

“An Earth Day Like No Other”

Rev. Lynn Harrison
First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto
Online Service via Zoom
19 April 2020

Reading

Remember - Joy Harjo

Remember the sky that you were born under,
know each of the star's stories.

Remember the moon, know who she is.

Remember the sun's birth at dawn, that is the
strongest point of time. Remember sundown
and the giving away to night.

Remember your birth, how your mother struggled
to give you form and breath. You are evidence of
her life, and her mother's, and hers.

Remember your father. He is your life, also.

Remember the earth whose skin you are:
red earth, black earth, yellow earth, white earth
brown earth, we are earth.

Remember the plants, trees, animal life who all have their
tribes, their families, their histories, too. Talk to them,
listen to them. They are alive poems.

Remember the wind. Remember her voice. She knows the
origin of this universe.

Remember you are all people and all people
are you.

Remember you are this universe and this
universe is you.

Remember all is in motion, is growing, is you.
Remember language comes from this.
Remember the dance language is, that life is.
Remember.

Reflection:

Well, this wasn't how we were expecting to celebrate Earth Day, was it?

Today I find myself thinking back to the massive climate marches, and Fridays for Future strikes, that so many of us participated in this past year.

It's been only a month of social distancing, but already the thought of marching in a huge crowd seems impossible.

Those events were meant to get the world's attention—
meant to get OUR attention—
calling us to change our lives
to prevent climate catastrophe.

On the news the other night,
I saw reports of wildfires beginning to burn in Western Canada...and as we know, a series of devastating tornadoes ripped through the United States last week.

As we're all at home wondering,
“What day is it? What month is it?”

It's a shock to realize that, on top of everything else, we're entering a season of severe weather events.

Climate change is not staying home because of the pandemic.

But because we are, we might be able to use this time in ways that make Earth Day more meaningful...

Ways that prepare us to make the lasting changes that are needed now.

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We're going through what's been called "The Great Pause."¹

There have been dramatic reductions in travel and economic activity.

Major cities around the world have seen their air quality transformed. Here in Toronto, researchers say that air pollution has dropped by about half.²

There's been a noticeable drop in noise pollution, an increase in wildlife activity.

¹ Julio Vincent Gambuto, "Prepare for the Ultimate Gaslighting," Medium, April 10, 2020

<https://forge.medium.com/prepare-for-the-ultimate-gaslighting-6a8ce3f0a0e0>

² NEWS 1130 (Vancouver) Reduction in air pollution has positive implications for our health, expert says. (4/16/2020) <https://www.citynews1130.com/2020/04/16/air-pollution-pandemic-positive-health-expert/>

Early estimates suggest that world carbon emissions may drop as much as 4% because of the pandemic.

Of course, that's far less than the 7% that is needed for us to avoid the worst consequences of climate change.³

Also, the route toward a sustainable planet can't require that millions of people are out of work, or be forever confined to our homes.

What it will require, though, is a deeper understanding of how we're interconnected—and how we as human beings are not separate from the Earth, but part of it.

In a wonderful book called “Healing Through the Dark Emotions⁴ – the Wisdom of Grief, Fear and Despair” author Miriam Greenspan says that we are “intervulnerable.”

She writes: “Unless we acknowledge and honour our vulnerability, unless we become increasingly aware of how inter-vulnerable we are...we will continue to pose a threat not only to our own survival but to the fate of the Earth.”

Similarly, in a recent article, author Rebecca Solnit lifts up the “privatization of the human heart” as one of the causes of our common predicament.

³ <https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/04/14/834295861/carbon-emissions-are-falling-but-still-not-enough-scientists-say>

⁴ Miriam Greenspan, *Healing Through the Dark Emotions: The Wisdom of Grief, Fear and Despair* (Shambhala, 2003), 41.

“The withdrawal from a sense of a shared fate and social bonds.”

She writes, “It is to be hoped that this shared experience of catastrophe will reverse the process.”⁵

That “privatization of the heart” is what John Prine was singing about, too,
when his character says, if the earth ends,

“...that’s okay,
'Cause I don't live here anyway.

I live down deep inside my head
Where long ago I made my bed.”

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I encourage you all to delve into the many sources of wisdom that are springing up right now.

I’ll provide links to all the sources I’m drawing on today along with this sermon that will be posted on our website in the next few days.

Right now, in so many ways,
we’re called out of our usual self-interested outlooks.

⁵ Rebecca Solnit in The Guardian: “The impossible has already happened: What coronavirus can teach us about hope” (April 7, 2020)
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/07/what-coronavirus-can-teach-us-about-hope-rebecca-solnit>

Places where we might feel quite comfortable...

Where we might feel somewhat detached
from what science is telling us...

From what the earth is telling us.

Right now, like the former planet Pluto,
we may be feeling a bit humbled, perhaps.

Brought down a few notches by something
as small and natural as a virus...which
reminds us our “inter-vulnerability.”

Reminds us that we do, actually, live right here—
In, on and of the Earth...

And that how we live
means the difference
between life and death for others.

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As we look ahead to an Earth Day like no other,
I wonder if we could take a few minutes now to
to think about how we can connect more deeply
with the Earth...

Even when we're spending less time outside than usual.

Are there activities you can do at home today
that remind you of your connection with the Earth?

Is there something that gets you “out of your head,”
away from your screen,
and into your creaturely body?

What can you do, this Earth Day,
that might plant a seed for a changed way of life—

Something that could be a blessing
during the pandemic...
and when the time of quarantine has passed?

Take a few minutes now to write in your journal
or reflect quietly, and when we come back I’ll lift up a few of
your reflections.

[Pause for Reflection]

[Sharing of Reflections]

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As we’ve just heard, this unexpected crisis can allow for
meaningful reflection, if we pause to make time for it.

Although shock and grief has been part of this experience,
I hope we don’t get stuck in the longing to simply return to
business-as-usual...

Or to avoid the discomfort that comes with growth.

I hope we give ourselves the chance to truly inhabit a world that is slower and more mindful...without as much automatic convenience and comfort as we're used to.

It's interesting...even in our own well-meaning efforts to seamlessly and rapidly move our services online, we have, in a way, been trying to maintain business-as-usual...

And we've been predictably frustrated when it hasn't always gone the way we thought it should!

It is difficult to learn new skills, to move in different rhythms, and to mindfully share our space...

All while living in deep uncertainty... and coping with grief and fear.

But these are skills that are, perhaps, more necessary than we know.

Rebecca Solnit hopes we do not "...lapse into believing that everything was fine before disaster struck, and that all we need to do is return to things as they were."

She writes, "Ordinary life before the pandemic was already a catastrophe of desperation and exclusion for too many human beings,

an environmental and climate catastrophe,
an obscenity of inequality.”

By being forced out of our comfort zones,
into a time of shared vulnerability
and global insecurity,

we have a once-in-a-lifetime chance to
understand the depth of our connection with others
and with the Earth.

Perhaps it is exactly what we need...
at exactly the right time.

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Resources:

Prepare for the Ultimate Gaslighting - Julio Vincent Gambuto
Medium, April 10, 2020

<https://forge.medium.com/prepare-for-the-ultimate-gaslighting-6a8ce3f0a0e0>

The Impossible Has Already Happened: What the Coronavirus Can Teach Us About Hope - Rebecca Solnit

The Guardian, Tuesday April 7, 2020

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/07/what-coronavirus-can-teach-us-about-hope-rebecca-solnit>

On Coronavirus Lockdown? Look for Meaning, Not Happiness – Emily Esfahani Smith

The New York Times, April 7, 2020

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/07/opinion/coronavirus-mental-health.html?referringSource=articleShare>

Miriam Greenspan, *Healing Through the Dark Emotions: The Wisdom of Grief, Fear and Despair* (Shambhala Publications, 2003)

John Prine, *The Tree of Forgiveness* (Oh Boy Records/RCA)

Michael Meade “The Light Inside the Darkness” in *Mosaic Voices*.

<https://www.mosaicvoices.org/the-light-inside-the-darkness>

NEWS 1130 (Vancouver) Reduction in air pollution has positive implications for our health, expert says. (4/16/2020)

<https://www.citynews1130.com/2020/04/16/air-pollution-pandemic-positive-health-expert/>

NPR, “Carbon Emissions are Falling But Still Not Enough, Scientists Say”

<https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/04/14/834295861/carbon-emissions-are-falling-but-still-not-enough-scientists-say>