

Just Enough

Readings: 'Mindful' by Mary Oliver
'Remember' by Joy Harjo
'Earth Day' by Carl Dennis

E.B. White, the author of beloved books for children like *Charlotte's Web* and *Stuart Little* once said, "Every morning, I awake torn between a desire to save the world and an inclination to savor it. This makes it hard to plan the day. But if we forget to savor the world, what possible reason do we have for saving it? In a way, the savoring must come first." Many of you have heard me share this quote before. And, I am sure, many of you will hear me say it again. It's one of my favorites—both for its beautiful use of language and its meaning. It's one I return to again and again because I, like so many of us, live with the desire to both save and savor this world. And what is Earth Day, a day so many celebrated yesterday and we honor in worship today but a commitment to both save and savor this world?

There is so much in this world to savor, we just need to open our eyes, our ears, our hearts. As the poet Mary Oliver reminds us, 'Every day / I see or hear / something / that more or less / kills me / with delight, / that leaves me / like a needle / in the haystack / of light. The world is always waiting to kill us with delight, always waiting with tulips to squeeze or puddles to sit in. Joy Harjo reminds us that the plants, trees, and animals are all alive poems. We are surrounded by this natural poetry, this pretty planet, this garden, this harbor, this holy place. There is so much to savor.

That celebration and savoring is part of Earth Day, a holiday that many celebrated yesterday and we mark in worship today.

Earth Day is a young holiday, first celebrated in 1970. It was first imagined by U.S. Senator Gaylord Nelson, Democrat of Wisconsin. An oil spill in California was his wake up call. He sought to echo the powerful social movements of that time and create a new movement devoted to preserving the environment. He partnered with others, including Republican Congressman Pete McCloskey, to launch the first Earth Day. Over 20 million people participated in rallies and protests and teach-ins. As the organizers describe it, it was a diverse group, 'Republicans and Democrats, rich and poor, city slickers and farmers, tycoons and labor leaders.' Participants in those first Earth Day observations joined with others to make a real and lasting difference. Within a year, the Environmental Protection Agency was created and the Clean Water, Clean Air, and Endangered Species Acts were passed.¹ It wasn't just Earth Day that made those changes in policy and practice, but Earth Day was a piece of it.

As we gather on this Earth Day weekend, we know that so much of this world needs both saving and savoring. We are surrounded by beauty on this day. I hope you can find some time for savoring, perhaps on this beautiful plot of land so lovingly maintained by members of this community.

We also know, even as we savor, that the work of the environmental movement is not done. The laws passed have made a tremendous difference. We celebrate those accomplishments and we know that we are called to continue that legacy. The natural world is in crisis and our ecosystems are in desperate need of restoration. We know that climate change is real and we are beginning to see the consequences. We

¹ 'The History of Earth Day.' *Earth Day Network*. Retrieved from <http://www.earthday.org/about/the-history-of-earth-day/>

know that because we trust the scientific consensus. The guidance of reason and the results of science are among the sources of faith and wisdom that we claim as Unitarian Universalists. Many in this community marched for science yesterday. What has the world come to when we need to march for science?

We do not know about ecological crises only because we trust scientists, though. We are seeing and feeling and sensing climate change in strange weather patterns, that in aggregate tell us that something is wrong. It is not just climate change that causes alarm. We know that aging infrastructure and chemical spills contaminate our water, natural and sacred places are threatened by oil and gas exploration and pipeline construction, and the list of threats to our environment goes on and on and on. As the poet Carl Dennis tells us, our mother earth sits in a rocking chair that nobody wanted in a dilapidated mansion with a rotted roof and flooded basement. It's a painful, true metaphor. We all know all this – and this is hard knowledge to have. The problems are so big and we are so small.

I wish I could tell you that if we all threw just the right kind of birthday party everything would be ok in our world. But while that is a step in the right direction, it is not the whole solution. It is the developmentally appropriate suggestion for young children, but you all get a different message, a message for adults. I don't know our best way forward – I trust people more knowledgeable about science and public policy to point the way. I know that if the path to environmental sustainability was easy, if there was a three step process with minimal impact on our day to day life, we all would have done it by now. It is not a problem with a quick and easy technical fix, but an adaptive challenge, a challenge that calls us into new learning and new ways of being. Saving the world likely involves drastic policy changes, a dramatic reshifting of national and global priorities, and a reimagined way of life. It might include those of us who have more adjusting to a life with less, so all may have some.

As we attempt to save our world, our blue boat home, we live with the tension of knowing that our individual efforts matter – and they alone are not enough. It matters that we recycle, that we are thoughtful consumers, that we join the 10th Street clean up efforts happening after church next Sunday, that we drive less and bike or walk or take the bus more. And while all of these small decisions add up and have a real impact over time, especially if we join with millions of others making similar choices, we also know this is not a problem that is solved by individual choices, even billions of them.

How do we live with the knowledge that while our individual choices matter, they do not matter enough to change everything by themselves? We know that our individual choices matter, that each decision we make or don't make ripples out in ways we cannot always anticipate. And we know that restoration is collective. We know that the best question when faced with the big challenges before us is not, "what can I do, but what can we do?" We need to work together. Rev. Theresa Ines Soto, who serves the Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Flint, has made the phrase 'all of us need all of us to make it' a key piece of her ministry there. All of us need all of us to make it. Not one of us alone can save the world, no matter what decisions we make. No one individual, no one community, no one country alone can save the world. Every being on this planet share a destiny. That's not an easy truth. It's a hard truth to hold onto sometimes, but it is the true truth.

This is a truth that we draw from our Universalist heritage. Our Universalist spiritual ancestors believed that everyone goes heaven, no exceptions, no matter what. God is loving and forgiving. One way of rephrasing that is – we all share a common destiny. We all share common destiny. That is a spiritual truth and a scientific truth. We are all in this together, connected in one garment of mutuality, one

interdependent web. We all share one earth, one blue boat home. All of us need all of us to make it. And it takes many of us to address the problems before us. We join together as committees and coalitions, communities, corporations, and countries to address the challenges before us.

There is powerful collective action happening now. We saw that at the Earth Day festivities yesterday in Bronson Park. We see it in the commitments of local institutions like Western Michigan University and Kalamazoo College to reduce their carbon usage and the efforts to encourage the city of Kalamazoo to adopt a climate action plan. People's Church people are deeply involved in these efforts. We also know about collective action on the global scale, including the Paris Agreement, part of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. It is an agreement to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions that has been ratified by 143 countries, including the United States. It went into effect last November.

There is criticism that these efforts might be too little too late. We know that our current administration threatens to walk away from the Paris Agreement, leaving its future in jeopardy. We know that the work of saving is never done. With the Agreement ratified, the hard work of implementation is just beginning.

When we read the latest headline about a spill of oil or chemicals or the latest rollback of environmental protections it can sometimes be hard to feel hopeful. How can we be hopeful when our world is in peril?

Denis Hayes was one of the organizers of the first Earth Day. He has said that that first Earth Day was about encouraging people to think in new ways about large scale environmental problems and let that knowledge inform their voting and consumption choices, but it was also, at its core almost an invitation to religious conversion.² It was asking people to change their pattern of life in service to a higher purpose.

We are called to approach our commitment to the earth, to our common destiny, in the same way we make our other religious commitments. We make our religious commitments not because they are easy, but because they are right. We do not expect the life of integrity to win us immediate tangible benefits, but the slow and steady satisfactions of a life well lived. Reinhold Niebuhr was one of the most important Christian theologians of the last century. He wrote, 'nothing worth doing is completed in our lifetime; therefore, we are saved by hope. Nothing true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore, we are saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore, we are saved by love. No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as from our own; therefore, we are saved by the final form of love which is forgiveness.'³

This – hope, faith, love, and forgiveness – are what sustain us for the hard work we are called to do. The hard work of continuing and building upon the legacy of Earth Day and all of the other commitments our faith calls us to make.

We know about the religious life, the life of integrity, a life rooted in right relationship here at People's Church. We know that living our values, that being people of love, people of hope, and people of change is not always an easy path. We know that being committed to the interconnected web of all existence and justice, equity, and compassion in human relations often requires new learning, self-sacrifice, and

² 'The History of Earth Day.'

³ #461 in *Singing the Living Tradition*. Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1993.

forgiveness of ourselves and others. We know that our efforts to save the world, whatever they might be, will likely not be realized in our lifetimes. We also know that we must both save and savor the world. We must return to what gives us joy and seek out the joy within because that will give us the strength, courage and commitment to carry on this important work.

We don't live with integrity and expect everything to change immediately. We live with integrity because it is right, even when it is hard, and we know that it matters to us and to the world.

Marge Piercy is a poet that I turn to often. She has one poem that has been echoing in my head and in my heart these last months. It is called 'The Low Road.'

What can they do
to you? Whatever they want.
They can set you up, they can
bust you, they can break
your fingers, they can
burn your brain with electricity,
blur you with drugs till you
can't walk, can't remember, they can
take your child, wall up
your lover. They can do anything
you can't stop them
from doing. How can you stop
them? Alone, you can fight,
you can refuse, you can
take what revenge you can
but they roll over you.

But two people fighting
back to back can cut through
a mob, a snake-dancing file
can break a cordon, an army
can meet an army.

Two people can keep each other
sane, can give support, conviction,
love, massage, hope, sex.
Three people are a delegation,
a committee, a wedge. With four
you can play bridge and start
an organization. With six
you can rent a whole house,
eat pie for dinner with no
seconds, and hold a fund raising party.
A dozen makes a demonstration.
A hundred fill a hall.
A thousand have solidarity and your own newsletter;
ten thousand, power and your own paper;

a hundred thousand, your own media;
ten million, your own country.

It goes on one at a time,
it starts when you care
to act, it starts when you do
it again after they said no,
it starts when you say *We*
and know you mean, and each
day you mean one more.⁴

That last part gets me every time. It starts when you say *We* and know who you mean and each day you mean one more. Piercy creates an image of an ever-expanding *We*. A we that expands as we find kindred spirits and as we broaden our vision and remember that all of us need all of us to make it. A we that expands when we stop asking 'what can I do?' and begin asking 'what can we do?' This ever-expanding *We* reminds us that whatever is ahead, we are an interdependent web with a shared destiny.

May this ever expanding *We* act individually and collectively.

May this ever expanding *We* create committee and coalitions.

May this ever-expanding *We* transform communities, corporations, and countries.

May this ever-expanding *We* remind us that we are all in this together, connected in one garment of mutuality, one interdependent web of all existence that shares one common destiny.

May our vision grow so large that we remember that there is no 'they' at all. It's all *We*, all a part of us.

So may we savor and we save this beautiful world.

And may we say we – and each day mean one more.

May it be so. May we make it so. Amen.

⁴ 'The Low Road' from *The Moon is Always Female* by Marge Piercy. New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1980.