

The Kenyan environmental activist, Wangari Maathai wrote, “We are called to assist the Earth to heal her wounds and in the process to heal our own—indeed to embrace the whole of creation in all its diversity, beauty, and wonder.”

First hymn is red #147, “Come Down, O Love Divine”

Our first reading is from the person some call the American Quaker saint, John Woolman, who wrote in 1772: “The produce of the earth is a gift from our gracious creator to the inhabitants, and to impoverish the earth now to support outward greatness appears to be an injury to the succeeding age.”

Our second reading is Psalm 24: “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for God founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters. Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in God’s holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up the soul to an idol or swear by what is false. That one will receive blessing from the Lord and vindication from God the Savior. Such is the generation of those who seek the Lord, who seek your face, O God of Jacob. *Selah*. Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is the King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is the one, the King of glory? The Lord Almighty—is the one, the King of glory.”

Our second hymn is Green #142 “Mid All the Traffic of the Ways”

Joys and Concerns---then music interlude

Dear Friends—As we lay ourselves prone and bare our souls together in the loneliness of prayer before the sacred, let us know the sacredness of the ground on which we lie, of the sanctity of the only life we know. And then let us lift up our heads and see the coming of the Light, experience its warmth, reflect its radiance, be its generator, live in its middle, in its center. Help us to see each other in the Light and to share in right proportion this earth with all who have been and will be. Let us concern ourselves with joy. Help us keep our sense of love and wonder in a changing and challenging world. Give us clean hands and a pure heart so that we may ascend the hill of the Lord. Amen.

Third hymn: green #27 “Eternal and Infinite Source of All Grace”

Children may now head downstairs for time with each other.

Message: Dear friends—The ancients knew that the best path was one of both moderation and generosity, what they sometimes called the golden mean and liberality. This practice involves a level of equanimity that allows one to consider others in positive regard, to be open and ready to learn and receive, to place oneself not at the head, but at the middle, as the reference point, not the determiner. It is a healthiness that is not tainted by suspicion or cynicism, a continual building of community and of relationships. The wounded are those who are guarded, who are wary of others, are those who hoard. Healing is something of an equilibrium, a calm that allows for time, and all the many others who live within it, to pass in peace.

If one always puts the self first, then it is difficult also to use the self for perspective and as a comparative learning place of reference. Similarly, placing the self at the extreme, isolating the self from general society and the general exchange, can result in a loss of balance. What those wise ones knew and proclaimed about moderation was that it was the most reliable way to happiness. In

a way, it is an observation consistent with contemporary science about the workings of the world, the sense of environmental balance within the system that always adjusts and recalibrates to accommodate new factors. What is sometimes called symbiosis. This balance and adjustment is also true on a cosmic scale, and is what allows contemporary astronomers to learn and understand the far reaches of the universe--the recent locating of the remnants of the big bang, the composition of far planets, the events of distant stars. If gravity and the elements, and the dynamics of light and speed and distance are always working in relation, their relativity can be seen as that constant search for moderation, for balance, for the golden mean. These were the ideals of ancient Egypt that so inspired the Greeks and Romans and produced a leader like Moses, and provided the childhood protected home for Jesus, and nurtured the early Christian church in its first center of Alexandria.

The difficulty with knowing the mean, the balanced place, is to find it, one must comprehend the whole. It is the holistic view that so often eludes individuals and throws off the sense of balance. The search for a holistic view is why we as societies have sought to embed our most talented thinkers and our quest for wisdom in what we call universities—places that will seek to balance and encompass the whole universe. It's what the arts try to do when they touch on profundity and true beauty. It's why we seek to make room for the many, for diversity, for the balance of many views. When I hear the common complaint that faculty members are overly liberal, I sometimes point out to parents and students that faculty members typically operate in the context of their disciplines, which are world-wide. In that frame, the U.S. professoriate is rather conservative, which fits being from so deeply right-wing a country on the global level. It is only if one puts us in the distorted and partial framing of just the U.S. that faculty members look liberal in a political sense.

Mother Jones, the great labor activist, is often quoted as having stated that her social mission was to afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted. This approach does not depend on knowing the full realms of knowledge and calculating the golden mean, but rather identifies and works on the outliers of power to get more toward the middle. This was also the approach associated with Christ, who constantly drew in the disenfranchised and despised, who questioned the religious authorities of the day, and proposed a radical equality, a radical access to Spirit, a radical love for the tax collector, the refugee, the common fishers, women and children, the wisdom of ordinary people in the parables, the obstacles to virtue for the wealthy and the well-connected. Jesus boiled down his message to love, to using the sacred and others, our neighbors, as our reference points-- to placing ourselves amongst the many, with the everyday, in the average. It is that force more powerful. It is the source of a generosity that transfers from the rich to the poor, the rich in material, in power, in resources, in knowledge.

William Penn, that wealthy aristocrat, once wrote in 1669 “That the sweat and tedious labour of the farmer, early and late, cold and hot, wet and dry, should be converted into the pleasure of a small number of men—that continued severity should be laid on nineteen parts of the land to feed the inordinate lusts and delicate appetites of the twentieth, is so far from the will of the great Governor of the world, ...it is wretched and blasphemous.” This, of course, is a similar sentiment to that of John Woolman from our reading this morning, though Woolman extends it to see that such resource exploitation can also be a theft from future generations.

From sub-zero to spring in one day, we are out of balance. Our earth is seeking to moderate itself, to counter the extremes in systems that have been distorted and stretched, defied and pushed. Some of you may have read the recent article that connected the “little ice age” of the 1600s to the genocide in the Americas when the western hemisphere’s indigenous population was reduced from

60 million to 6 million by the effects of European colonization. As pre-columbian cities were abandoned and the land went back to the wild, there was a direct effect on the CO2 in the atmosphere. The extreme treatment of the earth led to the earth's reaction and effort to maintain a balance. This is all happening again, or perhaps just further extending as part of the same pattern of exploitation.

Psalm 24 this morning tries to put this back into perspective, to bring the sacred to the center, and to place everything, a holistic view, as the grounding. "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it". All people and all things. It is only when we stand whole and clean in the face of that clear understanding that blessing comes. We need that ancient blessing, that golden mean, that true happiness. Moderation and generosity for ourselves and others. The conclusion of the psalm is that very interesting anthropomorphizing of the structures—lift up your heads, o you gates. They are called ancient. Look to the wisdom of the ancients, open yourselves to it, seek the balance of the golden mean. The image of gates, as something holding back, and that they need to pay attention, to open up, to look around. Be generous to all in your openness. As our earth seeks its balance and healing, let us stop defying it and join with it, and with each other. Look around. We shall be healed.

Our closing hymn is Green #215 "The Great Storm is Over"

Shirley Chisholm, the prophetic politician wrote: "Service is the rent we pay for the privilege of living on this earth. It is the very purpose of life, not something you do in your spare time."