I imagine that some of you read the front page article in the Register Guard this morning, linking the wildfires in California to climate change and its human causes. Or you may have read the article that took up the whole New York Times' Magazine this past Sunday, "Losing Earth," documenting all of the missteps in the past 50 years of conversation and attempted action about climate change.

They are problems that we know well. It is easy, reading those articles, to slip into an easy sort of despair, to recognize that well, now it's too late to stop climate change, so might as well enjoy our air conditioning before peak oil hits.

It bothers me that we move so quickly from denial to despair, and I think the place we all need to inhabit is the place between them – the place where we face the problem, mourn what is already lost, and try to think clearly about what agency we yet have to work for the good. Since that's rather a mouthful, I call that place in shorthand, "hope." I'm trying to figure out how we inhabit hope.

How do we get there? Well, here we are, at Rosh Chodesh Elul, the season of repentance. It is a season of looking at the truths about ourselves, about our lives – the one time of year when we are encouraged to be most awake and least in denial.

Here we are, at Parashat Re'eh, the instructions in Deuteronomy about how to live in the land together.

The parashah opens with an affirmation of collective human free will, telling the community, "See, I set before you this day blessings and curses." God can instruct us in the right ways of being together in the land, but God cannot force us. The rest is up to us.

That statement comes in Deuteronomy, not in Exodus, right after the people are freed from Egypt. The true test of their sustainability for a people comes not just with wandering, but in relationship to a land.

On other line particularly struck me from the parashah: Deuteronomy, Chapter 12, verse 8 instructs: You shall not act as we do here [in the wilderness], *ish kol yashar b'einav* – each person as they please. It goes on to talk about how once the Israelites enter the land, they will bring their sacrifices to the central location, the Temple yet to be built. Many commentators make it explicit that they think this is what the verse is talking about. Chizkuni, for example, writes, "we do not understand these words literally, but that it refers to offering sacrifices in his backyard, instead of bringing the animals concerned to the Tabernacle."

At first, this bothered me. Surely, it is a good thing if people treat the area right where they live as sacred ground.

But as I thought about it more, I realized, this is a profound distinction between the responsibilities of a sojourner, versus a settled people. For someone who is traveling should be a good guest, treating every place through which they pass as sacred ground. Once we are settled landowners, however, not passing through many spaces, there is the temptation to do just as Chizkuni says, to make our own plot of land the sacred space, and to neglect what it means to be part of a collective world.

Of course, not everyone is a good "guest". Robin Wall Kimmerer writes in *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the teachings of Plants,* "After all these generations since Columbus, some of the wisest of Native elders still puzzle over the people who came to our shores. They look at the toll on the

land and say, “The problem with these new people is that they don’t have both feet on the shore. One is still on the boat. They don’t seem to know whether they’re staying or not.”

It's a pointed irony. The European settlers who colonized this land did not treat anywhere as sacred. They – and we, their cultural if not biological descendants – have neither acted with the respect of guests, or the long term investment in the health of a place of natives.

We offered ancient sacrifices on holy ground, but the word “sacrifice” in modern parlance, comes up more frequently with the phrase “sacrifice zone” - a geographic location that has been permanently polluted or destroyed by extractive industry or place that has not yet been so destroyed, but for which there are plans for that destruction.

In other words, in contrast to Torah’s understanding, a sacrifice zone is the opposite of a sacred space. We are not supposed to allow sacrifice zones, in Torah’s understanding. When we are passing through, wherever we are is sacred. When we are settled remember that your backyard is not the only holy place– at least according to Chizkuni’s of the verse.

Ibn Ezra, in contrast, disagrees that the verse refers specifically to sacrificial practice, writing, “the phrase, *ish kol yashar b’einav* “each person as they please” means is that they were not all completely dedicated to God [until we were settled in the land]. . . there *were* many commandments concerning, e.g., burnt-offerings, which could not be fulfilled except in the land of Israel (for so it is written [**Numbers 15: 2**]).”

On a very practical level, Ibn Ezra is speaking to the logistical reality that certain Torah commandments only apply in the land of Israel. I think he also speaks to a deeper metaphoric reality, which is that to be a landholder, to be a citizen of some place is to have responsibilities that are at least as great as the privileges: responsibilities to the land, to each other in community, and to those who pass through. I'm pleased to say that Zevariah will be speaking tomorrow about our responsibilities to each other, and Gideon will be speaking next week about our responsibility to those who travel through.

So I want to talk about our responsibility to the land. We are not in the land of Israel, and many in this room are visitors for the weekend. But many of us are settled with lives and houses, somewhere. And our task – for those of us who did not grow up in a culture that taught us to be indigenous – as the task of the ancient Israelites was – is to learn how to treat the land in which we reside as if we are indigenous to it – and as if we hope our descendants will be too.

That would mean, for example, not allowing a pipeline to be built that would endanger water sources and habitats across Southern Oregon – even though it doesn't pass through *our* backyards. We don't let anywhere else become a "Sacrifice zone." First, the public comment period on the Jordan Cove pipeline that I just mentioned is about to close next week. Please submit a comment if you haven't already. Postcards are available at kiddush.

I also encourage us to practice our commitment to the sacredness of earth by attending one of the rallies in town upcoming this fall in support of climate justice. I'll be going to the one on September 8th straight from Shabbat morning services, and I hope you will come with me.

I get this charge not just from Re'eh, but from Elul. Elul is the season of looking at hard truths, but it is also considered in midrash to be *et ratzon,* a time of divine favor. Many early midrashim teach that the time from the 1st of Elul to Yom Kippur was the 40 days that Moshe spent on the mountain receiving the second set of tablets, after destroying the first when he witnessed the sin of the Golden Calf. So Elul is the time in which we trust that second chances are possible, even in the wake of great catastrophe.

Here we are, awake, alive, and on the land. So it's not too late to do something.