

**The Human Agenda**  
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First Parish in Hingham (Old Ship Church)  
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**Readings**

The first reading is from “The Enlightened Mind” by Stephen Mitchell. This passage is his summary of the ancient Buddhist metaphor for the interwoven oneness of existence: The Net of Indra:

The Net of Indra is a profound and subtle metaphor for the structure of reality. Imagine a vast net; at each crossing point there is a jewel; each jewel is perfectly clear and reflects all the other jewels in the net, the way two mirrors placed opposite each other will reflect an image ad infinitum. The jewel in this metaphor stands for an individual being, or an individual consciousness, or a cell or an atom. Every jewel is intimately connected with all other jewels in the universe, and a change in one jewel means a change, however slight, in every other jewel.

The second reading is from essays by Paul Hawken in “Drawdown: The Most Comprehensive Plan Ever Proposed to Reverse Global Warming”:

We see global warming not as an inevitability but as an invitation to build, innovate, and effect change, a pathway that awakens creativity, compassion, and genius. This is not a liberal agenda, nor is it a conservative one. This is the human agenda.

Climate solutions depend on community, collaboration, and cooperation.

...concern for the well-being of others is bred in the bone, endemic and hard-wired. We became human beings by working together and helping one another... What it takes to reverse global warming is one person after another remembering who we truly are.

**Sermon**

During my college years I was a camp counselor for several summers at a boys’ camp in the Adirondack Mountains. (I could still sing you the camp song! But I won’t.)

Anyway, early one morning, while a dozen sleeping nine-year-old boys were under the watchful eye of my co-councilor, I took a short hike up the side of Vampire Mountain – no more than a half-mile mile in, maybe less. But I got up high enough to sit

on a rock in a clearing from which I could see the grounds of the camp spread before me in the morning light: the open playing fields, the dozen or so cabins, all surrounded by the woods, hills stretching into the distance.

It was a lovely summer's morning. I sat for some time taking in the morning scene: woods, sky, the camp. Alone, so it seemed to me, on this rock halfway up the side of a little mountain.

Yet as I sat, it occurred to me that no matter how far I hiked, however deep into the woods, however many miles away, I would never be totally apart from others – never completely alone. And however apparently self-sufficient I might imagine becoming, in ways large and small I would still be to one or another degree dependent on and connected to other human beings.

It was not that I *wanted* to completely separate myself or to become as independent as possible. Rather, it was just that an awareness had come to me – not so much a mystical experience of oneness as it was a logical understanding of our human interdependence, one with another... and of course also with the rest of the world... animal, vegetable, mineral.

It was reassuring. And as you can hear, that summer morning's epiphany in the mountains has stayed with me all these decades hence. The image of the woods, hills, camp, and sky spread before me in my mind's eye now almost as vividly as if it were yesterday.

Maybe it was a sort of mystical experience. I treasure it in any case.

We heard Paul Hawken's words earlier: "What it takes to reverse global warming is one person after another remembering who we truly are."

That morning, sitting on a rock on the side of a very modest mountain in the Adirondacks, I knew one thing anyway: Who we truly are is, to begin with, not utterly separate beings, but intimately interwoven with everyone else and with all of life. As you know, I preach this all the time.

The Net of Indra, this "profound and subtle metaphor for the structure of reality," as Stephen Mitchell described it in the first reading, is a poetic expression of the same thing.

Similarly Paul's affirmation in one of his letters to the Corinthians that we, each of us and all of us, are part of one body of Christ, each of us with particular gifts, a particular role to play, yet at the same time part of one interwoven whole, one body.

Who we truly are.

Equally important, it seems to me, is to name that we human beings have evolved not to be primarily mean, brutish, and hateful – though we have that capability, all too apparent sometimes, all too easy to evoke. Rather, we evolved and survived as a species because of our ability to cooperate, to get along, to help one another. In his recent book *Human Kind: A Hopeful History*, the historian Rutger Bregman writes that science seems to suggest that the human story is mostly a story of survival of the *friendliest*.

That's a very different notion, he points out, from the idea that under the veneer of civilization and apparent kindness is the Hobbesian war of all against all, everyone only and always out for themselves – whatever they might pretend to the contrary.

But to use Paul Hawken's formulation, it is much more likely that "concern for the well-being of others is bred in the bone... We became human beings by working together and helping one another..."

Yes, of course there is evidence to the contrary, in too many ways all too visible these days. But in fact there is, even these days, more evidence, evidence all around us every day, in support of the notion that we are basically a friendly species, pre-disposed unless conditioned or provoked to the contrary, to be helpful, kind, and compassionate.

In any case, as Bregman writes in *Humankind*, if we choose to behave as if this positive diagnosis of the human condition is true... well, kindness begets kindness, compassion begets compassion, one pair of helping hands inspires another.

Hopeful stuff.

Hopeful, yes; but understandably we will sometimes despair over the state of the world – climate change, racism, and all the rest. Yet we can name this despair, allow ourselves to feel it, then at the same time choose not to allow it to overwhelm or immobilize us. And if we see our friend or neighbor in the grip of despair... well, we can be present for them, offer our helping hand, and together lift up some reasons not to despair.

Indeed, on one level this is what a number of us have been doing for the past several weeks, reading together that book from which the second reading was taken: *Drawdown: The Most Comprehensive Plan Ever Proposed to Reverse Global Warming*. It is an extraordinary book – published in 2016, but frequently updated on the Drawdown web site. The huge research team that put it together outlines a hundred "solutions" to climate change.

And if you thought that emissions from cars and power plants told the whole story of either the causes or the solutions to climate change, think again. The book offers us insight into an amazingly wide range of efforts to slow global warming and avert the worst effects of climate change: yes, of course looking at ways to reduce or eliminate carbon emissions from transportation and the generation of electricity, but there is so much more: how we build our buildings, how we farm, how we eat, how we use the land, how we educate women and children... and on and on. All efforts that are going on *now*, not pie in the sky, but efforts right now, around the planet, led by amazing people – from scientists at M.I.T. to farmers in Africa, from builders and designers to politicians and teachers.

And if all this begins to sound too big, overwhelming in its own way, there are of course things we as individuals can do, also noted in this book – things that I know most of you are committed to doing. For we really do make a difference through our individual choices and ways of living.

This said, as Bill McKibben, the climate activist and leader of 350.org, has put it, we also make a difference by becoming part of a movement: with our votes, with our

conversations with our neighbors, locally for example through our participation with such groups as Hingham Net Zero and the South Shore node of 350.MA, whose home base has been here at Old Ship. And each small thing we do adds up to a movement.

All of which is, as we heard from Paul Hawken, not part of a conservative agenda or a liberal agenda, but of the human agenda – or as I would extend it, the agenda of life. An agenda which will serve to meet the challenge of climate change in the spirit of climate justice, part of the movement for racial and economic justice and equity.

So - isn't this the team we'd like to be on for the long haul? The human team... the life team?

The team that seeks to feel kinship not only with "our" sort of folks – natural enough to feel kinship with our own kind, whether Republican or Democrat, Christian or Jewish, Muslim or Buddhist, citizen or new arrival, black or white, young or old, and so on. But also – also – kinship with all of humanity, with all of life.

And then get on with serving life!

Well, it was about fifty summers ago that I sat on that rock on the side of a little mountain, with a view of land and woods and sky spread before me. That moment and that view stays with me... as I invite you to envision a landscape or seascape spread before you now... maybe just outside your window... imagining all creatures, our human family and the family of life... living in land or sea... imagining the blue-green earth... one family... one team... our team...

Amen. Blessed be.