

Story

Years into the future, the effects of global warming that humans have warned themselves against have finally come to fruition. Cities have sunk under as sea levels rise-- only the tallest buildings remain, as a reminder of the past heights humanity had achieved before. Storm clouds cover the sky as grim weather approaches. A girl is in the water, hanging onto a plastic barrel to stay afloat among the various other pieces of plastic in the sea. But a holy figure comes to her, walking on water without sinking. Isn't this the same being that threw humanity into social collapse in the first place? But there is no time to think about that. In a world of no hope due to humanity's existence, that is her only salvation.

Inspiration

Since I was little, my family has always attended mass at the same parish in Moline, Illinois. Like numerous other Catholic cathedrals worldwide, Sacred Heart Catholic Church features countless stained glass windows, some towering far above the congregation and providing natural light to the church. One window placed to the left of my usual seat in Mass is the miracle of Jesus Christ walking on water. It is a phenomenon that reveals Jesus' divine power as he tells his disciples to "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."¹ He tests the faith of his disciples by inviting one of them, Peter, to walk on water with him. But as Peter starts to fear the water, he sinks, and Jesus chastises: "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"²

Water is always mentioned as we talk about the irreversible effects of climate change. Glaciers melt, sea levels rise, and civilizations lining the coasts are at threat of submersions, such as California and Florida in the United States. The Catholic community has created a generally positive response to preventing climate change, as they urge others to protect the Earth ("that

¹ Matthew 14:27 NIV.

² Matthew 14:31 NIV.

God has given them”) for the happiness of everyone. Yet, there is conflict between Christian principles on what should be done by the people. Some of the community ties this threat to God’s wrath, akin to the Great Flood and Noah’s Ark in Genesis of the Bible. Some believe that the effects of climate change are God’s will-- whatever comes is up to God, and we do not influence the future. The answer some devout come up with is to just pray for bad times never to come around. We are supposed to have “faith” in Jesus because that fate will apparently let us perform miracles and walk on water to save us from drowning.

With these ideas, I wanted to portray the direct influence of religion, especially Christianity, on the social perspective of climate change. Ultimately, my painting depicts Jesus walking on water in an apocalypse setting when the worst of global warming has affected the world.

The Sun

The portrayal of the sun is a common theme among Catholic paintings. Usually, rays of light shine down upon a heavenly figure-- Jesus, God, or symbolism of divine power. The sun also represents the opening of the heavens, where one could “be saved from death.” In this painting, the sun breaks out among many storm clouds, representative of the unpredictable and ruthless weather that will come with climate change, Rays of light shine down upon the figure of Jesus, who stands on water. Ironically, however, the sun in climate change is the general cause of the increasing temperatures, rising waters, and social instability. The “Day of Judgement” that Christians fear comes nearer as the sun grows brighter.

The Waters

Water has religious connotations, as water symbolizes rebirth and cleansing of sins. Water is used in baptisms to cleanse people from sin and invite them to Christianity. Water is also

associated with miracles, evident with the miracle of Jesus walking on water. However, the water is filled with waste in this painting, far from clean. Trash that fills our oceans even today and may not be degradable are shown in this ocean: cigarette butts, plastic water bottles, straws, single-use bags, food wrappers, six-pack rings, barrels with toxic waste, etc. This water is a far cry from “cleansing sins,” but in this painting, water may signify the rebirth of humanity.