

## **“Loving Our Earth”**

**Rev. Mary Gear**

**Delivered Sunday, October 17, 2021**

**First Reading:** from the book of Genesis 1: 26-27 (Message Bible)

God spoke: “Let us make human beings in our image, make them

reflecting our nature

So they can be responsible for the fish in the sea,

the birds in the air, the cattle,

And, yes, Earth itself,

and every animal that moves on the face of Earth.”

**Second Reading:** from “Threat of Global Warming/Climate Change,” a Statement of Conscience adopted by the Unitarian Universalist Association General Assembly in 2006.

As Unitarian Universalists, we are called by our seventh Principle to affirm and promote "respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part." We envision a world in which all people are assured a secure and meaningful life that is ecologically responsible and sustainable, in which every form of life has intrinsic value. In other words, Unitarian Universalists are called to defer to a balance between our individual needs and those of all other organisms. Entire cultures, nations, and life forms are at risk of extinction while basic human rights to adequate supplies of food, fresh water, and health as well as sustainable livelihoods for humans are being undermined.

To live, we must both consume and dispose. Both our consumption and our disposal burden the interdependent web of existence. To sustain the interdependent web, we must burden it less while maintaining the essentials of our lives.

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita are painful omens of how racism, sexism, and poverty worsen the effects of global warming/climate change. Our world is calling us to gather in community and respond from our moral and spiritual wealth; together we can transform our individual and congregational lives into acts of moral witness, discarding our harmful habits for new behaviors and practices that will sustain life on Earth, ever vigilant against injustice.

### **Sermon/Homily: Loving Our Earth**

A few weeks ago, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service removed 23 species from the Endangered Species list. It was not because the species had recovered, but because they have not been seen in the wild for decades, so are most likely extinct. Eleven birds, including the largest woodpecker, eight species of freshwater mussels and two freshwater fish, a fruit bat, and a plant. All gone due to loss of habitat, dams, pollution, logging, invasive species. Gone due to the impact of humanity on the world around us, the world that we are part of.

A few weeks from now, the United Kingdom will host the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties in Glasgow, Scotland, COP26. The subtitle of this conference is "Uniting the world to tackle climate change." This conference has been happening for 26 years, since 1995, to set goals for addressing climate challenges. The stakes are higher each year, and even higher now. A few days ago, the President-Designate of the Conference, Alok Sharma, said in a speech in Paris, "Responsibility rests with each and every country ... because on climate, the world will succeed, or fail as one." The next day, a study by Germany's Mercator Research Institute on Global Commons and Climate Change found that 80 percent of the Earth's land, where 85 percent of the population lives, felt the effects of weather events made

worse by climate change. We are in this storm together.

Today's reading from the book of Genesis also speaks of responsibility. "Let us make human beings in our image...So they can be responsible for...Earth itself, and every animal that moves on the face of Earth." Being responsible for the Earth is a different interpretation of this ancient text than many of us are familiar with. More traditional versions of this Bible verse use words like humankind will "rule over" or "have dominion over" all the animals of the Earth or will "be the master of all life on earth." That is language that sets up a relationship of domination and exploitation. "Be responsible" suggests a relationship of stewardship, tending to and caring for something of value.

Words matter and the words of our sacred texts matter even more because they help inform our beliefs. As a liberal religious tradition, we read sacred texts as living documents, open to interpretation based on what is real in this world, now. We are open to singing a new song.

I chose the Message Bible interpretation for our reading today because its words reflect a theology more in line with the Unitarian Universalist Association Statement of Conscience on Climate Change; we are part of the interdependent web, and we are responsible to and for that web of life.

As a people of faith, we understand this responsibility and through our actions, individually and collectively, we make that responsibility real. We join with other people of faith, even people with different theological foundations, because we all understand that we will succeed or fail as one. The Green Faith event tomorrow is an example of coming together to worship and act for climate justice.

I have spoken before about the importance of spiritually grounded justice, and Green Faith understands this. By spiritual, I do not necessarily mean something otherworldly. I mean being grounded in the awareness that there is something greater than us as individuals. A humanist might name that something as the power of we, what we can accomplish when we come together. A Christian or Jew or Muslim might name that something God or Allah or Jesus. Someone else might name it Infinity or All That Is or

the Infinite Web of Life and Love. No matter what you name it, living a spiritual life means acknowledging and being aware of something greater, and drawing on that something for courage and inspiration, even hope.

For last week's Question Box service, Shelley Ferer asked, "What are the theological traditions in Unitarian Universalism that support hope in this time of climate change?" This is what I think. The Unitarian tradition of reliance on reason and science helps us embrace what we can know about the world we live in and understand the impact of our actions on the environment. This offers hope because we can only change what we acknowledge and understand.

Our Universalist tradition informs our 7<sup>th</sup> principle, the interdependent web of existence of which we are a part. An awareness of our connection to other humans, other beings, and the Earth offers grounding in relationships and the inspiration to care for each other and all life; all beings are worthy of care and love. Our theology supports the spiritual practice of hope because we say that we are connected and we can make a difference, together.

I imagine spiritually grounded justice work as (gesture) the exchange between the inner and the outer. We identify, clarify, and deepen our values and beliefs, and then we act in the world, we live in our families and communities, we connect with others, and we live our mission, our purpose. Then we bring those experiences into our awareness to learn from them, then go out into the world again.

The continual flow from the inner to the outer, inner, outer. It is a figure 8 on it's side, which is the symbol for.....infinity.

Infinity is abundance. It calls on the idea that love is infinite, that the interconnected web of life is infinite, and if we connect with each other and with something greater from that place of love and abundance, we will find our way to enough, enough for all beings. That gives me hope. //

Before we go out and do the work of climate justice, work we must do, we can find some spiritual grounding. I invite you now into a guided meditation to journey inward,

then outward, connecting to something greater.

Get comfortable where you are. Feel the ground beneath you, connect to the Earth, Mother Earth, source of life. //

Relax your shoulders and neck. // Your arms.

Your core.// Your legs and feet.//

Breath in, breathe out. //

Relax your gaze or close your eyes if you are comfortable. //

If you are able, bring into your mind's eye this world, our Earth. Bring into your awareness something of this Earth that you are grateful for. It might be a person or another being, an animal or plant, insect, or bird. It might be a place, a mountain, a body of water. Bring it fully into your awareness, what it looks like, sounds like, smells like, tastes like, feels like.

(pause)

As you hold in your awareness with love what you are grateful for, notice the feeling of gratitude within you. Where do you feel gratitude in your body? Is it in your heart, your chest, your core, your belly? Is it everywhere within you? Notice that feeling with curiosity and love.

(pause)

Now bring into your awareness something of this Earth that you feel the loss of. It could be a person or another being, an animal, a place, a mountain, a body of water. Bring it fully into your awareness, what it looks like, sounds like, smells like, feels like.

(pause)

As you hold in your awareness what you grieve, notice the feeling within you. Where do you feel this loss in your body? Is it in your heart, your chest, your core, your belly? Is it

throughout your body? Notice that feeling of loss within you. Be with it for just this moment. Notice that feeling with curiosity and love.

(pause)

When you have located the grief and the gratitude within your body, imagine those feelings as delicate strands of thread that flow out of you. // Imagine strands of grief and gratitude flowing out of the people here today. // Imagine your strands connecting with the strands of everyone here now. //

Now expand your vision to imagine your threads of grief and gratitude connecting with the threads of everyone in your neighborhood, in your city, in your state. Imagine the web of connecting threads.

(pause)

Now imagine your strands of grief and gratitude connecting with threads of people around the nation, throughout the continent, around the world, even out into space. Imagine the infinite web of connecting threads. Imagine the web, all connected, holding the grief, sharing the gratitude, all held in love.

(pause)

Now return your awareness from the entire web / to your threads and slowly follow them back into your body, back into your places of grief and gratitude. Notice the feelings now. Have they changed? Have they moved?

(pause)

Recall what you grieve the loss of. Hold that grief in love. You might offer a word of thanks that it existed.

Recall what you are grateful for. Hold that feeling of gratitude in love. You might imagine or whisper a word of gratitude.

As we breathe together, connected by the web of life, let's hold a moment of silence

together.

(pause)

May we recognize that we belong to this Earth and to each other.

May we recognize abundance in ourselves, in this community, and in this amazing and beautiful world.

May we have the courage to act out of hope and love.