

Earth Day Celebration

April 18, 2010

Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Hillsborough

Ringing of the Chimes

Welcome – Welcome! We are glad you're here. Whether you are here for the first or second time, are a long time member, or somewhere in between, we are glad you're here. We invite all of you to stay for a time of fellowship after the service with a cup of coffee or tea. (ask for visitors to stand and introduce themselves) This morning we invite you to take a moment to set aside all the concerns and cares, the headlines and deadlines of life and pay attention to that spirit within us that asks us to lead a deeper, more reverent life. This morning we pay special attention to the spirit of the earth, how we are in relationship to it as part of the interdependent web and what that asks of us. Welcome!

Announcements

Prelude

Opening Words – *The Lorax* by Dr. Suess (contemporary prophet)

*At the far end of town, where the Grickle-grass grows
and the wind smells slow-and-sour when it blows*

*and no birds ever sing, excepting old crows...
is the Street of the Lifted Lorax.*

*And deep in the Grickle-grass, some people say,
if you look deep enough you can still see, today,*

*where the Lorax once stood
just as long as it could
before somebody lifted the Lorax away.*

*What was the Lorax? And why was it there?
And why was it lifted and taken somewhere
from the far end of town where the Grickle-grass grows?
The old Once-ler still lives here. Ask him. He knows.*

*You won't see the Once-ler. Don't knock at his door.
He stays in his Lerkim on top of his store.*

*He lurks in his Lerkim, cold under the roof,
Where he makes his own clothes out of miff-muffered moof.*

*And on special dank midnights in August, he peeks
out of the shutters and sometimes he speaks
and tells how the Lorax was lifted away.
He'll tell you, perhaps... if you're willing to pay.*

Opening hymn - #163, "For the Earth Forever Turning"

Greeting one another

Lighting of the Chalice – May the light we now kindle inspire us to use our powers to heal and not to harm, to help and not to hinder, to bless and not to curse, this marvelous world we have been given.

Candles of Joy and Sorrow – Each week we set aside a time to celebrate with those who have had a joyous occasion this week, and to support those through difficult times. Each of these is made more meaningful when understood by the community we love and support. If you have had a joy or sorrow this week, we invite you to come forward, light a candle, and share with us what is in your heart this morning.

Time for silent reflection

Children's Story –

Who knows the story that our opening words came from?
What is the story about? (turning the last of the Truffula trees into Thneeds; disappearance of the Brown Bar-ba-loots)

Read:

*And I'll never forget the grim look on his face
When he heisted himself and took leave of this place,
Through the hole in the smog, without leaving a trace.*

*And all that the Lorax left here in this mess
Was a small pile of rocks, with the one word... UNLESS.
Whatever that meant, well, I just couldn't guess.*

What do you think he meant when he said, "unless"?

None of us, I imagine, I unfamiliar with the idea of the earth becoming more polluted, of the ozone being depleted and global warming, of species of animals disappearing because of the places they live changing or being destroyed. These things have happened mostly because for years and years we've cared more about the conveniences in our lives and the speed at which we can live more than our obligation to take care of the earth which has sustained us for so

long. When the Lorax writes, UNLESS, he reminds us that we start to care more about the earth than our own convenience, it might not always be here to care about us, at least not as it does now.

It is one of our most fundamental of spiritual practices to learn how to save what is being lost, and to care for what is being treated carelessly. How we become part of that cycle of caring becomes part of our spirituality.

How does the story end?

Read:

*UNLESS someone like you cares a whole awful lot,
Nothing is going to get better. Sad to say, but it's not.*

*So... catch! (throw acorn)
calls the Once-ler as he lets something fall.
It's a Truffula Seed. It's the last one of all.*

*You're in charge of the last of the Truffula Seeds.
And Truffula Seeds are what everyone needs.*

*Plant a new Truffula. Treat it with care.
Give it clean water. And feed it fresh air.*

*Grow a forest. Protect it from axes that hack.
Then the Lorax and all his friends may come back.*

Sing the children to class

Offering – Each week we give of ourselves such that our efforts may reconstitute the world and the love we find in it. We do this by giving of our time, talents, and our money. We will now receive this morning's offering for the good of this congregation and the world that we serve.

Reading – *Psalm 104* by Robyn Kermes

*Contemplating the intricate web of creation,
I am touched by the sacred
To the depths of my soul.*

*The wind whispers to all the earth of the ever changing changelessness;
Fire and flame are the instruments of transformation.
Each element working together in the Dance of Life.*

Clear cold springs gush forth in the valleys,

*They burble up in the hidden places between the hills,
Giving drink to all the animals who live there.*

*The earth effortlessly brings forth food,
Wine to gladden the human heart, Oil to make the face shine,
And bread to strengthen the body's limbs.*

*The circle of the seasons is marked by the moon's ebb and flow;
The sun knows it's time for setting,
Completing the circle of the day.*

*Darkness comes round and it is night,
When all the animals of the forest come creeping out.
When the sun rises, they withdraw and rest.*

*May we learn to live our lives in harmony
With the energies and Rhythms embedded into the Earth,
That we may appreciate the glory of creation forever.*

Sermon

This Thursday, April 22nd, marks the 40th anniversary of Earth Day. How many of you here remember that first Earth Day? What were your thoughts on that day? Jubilation that people were finally paying attention? There is much to celebrate in that “paying attention” even as global warming has become more pronounced and our situation more precarious. It is easy for us to become insensitive to the changes we’re experiencing because we no longer live close to the earth. We don’t have a relationship with it like previous generations have had. I’m calling this service a Celebration of Earth Day, but I have to admit, there are times when I don’t know if we should be celebrating. How is that “paying attention” working out? Four years ago, 85% of Americans believed that global warming is actually happening. Today, according to a recent poll recorded in *Time* magazine, only 65% of Americans believe global warming is actually happening, even as its evidence becomes stronger. And I have to admit, I don’t have a good grasp of why that is happening.

There has been a lot of talk lately about whether or not the United States will be a leader in the 21st century, and I have to say, with those kinds of percentages, I'm really hoping we do not lead in this next century, unless we change the way we look at the world as a nation. Forty years ago, Earth Day was born out of the environmentalism movement. Things like air pollution, water pollution, population explosion, energy depletion... these were the concerns of the day. There was the beginning of an understanding about the synergy of organic systems, and this knowledge caused urgency and alarm for the safety of ecological systems. However, even as we were alarmed, the guiding principle remained, "What can we do to maintain this infrastructure *for human life?*"

There was a recognition that threats to the environment are threats to our most fundamental religious principles of justice and compassion, because threats to the environment disproportionately harm the poor and the marginalized: the very people who have little access to the benefits of energy consumption, and very little control over how resources are used.

Consider this: automobile fuel economy is an environmental issue for us. But when our dependence on gasoline drives a tanker aground and the spreading of slick deprives an Inuit family of seal meat, that's an issue of justice and compassion. And this: recycling is an environmental issue. But when a Chicago woman who has never smoked cigarettes gets lung cancer from breathing the fumes from an incinerator burning trash that could have been recycled, that's an issue of justice and compassion. Or this: deforestation is an environmental issue. But when tree root systems no longer hold soil in place and a mud slide sweeps down on a village, that's an issue of justice.

The principles of justice and compassion lie at the core of every religious tradition, and so addressing the ecological crisis should be a moral imperative for all faiths, regardless of doctrines or creeds, something we should all be able to rally around and address. And many faith traditions are addressing this global crisis from the perspective of ecological justice.

But I would argue that as Unitarian Universalists, we have the theological grounding and the responsibility to look at justice in its broader meaning. Our 7th principle – to affirm and promote “respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part” – leads us to a different level of understanding and responsibility. It means that the concept of *justice* goes beyond thinking about how our actions affect other people; it extends to how our actions affect all others, whether that Other be human, animal, vegetable or mineral. For although these things are distinct and external to us, they are also part of us, and we, part of them. And this is true, whether we have an awareness of it or not. As the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. once wrote, “We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.”

The theologian John Cobb writes that what we need is a “theology of ecology”, an ecological attitude that moves us toward a commitment as active participants in a process of healing the world community in which we live. For that we have to shift our orientation from being community director to community member. We have responsibilities, but we are not in control. We are not in control. When we feel like we have to be in control, it only leads to apathy and despair. We need to focus on our own personal responsibility, not, I believe, on being in control. This is in essence what it means to have faith, to take responsibility for change

while giving up control. And faith is meant to be for the big things when the odds seem to be against us.

So what are some of those responsibilities? First of all, as faith communities it is our responsibility to stand for the long view, with a moral imperative. The word *religion* comes from a word that means to both bind back and to look forward, so that as a religious community, we recognize that this community exists, not simply in the here and now, but backward through memory and tradition and forward through common vision. That means religious communities should be speaking out about the impact our decisions will have on future generations that are yet unable to speak for themselves -speaking from our pulpits, in our letters to the editor, our letters to our representatives, in our town council meetings and in our own congregational meetings.

Second, I'm going to suggest engaging in some traditional, tried and true spiritual practices. Spiritual practices are simply designed to help us remember what is really important. The first practice I'm going to suggest is keeping the Sabbath – it means that every seven days (not just when you're on vacation, but one day out of every seven) you stop participating in the rat race. You take some time to stop on this particular forming edge of your life, taking this particular day to not go shopping, not go to school or work, not bring work home, maybe even not drive your car. Can you imagine the change we could make if we all cut our driving by 1/7th? We could call it a national gas fast. Instead, give yourself time to walk in the woods, to see what's budding this week, how high or how low the water in the stream is. Part of my theology is grounded in the idea that God is not so much controlling the world, but loving the world, and continually urging us to love it as well. If we are truly made in God's image then we

take the time to love it too, and it's hard to love something you haven't built a relationship with. Give yourself time to notice, to pay attention, even to grieve the losses our environment is experiencing. Just stop the madness for a day. Keeping the Sabbath is a radical act of resistance to a culture that teaches us that the meaning of life lies in consuming Thneeds and biggering, biggering, biggering.

The second practice I would encourage is tithing – giving away 10 percent of your income. Give it to organizations you deeply believe in, organizations that are answering this urgent call of our time. I would hope that a portion of your tithe could also go to UUCH, but the most important thing is that your 10 percent tell the truth about who you are and what you value. It is a way of saying that you are a person of significance, with something to offer the world because you have received so abundantly from it. It says your presence matters in the world, and that your life has meaning in part because you are connected and care about things that are larger than yourself. This is another powerful way to be more mindful about consuming.

Most importantly, perhaps, especially for those of us in or close to my generation, those of us who were coming of age on that first Earth Day forty years ago, who felt that we were the generation with a most unique destiny to save the planet, we need to listen to those who are coming of age now. They are the generation with a truly global consciousness, who are developing the appropriate brain wave patterns to tackle the complicated problems ahead, because they are soaking it up in their DNA. I want to read you something from a website called kosmosjournal. The article is called “Voices of Youth – A Generation Waking Up”, written by a college student named Joshua Gorman. These two paragraphs are from his article:

All across the world we are waking up, answering the urgent call of our time, and connecting our unique gifts with the healing and renewal of life on Earth. We are the conscious-alive, planetary-active, spiritually-awake members of a new global generation. From across borders and continents, spanning oceans and time-zones, bridging languages and cultures, we are the largest and most diverse generation ever to be born, and we are coming together to create an unprecedented movement for whole-systems planetary change.

Every generation has a common purpose and a unique destiny. As each generation awakens to the realities that they have been born into, they are called to respond to the demands of their time. As we receive our global inheritance and find that life on Earth itself is hanging in the balance, we know that if we are to survive we will become one of History's most remembered and celebrated generations.

He goes on to describe the need for spiritual grounding for this work and talks about the new agenda being a “whole-systems” change, with peace movements, social justice movements, environmental movements, political movements and spiritual consciousness movements working together to accomplish goals. He ends the piece with this statement:

History will forever remember that just when the very survival of our planet found itself at stake, there came a new generation – conscious and alive, global and awake.

I want to email this young man and say, what can we do to help you? How do we give you the space to do this work? Or at least, how do I get out of your way with my antiquated ideas of what a progressive agenda should look like? It's this kind of energy and sense of mission that gives me hope for our future, and that renews my faith in humankind. Joshua may in fact represent the generation that can lead us into the Promised Land.

I don't usually like to close with a quote from someone else, usually preferring to have the last word, but today I will close with these prophetic words, written 40 years ago:

*You're in charge of the last of the Truffula Seeds.
And the Truffula Trees are what everyone needs.
Plant a new Truffula. Treat it with care.
Give it clean water. And feed it fresh air.
Grow a forest. Protect it from axes that hack.
Then the Lorax
And all of his friends
May come back.*

May it be so. Amen and Blessed Be.

Closing Hymn - #175, "We Celebrate the Web of Life"

Closing Words – We extinguish this flame, but not the light of truth, the warmth of community or the fire of commitment. These things we will hold in our hearts until we're together again.

Go in peace, my friends.

Extinguish the Chalice