

So may it be.

#*Opening Hymn #309 *Earth Is Our Homeland, v. 1-3* Amy Buckley, Vocal Leader

A Story for All Nate Pawelek, Director of Religious Education

#Sing the Young People Out *'Till we meet again (2x)*
May peace go with you (2x)

Honoring Our Joys and Sorrows

And, now, if you woke this morning with a sorrow so heavy that you need the help of this community to carry it; or if, in the spirit of thankfulness, you woke with gratitude in your heart that simply must be shared, now is the time for you to speak.

Please come forward to the lectern as you are able. Or, we will bring a mic to you, as needed.

PAUSE

Let us reflect with reverence in our hearts for the joys and sorrows spoken and unspoken today.

Musical Meditation: *Impressions in the Sky*, R. Hartsell

Offertory Words

The book of Deuteronomy says:

"We drink from wells we did not dig; we are warmed by fires we did not kindle." (Deut. 6.11)

Let us be sufficiently broad in our vision to know that our gifts today, support tomorrows we will not see.

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We thank you for your generosity to this faith and community.

Offering & Offertory Music #1024 *When the Spirit Says Do*

Sermon

Environmental Justice I: The Air We Breathe

Rev. Lloyd

One of my favorite passages in the bible is I Corinthian 13. It’s the one often used at weddings, and takes great pains to define love in its largest and best sense.

13 “If I speak in the tongues^[a] of men [and women] or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.³ If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship [so] that I may boast,^[b] but do not have love, I gain nothing.

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

⁸ Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when [wholeness] comes, what is in part disappears. ¹¹ When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I [was grown,] I put the ways of childhood behind me. ¹² For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.²

These words are attributed to the apostle Paul, the disciple who never met Jesus while he was alive. Paul is speaking “of [the] love [that he thinks] . . . [the Corinthian] Christians **should**³ have. In the original Greek, the word ἀγάπη *agape* is used throughout this passage for this highest form of universal, unconditional, self-sacrificing, humble, love.^{4 5} True to our Universalist theology it is thought to represent the covenantal love between G*d and humanity. And, we? We are called to likewise love one another in return.

² <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+13> 5/2/14

³ <http://www.craigkeener.com/tag/1-corinthians-13/> 5/2/14

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1_Corinthians_13 5/2/14

⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agape> 4/22/17

What I like about this passage is the humility woven throughout the text. It reflects an author (whether it is Paul or not) who doesn't have all the answers, but knows that we are called to do more than we can imagine in the name of agape, the expansive Spirit of Love.

I especially like the passage, “When I was a child, I reasoned like a child,” with the implication that as a mature adult, I now reason differently. A transformed Spirit is assumed. Now, I see things more clearly, I see the complexity of the world, I see that truth is rarely static, I see the shades of gray and the intersectionality of a variety of forces that shape our lives.

PAUSE

When we sing that we are Answering the Call of Love, or Walking or Standing or Marching or Sitting on the Side of Love,⁶ it is this kind of love to which we respond. It is this kind of love that calls us to practice kindness and to walk with others to assure the protection of human rights. It is this kind of love that calls us to risk being changed, being transformed by Love, as, with humility, we reflect on how the way we live our lives sometimes pushes people to the margins, and asks of them to make unfair sacrifices.

PAUSE

Between now and May 21st, I will be speaking on different justice issues and the language we use to understand them. Then on May 21st, after the Sunday Service and our fellowship time, the Social Justice Coordinating Team and I will hold a Justice Fair for the congregation. It will be a time when those of you who are interested in working on a particular justice issue will (hopefully) find others also interested in that issue. So between now and then, think about where the intersection is between the gifts you have to offer the world and the world's greatest needs. What is that intersection for you? How do you name it? Think about it. How shall we, as a congregation, in a variety of ways, address human rights issues in Connecticut and elsewhere? Is it the environment that calls you to express your care and concern for justice? Is it the differential treatment of people of color? Is it the corrosive power of classism? Is it hunger in this land and across the world? What tugs at your heart and says “do something”?

And so, this being Earth Sunday, I want to reflect with you on environmental justice both today and on May 7th. What does it mean? Why does it matter?

⁶ Jason Shelton

There is an old metaphor that describes the relationship between a fish, and its fluid environment, water. The thing is,

Fish don't know they're in water.

If you tried to explain it and they could talk, they'd say, “Water? What's water?”

They're so surrounded by it that it's impossible to see.

They can't see it until they get outside of it.⁷

(And, if they get outside of it – it would be mighty uncomfortable wouldn't it?)

Likewise, we can't always see the air we breathe, and by air, I am not really talking about that special mix of oxygen and nitrogen that we breathe . . . I'm talking about the culture we live in, the assumptions we make, the lens through which we see the world, and the invisibility of the cultural norms that allow us to blindly exploit the environment in such a way as to place at a disadvantage those with less choice and power.

Environmental justice is not just about “saving the planet”. (As though that weren't enough!) It's not just about enjoying lovely walks across the seasons of the year. It's not just about gardening or hiking, or cleaning up a river though she is our mother earth and deserves at least that much. There is so much more to environmental justice . . .

It is about our efforts to really see and change the culture in which we live.

But, we need help to understand how to do that, we need a path, a way of figuring out what the issues are. One of the certificate programs that the UUA offers is the Green Sanctuary program that certifies congregations who actively seek to come into an accountable relationship with the environment and the very people who suffer injustice when the environment is abused. Like Paul, this program raises the bar to both the heights and depths of love, of agape, emphasizing our need to ***shift from charity to the largest understanding of love (agape)*** by actively engaging with those who are negatively impacted by environmental abuses.⁸ Like the air we breathe and the water fish breathe, the Green Sanctuary program names that “[when working for] environmental justice, [we affirm that] the planet and its extraordinary diversity [must] be honored, supported and restored; [Our congregations are urged to ground their] environmental work . . . [in collaboration] . . . with those who are most marginalized . . .”

⁷ <http://sivers.org/fish> 5/2/14

⁸ <http://www.uua.org/environment/sanctuary/program/steps/justice/290976.shtml> May 2, 2014

⁹ [We are reminded that] “environmental issues are inextricably linked to the crises of racism, classism and other forms of oppression.”¹⁰

PAUSE

This thinking isn’t original to Unitarian Universalists. The U.S. EPA still defines Environmental Justice as:

“The fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. [And, that] Fair treatment means that no group of people, including racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic group should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, municipal, and commercial operations or the execution of [governmental] programs and policies.”¹¹

Frederic Beaudry is “. . . an assistant professor of environmental science, a wildlife biologist, and [an environmental] science writer.”¹² He says that “. . . environmental issues have profound effects on the living conditions of people worldwide. Billions of people face food and water shortages due to global warming. [He names that there are more environmental refugees fleeing climate change than there are refugees from war . . .]”¹³

He provides convincing evidence that: ¹⁴

- Nearly a Quarter of All Disease [is] Linked to [the] Environment
- Cleaning the Environment Could Save 13 Million Lives Annually
- Malnutrition, Pollution and Population Growth Increase Deadly Diseases

- Global Warming Creates Food Shortages for Billions
- Worldwide Hunger and Food Insecurity [Have Risen] Dramatically
- [Public policy] Make[s] Unhealthy Food Cheaper Than Healthy Food
- That “[changing] temperatures, wind patterns and pollution affect natural water sources, [making it more and more difficult for people around the world to find drinking water--or any water at all].”

⁹ <http://www.uua.org/environment/sanctuary/program/steps/justice/290976.shtml> May 2, 2014

¹⁰ <http://www.uua.org/environment/sanctuary/program/steps/justice/290976.shtml> May 2, 2014

¹¹ <http://www.environmental-justice.org/whatisej/whatis.html> May 2, 2014

¹² <http://environment.about.com/bio/Frederic-Beaudry-124275.htm> May 2, 2014

¹³ http://environment.about.com/od/healthenvironment/u/what_is_at_risk.htm May 2, 2014

¹⁴ http://environment.about.com/od/healthenvironment/u/what_is_at_risk.htm#s4 May 2, 2014

- [Global Water Supply \[Dries\] Up as Population Grows and](#)
- [A Billion People Worldwide Lack Safe Drinking Water](#)

PAUSE

My guess is that there are many justice issues that tug at your heart and call you to do something, but that you don't know where to start. It doesn't have to be large, but it is usually best to do it with others, because rarely does anyone of us have all the answers. Finding people who have similar interests as you, as you work to understand the issues and then find a way to act on them is a good way to start. With a little luck, you'll find someone else with a similar interest on May 21st.

Nonetheless, I don't want you to think this is primarily about fixing a problem out there, or saving “others” from some injustice. This is about you. This is about your spiritual grounding and your spiritual growth. Why? Because to do justice well requires living through a process of action and reflection. Action and reflection. What that means is, we try something – some justice action, and then together as a group or a congregation, we reflect on it. What went right? What when wrong? What assumptions were blown out of the water (no pun intended)? What relationships were made? How were we changed? It is this process of action and reflection that allows us to grow into the human beings we need to be, even if we don't know it now.

There are connections of the mind and heart to be made in this process. Connections that expand the meaning of charity to a broader meaning of love and humility that has the courage to risk change.

PAUSE

There are a number of questions about our communities and our nearby cities that I don't have answers to but they haunt me. I wonder whether the food we eat and the water we drink is effected by the invisibility of abuse that our environment suffers? Fertilizer may help things grow, but used unwisely it also kills. Where are fertilizer and insecticides dumped in our neighborhoods? Who among us has the option of acquiring food or water that is untainted? Who does not? And, what would we have to do, as a congregation, to take stock of and engage the larger environmental justice issues for people who, for survival reasons, have no capacity to leverage a “change of venue.” Who gets to have a choice in these matters and who does not? Does this choice fall along race and class issues? Does institutional oppression of one sort or another create barriers to health? Here's a suspicion that I can't prove right now, I think environmental injustice occurs not just in nearby cities like New Haven or Middletown or New London, but also in agricultural and suburban communities along the shoreline.

My guess is that most of us do not yet know how environmental injustice creates problems in our community, and does so differentially, for different people. But, I bet there is something there to be discovered.

How do you recognize it? It's a hard task. It's likely to be invisible, just like water is invisible to the fish. But, is even harder to see when we ignore it. The first step is to go looking, go searching for the broad systems and policies that compromise our environment right here and in nearby cities. The second is to accept that we are part of this environment with responsibilities for its preservation and health. And the third is to choose to hold ourselves accountable. Each day, policy makers ranging from those at the top level of government and in big corporations, to those at state levels, to food and water handlers at local levels, to those of us here, they/we decide what comes into our personal home, our spiritual home, and our communities.

We participate in an environmental system that favors "the haves" over the "have nots." I invite us to consider taking up the mantle of making informed decisions, and to do so by choosing to become accountable to ourselves and others, choosing to work with others to make a collaborative difference and thereby choosing to risk our assumptions so that we may be spiritual formed into the people we hope to be.

Today is an opening opportunity to begin to think about environmental justice and our place in it. Today is just the beginning. Consider the possibilities.

Put your thinking caps on, listen to your heart, and join us on May 21st for the Justice Fair.

May it be so.

***Closing Hymn #131** *Love Will Guide Us*

***Closing Words**

We extinguish this flame, but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Extinguishing the Chalice

Sounding of the Gong