

**“Gentle Footprints,  
Creating A Socially Just, Spiritually Fulfilling,  
Ecologically Sustainable Earth Community”**

**Sermon by Karen Hilfman Millson  
St. Paul’s United Church, Orillia  
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There is a story that reflects on the Manna Principle called “Retirement Plan”

A boat docked in a small village by the sea. A tourist was standing nearby, watching the man unload several large fish from the boat.

“How long did it take you to catch those fish?” the tourist asked.

“Not very long,” answered the man.

“But then, why didn’t you stay out longer and catch more?” he asked.

“Because that’s enough to meet the needs of my family, plus several other families,” replied the man.

The tourist asked, “But what do you do with the rest of your time?”

“I sleep late, play with my children, and take a nap with my wife. In the evenings, I see my friends, play the guitar, and sing a few songs . . . I have a full life.”

The tourist interrupted, “I’d like to give you some advice. I’m a manager with a large company. I have an MBA from Harvard and I can help you! If you start fishing longer every day, you can then sell the extra fish you catch. With the extra revenue, you can buy a bigger boat. With the extra money the larger boat will bring, you can buy a second one and a third one and so on until you have an entire fleet of trawlers. Instead of selling your fish to a middleman, you can negotiate directly with the processing plants and maybe even open your own plant. You can leave this little village and move to Toronto or even Vancouver! From there you can direct your huge enterprise.”

“How long would that take?” asked the man.

“Twenty, perhaps twenty-five years,” replied the manager.

“And after that?”

“Afterward? That’s when it gets really interesting,” answered the manager, laughing. “When your business gets really big, you can start selling stocks and make millions!”

“Millions? Really? And after that?”

“After that you’ll be able to retire, live in a small village by the sea, sleep late, play with your children, take a nap with your wife, and spend your evenings seeing your friends, playing the guitar, and singing a few songs!”

Past moderator Stan McKay reflected on the “Manna Principal” from the perspective of being raised in an aboriginal community in this year’s United Church’s Mandate magazine - special edition - whose theme is “Living from the Earth: Choosing Creation Over Empire”

Stan writes: “I grew up on a reserve that was economically self-sufficient. The parents in our community hunted, fished and trapped. They gathered food and shared so that everyone had enough. My father taught us, ‘You only take what you need’.”  
He was teaching “the manna principle.”

The manna principle is based on the instructions from God that Moses relayed to the people  
- to gather only what they could use on that day.  
Any attempt to store extra manna would result in its spoiling.  
This instruction asks us to trust that we will be cared for.

Stan goes on and notes:

“In President Barrack Obama’s inauguration speech on January 20, 2009 - he referred to the greed that has destroyed the financial markets.”  
Here, too, is a philosophy of taking only as we need - has something to offer.

In Stan’s Bible Study about the “Manna Principle” he refers to the work of William Herzog in his book “Parables as Subversive Speech” where it is suggested that in the parable of talents  
-(where three servants are given money to take care of for their masters - two invest it wisely and grow from the money  
- while the third buried the money because he was fearful of the master)  
Herzog lifts up the third servant - who buried the money - as a hero  
-suggesting that he buried the money to take it out of circulation  
- so that it would no longer be used for loans that would dispossess peasants from their land.  
The servant acknowledges his fear of the master who is exploiting the poor.  
Herzog suggests - that the third servant is a hero  
because he disassociates himself from the system . . . interesting thought

In another Bible Study in the special edition of Mandate - the United Church magazine that this year is exploring the theme “Living for the Earth - Choosing Creation over Empire” another story is told called “Shopping Gone Wrong.”

Ted Harrison (a UC minister) writes, "A couple of years ago,  
I overheard a friend's grandmother complain about a shopping trip.  
I assumed she would gripe about rising costs so you can imagine my surprise  
when I heard her complaining about low prices!  
At her local bargain store, it was cheaper to buy a new staple, packaged with staples,  
then to buy staples for replacement alone!  
Something was wrong.  
How had we come to so undervalue both our goods and the labour that produces them?"

Ted goes on and reflects: "That stapler wasn't made in Canada.  
We live in a country that prides itself on employment insurance,  
workplace standards, and a liveable minimum wage.  
But as we enjoy cheap disposable goods  
- its easy to overlook the ways in which we essentially outsource slavery  
to countries with oppressive governments and abysmal practises. . . hmmm."

At a funeral I did not too long ago - I was intrigued  
. . . . or maybe shocked would describe it better . . . .  
to hear some grandchildren (in their 20s) reflect on their grandmother's life  
. . . . talking about how she was a woman ahead of her time  
- long before it was the "in" thing to do their grandmother grew her own garden  
composted, bought food locally, did preserves and never used throw-away packaging  
. . . a woman ahead of her time - they thought . . .  
And I realized how deeply immersed that generation is in our current reality  
- that they don't know that this is all very recent . . . .  
and we've been part of helping it grow.

In the Mandate special issue study guide - we are invited to use a map of the world or a globe  
and put outlines of people figures in different sizes on the appropriate countries  
to reflect the size of our ecological footprint on the earth based on our society's life style  
(which is determined by the amount of water and land used per person per year).  
A person in North America is about 10 times the size of a person in India and China.  
A European figure is about 3/4 the size of a North American  
A figure from the Arab countries is larger than the North American figure.  
The average size of other countries is about 1/4 of the North American figure.  
It is estimated that if everyone in the world lived as we do  
- we would need between 4 & 6 planets to meet that requirement.

Once all the human figures are on the map  
- it becomes hard to find room for the animals and all the other creatures.  
So in the exercise people are invited to talk together about how big  
our figures should really be within God's creation.  
And how we might help make that happen.

I was flipping through Bruce Sanguin's book  
"Darwin, Divinity, and the Dance of the Cosmos - an Ecological Christianity"  
the other day - one of the books we'll be using for study this fall - Bruce is a U.C. minister.

As he was writing his chapter called “The Common Creation Story as Sacred Revelation”  
he inserts - what he called “A Commercial Break” (p87)

“I interrupt this narrative to bring you breaking news of cosmological import.

It just dropped through my mailbox. A glossy advertising brochure tells me,

“When You’re in a Perfect Moment, Time Stands Still.”

Underneath is an image of a new luxury car, a handsome vehicle to be sure.

The letter is personally addressed to me

Dear Bruce Sanguin,

Some people are content to let life’s perfect moments just happen

while others actively pursue them . . . .

what exactly are the elements that make up this perfect moment?

They begin with the heart of the 2007ES 350, the new 3.5litre, 272 Horsepower V6 engine . . . .”

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And we ask ourselves - what makes up our perfect moment . . .

the smiles of those who are lonely who are visited by a volunteer

- committed to alleviating loneliness by at least a moment of connection

with the church community . . .

the sight of your children discovering their gifts

and they wish to sing together and create memories

- perfect moments . . . .

A quote from a favourite author of mine - Carolyn Pogue

(read some of what she writes in the U.C. magazine, “The Observer”.)

While reflecting on ‘Empire’ - with particular emphasis on consumerism -

she ends her reflections saying

“What we buy (or buy into) can either continue the destruction of the earth - or help to stop it.

What we buy or buy into - can either tell us we are worthless unless we have certain products,

or help us to remember that God created us beautiful, spiritual, whole, beings.”

As we reflect on a commitment to help create a human presence on this earth

that is ecologically sustainable

- it is interesting to note that it wasn’t until the 14<sup>th</sup> century in our Christian history

that we first separated ourselves from nature as a way of understanding and experiencing God

- it was Augustine in the 4<sup>th</sup> century who first said “no” to seeing the divine in nature

- Augustine the one who influenced our history to focus on how we were born in original sin

- a concept that won out over the Celtic concept of connection to nature

and how we are born in original blessing

Meister Eckhardt in the 14<sup>th</sup> century was one of the many down through our history

who encouraged us to reconnect to nature - to seeing the divine within nature.

Last week I was sent a story that is cute - and allows us to laugh at ourselves  
. . . and sharpens our awareness of how bizarre our thinking can be sometimes:

GOD . . . TO St. FRANCIS (another saint of our past who tried to teach about our  
connection to nature and the animals -St Francis of Assisi)

Frank, you know all about gardens and nature. What in the world is going on down there on  
the planet? What happened to the dandelions, violets, thistle and stuff I started eons ago? I  
had a perfect no-maintenance garden plan. Those plants grow in any type of soil, withstand  
drought and multiply with abandon. The nectar from the long-lasting blossoms attracts  
butterflies, hony bees and flocks of songbirds. I expected to see a vast garden of colors by  
now. But, all I see are these green rectangles.

St. FRANCIS: It's the tribes that settled there, God. The Suburbanites. They started calling  
your plants 'weeds' and went to great lengths to kill them and replace them with grass.

GOD: Grass? But, it's so boring. It's not colorful. It doesn't attract butterflies, birds and  
bees; only grubs and sod worms. It's sensitive to temperatures. Do these Suburbanites really  
want all that grass growing there?

St. FRANCIS: Apparently so. They go to great pains to grow it and keep it green. They  
begin each spring by fertilizing grass and poisoning any other plant that crops up in the lawn.

GOD: The spring rains and warm weather probably make grass grow really fast. That must  
make Suburbanites happy

St. FRANCIS: Apparently not, God. As soon as it grows a little, they cut it - sometimes  
twice a week.

GOD: They cut it? Do they then bale it like hay?

St. FRANCIS: Not exactly. Most of them rake it up and put it in bags.

GOD: They bag it? Why? Is it a cash crop? Do they sell it?

St. FRANCIS: Actually, just the opposite. They pay to throw it away

GOD: Now, let me get this straight. They fertilize grass so it will grow. And, when it does  
grow, they cut it off and pay to throw it away?

St. FRANCIS: Yes

GOD: These Suburbanites must be relieved in the summer when we cut back on the rain and  
turn up the heat. That surely slows the growth and saves them a lot of work.

St. FRANCIS: You aren't going to believe this . . . . When the grass stops growing so fast, they drag out hoses and pay more money to water it, so they can continue to mow it and pay to get rid of it.

GOD: What nonsense. At least they kept some of the trees. That was a sheer stroke of genius, if I do say so myself. The trees grow leaves in the spring to provide beauty and shade in the summer. In the autumn, they fall to the ground and form a natural blanket to keep moisture in the soil and protect the trees and bushes. It's a natural cycle of life.

St. FRANCIS: You better sit down for this one. The Suburbanites have drawn a new circle. As soon as the leaves fall, they rake them into great piles and pay to have them hauled away.

GOD: No!?! What do they do to protect the shrub and tree roots in the winter to keep the soil moist and loose?

St. FRANCIS: After throwing away the leaves, they go out and buy something which they call mulch. They haul it home and spread it around in the place of the leaves.

GOD: And where do they get this mulch?

St. FRANCIS: They cut down trees and grind them up to make the mulch

GOD: Enough! I don't want to think about this anymore. St. Catherine, you're in charge of the arts. What movie have you scheduled for us tonight?

St. CATHERINE: 'Dumb and Dumber', Lord. It's a story about . . .

GOD: Never mind, I think I just heard the whole story from St. Francis.

We received a letter this week:

**Ebenezer Needs Help Urgently!**

"Ebenezer United Church, Tay Township, and it's partners in resisting the effort to create a garbage dump on top of the Alliston Aquifer - "*the purest water in the world*" - at Dump Site 41, urgently need help in blockading the entrances to the landfill site 24-7 starting immediately!"

"As you know, Ebenezer United Church, supported by Toronto Conference and the former Simcoe Presbytery of the United Church of Canada, is on the record formally as requesting a 10 year moratorium on the development or use of Dump Site 41, just north of Elmvale and within 10 km of the church. Members of the First Nation of Christian Island have maintained a peaceful vigil across the road from the main entrance to Dump Site 41 for more than two months and are committed to staying until the dump has been defeated. We are working together in an informal peaceful partnership to ensure the this site is never used for garbage. The Council of Canadians led by Maude Barlow, Senior Advisor on Water Issues to the President of the United Nations, through it's legal representation has notified Simcoe County Council that unless work on Dump Site 41 is stopped immediately the Council of Canadians

will begin legal action. Opposition to the development of Dump Site 41 continues to escalate as the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation, The First Nations Chiefs of Ontario, and the David Suzuki Foundation have declared their concern. Broadcaster Dale Goldhawk (Goldhawk Fights Back For You - AM740 weekdays from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.) is a staunch public advocate for a moratorium on development of Dump Site 41 until all questions and concerns have been openly explored. Support from private individuals is growing exponentially.”

“Initiated by the Vigil keepers, since Monday, local residents and supporters of the First Nations Vigil have begun a round-the-clock human blockade of all entrances into Dump Site 41 until the Federal Government Ministry of Fisheries and Natural resources fulfill their “fiduciary responsibility” by treaty with First Nations to ensure safe water which is threatened by the projected opening of Dump Site 41 - which may happen in as little as two weeks from now. Members of Ebenezer United Church actively support this peaceful activity.”

At the executive meeting of Toronto Conference after our annual meeting  
- a motion was passed that we as a conference support the efforts  
to place a moratorium on Site 41 in Tay Township opening as a garbage dump  
- until the implications can be considered more fully.

As a conference we are calling upon the whole United Church  
through General Council to support this action

Becoming aware is the first step to turning things around.

With awareness we enter into reflection

- taking into consideration what we believe God is calling us to.

Reflection provides clarity about any changes we can make  
to uphold and live the wholeness, the peace that are we called to.

We are a people of both prayer and action.

After our offering - in our prayer time we will sing -

‘It’s Time to Turn, Turn, Turn’

- it will be a song about how it is time  
now to be people of action and words

### **It’s Time to Turn, Turn, Turn**

*Chorus:*

*It’s time to turn, turn, turn, turn.*

*It’s time to learn, learn, learn, learn.*

*It’s time to make a new earth and new heaven.*

1. It’s time to be born to blessing and care.  
It’s time to grow, free to be you and me.  
It’s time to have the world work for all.  
It’s time to be as one family.

2. It's time to plant new seeds of hope.  
It's time to nurture seedlings of peace.  
It's time to harvest the fruits of our work.  
It's time to share together the feast.
  
3. It's time to grieve the suffering and pain.  
It's time to heal wounds of hatred and fear.  
It's time to waken to dreams of new life.  
It's time for wisdom and joy to be here.
  
4. It's time to feel awe for the cosmos we share.  
It's time to honour the earth we live on.  
It's time to bring justice to every land.  
It's time to move forward to a new dawn.

May it Be So

Amen.