

Creation Calls
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First Parish in Hingham (Old Ship Church)
Unitarian Universalist
October 1, 2006

Readings

Genesis 1:26-31, translation by Everett Fox:

God said:

Let us make humankind, in our image, according to our likeness!

Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the fowl of the heavens, animals, all the earth, and all crawling things that crawl about upon the earth!

God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God did he create it,
male and female did he create them.

God blessed them,

God said to them:

Bear fruit and be many and fill the earth
and subdue it!

Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the fowl of the heavens, and all living things that
crawl about upon the earth!

God said:

Here, I give you

all plants that bear seeds that are upon the face of all the earth,
and all trees in which there is tree fruit that bears seeds,

for you shall they be, for eating;

and also for all the living things of the earth, for all the fowl of the heavens, for all that
crawls about upon the earth in which there is living being --

all green plants for eating.

It was so.

Now God saw all that he had made,

and here: it was exceedingly good!

There was setting, there was dawning: the sixth day.

“Creation is too grand...”

William Schulz, former president of the Unitarian Universalist Association, and immediate past
director of Amnesty International USA

Unitarian Universalism affirms:

That Creation is too grand, complex, and mysterious to be captured in a narrow creed. That
is why we cherish individual freedom of belief. At the same time our convictions lead us to
other affirmations . . .

That the blessings of life are available to everyone, not just the Chosen or the Saved;

That Creation itself is Holy -- the earth and all its creatures, the stars in all their glory;

That the Sacred or Divine, the Precious and Profound, are made evident not in the miraculous or supernatural but in the simple and the everyday;

That human beings, joined in collaboration with the gifts of grace, are responsible for the planet and its future;

That every one of us is held in Creation's hand -- a part of the interdependent cosmic web -- and hence strangers need not be enemies;

That no one is saved until we All are saved, where All means the whole of Creation;

That the paradox of life is to love it all the more even though we ultimately lose it.
from *World* January/February, 1990

Sermon

This past spring it seemed that more often than not I awakened as the birds began their morning symphony. It was 4:30.

Mind you, I didn't *mean* to wake up with the birds. But our yard ends at the woods, and once the birds got going... they didn't stop for what seemed a long time.

Often I would go back to sleep, but sometimes I wouldn't. The birds' symphony, their chorus was beautiful to be sure; yet some mornings I found it irritating. Didn't I used to sleep through the birds' springtime wake-up calls? Am I just getting older, sleeping less soundly? What's going on here?

Then, my better, less irritable self began to reflect. And in the midst of my musings I remembered Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. How many of you read *Silent Spring* when it first came out about forty-five years ago? How many of you have read it or re-read it since?

Well, as many of you do recall, Rachel Carson, who was both a fine scientist and a fine writer, in her book those forty-five years ago imagined a "silent spring," a spring without birds and their songs sometime in the not too distant future were we to continue our overuse of pesticides, and in particular DDT.

So... it might understandable to think she was wrong. Particularly at 4:30 in the morning after far too little sleep, it might seem clear that she was wrong. A silent spring this most recent of springs was not!

Of course it would be closer to the truth to affirm that her prophetic voice staved off the imagined silent spring, at least for a generation or two. Her influence was in fact enormous. So, it also really would be closer to the truth to say that I was awakened by birdsong – one of the most beautiful choirs on the planet – because Rachel Carson lifted *her* voice, her prophetic call to stop the overuse of pesticides, a prophetic call rooted in (and this is critical) not only her knowledge of the science, which was profound, but in her love of the natural world, her love of

the daily morning symphony. Of course the political realities of getting legislation and regulation passed were complex, but hers was a huge part of the story.

Well, all this occurred to me just about the time that Al Gore's film, *An Inconvenient Truth* was released. Some of you attended the receptions we held in our Fellowship Hall following screenings of *An Inconvenient Truth* at the Loring Theater here in Hingham Square. And as participants in those conversations shared their anger, frustration, and also their hope and their visionary ideas, I began to wonder whether *An Inconvenient Truth* might in another forty-five years be remembered as the *Silent Spring* of our time. Perhaps, I thought, in another forty-five years I will still be awakened by birdsong (that's if I'm still here and can still hear anything at age 100!); and perhaps New Englanders will still be tapping maple trees for their syrup each spring; perhaps each fall we will still be stopped in our tracks by the awesome reds and yellows of autumn; perhaps polar bears will still be hunting amid the Arctic ice; perhaps Hingham Harbor will still be half a mile away and not swirling through Hingham Square and along Main Street...

And if all this *is* true in another forty-five years... in other words if the dire scenarios portrayed in *An Inconvenient Truth* do not come to pass... if all this is the case in 2051, it won't really much matter if we then look back and see Al Gore as an alarmist whose fears were unfounded or if we realize that he was among those of this generation (us too, will we be among that number?) who helped to ensure a healthier planet for generations to come for humanity and for all life.

I, for one, am more and more convinced all the time by Al Gore, by scientists like James Lovelock and E.O. Wilson and countless others (most recently you can see the September issue of "Scientific American")... and by the increasing body of evidence itself... that in order for life on the planet to be relatively pleasant come the middle of this century, there is much to be done (understatement!). For I am convinced that if we fail to act and to act quickly and with urgency there may well be no ice in the arctic for the polar bears, there may well be no Vermont maple syrup or dramatic fall foliage, much of the birdsong may well be gone, and even more importantly millions of our brothers and sisters – maybe some of us here will likely be displaced by rising sea levels, and more thousands of lives, perhaps millions may be lost to killer storms and heat waves. In other words, I believe, as perhaps by now most of you believe too, that the danger and crisis of global warming or global heating, as James Lovelock names it (pulling no punches, since "warming" sounds kind of pleasant after all) is real and growing.

Some believe we have already passed the point at which we can do anything that will stop the runaway effects brought about by the elevated and growing amounts of greenhouse gases we are putting into the atmosphere at an ever increasing rate. One of many examples: as snow cover recedes due to warming, less and less sunlight is reflected back into space, thereby increasing the pace of warming. How do you replace the snow on a warming planet?

Well, it can all be pretty depressing, and all the more depressing as we see our government repressing scientific reports on global warming, as we see the newspapers continuing to place articles concerning yet one more piece of evidence for global warming in the back pages. (Though I was heartened to learn of a new, weekly program on The Weather Channel devoted entirely to exploring the effects of global warming.)

Yes, it can all be pretty depressing. So, I don't know about you, but I need to hear again the calls of creation: The call of creation's beauty and the call of creation's pain. These are the

calls that Rachel Carson heard. These are the calls that Al Gore hears. One of the most moving parts of his film for me was the visual portrayal of the river at dawn near his family's farm in Tennessee, a lovely scene... with a voice-over reminding us that so much of the beauty and richness of nature is threatened.

And for me, as for so many, it is beauty through which creation calls – daily.

The bird calls on a spring morning, that is creation calling.

Reaching the top of Turkey Hill one morning this past week just as the sun appeared above the horizon of woods and distant Atlantic, that was creation calling.

The annual display of autumn, taking our breath away, this is creation calling.

Creation calling to our hearts, calling beyond words, calling and reminding us that we are part of creation. Not rulers over creation as Genesis to our great detriment suggests; for even if we reinterpret “dominion” as “stewardship,” as many do, the language is in dangerous territory; for we must learn to be *partners with*, not *rulers over* nature. This means we must ever be open to the mystery, as Bill Schulz reminded us in the second reading, open to all that we don't and may never understand of the miracle of creation, the miracle of each small part of creation, interwoven with every other part. Einstein once said that it seemed to him there were two ways to live life, as though nothing is a miracle or as though everything is a miracle. (Well, I know my choice.)

Einstein, a scientist, who surely devoted his life to understanding all that he could about the inner workings of nature, yet who nevertheless knew that nature, the creation, was also still and always would be mystery and miracle.

So it's not that *we* in our time shouldn't try to understand what's going on here, to understand with the best tools of science at our disposal how the climate works, how Gaia, the living Earth works, so that we can learn to live in something closer to harmony and balance within this living Earth of which we are a part.

But at the same time, we must also allow ourselves to be moved by the inexplicable beauty of it all and allow ourselves to be moved also by the destruction for which we have thus far been responsible, and the potential for devastation yet to come – creation's other call, creation's call of pain.

And here is an important point: I don't believe that anyone set out to create global warming and climate change. It has simply been our fate as a species to be just curious and creative enough, mixed with just ignorant and sometimes greedy enough, to set all this in motion with the onset of the industrial revolution, and the exponential growth more recently in population and energy use. We didn't *mean* to heat up the atmosphere to a point where civilization may no longer be tenable. But the warming is nevertheless our *responsibility*.

Also important to acknowledge: Gaia, Earth, will of course tend to herself. Ice ages have come and gone. Species have come and gone. Meteor strikes have caused periods of great extinctions in the past. Gaia, Earth, survives. Which is not to say that Gaia, the living Earth, will last forever. The sun will eventually by its own internal time clock heat beyond the ability of life to respond, will eventually, billions of years hence, explode in a final conflagration.

But while we *are* here, isn't creation calling to us to be its partner and not its adversary? Isn't creation calling, with its heart-stopping beauty and with its heart-wrenching pain, calling us to be its partner and not its adversary?

So today I'm not spending time on the long list of things we can be doing personally and politically in relation to climate change. I've preached that sermon before, and will surely preach it again – this is that important. In any case, most of you already know all these things to do and are doing many of them.

My intention today is simply to invite us to remember to listen for the deeper, sustained notes of creation's calls – first because that is, I believe, a huge part of why we are here: to notice creation so that it need not play to an empty house, as Annie Dillard famously put it; and second, because paying attention to the deep calls of creation is our primary and ever-renewable energy source for all that needs to be done, for the very living of our lives. The deep calls of creation wake us up not just at 4:30 on a spring morning, but if we are listening, wake us up at any time, wake us up and enliven us as we are reminded that we are part of and partners with this mysterious, miraculous creation – part and partners with God if you will.

I leave you with a poem, by Mary Oliver: “Messenger.”

My work is loving the world.
Here the sunflowers, there the hummingbird—
equal seekers of sweetness.
Here the quickening yeast; there the blue plums.
Here the clam deep in the speckled sand.

Are my boots old? Is my coat torn?
Am I no longer young, and still not half-perfect? Let me
keep my mind on what matters,
which is my work,

which is mostly standing still and learning to be
astonished.
The phoebe, the delphinium.
The sheep in the pasture, and the pasture.
Which is mostly rejoicing, since all the ingredients are here,

which is gratitude, to be given a mind and a heart
and these body-clothes,
a mouth with which to give shouts of joy
to the moth and the wren, to the sleepy dug-up clam,
telling them all, over and over, how it is
that we live forever.

We of course will not, not any one of us singly, live forever, but we can live in “eternity's sunrise” each moment if we pay attention, really listen, and then live according to the call we hear – at 4:30 on a spring morning or mid-day on an October Sunday – and every day as we share the work of tikkun olam, as our Jewish brothers and sisters put it during this season of Rosh Hashanah, the repair and restoration of the world, work which just may help us to transcend so much that sadly divides us.

Yes, may we hear, every day, every moment, creation's call.

Yes, may we heed the call.

So may it be.