

***Order of Service – July 5, 2015
Interdependence Day***

*Musical Prelude
Greeting- Canticle of Creation*

1st Hymn: Morning Has Broken, Green 32

*Readings - Thomas Berry; Genesis 3:1-9; Garden Snake in the Sun, Mary Oliver;
Dissenter Church, Reverend LoraKim Joyner*

2nd Hymn, Earth Was Given As a Garden, Green 306

*Joys and Concerns
Musical interlude*

Prayer - Be Praised, Dear God, for our Homecoming

***3rd Hymn: All Things Bright and Beautiful, Green 1
(a children's hymn and then the little ones leave)***

Pastoral reflection or message

Silent worship

4th Hymn: All Things of Earth, Blue 128 (Tune Green 2)

Closing/Benediction - It is Possible to Live In Peace

*Introductions/Announcements/Afterthoughts
Postlude*

Greeting

Be praised Good Lord for Brother Sun
 who brings us each new day.
 Be praised for Sister Moon: white
 beauty bright and fair, with wandering
 stars she moves through the night.
 Be praised my Lord for Brother Wind,
 for air and clouds and the skies of every season.
 Be praised for Sister Water: humble,
 helpful, precious, pure; she cleanses
 us in rivers and renews us in rain.
 Be praised my Lord for Brother fire:
 he purifies and enlightens us.
 Be praised my Lord for Mother Earth:
 abundant source, all life sustaining;
 she feeds us bread and fruit and gives us flowers.
 Be praised my Lord for the gift of life;
 for changing dusk and dawn; for touch
 and scent and song.
 Be praised my Lord for those who
 pardon one another for love of thee,
 and endure sickness and tribulation.
 Blessed are they who shall endure it in
 peace, for they shall be crowned by Thee.
 Be praised Good Lord for sister Death
 who welcomes us in loving embrace.
 Be praised my Lord for all your
 creation serving you joyfully.

That is the Canticle of Creation, written in the year 1225, by Francis of Assisi. About three weeks ago, Pope Francis, the spiritual leader of 1.2 Billion Roman Catholics worldwide, took inspiration from those words when he issued a sweeping papal encyclical, called *Laudato Si*, which means "Praised Be." The document entreated all of humanity to care for our imperiled common planet home. He also deliberately, overtly, repeatedly connected the dots between economics, technology, poverty, power, privilege, greed, racism, militarism, and ecological distress. Over and over again he said "everything is connected."

Yesterday was Independence Day. I have been reflecting on how independence -- autonomy -- a sense of separate selfhood, meets all that we are in relationship with, our larger selfhood, our larger body, The Body of Christ as our tradition has called it. There is a movement among faith communities to celebrate Interdependence Day, so today, that is what we will do.

First Hymn -- Morning Has Broken, Green 32

Readings

I once again have four readings, connecting our thoughts on interdependence. Our first reading is a line from Thomas Berry, Catholic Priest, religious historian, theologian, and scholar of Eastern religion. Berry called himself a Geologian, and contributed much to the body of thought around spiritual ecology with books such as *The Universe Story*, inspired by Teilhard de Chardin's *Divine Milieu*. He also wrote *The Dream of the Earth*, *The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future*, and *Evening Thoughts: Reflecting on Earth as Sacred Community*. And he said:

“The Universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects.”

Genesis 3: 1-9

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’” The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’” But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves. They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. And God called out, “Where are You?”

Ribbon Snake Asleep In The Sun ~ Mary Oliver

I come upon him and he is

*startled; he glides
to the rock's rim; he wheels, setting in motion
the stripes of his body, yet not going
anywhere. And though the books say
it can't be done, since his eyes are set
too far apart in the narrow skull, I'm not
lying when I say that he lifts his face and looks
into my eyes and I look back until
we are both staring hard
at each other. He wants to know
just where in this bright, blue-faced world
he might be safe. He wants to go on with the
flow of his life. Then he straightens
his shining back and drops
from the rocks and rockets through
the tangle of weeds, sliding, as he goes, over
my bare foot. Then he vanishes
into the shade and the grass, down to
some slubby stream, having
startled me in return. But this is a
small matter. What I would speak of, rather,
is the weightless string of his actually soft and
nervous body; the nameless stars of his eyes.*

Dissenter Church: Reverend LoraKim Joyner, UU minister and Veterinarian. They say it can't be done. We humans cannot look into the face of other beings, and see the stars of the universe. We cannot look into own demise and know that we are all descended from the death of stars. We cannot see that each hatching and birth brings an inherent worthy being into this world, a star. We cannot live in peace.

I am of the dissenter church for I say it can be done. We meet in that nailed together Hodge podge of someone else's garbage that you find on urban littered streets, in oil sludged waterways, in razed forests, and in orphanages and gangs that harbor and harm children. There our witness says that if flowers can bloom amongst the garbage, then we know that the stars look favorably upon us, not from above, but through the eyes of another. What I mean to say is that to look at tree, flower, child, or snake is to look in a mirror and see glory. I say we can live in peace.

Second Hymn -- Earth Was Given As a Garden, Green 307

Joys and Concerns

Interlude

Prayer *Be Praised, Dear Lord, for the air in this room where we worship together. Invisible, pure, clean, brought here by the unseen hands of wind from the rain forests and ocean plankton, great lungs of our larger body, planet home. It fills our lungs and gives us breath to praise You. Praised Be, Dear God, for these hearts you have given us, that send the blood of life to each part of our small and vulnerable bodies, that beat so dependably, that tell us with their joy and their pain how we are connected to others. Be Praised for our minds, creative, curious, ingenious, crafty like Eden's snake, creating and solving problems, complicating what is simple just to relish working out the solutions. Praised Be Dear God for our capacity to come to new understandings, for our knowing when we need to change, for facing the little and big deaths that changes of all kinds entail. Praised Be for You: Holy and enduring presence, still here through all of our changes, though we feel sometimes so separate, as if we had been banished. Praised be for the sacred stories that tell us in an ancient language how we have struggled to understand, as long as the stories have been told, that your world is always speaking to us, in unexpected ways, from unexpected sources, that our hearts and minds and your still small voice are always calling to us, Where are you? We pray today together that we hear you calling and that we come home, to you, Holy God, and to your Beautiful Earth. Amen.*

Third Hymn -- All Things Bright and Beautiful, Green 1

Message

Fourth Hymn -- All Things of Earth Blue 128 (tune Green 2)

Benediction -- *Be praised Dear God, you who called all creation good. Praised be for Earth, and sea and sky, for tree and flower and child and snake. We who are of the dissenter church, let us go forward today as Creatures of Earth. Let our celebrations of independence remind us of our interdependence. Let our longing be a call for belonging, let our separation be a call for connection. Let our exile be a call for return, for homecoming to this Bright, Blue-Faced World. Praised Be.*

Message: Coming of Age: Independence and Interdependence

I confess, Friends, that I am afraid of snakes. I harbor a prejudice, that I would like to overcome, against creatures whose expression of the Sacred manifests as a form without legs, like snakes, or a form with more than four legs, like spiders. One morning recently, on a walk down to the bottom of our road, there, at the curve in the road, was a large snake, stretched across the middle of the road, where it was surely destined to be squashed. I am troubled by animals being hit by cars. It seems unfair, swiftly, obliviously violent. so I had a dilemma. I approached the snake with caution and tried to communicate. “Snake,” I said, “that is a bad place to rest.” it flicked out its tongue. it did not seem to feel urgency. I found a large stick, probably about seven feet long, thinking that I could keep my distance and gently prod it to move it on its way out of danger. But when I touched it with the tip of the stick, it curled around itself just like Mary Oliver describes and reared up, as if to strike. I was reasonably sure that this was a milk snake or possibly a water snake, because there is a marshy pond at the bottom of our hill, both common snakes and harmless to me, but nevertheless, I made undignified sounds.

There was an orange caution cone, the kind used to alert drivers to road work, off to the side of the road, so I had the idea to try to place the hollow base over the now coiled snake, thinking I could shuttle him or her to safety, but I was too scared to get that close, so instead I sort of tossed the cone right near the snake, hoping that would at least slow cars down and alert them to the presence of this creature in the road, who by this point was perhaps understandably acting aggressively toward me. The cone in place by the snake, I hightailed it back up the hill, sensing all the while, that snake behind me.

I share this story because it brings me up against my conflicting sense of both belonging to and alienation from this world, this living earth of unimaginable biodiversity. I was both afraid of the snake in the road and felt a kinship to and responsibility for her. I wanted to relate to her subject to subject, and was brought up short by my fear. it made me think of that other snake, the famous one in the Garden of Eden and of the original alienation embedded in that deep mythology of our spiritual ancestors. The myth of the Fall from grace, and the ensuing doctrine of Original Sin, has become almost what this story means, period, but I was interested to hear last week that early Quakers rejected the doctrine of original Sin, emphasizing instead the Indwelling Light in all people, not the inherited sin of the original man and woman. I am struck by how radical that is, how radical it still is, to lift up the Light in all people. To hold that there is that of God among us is an essentially hopeful, profoundly loving theology. Especially now, when it is easy to

find evidence for humanity's destructiveness, and our propensity for violence seems all around us. I have heard people say that the Earth would be better off without us, and I hear under words like those a deep sorrow, a despair that there is just something wrong with our species. The interpretation of the Garden of Eden story that rests on the idea of Original Sin and the fall from grace speaks to that sense that there is something wrong with us. Under that anguish is profound separation from our larger body, our larger self, the earth community. and there is a longing for communion.

For much of European and Christian history, although we have been inspired and awed by nature, nature has also been something other than us, something we are afraid of, a force with tremendous power over us. Nature has not been something that we are, but an unknown quality of unknown quantity with a capacity for unknown degrees of harm. When Europeans were exploring and naming and mapping the uncharted earth, at the edges of what was known to be, map makers simply wrote the words "THERE BE DRAGONS HERE." That is how nature has felt to many of our forebears and ancestors, and that is the theological, spiritual, cultural, legacy that has shaped our own culture, our technologies, our sense of meaning. We have felt apart from the thing we are a part of. We have sought independence from it. We are sometimes not sure if we belong, why we are here, if the other creatures here are our kin, or our enemies, or brutes to be subdued. We have felt like strangers in a strange land.

And yet there are also other voices in our ancestral legacy who speak from our yearning to belong here, to be held here, to feel safe, to feel as if we are part of Creation, and not apart from it. There are psalms and songs and testimonies that exult and testify to the presence of the Sacred alive in this world, and that exalt the way that Creation seems to support our very existence. Food grows on trees! Sweet water wells up for drinking! Take, eat, it seems to say, here, drink. this is my body, this is my blood, I give it for you! We are *part* of this world.

But in the story of Adam and Eve, the primal act of reaching for the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil becomes the birth of humanity's self-consciousness, our knowing of ourselves to be separate and distinct as a species, and as individual humans. It puts into story form the moment when we know that humanity stands somehow apart. To be "like God, knowing good *and* evil" is to have knowledge of opposites, to be capable of a self-world distinction. Once our eyes are opened to the boundary between our own skin and the world, to where we end and the rest of Creation begins, we feel vulnerable, naked, and our response is to hide ourselves from the Sacred, the Holy Presence, not to be seen by God. In their awareness of

their own vulnerability and in their self-consciousness, Adam and Eve feel separated already from the Sacred. And yet God, that Presence that is both within and without, calls out for them: “Where Are You?”

This sacred mythology communicates something about relationship. Relationship between humans and the rest of Creation, between the Creation and the Sacred, between humans and what we would call God. It reflects Israel’s earliest wrestling with the sense that there is something different about us, our species. We know it, we grapple with our sense of independence, our self-awareness, our separateness, **and** a longing to know our connectedness. This is a story about growing up, about leaving childhood innocence, leaving behind the protected bliss of spiritual infancy, which is, God knows, a kind of death. In this tale there is a sudden realization of self and selfhood, propelled by an outward-focused curiosity, a thirst for knowledge and experience and engagement with a world that is beckoning, calling to be explored, offering itself to us, fruit ripe for the picking. But then, there are eyes which once opened, cannot be shut again, things which once known, cannot be unknown, thresholds which once crossed, cannot be uncrossed.

Marcus Borg, the pioneering, progressive New Testament scholar who died in January of this year, said that The legend of our primeval parents tells us something that ancient Israel considered universal about the character of the human situation. All of us begin life in the womb with an experiential sense of undifferentiated unity; we begin in paradise. But the very process of growing up and the birth of consciousness that is intrinsic to it propels us into a world of division and separation. Living “east of Eden” is inherent to the experience of being human. We will all go through “The Fall” and we will all confront exile and estrangement in some way.

So, it is, too, with the collective human endeavor, enfolded as it is in the wide and grand story of the earth community, the unfolding story of Creation. God’s last words to Adam are “you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” This has always been read like a curse, because we, perhaps among a small number of fellow Earth species, are conscious of our own mortality, our numbered days, and that consciousness, too, is a knowledge that is Sacred, that sets us apart, “like God.”

But I hear those words as a promise. People *are* creatures of the Earth. We *are* dust. We come from Her, and to Her we will return. To set out from the garden is to be given the opportunity to find our way back. back to the felt and lived presence of God. To set out from the garden is to find our way forward as Earth’s creatures, as Earth dust, walking, thinking, feeling, searching, part of the Earth as Earth is part of us. It is to be given a great responsibility and privilege, to carry the

sight and the knowledge that appears to be ours alone. We are the creatures of Earth who know ourselves to be naked, vulnerable, separate. We are the creatures of Earth with knowledge of good and evil. Maybe what this story can say to us now is that we are that part of the earth recently emerged into self-awareness. maybe we are the earth becoming conscious of itself, a consciousness that began a long, long time ago, so the story goes, when the mythical Mother of All Living stretched out her hand, to be given a great knowledge that would take her on a perilous journey toward wisdom, a vision quest for Earth and our species, an arc from undifferentiated innocence to self-consciousness, a journey through alienation and exile, and finally, finally, homecoming.

Maybe the first step toward knowing and remembering our belonging in God, our belonging to Creation, began with the first step away. Maybe the story of our remembering – consciously realizing again that we are members of The One Body – is the story of our age. Perhaps we will be the ancient spiritual forebears of those who come after us, and our children’s children’s children’s children will be told stories that begin with our sense of separation from what is Holy, our celebrations of independence, and perhaps the tales will continue from there, and will tell of the long and perilous journey we took back to God, back to Earth, how close we came to dismantling Creation. Perhaps in the time to come they will speak of how we came of age instead, of how we came to know that beyond the place where our bodies end and the world begins is the larger body, the one to whom we have always belonged, all along. Perhaps in those stories we will look the snake in the eye and see, finally, the stars of the universe.

And God called out, “Where are you?”

I am of the dissenter church, for I say it can be done. I say we can live in peace.