



The Unitarian Church in Westport

SERMON TRANSCRIPT:

Reflections of an Earth Walker!

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April 19, 2020

My fellow travelers... COVID-19 is a common experience we have as a forced Sabbath.

“The intimacy of experience is where the simplest teachers present themselves.”

Stopped in our tracks by the presence of an unseen force, it moves amongst us taking lives, disrupting our mad race to survive. We are surrounded by an endless sound of sirens. Our common vulnerability felt is at our core. Safe distancing moves us into being alone or in very small groups. A small virus has brought large health care systems and economies to their knees.

As I start this reflection this Earth Day, I am faced with a significant dilemma:

- Do I passionately rail with my considerable rage against those forces of men and women who are completely detached from the earth as their living relative, provider & teacher? They believe and act as if the earth is only their vault of resources to be mined, controlled, optimized and leveraged in pursuit of capitalistic goals.

- Or do I share my almost mystical appreciation of the earth as my first teacher and touch point for SOURCE ENERGY?

In the beginning SOURCE ENERGY moved throughout the universe. It emerged in many forms. As a living entity, it generated into a web of life. A web that we are an essential part of. Scientists tell us that the earth has been evolving for over 4 billion years. Starting as gas and moving forward. At every point of our investigation, we come to realize that the earth is an integrated living macro-system of multiple micro-systems that have organic relationships. As each of these systems follow their own path of development and life, they are impacted by their inter-connectivity with all life forms. This is truly a source of WONDER!

Consider the path of the Monarch butterfly. Monarch butterflies go through four stages of development: as an egg, a caterpillar, chrysalis in a cocoon, and as an adult butterfly.

In March, hibernating monarch butterflies leave Mexico or California to find a mate. They then migrate north and east to lay their eggs on milkweed plants in April. These eggs hatch into baby caterpillars. These caterpillars spend the next two weeks eating as much milkweed as possible. When fully-grown they attach themselves to a stem or a leaf using silk and they transform into a chrysalis (cocoon). Although, from the outside, the 10 days of the chrysalis phase seems to be a time when nothing is happening, it is really a time of rapid change. If a caterpillar could speak to us from within this process what might it say?

“Everything is dark. I don’t know what’s happening. My soft body is not the same. Everything is wet. I wonder if this is the end?”

I wonder if any of you can see this COVID-19 dark space we are passing thru as potentially a similar experience of metamorphosis? Lots of heaviness and lack of light. Everything feels fluid... Uncertainty abounds. **“The intimacy of experience is where the simplest teachers present themselves.”** How long? How deep is the change? It feels like major shifts are taking place. What new forms of life and connection are being readied to come forward?

What do we need to shed so that new life can come forward? Here we are in a closed isolated space not knowing where or how things will end. We know a butterfly needs to push against the tight space of the cocoon to strengthen its wings and be ready to fly. What are the forms of resistance that we need to push against in order to be strengthened and ready to emerge as new life after COVID-19? What transformations are taking place within ourselves, our families, our workplaces and communities?

We can imagine the voice of the butterfly as it leaves its cocoon... “can you believe this... I’m flying! Look at my beautiful colors. Wow that thing in the sky is bright and warm. What’s next?” There is nothing like the joy of experiencing a breakthrough.

The transformational chrysalis phase is one of the greatest mysteries of biology. No one knows exactly how the caterpillar changes form in such a dramatic way. But this much is known: inside the caterpillar’s body is a cluster of cells that biologists call imaginal buds. The imaginal buds contain the idealized image, blueprint, for growing as a butterfly. While the caterpillar goes about its earth-crawling business, these cells, deep inside are moving toward flight.

When we make stop in nature and ask the big questions of life... many of us realize that source energy is moving through us. We come to an enhanced state of consciousness that activates an inner sense that "something bigger than ourselves is in play." Connecting to nature enhances our sense of sight, smell, hearing, touch and taste. These connections are the essential building blocks for a commitment to the sustainability of the earth. **"The intimacy of experience is where the simplest teachers present themselves."**

The imaginal buds of a new world society are ready to break forward. We can feel their ripening waves of transformation. Everything is connected! In the face of this little Coronavirus, we have come to realize that what we do -- handwashing, safe distancing, wearing face masks, elbow-tapping -- impacts our lives and those of others.

The Coronavirus is a mirror for us to see things as they are. For a month or two... life as we know it has come to a stop. A tremendous drop in the use of fossil fuels has resulted in dolphins returning to the canals purified by the fall off-of motorized traffic; substantial fogs of pollutants in Denver and LA have disappeared; environmental issues impacting our breathing have been reduced. Families pulled in many directions by technology, travel, and work find themselves in small formations of connectivity rekindling the hearths of home.

Kindness and care are blossoming everywhere. Helping hands are surfacing to feed, coach and connect all to an awakened sense of the whole. No one person or movement could have organized a reaction like this Coronavirus has.

The truth of our human and world situation is laid bare for all to see. Our society's broken edges of unequal access to health care, inequities of pay, inadequate housing, climate change and systematic poisoning of our environment are all connected. Many of the paradigms that organize our world today are the cause of the earth's demise. Our passivity in the face of these paradigms are bringing about the systematic destruction of our home. Time has run out.

In the story of Jesus, there is the miracle of the loaves and the fishes. A multitude of people have gathered to hear Jesus teach. It comes time to stop for lunch, they have five loaves and a few fishes amongst them. Jesus instructs his disciples to pass the basket amongst the crowd. It is reported that all were fed. For many years I entertained magical thinking about this miracle. I no longer think that Jesus waved his hand over the

basket and a pile of food appeared. I think he spoke to the multitude in such a way that they opened their hearts and shared what they had so that all were satisfied.

At the time of the Italian Renaissance, there was ready access to marble. There were many sculptures that emerged to use these resources. There was a Latin saying “sincere” which meant “without wax” which surfaced in reference to filling in the cracks/imperfections of a sculpture. It has emerged in English as “sincere.” To be without wax means to be open/vulnerable with our imperfections. To be an actual reflection of what truly is! We are a people cracked and softened by experience and time. To stand in one’s true space is to be “sincere.” We are called to live a life of vulnerable welcome without hiding our very human flaws. After all it is in the presence of this truth that we can truly connect!

The Coronavirus has laid bare the essential destructive path of rugged individualism, that has as its core underpinning... “me first materialism.” Our only choice to survive, is to live in support of the “common good.”

During this terribly destructive, uncertain and painful period, we are seeing multiple examples of true kindness showing up in many forms. The pursuit of the Common Good is the power that will heal the earth and its people. The pursuit of the common good cannot exist without connection to the earth.

I would like to end my reflections today by quoting from a colleague and fellow Unitarian Universalist, Dr. Stephen Polmar. He recently wrote about this COVID-19 period as a Springtime in Purgatory:

“Hopefully as we begin to emerge from this Springtime in Purgatory, we will choose not to return to the way that “things were before.” We will commit to addressing the inequities that produced so much pain in our society during the pandemic as well as act upon the opportunities that have been so clearly revealed when human activity temporarily decreased. We can, indeed, burn away “Origen’s wood” so that our truly “good works” will have an impact on the future. Only in this way will this whole dreadful experience have real meaning.”