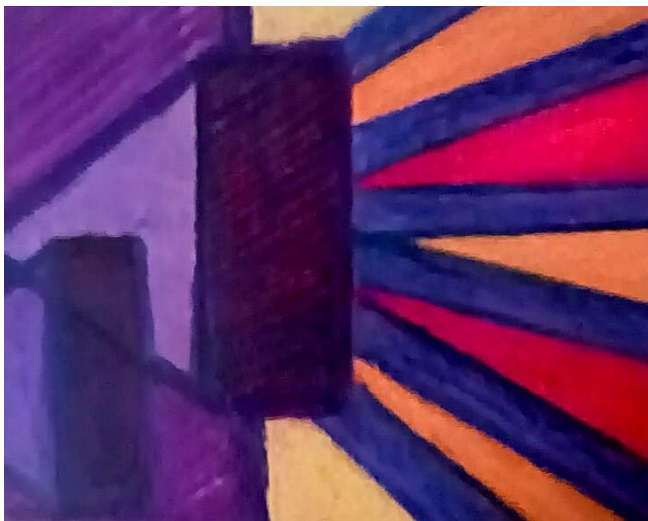


“Radical Interdependence” by Kolya Braun-Greiner and other members of the Earth&Spirit Mission Group

April 11, 2021



pastel drawing by Martha Phillips

The Second Sunday of Easter

Kolya: Today's sermon is a collaborative effort of the Earth & Spirit Mission Group. We begin by sharing some passages from this week's lectionary along with ways these scriptures can be understood through our experiences of the natural world.

Keith: John 20:29 *Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*

Sharon: We, members of Earth & Spirit, who have seen Christ in the natural world, have also believed...

Judy: 1 John 1:1 *We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our*

eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life...

Claire: We, members of Earth & Spirit have seen with our eyes and touched with our hands the word of life expressed in God's exquisite Creation.

Kevin: Acts 4:32 *Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common.*

Kolya: The early Christian community in Acts was challenged to level the disparities among them by becoming of "one heart and mind [or soul]. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had in common." This was a radical sharing forming a community of radical interdependence, counter-cultural to that of the empire, which was stratified by wealth and centralized power.

Our interdependence with one another in human community is a strong commitment here at Seekers, which I deeply value. The weekly prayer of commitment we say during worship states this clearly:

We pray for the commitment to grow together, sharing the gifts [God] give(s) us with others here and in the wider world.

As I've meditated the upon today's scripture of radical sharing, the question arose: Is our commitment to the wider world broadly defined, inclusive of the whole community of Creation, the web of interdependent life? This radical interdependence is in fact our reality, a radical meaning both counter-cultural and deeply rooted. The generosity of earth's sharing is all around us. We are utterly dependent upon the earth, but our dominant mainstream culture and society just

don't have this as a central tenant. I'm reading a book called Sacred Instructions, Indigenous Wisdom for Spirit-Based Change, by a Penobscot woman, Sherri Mitchell, who is a lawyer and spiritual teacher. She describes our separation from the earth as another way that our minds have been colonized. She says that in *her* culture, "our core cultural values... are shaped around a core understanding of our kinship and interconnectedness, and based upon concepts of reciprocal sharing and inclusivity. We believe that life cannot be separated into individual compartments. There is no hierarchy of value that sets one part of creation above the other. Our beliefs are based on equanimity within the whole of creation."

How are or could our decisions, our purchases, and our daily lives be "of one heart and mind," less colonized and based upon "equanimity within the whole of creation"? This is not only radical interdependence, it's also radical inclusivity.

The movement toward Environmental Justice is also a call to radical inclusivity! The Acts community is an affirmation of an inclusive community in which many languages are spoken. Listening to the many voices of what are called "frontline communities" of the environmental justice movement, we can be, and many of you are already, in solidarity with those who are most affected by the extractive industries we are still dependent upon.

And what about all the voices that were understood by that radically interdependent and inclusive Acts community? – what if we extended the definition of community here too to be inclusive of the other than human world—As we are reflecting on witnesses among us this Easter season, could they be witnesses to us? What if we understood the voices of the plants and animals?

Many indigenous cultures recall a time, when the humans knew how to talk with and understand what the birds, trees and coyotes were communicating. Walking Buffalo, a Stoney Indian,

[Canada (1871-1967) in the last century said, "Do you know that trees talk? Well, they do. They talk to each other, and they'll talk to you if you listen. Trouble is, white people don't listen. They never learned to listen to Indians so I don't suppose they'll listen to other voices in Nature. But I have learned a lot from trees: sometimes about the weather, sometimes about animals, sometimes about the Great Spirit."

I thought for a long time that this was a kind of myth with a beautiful meaning, but without scientific fact. Then recently I stood listening to a bird at Dayspring and it suddenly dawned on me, an epiphany – of course! If I and my ancestors had lived on this same land for generations, deeply rooted in an ecology of place, we would have such an intimate knowledge of the languages, behaviors and rhythms of life expressed by the other than human members of the community, then indeed, we would understand them. When Buddhist teacher and monk Thich Nhat Hahn was asked, "how shall we save the world" – his answer was: "Hear the voice of the earth crying." Crying – what would God the Creator and Creation be weeping about? Sadly, the litany of ways that biodiversity is unraveling...

But this kind of deep listening and understanding, and communing with nature takes time and deep attention, much of which is sorely lacking in our culture addicted to busyness and business as usual.

Interdependence with the whole of Creation is found in the Christian Celtic roots of my own ancestry, rooted in the land, through which the grace of God was understood, a spirituality of the Celtic Christian church, which was deemed by the Roman Church at the Council of Whitby in 625 as blasphemy. Learning more about the beliefs of my ancestry was spurred by study I've been engaged in with the Work that Reconnects created by my root teacher Joanna Macy. On the reading list for the course is Resmaa Menakem's *My Grandmother's Hands*, which encourages us all to look deeply into our ancestral intergenerational history of trauma and resilience. The Work

that Reconnects gathers wisdom the resilience of our ancestors, and the imagined memories of our descendants and the voices of nature, all of which can be a resource to us for facing the future. A central tenant of the teaching is that we are living in the midst of a Great Turning, a turning from the Industrial Growth Society to a Life-sustaining civilization, in which an understanding of what I'm calling radical interdependence is a core and lived value. I invite you into an imaginary glimpse of this Great Turning becoming a reality by entering an experience of Deep Time, imagining the voice of a descendent living 200 years from now, speaking to us. Their words are predicated upon 2 premises: Somehow humanity has survived, and also has preserved a common memory of the times in which we currently live. I've adapted a version of this memory which appeared in the Green America Magazine

[I invite you to close your eyes.] Imagine that you have received a letter sent from your descendants 200 years from now. May it offer a "signpost of what's ahead."

(Jonathan Martin, *Prototype: What Happens When You Discover You're More Like Jesus Than You Think?* , p.197)

Dear Ancestors of 2021,

Today, we'll hold a celebration in your honor and read our spring tribute to you. We call you our Ancestors, the people who began the revolution of thought and actions that make our life here in 2221 possible. We thank you for having the vision that brought justice, peace and environmental health to our world.

You, our Ancestors, walked the planet during the Climate Emergency, when people choked on pollution and communities of color bore the worst of the burden. You harnessed clean energy, phased out polluting machines powered by coal, oil, and nuclear reactions, and restored clean air and water to communities everywhere.

You lived when people actually sprayed poisons over the whole countryside to grow food. You led the regenerative agricultural revolution, from the wisdom of Indigenous cultures that produced high yields by farming with Mother Nature instead of against her.

Here in 2221, we love to tell your stories. You lived in pivotal times. You made our lives possible—we who are your children of the future. We tell your stories and build on your work so that the citizens of the future will still be holding their spring tributes all around this inclusive, healthy, thriving world.

Come back now into the present moment...

We too, members of Earth & Sprit offer our “spring tribute” as we invite you to join us in opportunities such as the nature hike next Saturday. May our direct experience in dialog with God through nature inspire our actions as we continue to examine how our lives can be less complicit with empire, colonized minds and destruction... and *more* healing of earth. And lest you become discouraged, as I sometimes do with the sheer enormity of the challenge to heal and restore balance to our relationship with earth, I share these words from Joanna Macy: *You don't need to do everything. Do what calls your heart; effective action comes from love. It is unstoppable, and it is enough.*

If you are interested in discussing how we might express “effective action coming from love” as Joanna Macy says, or radical interdependence, please join us tomorrow night to learn and discuss some opportunities to heal God's Creation together.

These reflect both the inner and outer journey of Earth & Sprit – Attending to the voice of God in nature and responding to the call of our Mission Statement which begins:

The Earth & Spirit Mission Group is called to support deeper

spiritual connection with God through experience with the natural world. We are called to be awake and appreciate the world God has created, responding with gratitude and awe for nature's beauty, diversity and wildness.

There are 6 members of Earth & Spirit each of whom is inspired and informed by different aspects of our Mission Group's call:

Kevin: After reading our call statement again, I find that this particular phrase "*We are called to be awake and appreciate the world God has created...*" jumps out at me. As I strive to stay "awake" in the world in general, I'm particularly drawn to awakening to all that I can see and cannot see in nature. And then allowing myself to curiously melt into a sense of awe when the mysteries of nature are revealed. I'm struck by the unencumbered gracious ways the natural world speaks to me, and her way of untaming me to experience her wildness.

Claire: As I reflect on Earth and Spirit's call to experience God's teachings through direct communion with the natural world, I am reminded of the moments in my life when I have felt the greatest intimacy with God. Invariably, these experiences have occurred in nature. It is through such direct encounters with the regenerative power of the natural world that my faith, hope and trust in God have been affirmed time and time again. During these experiences of communion, God's teachings root into my body and soul—enabling rest, renewal, peace, joy, grace, delight and ultimately, a sense of blissful union with all of life. Through observing the inevitability of renewal and rebirth in the cycles of nature as well as in my own life and the lives of others, the resurrection and redemptive power of Christ has, for me, become utterly undeniable. Through communion with God in the natural world, I witness the mysterious and awe-inspiring power of the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, I feel blessed by a sense of wonder, undying hope and an inner knowing and trust that, all, will indeed, be well.

Sharon: I am drawn to these words of our mission statement: *"We act for the good of God's creation and advocate for the earth's restoration. We encourage resource conservation and concern for nature at Seekers Church."* We've done this by offering reading, videos and discussions, and by joining other faith based groups that are working on local climate issues. We have led two stream cleanups, offered a boat trip to see new life on the Anacostia River and led several hikes for the community. I also continue to tend to the small green space at Seekers church.

Judy: There are two areas that draw me to them: First, *"The pain of our broken relationship with nature"*. I feel awe at its capacity to rejuvenate. I am following the efforts to limit fossil fuels and build our energy systems toward green energy. Second, How we invite all ages & abilities at Seekers (and elsewhere) to accompany us to experience nature. I'm struck by how, children especially, have such restricted opportunity to be alone in nature without technology nipping at their heels. I spent most of my childhood in the woods and sitting in trees.

Keith: I'm drawn to the last sentence in our Call: *"We strive for the freedom to be fully embodied and connected as part of nature."* So much of our human construct is about humans being separate from nature, as opposed to being absolutely a part of nature and God's earth. I realized in the recent School for Christian Growth class on *Meeting the Divine* that my most notable and deepest spiritual and mystical experiences are all in nature, connecting as a naturist without any barriers separating me from nature.

Kolya: And I am most inspired by this sentence in our Mission Statement: *"We recognize our interdependence with the whole web of life."* In light of so much in present society that separates us from nature along with the historical baggage of the institutional church's dualistic separation of humans from nature, upholding these as inseparable is what I call radical

interdependence. As David Abram has said, “we are not on the earth, but in earth.”

Each member of our Earth & Spirit brings different life experiences that inform our call, but what members of the Earth & Spirit Mission group hold in common is a yearning for connection with nature. This connection fuels both our love for it and our desire to put that love into healing action in solidarity with earth expressing our conviction that we are radically interdependent with nature.

The natural world is where we experience the community of God’s Creation inclusive of all life. As those of you who read Richard Rohr’s Universal Christ book recall, “Christ is in all things, everywhere.” And as Julian of Norwich said, “The fullness of joy is to behold God in everything.”

AMEN

The full Earth & Spirit Mission Statement can be [found here](#).