



No Sacrifice Zones

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A sacrifice zone is a geographic area that has been permanently impaired by state-sanctioned environmental devastation and/or organized abandonment. Sacrifice zones exist across Mother Earth already. Some examples include mountaintop removal and open pit mines—open wounds that won't heal—industrial farming poisoning the water in her veins and all life that depends on water, exploitative mining killing the children sent to pull lithium and other minerals from her bones in Congo, and mostly Black and Brown communities suffering lead poisoning and cancer in the abandoned industrial zones of the United States from Flint, Michigan to St. James Parish, Louisiana.

Sacrifice zones are considered the necessary collateral of colonization and capitalism-driven technological advances. It is ecocide. It is genocide. And the sacrifice zones are growing in number as colonization and capitalism drive scarcity and militarization and it all collides in our lifetime with climate collapse. Where I live in southern Arizona, entire mountains, watersheds, sacred land of the Apache people at Oak Flat, and critical migratory passageways for endangered birds and panthers alike, will be utterly and completely destroyed for copper and lithium so the same companies that drove the oil boom can now profit on the green energy boom and we don't have to imagine different, more life-giving ways of being.

We will continue to fight for justice and change, and to heal our relationships with one another and the land, but sacrifice zones are already a growing reality and they are anti-Christ. Perhaps you do not live in an area threatened by numerous mining projects like I do in southern Arizona, but organized abandonment also looks like disaster zones that go unserved because the state

invests billions in militarization and defunds critical infrastructure and emergency services.

As disciples of Jesus we are called to care for living and dying relationships, offering our prayerful, pastoral and transformative presence through every season, struggle, and celebration. We are called to build community and life in places under imminent threat of becoming, or in the process of becoming, or the already existing, so-called sacrifice zones.

Psalm 9:9 God is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.

What is a stronghold amidst the oppression and trouble of our time? I believe it is people who refuse to abandon one another, who lean into responsibility and solidarity (radical dependence), and do not flee the trouble. It is the Apache Stronghold coalition of people praying and defending land, water, and air. It is Palestinians, suffering genocide in Gaza, refusing to let their stories go unheard or to stop caring for one another though they are cut off and abandoned by the world. It is mutual aid groups giving people the means to survive in the aftermath of a hurricane, or the war zones of Sudan. Love is presence. The opposite is abandonment and apathy. We are called, everywhere and always, to love, to be fully present, in prayer and with care, finding abundance in collectivity. That is our sacred intention and attention. In doing so, we find what we all seek and need, belonging and beauty, in spirit, in community, in the world, despite the imminent threats that oppose life.

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