

Activism and love

Angela Gibson shares her journey



Love grows through attention

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I read this sentence recently: “Activism is love made visible”, and it stopped me in my tracks¹. Was my response to the climate crisis rooted in love, I wondered, or had my actions drifted to being fuelled by frustration and anger? Over many years of campaigning: signing petitions, organising and attending events, I realised that I’d scarcely taken time to catch my breath and reflect.

On examination, I sensed that my motivation had increasingly become driven by anger and outrage at the worsening climate crisis, the blindfolded greed of global corporations and the persistent inaction of political leaders; all leading to immense suffering for so much of creation. That realisation was uncomfortable because although anger can be powerful, it is rarely sustainable and can lead to burnout and despair. So, I paused to consider: if my activism is meant to be an expression of love for the Creator, for creation and my neighbour, how do I reconnect with that intention?

Firstly I recognise that the anger I feel is a symptom of love, along with grief and outrage; it’s not a purely destructive emotion. Because of my love for the Creator, I am angry when I see the Amazon rainforest disappearing for short-term profit. Because of my love for creation, I feel grief when I see rivers, lakes, and coastal waters polluted by water companies, placing fragile ecosystems in peril. Because of my love for my neighbour, I feel outrage when people in India are enduring daily life in unrelenting temperatures of 47°C. In reality, anger is my love refusing to sit by and accept that these things are inevitable or unchangeable. Indifference and passivity are the true opposites of love. It is precisely because of love that I am angry and feel compelled to do all I can to alert people to the growing climate crisis and speak truth to power.

Anger is also a natural response to the unrelenting news of pain and loss: majestic Laysan albatrosses unwittingly killing their chicks by feeding them plastic waste; small island

nations confronting rising sea levels; the criminalisation and imprisonment of those seeking to raise the ecological alarm. That anger turns to rage when, despite overwhelming scientific evidence that we are in the midst of a climate crisis, widespread denial remains. These things break my heart, just as I believe they break the heart of the Creator.

When Jesus overturned the tables in the temple, it was measured direct action in response to his Father's house of prayer being used as a marketplace, as "a den of thieves" as Mark's gospel recounts (Mark 11:17). It's thought that the inflated prices of sacrificial items were excluding the poor from worship; besides as the only place non-Jews could pray at the temple was the Court of the Gentiles, physically locating the marketplace there made it difficult for them to come and worship. It appears that Jesus's actions were motivated by a fierce love for God, and also for the poor and marginalised. Righteous anger, when directed towards injustice and rooted in love, is biblical.

When governments and global corporations are prioritising profits over planet and people, and where society feels increasingly divided, I believe that love becomes an act of resistance. Love ensures that people's views are respected and are treated with dignity, even when their beliefs are very different to mine. Unpleasant exchanges on social media draw people into spirals of unkindness and vitriol and achieve little beyond fuelling division. Choosing to ensure that love is the source of my activism is an important way to stay grounded in God as I work for change.

Relentless bad news in the media easily provokes feelings of overwhelm and exhaustion. This is when I need to remind myself to return to the Source and take refuge in God. He is the safe place I can run to with my sorrow, frustrations and questions. Lament can also be a powerful practice to help process difficult emotions and feelings, and leave them in God's hands.

I often return to 1 Corinthians 13, where St. Paul reminds us that all our actions and words must be rooted in love. This is a daily challenge for me. Love, he writes "...always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres" (1 Cor. 13: 7). If my activism is truly to be love made visible then I must move beyond frustration, inaction and apathy. Trust, hope and perseverance must shape how I engage.

Love also gently steers me towards others who feel called to use their gifts, skills, and talents to protect creation, driven by love. These communities are places to share burdens and



Love made visible

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bring hope to sustain us in difficult times. Praying together is such a profound experience and creates space for fellowship and friendship.

Everyone has a role to play. As someone who is neurodivergent, the thought of attending a protest or taking non-violent direct action is overwhelming for me. But there are other ways I can contribute and make a difference: taking the flight-free pledge, reducing, reusing and recycling, signing petitions, adopting a plant-based diet, meeting MPs or raising awareness through conversations with others.

Love grows through attention. When I become too wrapped up in crises and bad news, spending quiet time in the beauty of nature brings gratitude. Seeing the bright flash of a kingfisher as I walk along the river in my local nature reserve, leaves me breathless. The sudden appearance of a little egret rising up with long legs dangling fills me with joy. I'm delighted by a glimpse of a vixen and her cubs. These remind me why my activism matters.

Activism is the form that love takes when it refuses to stay silent. Love calls me to notice beauty, to grieve what is being harmed, and to act where I can. It calls me to care for my neighbour and for creation, resisting the pull of cynicism and despair that would dim the light within me. As a follower of Jesus, I am called to stand with the vulnerable, confront injustice and let love become visible through my words and actions. I have come to realise that rest and reflection, through prayer and meditation, is not a luxury but a necessity if my activism is to remain rooted in love. ■



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1. Sedgmore, L. (2024). *Presence Activism*. John Hunt Publishing.