

“Earth Day Unlimited”

Rev. Lynn Harrison
First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto
18 April 2021

“The first good thing is the goodness of nature.

God is the same as nature.
The goodness in nature is God.”

These words sound like they could have been written yesterday.

And I’d venture to say that they describe the spiritual outlook of many people today—people who see the “Spirit of Life” or “Source of love beyond all naming” as identical with Nature.

If I didn’t tell you otherwise, you might think those words were written by some modern-day minister.

But they weren’t. They were written by Sister Julian of Norwich, about 700 years ago.

Here’s a longer quote, slightly adapted:

“The first good thing is the goodness of nature.
God is the same as nature.
The goodness in nature is God.

[The goodness in nature] feels great delight to be our Father.
[The goodness in nature] feels great delight to be our Mother.

We experience a wondrous mix of well and woe.

The mingling of both well and distress in us
Is so astonishing

That we can hardly tell which state
We or our neighbour are in—

That's how astonishing it is!"

Julian of Norwich was a medieval mystic who lived from 1342 to about 1429.

With her book "Revelations of Divine Love," she became the first known female writer in the English language.

And here's what's perhaps most interesting about her hopeful and uniting message.

She wrote it not during a time of abundance and prosperity.

She wrote it during the Bubonic plague, which killed about 25 million people in Europe.

Like us, she was living in a "wondrous mix of well and woe."¹

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She lived as an anchoress in a tiny cell but interacted with the people of Norwich—the second largest city in England at the time—through a window from which she offered spiritual guidance.

In her outlook, there was no separation between "God" and "nature" or for that matter of "self" and "other."

She didn't suffer from the dualisms that so many humans do—the dividing of people and the separation of physical nature from her concept of Something More.

¹ Matthew Fox, *Julian of Norwich: Wisdom in a Time of Pandemic—and Beyond* (iUniverse, 2020).

For her, God was in all things at all times,
and all people were in nature,
so there was an intermingling which she found beautiful and hopeful—
even in a time of terrible suffering.

She was a wonderfully creative writer.

She made up the word “oneing” which I’d like to use more often...and she
also made up the word “enjoy!”

This was the same woman who said, “All will be well,
and all will be well, and all manner of things shall be well.”

How astonishing, given that she was writing during the time of the plague.

Her understanding of “mingling” of God and nature and humans and
nature is so similar to the idea of “interbeing” as taught by Buddhist
teacher Thich Nhat Hanh, the writer Charles Eisenstein, and many others.

And of course, it’s very much in keeping with the outlook of many
Unitarians, such as, for example, the composer Jim Scott, who wrote a
hymn in our teal hymnbook called “The Oneness of Everything.”

In order to heal the wounds of the earth,
and the wounds within ourselves,
we must heal from the sense of separateness
that we know so well...

Indeed, the separateness we are taught to feel.

The dividedness from the earth, from others,
and from our deepest selves.

The term “Earth Day” is actually quite curious.

How could we separate out only one day,
to love, nurture and sustain being itself?

If we truly believe that we’re inseparable from the Earth,
tiny parts of one living and breathing organism,
perhaps it should be called “Love Day” or “Life Day?”

But even then we would be creating a dividing line.

After all, the love of life can never be confined to a day.
Love transcends such limitations.

Our hope, then, is to deepen in our sense of loving interdependence with
life and earth...

So that when Beautiful Gaia is “calling us on,”
as we will sing together in a few moments,

it is truly our deepest and truest selves that is doing so,
because we are not separate from Gaia at all.

This understanding is I believe at the heart of all spiritual and religious
wisdom, whether it was expressed hundreds of years ago or in our present
day.

True wisdom transcends limitations of time, place and culture—and it does
so because we are one.

Here’s the writer Charles Eisenstein in his recent book called “Climate: A
New Story.”

“We are not alone here. Something is watching.
Something is listening. [...]

That something that is listening is everything:
earth, sky, water, air, rocks, trees, animals, plants...

Along with beings we do not see and that have no name (in English
anyway).

Matter is sentient, watching, listening.

God, you might say,
is in all things, and nothing is not God.”²

Woven, as we are, in the Interdependent Web,
we are each of us embraced, always,
in the sacredness of life...

And we are able to love and care for the earth
no matter who and where we are.

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There are so many ways we can do that.

So many ways to “do justly now and go humbly now” in alignment with
the oneness of Earth.

We can engage in local action...
Love a particular place, like Duffins Creek...
And join together with others who are working together
to care for it.

We can support these efforts through our financial contributions,
as we’ve been invited to do today.

We can speak up, by writing, lobbying, protesting.

² Charles Eisenstein, *Climate: A New Story* (Creative Commons, 2018), 266.

And there are other ways, perhaps less obvious but no less important, that we can nurture our “well interbeing” or perhaps our “inter-well-being.”

Such as.... slowing down and listening...
to trees, rocks, plants, breath.

Allowing space and time for human viewpoints that are not our own,
because we are all part of the same Being.

Expressing our love for the Earth through art, music, poetry, music and
the appreciation of beauty in all forms.

Gently “catching” ourselves when we “other” another person, place or
thing.

Noticing, too, when we act or think in ways that maintain
the sense of competition, acquisition and striving that
has defined our society for so long.

Just as we return again and again to our breath in meditation,
or return again in love after disagreement,
we can catch ourselves in the story of separation
and listen instead for the song of “oneing”
that is already singing in our hearts.

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So I invite you, and I remind myself,
especially in this time of pandemic when we might feel
quite divided and limited at times...

Find a way, as often as you can,
to “touch base” with the Something More within you...
the “Earth consciousness” if you will.

Whatever way you do this
(and there are countless ways, you'll know which ones work for you) you
will be caring for your own well-being...
which is a form of caring for the Earth,
when we understand ourselves to be part of it.

Returning ourselves to a sense of peace,
or well-being, or centeredness,
extends then to others,
who benefit from our health in this interdependent way.

It also positions us to do the next right thing
that is within our scope to nurture and care for the Earth
from our place in it.

No one can tell you exactly what shape that will take for you.

But when you respond to Life,
from that deep knowing that you belong to it...
that you are an inherently good part of it
and that what you can give is needed and valuable now...

You and I will no longer be limited
by our feelings of disconnection,
division and conflict.

I hope and pray that you, and I,
might be freed of these limitations...
that together we may care for the Earth

In faith, hope and love.