

Home on Earth
Rev. Ken Read-Brown
First Parish in Hingham (Old Ship Church)
Unitarian Universalist
Earth Day Sunday
April 19, 2020
(text of live-streamed worship)

Call to Worship and Lighting of the Flaming Chalice

We have gathered for worship.
Wherever we are, whoever we are, we have gathered –
neither space nor time preventing us from being together in spirit,
supporting one another, reaching our hearts out to one another,
loving one another –
each of us the hands and heart of the one spirit embracing us all,
spirit of love, God of many names and beyond all names.

And may the flame of our chalice - flame of truth, of freedom, of community, of love –
symbol of our Unitarian Universalist faith, remind us of all that we share, wherever we may be
on this one blue-green earth.

With that thought a few words from Walt Whitman’s “Song of the Rolling Earth”:

I swear the earth shall surely be complete to him or her
 who shall be complete,
The earth remains jagged and broken only to him or her
 who remains jagged and broken.

I swear there is no greatness or power that does not emulate
 those of the earth,
There can be no theory of any account unless it corroborate
 the theory of the earth,
No politics, song, religion, behavior, or what not, is of account,
 unless it compare with the amplitude of the earth,
Unless it face the exactness, vitality, impartiality, rectitude
 of the earth.

Meditation and Prayer

May we now pause, slow down, breathe into this moment, breathe into full presence, body, mind, spirit... feeling our shared presence in spirit, even at a distance... feel held by the love we have for one another... and by the love that embraces all...

Feel in our bones too that we are connected to all life on our dear Earth home... as we imagine the circulation of wind and water around our home planet... as we imagine our breathing out giving life to the blooming flowers and leafing trees... and the trees and grasses breathing out giving life to us and all creatures on this Earth we share...

And from this profound experience of interdependence, our hearts' yearnings arise, our prayers to the God of our hearts, God of all blessings... for all in need of help and healing for whatever reason, for the ill, for the hungry, for those facing financial hardship... and our prayers of gratitude for all the helpers and leaders guiding us through these times...

May we pause in silent communion... wherever we are... whoever we are... whatever our circumstances...

Readings Words from some of Earth's astronauts

From *The Home Planet*, ed. Kevin W. Kelley for the Association of Space Explorers

Yuri Artyukhin (Soviet Russia):

It isn't important in which seas or lake you observe a slick of pollution or in the forests of which country a fire breaks out, or on which continent a hurricane arises. You are standing guard over the whole of our Earth.

Rakesh Sharma (India):

My mental boundaries expanded when I viewed Earth against a black and uninviting vacuum, yet my country's rich traditions had conditioned me to look beyond man-made boundaries and prejudices.

Muhammad Ahmad Faris (Syria):

From space I saw Earth – indescribably beautiful with the scars of national boundaries gone.

Alexei Leonov (Soviet Russia):

The Earth was small, light blue, and so touchingly alone, our home that must be defended like a holy relic.

Sigmund Jahn (Germany):

Before I flew I was already aware of how small and vulnerable our planet is; but only when I saw it from space, in all its ineffable beauty and fragility, did I realize that humankind's most urgent task is to cherish and preserve it for future generations.

Alfred Worden (USA):

Now I know why I'm here. Not for a closer look at the moon. But to look back at our home the Earth.

Message

This Wednesday marks the 50th anniversary of the first Earth Day.

But what many who are old enough might remember more vividly – and many others recall from history – is that just last week marked another 50th anniversary, the 50th anniversary of the successful return to Earth of the Apollo XIII astronauts – with nothing routine about it.

Apollo XIII was the sixth mission to the moon and was intended to be the third landing on the moon.

But the landing was not to be.

On their way to the moon, one of the oxygen tanks in the Apollo spacecraft exploded. The fate not only of the mission but of the lives of the three astronauts was in grave danger. Landing on the moon was out of the question. And it was not by any means certain that return to Earth would be possible.

Only through the skill and clear-headed creativity of the controllers on the ground and the three astronauts hurtling through space did Jim Lovell, Jack Swigert, and Fred Haise return safely, splashing into the Pacific on April 17, 1970.

At which moment commander Jim Lovell said to his comrades, simply, “Fellows, we’re home.”

The other day, as I read the details of the final hours of their voyage, hours which had followed one potentially disastrous event after another, (in *Lost Moon: The Perilous Voyage of Apollo 13*, Jim Lovell & Jeffrey Kluger), and even knowing it would end well... tears came to my eyes when I read those words: “Fellows, we’re home.”

And here we are... most days taking for granted that we are home on Earth, too often deaf and blind to the daily miracles of flowing air and rolling water, of blue sky and clouds and sun, of Earth rolling and sailing through space, of daffodils blooming and maples and oaks leafing, grass greening, peepers peeping, birds singing... Here, on our home, the “holy relic” of our boundaryless home, beautiful home.

Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh, writing some years ago, put this thought so beautifully:

I think the real miracle is not to walk either on water or in thin air, but to walk on Earth. Every day we are engaged in a miracle which we didn’t even recognize: a blue sky, white clouds, green leaves... All is a miracle.

Well, in a few days we will indeed mark the 50th anniversary of Earth Day – begun all those years ago with such great hope (not to mention also action, as in response Congress passed and President Nixon signed the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts and the Endangered Species Act)... hope which we still need, hope which can only be realized through the work of our hands, the dedication of our lives, our letters and emails, our votes (in this spirit, the organizer of the first Earth Day, Dennis Hayes, suggests that since Covid-19 has robbed us of a full celebration of the 50th anniversary of Earth Day, we should make Election Day Earth Day.)

Many have noted that the lockdowns necessitated by coronavirus, for all the real hardship they have brought to thousands, to millions... has at the same time been a healing time for the Earth – as energy use has declined, meaning that greenhouse gases and other forms of pollution have also declined.

We of course must bring back the livelihoods of the millions who are out of work around the planet. But the challenge is to do so in ways that don't just replicate the past "business as usual" – business as usual that has, as we know, been overheating the planet for decades at great peril to our human lives and to all life.

This means that the challenge will be to create a new, improved normal as coronavirus recedes: greening our way of life on our home planet, living more gently on the Earth, using less energy in all of our sometimes frenetic moving around... so, maybe moving around less (which we've discovered we can do...), all as we bring greenhouse emissions to net zero as quickly as we can... all as at the same time we reduce the social inequities that scar the lives of so many, inequities starkly laid bare during coronavirus.

All... as we rise to the task the German astronaut named: humankind's most urgent task, which is to cherish and preserve the earth for future generations.

Wouldn't all this be wonderful? And why not? Earth Day 1970 give rise not only to hope, but to substantive action – why not Earth Day 2020? (After all, as the saying goes: If we could send men to the moon...)

Why not?

So may it be.

Benediction

In the words of a current climate change anthem:

The task is mighty – but so are we...
The world is ready – and so are we...

In this spirit, blessed by this life,
may we turn and make of our lives a blessing to all life...

Be well. Be safe.
Take care of one another.
And together, may we take care of our earth home.

May it always be so. Blessed be. Amen.