

Got to Get Back to the Garden

Unitarian Universalist Church of Ogden

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We are stardust, billion year old carbon. We are golden, caught in the devil's bargain and we've got to get ourselves back to the garden.

Ah, the garden, paradise, Eden. We are always trying to get back there aren't we? Trying to get back to the place where we belong, to abundance, to a land where people get along. Peace, love, and rock and roll, that was the dream of many of those who attended the Woodstock music festival back in 1969. The Joni Mitchell song about that event, the one that Beth just sang so beautifully, was one of the anthems of the counterculture movement of the time.

Earth Day is Tuesday, April 22nd. Created in 1970, the first Earth Day was a grassroots response to increasing concerns about environmental issues. 20 million people participated. 38 years later, we still haven't gotten back to the garden, but some progress on cleaning up the environment really was made for a time.

The Environmental Protection Agency was created in 1970 and the Clean Air act was passed the same year. The same year as the first Earth Day.

In 1971 the use of lead based paint was restricted. In 1972, the pesticide DDT was banned and the Clean Water Act was passed. Clean air and clean water, what a concept!

There have been other important legislative milestones.

In 1975 Congress established the first fuel economy standards for cars.

In 1978 the federal government banned chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) as propellants in aerosol cans because they were destroying the ozone layer.

In 1987 the United States signed the Montreal Protocol, pledging to phase-out production of CFCs.

In 1991 Federal agencies began using recycled products.

In 1996 The Food Quality Protection Act tightened standards for pesticides used to grow food.

In 1999 there were new emissions standards created for cars, sport utility vehicles, minivans and trucks.

Clean air to breathe, clean water to drink, and wholesome food to eat, everyone should have these things. But despite some progress, we are hardly there. We have got to get back to the garden, but what is taking us so long and how can we get there?

There are theological answers to that question, of course. Theology enters into more things than you might think. Are we supposed to take care of the Earth and what does that mean

anyway? Is the Earth here simply for our use and even abuse until we find our way to some better afterlife? Are we humans more important than the plants and animals, than the mountains and the oceans? Or are we rather merely one part of the larger ecosystem of life, an interdependent web of existence? These are important questions that I think we all need to ask ourselves.

I am not going to give you the answers, but I will remind you of the story of creation we heard earlier. It is one way to look at things. Tikkun Olam means repair of the world. Maybe our task is more than to simply live in the world and not do more damage, maybe we are meant to actually repair the world.

Call me crazy, but I think we can do this. We can find the broken pieces and fit them together again. We can heal the world and ourselves. We can do this on the environmental level as individuals by living more simply ourselves, by consuming less, by recycling. We can also teach others and we can be activists, insisting that our government work with the world community and with business and industry to promote environmental responsibility in all sectors of community life. In our recent vision discussions, environmental issues came up as an important concern for this religious community. There is a lot of work to do right here in Ogden and we can do it together. This week, coming home after a vacation, I was so glad to see the mountains, clear and crisp against the sky. I wanted to weep when a day later I could barely see them because of all the junk in the air. It doesn't have to be this way. Everyone needs air to breathe. The mountains need to be seen.

As Unitarian Universalists, most of us believe that it is this life that matters most. This planet, this life, is a precious gift, one that should be treasured and protected as well as enjoyed. We are all connected to the natural environment and to each other.

Separation from that knowledge of connection dulls our senses and dampens our spirits. The connection is there, you can feel it in your bones, in the beating of your heart. Breathe deep and you can feel it. We are connected to the earth. There is a chant I like – let's see if we can try it.

Earth my body and water my blood, air my breath and fire my spirit.

We are connected to the earth. Taking care of it is the same as taking care of ourselves.

We are also connected to each other. We welcomed a lot of new members this morning. What a joy that is. The bonds that are formed in a religious community of love and action are precious indeed. Building bonds between humans also helps repair and heal the world. If we can accept one another in all of our glorious diversity, treating each other with

respect, with care and compassion, we will be putting the broken pieces back together.

When all of our differences, whatever they might be, differences in race or ethnicity, in financial resources, in gender or gender expression, in education, in sexual orientation, in theology, in which basketball team we root for, in what type of music we like - when those differences become not obstacles but opportunities, opportunities for learning, for joy, for enrichment of each others lives, then - ah then - I think we will truly be back to the garden. We are working on that here in this place. Hallelujah! What a wonderful task it is. We have a way to go yet, this isn't easy work, any of it. There will be times we get discouraged, and there will be times we need to rest. We will need to help each other along the way. But we will get back to the garden, because, well, as the song goes, we've just got to get back to the garden.

Amen and Blessed Be.

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