

Dreaming of a New Earth
Sermon by Fred Joblin, April 20-08, Earth Sunday
St. Paul's United Church, Orillia

Psalm 19 and Matthew 6:19-21, 25-34

I had a dream early Tuesday morning. I don't always remember my dreams, but this one was so vivid, and so appropriate to Earth Day, that I wrote it down and immediately knew I wanted to share it with you today. I sense that it's a metaphor for my life, and maybe a metaphor for our human journey at this time of ecological challenge...

In the dream, I was preparing to go on a hike. I had a large map which contained an insert of the area where I planned to go, with two possible paths, one that I apparently already knew which would go along a shoreline and back, and the other that I didn't know which went inland and had several turns that led to a small lake, but then had a forested area—with no trail—that had to be crossed to get back home.

I took the second path, which after a while, required a right turn; but once I turned, I was suddenly in a building I had to find my way through. The building was like a maze, with doors leading to rooms leading to doors leading to other rooms. In one room was a group of people I didn't know, and I asked them the way back to the path, but they didn't know. When I brought out the map to show them the path I was looking for, the insert that was there before wasn't anywhere to be found.

So I no longer had the mini-map, I was stuck in a building, and the people with me couldn't help.

I moved on, making my way out of the building with no further problems. I followed the path and came to the small lake, which I recognized from the map by its shape as a slice of pie. I went around the lake, knowing I'd have to bushwhack it to get back home. So I headed into the forest, where I suddenly had the urge to pee, and so, of course, that's when I woke up.

After the pee and getting back into bed, I wished I could go back to sleep and finish the dream, but that didn't happen. So I reflected on the dream and let it continue in a different way with a waking dream that I/we will make it through the forest and find our way home, for certainly, where we find ourselves in the history of our species is in a new place, without a clear map, bushwhacking our way "home," as we face the greatest human challenge ever of being on the precipice of ecological change and potential catastrophe that we are but glimpsing at this time.

I don't need to give you more "inconvenient truths"—they abound in our consciousness these days to the point of overwhelm (unless we're in denial)—but let me share with you a sobering "inconvenient truth" that I found when reading a recent *Macleans* magazine article by Colin Campbell. He indicates, among other things, how even if everyone in Canada turned out their lights for a year and stopped emitting any greenhouse gases at all, the effect would be wiped out by a little more than a month's emissions from China. (Not that we can haughtily point a finger at China and India for doing what we've been doing for the last century.)

With the carbon dioxide in the atmosphere already way over the safe upper limit, and emissions continuing to escalate, the prognosis for the future is grim indeed.

This is one way Campbell indicates that our efforts to deal with global warming are being lost in what he calls “humiliating fashion.” The old way of doing things, even among environmental groups, he says, is just not enough to deal with the scope of transformation that is needed in our economy, in particular, and also in the way we take on the powerful and the rich.

He talks of an economic transformation whereby the same amount of resources that would go into the space programme would be spent on developing the sustainable, economically feasible kinds of energy resources we need.

Funding from this would come from various sources including a tax on carbon emissions, something the BC government has already implemented.

Campbell sees hope, but only if our collective personal and political wills are strong enough.

This is where we come in. This is where what we think and what we do become so critical. This is where, as spiritual traditions down through the ages have said, our inner work is needed to create and live out a new dream—really an old dream that has been God’s dream from the beginning—a dream of healing, wholeness, and community.

This inner work we might describe as making healthy our “inner environment”—always the first place to look—so that we become, as Gandhi said, the change we want to see in the world.

This change, this transformation, is an ongoing process as we let the Spirit guide us to new awakenings each and every day.

One of those new awakenings is described in our gospel reading for today, in which Jesus invites us to let go of worries—let go of worries—a tall order given the magnitude of our environmental concerns!—and live from a place of gratitude and trust that God has given us all we need to live life abundantly.

The flowers and birds become our teachers in learning about true beauty and about how to live in the moment.

Reconnecting to nature is a critical issue of our day, especially for children, according to Richard Louv, who discusses what he calls “nature deficit disorder” in children as well as society in general.

He recommends free play and exploration in natural environments, as kids used to do—before sterile playgrounds and organized activities became the norm—in order to make a gut-level connection to the earth. This, he claims, will also help reduce the symptoms of ADHD, reduce stress, increase creativity, develop cognitive skills, and provide the full use of the senses.

But mostly, it will lead children, youth, and adults to the kind of inner connection with nature that is very spiritual and necessary in order for us to have the passion needed to care for our earth.

Yesterday's Clean Up Orillia Day is an example of this passion being lived out, as 20 St. Paul's people, including several very young children, spread out around town to fill up bags with trash and recyclables.

Something that really struck me in the process was how much trash there when I got down on ground level and looked. Something else that struck me was the impact on the children who were there, to embed in their hearts and minds the need to keep our environment clean—and have a fun group time in the process.

As I ponder the times I've felt most connected the earth, I always think of the maple sugar bushes we had while living in Parry Sound, and what an wonderful way that was to experience the coming of spring and new life.

I also think back to some of my fondest memories of our son Ted's childhood, even while living in the vastness of the city of Los Angeles, when we explored the shoreline of the ocean, hiked in a nearby canyon, and hung out in Wilderness Park, a large park right in the city with trees, rocks, ponds, frogs, fish, and mud.

Our souls were nurtured by these experiences and have remained nurturing memories for Ted and Kathie and me.

Where and when is it that you feel your closeness to nature that nurtures your soul?...

Another part of the inner journey is what Eckhart Tolle describes in his book, *A New Earth: Awakening to your Life's Purpose*, about our need to become aware, to become conscious of what we are thinking, feeling, and doing.

He eloquently describes how *unconscious* we tend to be—caught up in thinking patterns that keep us in our ego, in our worries and fears, in our desire for comfort and security, in our preoccupation with trivial matters, in our judgements and opinions—all of which are ways we bring about suffering upon ourselves and others.

The key to awareness, he says, is simply to notice, without judgement, what we are thinking and feeling. Once we notice, we can then pause, step back a moment, observe ourselves, and then consider other choices.

A simple way that I realize I'm often unconscious is when I'm driving along, usually in a hurry to get somewhere, not noticing much else but the cars I'm going by and the speed I'm going that is just under what might get me a ticket.

I did something different on Friday, however, while driving to Mississauga to see my mom in the hospital. I drove the speed limit, 100 kph, down Highway 400, staying mostly in the right hand lane. My main motivation in doing this was to save money on gas by slowing down, given the gas prices these days.

The amazing thing I discovered was how less stressed I was while driving, and how I could be attentive to driving, yet still notice things like birds, fields, people in their vehicles, and the Gordon Lightfoot music I was listening to.

Tolle talks about deeper levels of awareness, such as recognizing the interconnectedness of all things, and how having this awareness completely alters how we view other people, ourselves, and creation.

As our Psalm reading said today, “My life is inextricably linked to yours, and our common survival is tied to the trees and insects. This is the beginning of wisdom. It is better than wealth, more valuable than possessions. Awareness of it will change you forever.”

It’s the kind of wealth Jesus spoke of when he said to seek treasures from heaven: treasures of appreciation, beauty, and trust in God.

It’s the kind of wealth that’s only possible when we slow down, not just to smell the roses, but to pick up the trash, to plant a seed, to watch a butterfly, to take a spider outside rather than kill it, to watch the clouds go by the moon, to listen to the wind in the trees, to give thanks for the glorious abundance of God’s creation, to sense our oneness with it all.

From this wealth will spring a deeper commitment to love and care for each other and the earth, knowing how we are all one in spirit.

As a resurrection people, we hold to the hope that new life always emerges from challenges and sufferings and even death. Plants grow amid concrete. Wells provide clean water for communities. Forms of renewable energy become more affordable and feasible. People commit to minimizing their environmental footprint. Children and youth and adults develop a local and global consciousness of our interdependence. People give selflessly in times of suffering. A new awareness grows of our unity in God and our oneness with the earth. A common dream emerges of a world of shared resources; of food, shelter, justice and freedom for all; of sustainable forests, farmlands, oceans, and fresh water supplies. The spirit lives and moves among us to bring new life, even where none appears possible, like in Eritrea where a 7 km stretch along the shore of the Red Sea, once lifeless desert baking in year-round 40 degree Celsius heat, has become lush with planted mangrove trees, providing a new and thriving community with food, shelter, and hope for the future.

That’s a dream that can be duplicated anywhere if we have the will to make it happen!

So on this Earth Sunday, let us commit ourselves to deepening our awareness, connecting more fully to the earth, and seeking the treasures that will bring healing and wholeness to creation.

As Dostoyevsky put it in his book *Brothers Karamazov*: “

*Love all Creation.
The whole and every grain of sand in it.
Love every leaf, and every ray of light.
Love the plants.
Love the animals.
Love everything.
If you love everything, you will perceive the divine Mystery in all things.
Once you perceive it, you will comprehend it better every day.
And you will come, at last, to love the whole world with an all embracing love.”*

This love will free us to live within the truth of God’s promise to be with us as we journey toward healing and wholeness.

It will lead us to choices on a personal and global level to live more simply, to act more responsibly, to share more fully, to remain hopeful, to be conscious of what we put in our bodies and feed our children, to be environmentally aware buyers, to support groups and organizations working for the environment, to elect environmentally conscious politicians, to join together with others in fulfilling our promise and commitment to leave a healthy planet for our grandchildren’s grandchildren’s grandchildren.

To help us come to this place of love, I invite you to join me in an Earth Day meditation, one that came to me on the Internet this week from the HeartMath Institute, which helps people connect heart and mind and so to live from a place of awareness and passion. The meditation is called, *Connecting a million hearts*, and the follow-up invitation is to schedule two minutes on Earth Day, April 22, to stop and genuinely focus on the feeling of appreciation and gratitude for our beautiful planet.

(Voices United #381, Spirit of Life, plays in the background...)

We are six billion plus strong.

Imagine what we can do if we all work together?...

What if we all felt more genuine appreciation for each other?... and for our planet?...

What if there was one simple thing you could do to help create a positive change for humanity and for our planet?...

Something that not only benefits you and those around you but can start healing our planet as well...

Science has shown positive emotions have a beneficial effect on all living organisms – people, animals, plants and even water.

Are you interested in doing one thing to make a difference?...

Join people around the world, connecting hearts to actively appreciate planet Earth.

Take a moment and focus on the area around your heart...

Recall the feeling of appreciation as you witness a spectacular sunset... the exhilaration standing atop a mountain... the love felt when watching family play at the beach...

There are many heart-felt moments we've all experienced that bring a genuine feeling of appreciation alive and in focus.

Now hold that feeling of appreciation in the area of your heart...

Imagine you are radiating this feeling out to the planet...

Imagine one million more people doing the same thing...

Imagine it is only the beginning...

Pass it on...

By the power of the Spirit, may we indeed pass on this spirit of appreciation and commitment to make a difference in the healing and sustaining of this our only home, our beloved planet earth. Amen.