

The Truth that Can Save Us
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First Parish in Hingham (Old Ship Church)
Unitarian Universalist
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Reading from *Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings* by Joy Harjo

Our Muskoke new year is inherently about the acknowledgment and honoring of the plant world. We become in harmony with each other. Our worlds are utterly interdependent. All of our decisions matter, not just to seven generations and more of human descendants, but to the seven or more plant descendants and animal descendants. We make sacrifices to take care of each other. To understand each other is profound beyond human words.

Sermon

Sometimes I feel like a motherless child...
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child...
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child...
A long way from home... a long way from home.

Sometimes we really do feel alone, very alone. Like that old song.
And sometimes we feel a need to be alone, we want to be alone for some period of time, for some reason – to reap some fruits of solitude.

But the reality is that we are never entirely alone.

One summer during my years as a camp counselor in the Adirondacks I had a little urge to be alone for a bit and took an early morning hike not even a mile away from camp, partway up the side of a small mountain we called Vampire Mountain (we called it that because of its shape in silhouette, though it probably had a more official name).

The name is beside the point though. I hiked up the side of the mountain on a beautiful summer's morning, and found a rock to sit on that afforded me a splendid view back towards the camp. And for some reason my musings took me to the insight that no matter how far I hiked I could never be completely independent of connection to others, however much I might think I wanted to be; that, even on Everest or in Antarctica or wherever, I would depend one way or another on others – for the clothes on my back to the food in my pack. And if I could somehow live entirely off what we now call the grid, grow my own food and so on, that would have been possible only because of all sorts of things I'd been taught by others... and in any case would always depend on the air I was breathing and the food I was harvesting or gathering, part of that interdependent web of life so beautifully evoked in the second reading from Joy Harjo, naming our plant and animal cousins.

(Not to mention, and on Mother's Day I must mention, that the very life I was living and live still began through the love and courage of my mother. We all descend

through mothers and fathers spanning untold generations, our very lives dependent on those generations.)

No such thing as just one completely independent human being.

And when this realization came to me that morning in the Adironecks it was not depressing, this reminder that I could never be utterly independent. It was reassuring.

In a movie I saw long ago based in colonial times there was a scene in which a French missionary became lost and disoriented, panicked in the woods. When he reconnected with his Iroquois companion he related that he had gotten lost and was afraid; the Iroquois, incredulous, asked: How can you be lost in the woods?

After all, walking – wherever – on the earth, mother of us all. Never alone, never away from home.

The poet and philosopher Rabindranath Tagore, whose birthday was earlier this week, reflected in an essay from the 1920s that it was in the forests of India that the ancient sages of the Vedas and Upanishads awoke to the essential realities of interdependence; expressed in their religious terms in the equation that our individual souls, or Atman, are one and the same with what we might call the world soul, which they named Brahman. In a more down-to-earth way Tagore wrote of standing “under the lavish sunshine of an Indian sky and greeting the world with the glad recognition of kindred.

So many ways of naming the reality of interdependence, relatedness, oneness.

But whether in the language of Joy Harjo and the Muskokee or the Upanishads or Paul’s assertion that we are all part of one body of Christ, this reality is a truth, and is maybe a truth that can save us: Put perhaps most simply it is the truth that we are one family of life, all related to one another, dependent to begin with on nourishment from our mother in the womb, nourishment that of course was possible because our mother was eating and drinking courtesy of our relations the plant people and animal people.

But a truth that can *save us*?

Yes.

To begin with, to save us as individuals from a feeling of utter aloneness and separation that might overcome some of us now and then, or for a few of us often. Because we are not alone even when we feel alone. So, when we see a friend who looks as though they are caught in the cage of unwelcome aloneness, the greatest gift we can give them is to let them know just by our presence they are in fact not alone.

In that spirit I hope that simply coming together here in this old house as we do each Sunday reminds us, even if subliminally, that we are not alone, that we are part of this community, and by extension part of the community of life – whatever life is throwing our way on any given day.

Yet further, this truth of interdependence, of connection, of relatedness, can save us in a much larger sense too.

I've been thinking of this this week in particular as we learned from a report prepared by a United Nations scientific panel that about one million species on the planet are threatened – soon – with extinction. Now, extinction has from the beginning been part of the circle of life. But the *rate* of extinctions right now on the planet is unprecedented in the span of human history, rare even across the millennia of geological history. And this impending loss is not simply *sad* because the beauty and uniqueness of irreplaceable species will be lost forever, but because all the species – us very much included – are dependent for their health and well-being upon the others. It will be a cascading disaster – one that has already begun... but that we can, with collective effort, slow... if we remember the truth that can save us.

For if we would thrive – maybe even just survive – as a species, we must collectively embrace more than ever the truth of the reality of interdependence and mutual relatedness... and behave as if we knew it: paying ever greater attention to habitat destruction, climate change, our profligate levels of consumption, and much else.

Is there any good reason we shouldn't we be able to do this?

Bill McKibben, in his recently published book *Falter: Has the Human Game Begun to Play Itself Out?* spends most of the book depressing us with all the facts, figures, and stories of the ways in which we humans are in the process of, as he puts it, wrecking the earth as we know it. But at the end he lifts us not only with strategies for changing our ways for the better, including confronting powerful political and corporate forces arrayed against earth justice, but lifts us with these words:

Another name for human solidarity is love, and when I think about our world in its present form, that is what overwhelms me. The human love that works to feed the hungry and clothe the naked, the love that comes together in defense of sea turtles and sea ice and of all else around us that is good. The love that lets each of us see we're not the most important thing on earth, and makes us okay with that. The love that welcomes us, imperfect, into the world and surrounds us when we die.

Yes, sometimes we may feel like motherless children a long way from home. But we are always at home on this earth, our mother, and we can learn to embrace and help and heal all our relations on this earth we share, as we awaken the loving motherly spirit in our hearts and our lives – to live as those Psalms we've been hearing sung this morning remind us to live...

So may it be.

Blessed be.