

SAY YOU LOVE THIS WORLD

Sermon by Ilene Cummings

November 11, 2007

Good morning on this Remembrance Day, 2007. Today is the day we traditionally remember the soldiers who died for what they hoped would be a better world. Let us expand this remembrance to include all who have died in the tragedy of war in the past and even as we speak today, as we ponder our situation in the present world.

I'd like to start this morning with these words from the eleventh century mystic poet, Rumi:

We are the mirror as well as the face in it.

We are tasting the taste this minute
of eternity. We are pain

and what cures pain, both. We are

the sweet cold water and the jar that pours. I love this poem. "We are pain and what cures pain, both." I quote it because it seems to me this poem written in the mid-1200's (in Persian of course, not English) expresses so beautifully the very idea behind today's theme. That is, the Unitarian-Universalist seventh principle where we covenant to affirm and promote respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. We are intimately interconnected not merely with all living things but with all existence. The poem says it more beautifully. "We are the sweet cold water and the jar that pours."

A few Sundays ago I was struck by the words of young Matisse St. Arnaud French, speaking from this pulpit on "The World I Want" in which he said, "I'm not saying a crisis is a good thing—but sometimes we need a crisis to get us moving." I realized he's right. We all need deadlines, don't we? We've got a full

blown world crisis deadline right now—so maybe that will help us change. I hope so. If we don't mend our ways and recognize our interdependence with all living and non-living things; if we don't become stewards of the earth and sky instead of selfishly using them up; if the rich continue to exploit the poor; if we don't begin thinking about the future generations in our forward planning;-- there aren't going to be any future generations, simple as that. The gauntlet has been thrown down right here in front of us—our generation. That is, those of us living and breathing at this time. We may wish and pray that this was not the case, but it's a given.

I go back a long way with this congregation and can remember words spoken from this pulpit by the Rev. Duke Gray back in the seventies. His definition of Original Sin was humankind's false sense of separation from ourselves and from our environment. When you stop and think about it, that's what is at the core of all the bad things in the world. This feeling of disconnection with other people and with animals, the earth, the water, the air—this feeling accounts for war, injustice, inequality, pollution, you name it.

In Ayurvedic culture (that is, the ancient healing philosophy of India), it is taught that one of the major ills of humankind is “ahamkara” which is exactly this sense of disconnection. That is, the individual's sense of separate containment, ownership, and illusion of permanence which results in amnesia of source, of forgetting where we came from. Our recently acquired cultural dependency (some call it addiction) on fossil fuels and/or electricity merely exacerbates this condition, giving us an illusory opulence and sense of entitlement. How eagerly we in the affluent parts of the world have adjusted to car ownership, for example. How pleasant it is to sit alone in our vehicles, traveling at what were unimaginable speeds even a short century ago, surrounded by our favourite music, untouched by outdoor temperatures. (As a newly confident driver I can assert to this pleasure.) The sense of disconnection feels powerful and gives an illusion of freedom. This same sense of disconnection can result in road rage or reckless driving. We also love air travel, shopping for tangible things which were

unimaginable even fifty years ago. Again we engage in amnesia of source as we make purchases which depend on the desecration of the earth and slave labour conditions in faraway lands. What can we do?

Overcoming this sense of disconnection is our true task. Big brain power is not going to save us. What can we really know here on earth using our standard five senses? Science gives us a part of the picture—but we're never going to know the full story, at least not now, or not in the usual way. And science alone is not going to solve all our problems. Ask yourself which is more important, high intelligence or a compassionate heart? Keep in mind a lot of very intelligent people invented nuclear weapons and other horrific means of destruction. Brain power without heart will only bring harm.

What is really required is a re-ignition of that sense of interconnection known by ancient cultures around the world. What's really required to resolve this crisis is open loving hearts much more than brain power.

As an antidote to this sense of disconnection I was going to lead you through a guided meditation right here in the middle of my sermon based on a Buddhist meta. Unfortunately time constraints have forced me to cut it but it consists of opening your heart first to yourself, then to others and then to the earth, visualizing it hanging in space. I like to warm my heart first by remembering a place on earth that I truly love. I send loving kindness to that place, then expand my imagination to encompass the whole world, sending loving kindness to those places which especially need our care. This loving focus can translate into a source of courage at times of despair. It is also something simple you can do by yourself when you take a quiet moment.

It's certainly better than filling ourselves constantly with fears and worries about the earth.

In healing circles we have a saying “energy flows where attention goes” or sometimes: “energy flows where intention goes”. Either way it seems to imply we have a lot more power than we think we do. In quantum physics they say even a butterfly lifting its wings in Japan can have an effect on the other side of the world. Now how they measure that I can’t imagine, but I can imagine that what we do and think has its subtle effect on the world. And our emotions set in motion many subtle vibrations that do have their effect on the larger whole. I feel strongly that if large numbers of people began doing visualizations such as these on a daily basis it could have a tangible effect on this earth. Certainly it can do no harm, unlike the harm done by constantly focusing on violence, weaponry, fear and hatred. Energy flows where intention goes. I’m telling you right now large numbers of people are sending a lot of energy out into the world in the form of fear, hatred and despair. And look at the sad state of everything.

My friend Loreen is here and she has a few things she wants to say.

(Ilene performs a portion of her one-woman show.)

Ilene: Yes. That’s Loreen. I invented her for the one-woman show I’m writing, yet to be performed. I recently set myself a deadline—we all need deadlines, remember? I’ve now committed myself to presenting a first draft of my show at Daytimers by the end of February.

Okay. So, now what? What can we do about all these things Loreen is talking about? I think we’re all agreed it’s a big problem and it all starts back with that sense of separation. Therefore it’s not merely a physical problem, solvable by physical means, it’s also a personal spiritual problem and we all have our parts to play. The song Ann just sang “Ella’s Song”, was written in the early 1980’s by a 17-year-old Russian girl, for the international youth exchange musical, “Peace Child”. “Say you love this world,” she wrote, “...do everything just to save this world from being killed, shake all of your heart with the strongest power of your love...”

So that's what I'm going to ask you to do. First of all, remember a place on earth that you love. Let your heart creak open, let it remember that place. *(pause)* Can we say it together, "I love this world." *(All)* "I love this world." Come on! "I love this world". Yes we do, we do love this world. Can we whisper it together once more? "I love this world".

And that is the first and foremost suggestion I give to you and to myself. We all have our parts to play and we're all interconnected. It's important to find ways to connect with the earth and mindfully feel our emotions. A big part of the problem is that we disconnect from our emotions regarding the earth—the news in the papers and on TV is so terrible (hey, it's not news unless it's terrible—or totally frivolous!) and we get to feeling helpless and full of despair and rather than experience that deep sadness we shut down and try to forget about it. But of course we care. It's our home.

So let's care! Here are some things we can personally do. First of all, love the earth. Let's take time to connect with nature every day. Go outside if possible. If the weather is bad or for some reason it's impossible to get outside, then let's open a window or touch the leaves of our plants or stroke our pet or even look at photographs of nature just to foster a sense of connection and remind ourselves we love the earth. We are all interconnected and interdependent and that is the truth of it all. What we do to others or to the earth we do to ourselves and I'd like to add conversely, what we do as individuals affects the whole.

If you are so inclined, you might make a small altar for the earth in your home with whatever helps you remember that sense of interconnection. It can serve as a place to sit and visualize the earth in space and send loving kindness to places we love and to places which need special care. These are not frivolous things to do.

We all know the physical things environmental enthusiasts tell us to do and most of us are probably doing at least some of them: recycle, reuse, compost, conserve

water, use your car less often, fly less often, stop buying bottled water, save energy, etc. And yes, these things are important too, **do these things** but not out of guilt or despair or deprivation. Do it from the sense of interconnection. Vote for political parties with an environmental platform, write letters, attend protests, whatever it is you are driven to do. Do these things from the heart.

We are pain and what cures pain both. We are the sweet cold water and the jar that pours.

Simple things like picking up garbage from the sidewalk near your house. My husband John is very diligent about this. He might be surprised to know that I consider this a spiritual practice. But think of the interconnectedness of things. Such small actions can have a larger effect. John's noticed other people on our street beginning to pick up garbage, for instance.

Find opportunities to work with others for the good of the planet. Perhaps it's time for us as a congregation to revisit the Green Sanctuary program developed by the Unitarian Universalist Association. It offers many good ideas for the environment that we can do as a congregation. Shawn Newton knows a lot about this, having helped to implement the program in the Arlington Street Congregation in Boston and I'm sure would be more than happy to help us with this process should we decide to do so.

Say and did you know November 23 is "Buy Nothing" day? Mark it down and resolve to buy nothing that day. Wouldn't it be amazing if it really caught on and no one bought anything that day? Or at least if sales went way down that day.

Today is a day of sadness, a day of remembrance. We remember the futility of war, the lives cut down before their time. How will the future generations remember us, "the consumer society". It's something to ponder, isn't it?

I'd like to close by reading the poem quoted by Shawn in this month's HORIZONS, "Stubborn Ounces" by Bonaro Overstreet. (There is a subtitle: "To one who doubts the worth of doing anything if you can't do everything.")

You say the little efforts that I make will do no good
they never will prevail to tip the hovering scale
where justice hangs in balance
I don't think I ever thought they would
But I am prejudiced beyond all doubt in favor of my right
to choose which side shall feel
the stubborn ounces of my weight.

Let's all add our stubborn ounces to the scales of justice, connection and loving kindness. It's all we have—it's all we do. It's more powerful than any of us can imagine.

Thank you.