

Last week we sang “For the Beauty of the Earth” and the scripture lesson was Psalm 19, “The heavens are proclaiming the glory of God,” as well as Jesus pointing to the birds and the flowers in his “sermon on the mount.” Yes, April flowers finally in brilliant color, and bird calls gracing the early dawn! A time for much thanks, praise and hope, even amidst much illness and death in our world.

This week, as promised, I’m continuing with theme of the Earth, but addressing the “wounds” of our Earth home. I know we would rather not see any wounds, nor talk about them, but if we really care about Nature, we must keep our eyes and ears open regarding the dangers to life all around us. In her book *Boundless Compassion*, Joyce Rupp, contemporary spiritual leader, summarizes our situation well: *“We do not have to look far to see how the natural world suffers. The pain of our planet becomes visible in polluted waters failing to support life, destroyed rainforests that cannot contribute life-giving oxygen, land stripped of its precious topsoil to build shopping malls, carbon-polluted air damaging our precious thin layer of atmosphere, the elimination of wildlife habitats, and the extinction of species of animals, plants insects, and microorganisms.”*

While that covers most everything, we can add many obvious things we have seen and heard: Many whales get entangled in fishing lines and drag heavy fishing gear behind them. We’ve probably all heard of sea animals ingesting non-degradable plastic, like plastic straws that are found in sea turtle’s noses. The Firehouse and Port Media for several years have sponsored the the Earthport Film Festival; I recall vividly the images of miles of plastic amassing in the ocean. And regarding the pollution of rivers, we all remember Flint Michigan stories, whose toxic water can also be an example of “environmental racism” since it affected predominantly people of color... (not in my backyard, but OK in their backyard.) And in the “backyard” of a Dupont Chemical Plant in West Virginia, 80-90% of one farmer’s cows were killed by pollution from the plant; the farmer won a lawsuit against Dupont for “knowingly” dumping toxic chemicals!

We don’t have to go very far; I heard that Bill Silsby’s Dad who owned a farm in Bradford, who prohibited his sons from swimming in the Merrimac, accidentally fell in one day, and wound up in the hospital for several weeks due to the polluted wa-

ters. Fortunately the Merrimac is much cleaner today, thanks to environmental regulations,

but I'm still not eager to swim in it. One story that really hits home for me is that of the clammers in this area. They used to make a good living clamming (look at the old photos at Joppa flats), but as Belleville began helping two homeless clammer brothers, I was shocked to find out that "full-time" clammers could not garner a living wage, as the clam flats were closed almost half the time, from either red tide or acid rain coming from the land. (Acid rain is the result of air pollution, and "Rainfall closures" of clam flats are often about 10 days!) And regarding fish, when I was a child, flounder were abundant and easily caught, right close to shore; but for the last 20 years or more, they are seldom seen. The fishing industry itself, in New Bedford or Gloucester is dying, and fishermen need to find new skills and new jobs.

Clearly, we humans bear much responsibility for the wounds and disease in our world. For the current virus pandemic, it is hard to prove direct culpability, as there are many questions and much inconclusive research. But from what I've gathered thus far, many scientists do point to the close contact and therefore conflict of humans and wildlife. Professor Thomas Lovejoy, an environmental scientist and senior fellow at the United Nations Foundation, said recently: *"This pandemic is not Nature's revenge; we did it to ourselves. It is the 'consequence' of our persistent intrusion into Nature, in particular the wildlife trade and illegal markets."*

Could it be that the pandemic is a "wake up call?" Is it trying to correct some imbalance between humans and nature? And do we bear some responsibility? We are so interconnected with all of creation. It is surely a call to look more closely at our world, to care more for the Earth that is our home. Unfortunately, some Christian sectors have had a history of disregarding the delicate balances of our Earth. The passage in Genesis 1 about having "dominion" over the Earth, has often been interpreted as having "domination" over. Another translation says to "be in charge of" which has also been interpreted as being "stewards" of the Creation. If God is the Creator, we are stewards for God and the goodness of creation; we are not free to do whatever we please, at the expense of other parts of Creation. Our scripture lesson this morning, Psalm 24, is clear that "The Earth is the Lord's"..... It is not ours, nor made by us. And the words of Paul in Romans 8 said that "All Creation is Groaning," waiting for redemption. Yes, even in Paul's time it was clear that our suffering

and that of the Earth are bound together. Our interconnection gives us a responsibility, a call, to be part of the solution just as we are part of the problem.

Rev. Jim Antal, who was president of the Massachusetts UCC until about 2018, then completed his book entitled “Climate Church, Climate World: how people of faith must work for change.” He quotes another environmental activist in saying that what we need now is a Golden Rule 2.0. People of faith would do well to say not only “Do unto others (as you would have them do unto you)” .... But Do unto the EARTH, and Do unto FUTURE GENERATIONS.” I attend a recently statewide UCC convention where a grandfather from Weston UCC read a letter to his grandchild. He spoke of the unhealthy state of the climate and creation now, and what he was trying to do to make it better for the life of this grandchild.... Moving, sad, urgent.

One of the key issues (that we would rather avoid talking about) is our dependence upon coal and oil, upon “dirty energy.” Rev. Jim Antal passes along the startling imagery of a Carbon Dioxide “bomb” that has been “quietly exploding since the beginning of the industrial age.” He quotes research that this CO<sub>2</sub> bomb has been polluting and heating up the Earth’s atmosphere at the rate of 400,000 Hiroshima-sized nuclear bombs every day!” Rev. Antal was asked to write a resolution for the national UCC convention in 2017, which included these two commitments: 1. Resist Expansion of fossil fuels infrastructure, and 2. Seek and demand new sources of renewable energy, accessible to all people, all economic classes.

We all have resistance and excuses for not acting for the Earth. We say it is too political (It does not have to be. We are stewards of Creation, for God, for preserving our common Earth home. Surely, we can work for bipartisan action, and for compromises in legislation). We say the problem is too large (well, people of faith have always said “light one candle, or take one step in faith.”) Then we hear what about the storm of ’34, or what about the blizzard of ’78? Sure, there are occasional chaotic and tumultuous events in nature, but not at the rate we see them now. It seems obvious to me that we have a rise in the *frequency* of storms, we have a rise in the average temperatures (with loss of ice and glaciers), rise in the CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere, and most obviously a rise in pollution of air and water everywhere! Less carbon emissions during these “shelter-at-home” times has clearly improved the air quality over major cities around the world, by many reports.

So we have a call to action, action for our Earth home. We are part of an interconnected system. Because we are part of the problem (overconsumption and pollution), we need to be part of the solution (live more simply, and clean up our environment). It is both a moral and spiritual issue. Environmental theologians put it this way: Will we continue to "sacrifice the environment at the altars of consumption, economic growth or convenience?" Jesus put it in another way: "You cannot serve both God and Mammon (money)... one will be the master." (If the master is not God, then we have an idolatry of economic growth, at the expense of all else, especially God's creation.)

There are so many little actions we can take; we each will choose, and I'll mention just a few. From a morning coffee group friend, I learned about an effort called "4 Ocean." Started by two young guys, they now have a fleet of boats that actually circle and remove plastics from the ocean, then find ways to recycle them. Better yet, let's buy things in other containers rather than recycling plastic that will just make more plastic .... Perhaps buy soda in glass bottles! Perhaps join a crew for a seashore clean up project nearby. What about saving transportation costs and pollution by shopping for more locally grown food? Choosing food grown with less toxic pesticides? What about solar panels for our homes or churches? Or energy-saving appliances? (after the old ones have had a good long life, of course! ) How about reducing our carbon footprint... vehicles with less CO2 emission? Or even some divesting from fossil fuel companies, at home or at church? (I know we worry if dividends and growth would suffer with more environmental companies, a tough issue to address). And endless number of action steps we could take, but perhaps we choose 1 or 2 ways that we can help protect and preserve the earth, especially for the sake of generations not yet born.

Yes, it is a spiritual call, and spiritual growth for people of any faith or no faith. For those who follow Jesus, we remember that he was continually teaching and making analogies with examples from Nature. I'll conclude by suggesting that we: Meditate on Nature, our Earth home, also Meditate on the *wounds* of nature and ask ourselves if our "God" will be economic growth or Care for Creation?

Finally, will we commit our time, talent, or treasure to protection and preservation of the Earth? Could this be the time to do so? Could a health crisis and time at home be the time to commit and to act?

I'd like to close by singing a song by Ken Medema called  
"THIS IS THE TIME."

*This is the time, and you say it's the wrong time. This is the way, and you say it's the wrong way. You are the person, you say you're the wrong person, to do what's calling to be done. And if you wait til you find the right time, and if you wait til you find the right way, and if you wait til you're the right person, you may find your chances will be gone...*

*Cause life is what happens to you when you're making other plans. If you with until your plans are made, life will slip right through your hands.*

*This is the time and you say it's the wrong time, This is the way and you fear it's the wrong way. You are the person, but you say you're the wrong person to do what's calling to be done.*

*You've got some plans you're making, you've got some dreams you're dreaming, One of these days the world will see you come alive! You hear your drummer drumming, you say your time is coming, and until that time, you've just got to survive. You say you're getting stronger, you say it on't be much longer. You know you're afraid of the unknown behind that door! And if you keep on waiting, if you keep hesitating, You'll be too weary to dream anymore!*

*This is the time, and it may be the right time; This is the way, and it may be the right way. You are the person who may be the right person..... to do what's calling to be done..... Come do what's crying to be done!*