

“Ambitious about the small”

On the meaning of the People’s Climate March, by Greg Yost

Greg Yost was one of the 300,000 who marched Sunday 21 September in the “People’s Climate March” through New York City. The comments below were read by another at a supporting rally Sunday in Asheville, North Carolina. Yost, a high school math teacher and long-time climate justice activist, is a member of Circle of Mercy Congregation in Asheville.

Hello, friends. As we march today amidst hundreds of thousands of people in the streets of New York, please know that what we have on our minds is not just the spectacle of the moment or the exotic, big city location. We're actually thinking about you guys standing out with signs and banners, making a small, Asheville-sized ruckus about the climate. We up here, just like you down there, are thinking about our mountain home.

Events like this Climate March are important because they remind us that we're not alone. Keeping our homes safe and livable is on the mind of people all over this country and, indeed, the whole world. We march because we have to be reminded that no matter how much money and power the fossil fuel industry may have, we, in fact, do have the numbers to make change happen. We are a climate majority. We are raising a moral issue. We outnumber the profiteers of planetary destruction 10,000 to 1.

But if coming together gives us that reminder, it's also important to understand what marching and sign waving don't do. By themselves, they don't make change. They can even be a distraction and a hindrance if we are naive enough to think that they should. As impressive as today's events will be, with climate demonstrations in cities large and small, we run a risk of depression and despair tomorrow when we realize that our moment on stage didn't budge the needle one iota on the amount of carbon daily pouring into the atmosphere. And the greedy executives, the blowhard pundits, and the know-nothing politicians that together obstruct our forward progress today: they will all still be there tomorrow.

No, what is going to swing that needle will not be one (or even many) large, telegenic media moments. We will preserve ourselves and our communities by the sustained application of hope and dissatisfaction to what is by comparison very small. We are on a path to learning to be ambitious about the small.

This means that we are losing interest, for example, in marking the vicissitudes of public opinion polling about "the environment." Instead, we have our heads down, pushing hard to shut down our local, coal-fired power plant. We don't get fluttery anymore when a president-elect makes nice words about slowing the rising of the seas. Instead, we in Asheville make and then act on plans to shut down a government agency in Washington that issues rubber stamp permits to the very fracking industry that is accelerating global temperature and sea level rise.

Make no mistake: We are not organizing as we have in the past just to influence policy. We have committed ourselves to making a revolution. Because it is true that you can make some changes to seemingly big things surprisingly easily. But when you set your sights on the immediate and the small; when your ambition is to reset the day to day intersections of our lives with energy,

food, transportation, democracy, education, law, online culture, and even spirituality; when you start to wake up in the morning with a grin on your face, thinking to yourself, "How can I be the biggest pain in the ass possible to the planet killers today?"—that's when you know that you've taken the serious step from "environmental advocate" to revolutionary.

So I hope there are a lot of you there while Anne reads this. But if not, take heart: as far as numbers go, we've more than got you covered up here. Just like you're out there standing with us today, all quarter million of us (or whatever) are likewise standing with you.

And while it feels good to come together like this in a group large or small for mutual emotional support and to try to dent public consciousness and the lethargy of our leaders with the urgency of the situation, it is, of course, not inevitable that we're going to be successful at staving off total disaster. But search your heart and ask yourself this: Is not the love, the anger, the hope, the *fierceness* that's growing inside you and that brought you here today—is it not making it inevitable that you're going to shake the foundations of heaven and earth itself when you try?