it. When we continue to forego implementation of sustainable energy, or dismiss taking small steps such as recycling or consuming less, we are feeding the greenhouse effect and destroying the earth’s health.

As I was walking the half-mile from the Metro train to my dark, stuffy and silent apartment on one of the hottest days in D.C. in the most miserable of moods, I thought that the worst had happened to my sister, her boyfriend and me. We had lost hot water, hundreds of dollars of refrigerated food, the movement of air throughout our house, our nice evenings of watching television, everything we had taken for granted.

These thoughts were stewing in my mind when something lit up and burned me: the glowing ember in my mind, Matthew’s verse, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” I realized suddenly that all this time I had been treasuring the wrong things and my heart was in the wrong place. What I should have been treasuring was the health and safety of my friends and family. Many people in Colorado were in dangerous, unhealthy situations and had just lost so much of their lives, their homes, businesses, schools, parks and

memories. I realized that while we were inconvenienced and frustrated, my sister, her boyfriend and I were ultimately OK.

Are our hearts in the right places? Are we treasuring the right things? I think Matthew would frown upon many of our treasures: our gas guzzling cars, our plastic disposable water bottles, our power plants with billowing smoke stacks. I urge us to loosen our grip on these earthly treasures, and I challenge us to shift our focus to our God, our neighbor and God's creation.

I think we should be treasuring our ability to change the course of climate change, to do something different that will improve the health of the earth and protect millions of people on it from these "natural" disasters. If we do this, our hearts will be with the people we are protecting, helping and changing.

Let us not think that changing weather patterns -- and the ensuing struggle, tragedy and destruction -- are normal. Let's put our minds and hearts with the earth and make that our most treasured possession.

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