

Climate Brewing | Justice Manning: Climate Denier to Supporter, Age 89

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

SPEAKERS

Susan Oxley, Justice Manning

Susan Oxley 00:05

Hello, and welcome to this podcast that is sponsored by the Community of Christ. My name is Susan Oxley, and I'm your host today for this episode of Climate Brewing. This is the series that focuses on the causes and effects of our climate change, and what we can do about it, the kind of solutions that can help us as we face different climate issues and want to get involved. I'm recording from Seattle, Washington, with my good friend, Justice Manning.

Justice and I are members of the Climate Support Group that meets twice a month. And I've invited him to share with me today a little bit about His interest in climate issues, how he got interested, and what he's doing about that.

Justice Manning 00:48

Well, thank you, Susan. I'm Justice Manning. I live in Daphne, Alabama, which is on the eastern shore of Mobile Bay. I'm glad to be able to be on this podcast.

Susan Oxley 01:04

Thank you so much, Justice. So, let's start with a simple question. Justice, how is it that you first got interested in climate change and the environment?

Justice Manning 01:18.

I spent my career as an environmental engineer, called by different names, different organizations. So, basically, I've been interested in the environment throughout my life. I think the church, the Community of Christ, has helped me be aware of the need to protect, to take care of our environment. In particular, The Sacredness of Creation, one of our Enduring Principles, is very prominent in my consideration. I think our society doesn't give nearly enough attention to such need that confronts us.

And because of my interest in the church and the teachings of the various contacts through my life, I became interested in not only the environment, but as climate change became more pronounced in the, I guess, early 2000's for me, I was a climate denier.

Susan Oxley 02:44

Tell me about that. What was it about what you were hearing that made you a denier?

Justice Manning 02:50

Beginning in the late 80's and 90,s, I became very active in my professional association. I worked with the Environmental Protection Agency, the Tennessee Valley Authority and a local health department. My first job was with a local health department as a public health engineer and of course, I was involved with public contact frequently.

Since I retired in 1997, I became more active in the southern section of the Air and Waste Management Association, my professional association for air pollution control. The state climatologist had reams of data showing that climate effects on the environment were not of significance. (Okay.) I supported that position for a long time because he made presentations at our annual meetings very convincing, a very knowledgeable climatologist. So, I supported his views, along with many other people.

And then, as data kept being released through news items, I started looking at the situation. Until the late 90's, we lived in Ohio. When I moved south, I noticed we seemed to be getting more hurricanes, strong thunderstorms, and I read about fires in the West, etc. So, I started looking more closely at the data--not in detail, but just the effect on the environment. And that's when I transitioned from being a denier into being somewhat neutral.

Susan Oxley 04:45

Now, have you personally experienced any of the effects of hurricanes where you are?

Justice Manning 04:51

No, we've been fortunate. We've had four rather severe since we've retired. This is as long as we've ever lived anywhere. 28 years we've been here. And we had 2004 and 2005--two years in succession--we had two pretty severe hurricanes. In 2005, I think it was, was Katrina, and most people heard of Katrina. But we were on the western edge of the... eastern edge of that, so we didn't have any bad effects.

In 2020, I think it was, we had Hurricane Sally, which hit our county, the southern part of our county. It wasn't nearly as severe as Katrina, but it did a lot of local damage because of the heavy winds. But again, we've been fortunate. (Yeah.)

We were living in North Carolina, about 1979, Hurricane Frederick hit the Gulf, and my dad suffered. He was without power for 2 weeks. It wasn't quite as bad as Helene in North Carolina, but it was pretty severe damage. Well, we came home that... It happened in September, we came to Mobile in the Christmas time and it still looked like a war zone. I'm not sure it had a direct impact in this area, but it was very close because, like I say, it looked like a war zone.

I think it was 2010 sometime, one went just east of us, went up through the town where I was born in southern Alabama and it did some major damage, but again...Personally, our family has been fortunate.

And then the church climatology team started sponsoring the webinars on the climate colloquy.

Susan Oxley 07:09

That was the North American Climate Justice Team.

Justice Manning 07:12

Right, and I couldn't think of that, so... Anyway, when those seminars or colloquies were announced, I've attended most of them. I've had to miss a few. But the more I heard, the more convinced I became it's something that we can't take lightly. So I became a strong supporter. And then after a couple of years of presentations, The people wanted to start groups that would do something about what we've been talking about. And I became a member of the Climate Support Group that needed to learn how to talk about climate change. And that's how I became more familiar with Susan, and with the opportunity that we have to--each individual--to do something about it. Simply by talking about it, like Miss Hayhoe says.

Susan Oxley 08:12

Was that a struggle for you, to change your opinion?

Justice Manning 08:17

As with most things--and I think, most people--change is a struggle, whether it's a view about the environment, a view about doctrine, a view about the name of the church. Change is a struggle for me. And just to give you a little more context, I'm 89 years old. So, yes, it was difficult. But... It got to the point I couldn't deny the evidence.

Susan Oxley 08:56

Mm-hm. I understand. That takes a lot of courage. So what prompted you to get involved with a couple of local organizations that deal with environmental issues?

Justice Manning 09:10

At some point in our travels, my wife bought me a shirt, a little t-shirt. It said, "Stop me before I volunteer again." (laughter) My nature is such that I feel like I need to be doing something. When I retired, I went to work as a volunteer for our County Extension Office, who had started a program of teaching school students, starting at second grade, elementary, up through high school. And some civic organizations, like the Civic Clubs, Rotary, Lions Club, etc., making presentations to these groups about the environment. I did that for 20 years.

When I got too old to carry the demonstration equipment, I felt like I was not doing anything, so I... At one of these exhibits that I was attending, the city in which I live, the Environmental Programs Manager and I ran into each other. And I gave her a

synopsis of my background. She says, we need you on our Environmental Advisory Committee. So, I applied, they accepted me, I became active in that.

And then... My wife and I have always felt that we need to keep learning. We had a group that met twice a year, in the spring and the fall about lifelong learning. One of the courses that I... we took started on the Wednesday before the world was closed down with COVID. March 2020. We had one class and the rest of the classes were canceled because of COVID. But on that first class, one of the men, in fact, the teacher who was going to present the material, he was a world traveler. He had been to Africa and some of the islands of the South Pacific. And he mentioned a local organization called Gulf Coast Creation Care.

I started attending. They had a monthly Zoom meeting. I attended two or three. I liked what I heard, so I joined as an official member. And that group is conscious about trying to keep the environment as pristine as possible. But that's how I became involved. I was invited in one case, and took the initiative in another.

Susan Oxley 12:22

Wonderful, and what are those groups doing? How are you assisting?

Justice Manning 12:26

Personally, because of my physical and hearing situation--which is part of the physical--I've been trying to resign on the Environmental Advisory Committee for almost 2 years now.

Susan Oxley 12:50

(laughter) Okay.

Justice Manning 12:51

And the chair of the committee says, "you're too valuable." Well, the main contribution I make is, I edit the minutes each month. I don't... I can't take the minutes because the work they're doing is primarily water-related, and I'm an air pollution person. Or used to be. And so I said, I can review them, I'm kind of picky, I like things to be correct. So... They gave me that job.

This committee tries to post information for a special day each month on social media. A couple of them are: Indigenous Peoples Day is August the 8th each year; World Environment Day; Sun Day/Energy Efficiency Day, it was this past September. It's September the 21st each year. And the one for this month [November] is National Recycle Day. Anyway, I prepare a short blurb on each of these days, send it to the chair of committee. She has it posted on the social media by the computer experts.

So those are the two jobs that I'm doing for the advisory committee. I don't view them very significant, but apparently she does.

Susan Oxley 14:28

Providing those paragraphs about the special day, environmental day, that's a wonderful contribution! And you enjoy the research and the writing, don't you?

Justice Manning 14:41

Well, I try to copy it, put it in language that I can understand. (laughter)

Susan Oxley 14:47

What are some of the other activities that the Environmental Advisory Committee for the city of Daphne has done?

Justice Manning 14:55

The one that we just completed--brought to fruition—was planting about 65 species of native plants so the people who move into this area, they have a place they can go. It's a central place, about 3 tenths of a mile around an old golf course. You can actually see the plant in existence--this time of the year, they've been blossomed quite well over the spring and summer--and do the QR code, and you can see in real life what the plant looks like. We have a slight description, a short description, of the advantages and disadvantages of that as a landscape product for this part of the country.

On the committee was a professional forester, or something. Or his knowledge had to do with forestry, and he was familiar with all these plants. But they asked me, because of my pickiness, to edit it and put it in language that the average person could understand. I'm a rather simple person, so my vocabulary's not great... [not] very large, but I know what I like to read.

I first of all checked with the author to make sure I had not messed something up in terms of meaning. But it's only... in most cases, it's at most 4 sentences, and some of them are short. There's a few rather long sentences. What I did, was just try to make it understandable.

Susan Oxley 16:44

There's a sign for each of the plants?

Justice Manning 16:48

Yes. (You were...) The common name and the Latin name is on the sign.

Susan Oxley 16:56

Okay.

Justice Manning 16:57

The QR code, and that's the purpose of the QR code, is to get to the description.

Susan Oxley 17:03

And that's on the internet, then?

Justice Manning 17:05

Right.

Susan Oxley 17:06

So, you just had the dedication of that nature trail a little while ago, didn't you?

Justice Manning 17:15

It was November the 1st, to be exact. I'm not sure we called it dedication, I think it was called a grand opening of the Native Plant Trail. We put out notices, inviting people to come, with the enticement of giving away three different species of trees that are native to this area. Those species were live oak, red maple and eagleston holly. But I would guess there were over 100 people there. And, as I mentioned, it's part of an old golf course that had been discontinued I guess ten years ago. I'm not sure.

The mayor was available. He made a few remarks. But one of the statements that the mayor made, he said, "This is one of our committees in the city. This one is active!"

Susan Oxley 18:18

Well, congratulations! I'm so glad that it was successful, and that you had the grand opening. Now, what kind of other projects do these different groups have in mind?

Justice Manning 18:30

Well, the advisory committee, gives advice to the city on general environmental projects, with primary emphasis on stormwater. And that's why somebody else has to take the minutes. Not only is my hearing a problem, but I'm not as familiar with stormwater as I used to be. My first master's degree was in water resources. (Oh.) My second master's degree at University of North Carolina was in air pollution control, so... I've got a good background, but memory is not the best part of my body.

Susan Oxley 19:10

(laughter) It does slow down a bit, doesn't it?

Justice Manning 19:15

But, some of the other projects: In addition to stormwater any kind of environmental issue that may come up, the city environmental program managers are responsible for. For example, we have discussed some of the zoning ordinances based on the effect on the environment around a given subdivision.

The Gulf Coast Creation Care, they're sponsoring a free weatherization project program, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. It's a full day, I understand, quite rigorous. You can become certified. So we've got some contractors who have signed up for it, especially rural contractors, I understand.

I think I've mentioned to you in the past, the Forest Therapy Trail, which, in our case, was a trail of about probably half a mile, maybe a little over, of signs in the woods in which you could stop and meditate. It had some suggestions for each station to how

one could meditate on a particular aspect. And... I did that trail. It was quite enjoyable. This has been a couple of years for that, I guess.

Projects of that nature to help the community become more aware of--as our church calls it--the sacredness of creation. It's one of the objectives of that group, the Creation Care Group. Anything to help keep our environment--physical and emotional, I would say--is something that the Creation Care Group seems to be involved in.

They got started by having read a book in their Sunday school class. And after they finished the book--kinda like the North American Climate Justice Team: we've talked about it for 2 years, let's do something! So, this... Two or three people in that group looked into it, and that's when they decided that they couldn't join a national organization since they didn't have one. So they took the initiative and established a 501-3C locally.

Susan Oxley 22:06

So how, how hopeful are you about the future of our planet?

Justice Manning 22:13

Well, as we all know, there's a lot of reason for despair. But... The reason I'm hopeful: I still have faith that God is in charge. And I don't want to leave the impression that just because of God being in charge of His creation that we don't have something to do.

Section 68 of Doctrine and Covenants: Do many things of your own free will. I think God has charged each of his creation to do what He's given us the ability to do. So that his work... We won't have to depend on God for all the work that needs to be done. So, hope is a two-way street, I think.

I think God is patient. Just like me, a strong denier of the need for a man to give attention to climate. That was pretty prominent in my thinking for several years, probably six or eight, in the mid 2010's. But God was patient enough to... I came around to the point that you can't deny some of the effects that are happening over the world. And that's the other aspect of it: it's not a local problem, it's a global problem.

Susan Oxley 24:02

That's true. And you're one of the people that's helping to make a difference.

Justice Manning 24:08

(laughter) You're kind. Thank you.

Susan Oxley 24:11

Thank you for the work that you're doing, for your interest, your continued interest in the sacredness of creation, and in making that difference, and doing anything that you can as the opportunity comes. I think... I admire you and respect you for the work you're doing. Thank you.

Justice Manning 24:27
Thank you.