

## **'The Earth Forever Turning'**

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When I was a young man, not that long ago (!), I can still remember watching the spawn of the salmon and steelhead up the Larkspur Creek. You could stand on the bridge across from what is now the College of Marin and watch them by the hundreds as they made their way upstream.

Go back earlier, (up through the 1950s and into the 1960s) and many still have memories of the mouth of the Russian River after a late winter or early spring rain and seeing the surge, like the wash of a breaking wave push up the river towards Cazadero Creek. It was the churning of the steelhead who had gathered right outside the mouth of the River by the thousands just waiting for the high water to enter the river and spawn. And then the salmon would follow.

For thousands upon thousands of years these kinds of vibrant life songs have blessed this planet we share and had become an integral piece of what we call contentment and joy. In this coastal region of the North West Americas these expressions of life

signaled by these wonderful fish not only sang of abundance and bounty but joy in the blessing that such vibrant company offers us. Because of this the salmon and the steelhead represented for many native peoples, for lack of a better word, god – literally gods by the thousands!

Can you imagine for a minute what wonder they may have sensed when they took in the sweet smell of the wind when it had crossed a forest surrounding a cool clean lake in the hot days of summer, or when the sky was gray with countless gathering birds for hours on end, or when they looked out across a vast expanse of bison reaching to the horizon and farther, or when they walked in an ancient forest with trees so large you could build your home inside a burned out hollow?

Sadly these experiences are all but gone now, except in the stories we tell of them. Still they have set the foundations for some of the most meaningful parts of our human understandings. These things are truly deeper in us, and in our human culture than we in this crowded polluted and over used time generally see, touch, or understand anymore.

Yet still when we judge the evolution of culture, a community, and its social content, it is by the art and the crafts of the population and how it shows their care. And even now what we recognize as art in its earliest expressions are reflections on these kinds of experiences, that in our time are for the most part gone. But they are not forgotten in the deepest parts of our souls. We still resonate with the beauty of the depictions in the caves of Europe, on the rocks of the Australian outback where frescos dating back 40 thousand years or more still bring excitement to our hearts and visions to our spirits. These marvelous works of art are expressions of an experience of life that has left its legacy of deeper meaning and joy ingrained in the human species.

We ourselves in this congregation which deals with finding meaning in the wellsprings of life have recognized our responsibility here by becoming a UUA certified Green Sanctuary congregation. It is a significant, preliminary step to our part in developing a healthy planet. And we will celebrate this wonderful effort by hanging our Green Sanctuary certification in the foyer at the end of this Sunday's service.

We should be proud of this choice to publicly announce our commitment to sustainability as a Green Sanctuary but we must be

vigilant that it does not lull us into returning to the complacency that is so easy to fall back into. We can not lose focus of the issues which were and are the reasons we developed such a certificate program in the Unitarian Universalist Association and why we as a congregation stepped up to participate.

The environmental degradation we continue to face must be acted upon. It is real and ongoing. Knowing that it is severe is just the first step. We must join together in educating ourselves in the reality of this new time we are now in, and will leave behind to our children and their children's children's children. This designation as a Green Sanctuary is not just a nice label but a charge to do the work of change.

We must also put effort into communicating the importance of the shift we now must engage, not only here between friends and allies but in how we interact with the world. Sure it is much more comfortable and seemingly safer to just say nothing but we must look into the future, and ask ourselves can we truly be silent?

Actually, no, we can't-- just look out the window and you are looking at 390 parts per million of carbon in our atmosphere and rising. Right now, today. We now know from all the many studies

and scientific research on the earth's atmosphere that this fragile planet and its ecology is not capable of surviving more than 350 parts per million for any long trend, and perhaps in the short term, we don't know. People must know and understand that this rate of change in carbon in the atmosphere is really and truly very real and very scary. Because it actually means that the Earth's systems can't cope with it.

The rapid rise in greenhouse gases we have seen over the past century is like no other shift we can see in at least 800,000 years. This is the story told by the oldest Antarctic ice cores which expose a record of climate change that goes back farther than the human species. The air bubbles trapped in this ice for hundreds of thousands of years make it clear that we humans have changed the composition of the atmosphere in a manner that has no known natural parallel. This is as real as a broken sewer line in your back yard; would you just be quiet about that because it was easier?

Certainly our capacity as a human species to adapt to changes that are much faster than anything in human experience, is at best, a very real problem and generally a 'we don't have a clue' conversation. And yet we must take up the task to learn and act. And hope that it is in time! We must not be afraid to speak out in

all of the various places our voices reach. This alone is a very big challenge for sure. This is not easy to do. But it becomes easier the more we do it and the more we support each other in this practice of loving and caring teamwork.

In time the message will be heard clearly by more and more folks.

To prepare us for the road ahead, we must get beyond the mantra of the three Rs (Reduce, Reuse and Recycle) which was foundational for our studies on Environmentalism 101. But as we have come to understand, this mantra of the three Rs is incomplete. It is our task now to add the fourth: RESTORE. Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and Restore! We have little hope for the sustainability of our earth if we can not restore as least some of what we have destroyed. Without restoring much of our efforts will be a long lasting as trying to bail out a sinking ship with just a coffee can. We must bail as we repair the tear in the hull or sink.

So it is our responsibility to put things right and it begins right here on our home planet, in our home of memory and hope—the church. There is a growing line of thought in world that says we cannot save the planet unless there's a far-reaching spiritual or religious awakening.

Paul Hawken a presenter at the Bioneers' Conference in 2006 remarked on this line of thought: He said:

“When I've heard that we need to have a spiritual or religious awakening in the past I have sort of buckled and stiffened-not because I didn't think it'd be a good idea, but because I thought, well, yeah, but we have work to do.

Things are going so fast that we can't depend on such a thing arising. But I have come to think about this in a different way. My question for you is this: Would we recognize a spiritual awakening in this world if we saw one? Let me put the question to you another way: What if an awakening was already deeply in place and we don't see it? In other words, it's here.”

I was struck by this quote because it truly is a spiritual and religious task to sustain this world of ours. And we have been led so long down another path that we cannot see through the acculturation of dominion spun out of political monotheism to remember that this is our true religious and spiritual call; to be responsible to life and to be good stewards of this—our one and only planet home.

He goes on to speak about the Axial Age, which was a period between 200 and 900 BCE, a time when cultural movements were turning away from violence and cruelty and barbarity. There was an upwelling of philosophy, insight, and intellect at that time. We see it in the work of Socrates and Sophocles, Lao Tzu, Confucius, the Buddha, Ashoka and others. This time marked a clear and dramatic shift in evolution of the human community.

But what is fascinating is that rather than creating religious institutions, these folks moved forward social movements that addressed human suffering. And even more interesting to today's topic is that Ashoka, a very powerful ruler in eastern India, wrote the first ecological laws in the seventh century BCE. So if you believe that ecology is just a modern invention, that this is only the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Earth Day, think again. Deep and far back in our human story is an understanding of our responsibility to be stewards. Here in Ashoka's laws were protections for all the natural life, leopards, tigers, and deer; trees and rivers and hills. These proclamations of law still remain standing as historical monoliths in India.

And what became of Axial Age thought and efforts? From them arose Confucianism, Taoism, Hinduism, Buddhism, monotheistic Judaism, democracy, and Philosophical Rationalism in that order. And it hasn't stopped.

Here we are today a continuation of a rich and important legacy. It is our time now to take up the effort of restoring our home. And so we honor memory, and its place in this effort. For as much as we have the tools to let us remember earlier efforts of our race to deal sustainably with our earth and all its systems, we can use our own memory which is the power, the impulse behind restoration.

We can't restore without memory in which we can bring the best forward. Remember not just 40 years ago when you could still drink from any creek in the high mountains of the western United States, and in many others right here in Marin and along the northern coast of California—even from the lower regions of the Russian River? Such memories are the well springs to water our deepest souls which give us the nourishment for the challenges we face. And when we can hold memory close to our efforts of hope, which is the recognition of change, we can build a world which rivals any that went before us.

Make no mistake, working together we are the pioneers of a new age—a magnificent age of compassion, accountability and vision. For when we can see ourselves as true participants in a vital, living system which we can sustain and steward into a rich and vibrant future we will find ourselves in a dynamic world which is forever turning and we will be turning over into a new day. The seeds will have been planted so that five generations from now we will hear. “Tell me again about how our great, great grandparents and how it was they decided that they were a part of the greater story of our earth forever turning.” Can you imagine what a story that will be?!?

So be it.