

Every Day is Earth Day
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UU Congregation of Danbury

Each Earth Day we remember all that has been accomplished since the first one almost fifty years ago. Given the current political climate, it is easy to despair as we watch some of the progress we've made supplanted in favor of big business and profits. That's when we are supposed to consider what actions are needed to address issues like climate change. And then we make commitments to protect the earth from further incursions.

That is certainly part of Earth Day. But not all of it. Earth Day has to do with protecting the environment. We are part of that environment, and it includes the environment of our being. It is part of everything we do and everywhere we go. I have no doubt that most, if not all, of you are savers of the earth in some way. With that, and with everything else you have going on here in this Congregation, and all that you have happening in your personal lives, and all the issues of injustice you work to correct, I have another suggestion for this Earth Day. Let's "declare a Sabbath – a space of quiet: for simply being and letting be,... for learning how to live again" (U.N. Environmental Sabbath Program). We can start by inviting the Earth to teach us – as we listen:

Earth teach us stillness...
Earth teach us humility...
Earth teach us caring...
Earth teach us limitation...
Earth teach us regeneration...
Earth teach us to remember kindness...
(Nancy Wood)

And then we can express gratitude for all that we have been given.

Often I have felt that I must praise my world (Max Kapp writes)
For what my eyes have seen these many years,
And what my heart has loved.
And often I have tried to start my lines:
'Dear earth,' I say,
And then I pause
To look once more.
Soon I am bemused
And far away in wonder.
So I never get beyond 'Dear Earth.'
(Max A. Kapp, *To Meet the Asking Years*, 1983)

When we notice all that we have seen – all that we have received – we are grateful that we are one among many in this interdependent web of all existence. When we listen to the earth, we are reminded of what it is we seek to protect and nurture -- the many parts of the web that support the whole of creation, including us.

We are often last on the list. And yet we deserve the same kind of care and respect that we give to the earth and the rest of its parts, each and every day.

In Native American tradition, the web is a metaphor for the world. The center is everything, and everything is connected. For some people, the center of being is only in themselves. The web is constructed around them, forcing everything and everyone else to conform to their demands. Some of us have pets around which our lives revolve...

Our pets and other critters teach us all sorts of lessons. Author and priest, Edward Hays, talks about what we can learn from the little spider:

...Watch a spider as she patiently rebuilds her web each time it is broken or removed. Seldom will she move its location but chooses to rebuild it with patience. She reweaves its broken strands each time they are broken. She waits, in patience, for dinner to come into her white cosmos of tiny threads...

Like the spider, we must return again and again to rebuild our webs by bringing together the threads of our lives and uniting them to the divine center within. Without such work, our lives become disconnected, unpeaceful and broken. Perhaps the next time we see a spider's web, we can see it as a spiritual classroom and not simply something to be swept away... (from *Pray All Ways* by Edward Hays)

I like to think of myself as the spider in the reading. I choose to reweave the broken strands of my web each time they are broken. Reuniting the threads of our lives is holy work. "Without such work, our lives become disconnected ... and broken." Rebuilding webs requires patient effort, and a mindful attention to the task at hand.

And yet, when I did a Mid-Career Assessment in 2003, the various tests administered by the career counselor revealed another side of me: when I am stressed, I can become greedy and stingy -- with my time, myself, and my energy. At those times, I don't want to be the patient builder of broken webs. I become more like the spider Loren Eiseley describes -- the one whose senses do not extend beyond the lines and spokes of the great wheel she inhabits. Her extended claws feel every vibration throughout that delicate structure. She knows the tug of wind, the fall of a raindrop, the flutter of a trapped moth's wing. Down one spoke of the web runs a stout ribbon of gossamer on which she can hurry out to investigate her prey. (from *The Unexpected Universe* by Loren Eiseley)

Perhaps the lessons from Earth Day are best found in all that we cannot do, all that we cannot change, all that we cannot save, and all the letting go we must accept lest we be consumed by the web. Like the spider that returns again and again to rebuild its web, we are called to bring together the threads of our lives and unite them to the spiritual center within. Without such work, our lives become disconnected and more stressful. And whatever we do to ourselves, we do to the web.

Aspects of both spiders described are part of nature, and human nature. We patiently mend what is broken, and when necessary, protect our web from intruders. The lessons from

nature teach us that we – and life – are not designed to be one particular way. The web we inhabit is sturdy, but not impervious to attack. When we feel threatened, or confronted by the unknown, we may “vibrate” with a force that makes everything else a blur. Protecting ourselves and our home becomes our sole focus.

When a spider responds to unwanted intrusion, it is protective. And yet, when I heard the words “greedy” and “stingy” from the career counselor, I knew these to be “negative” aspects of myself. I don’t want to give away too much. I prefer to intellectualize what is happening around me, and I create a “castle mentality” that doesn’t deal with feelings. It isn’t that I don’t connect with people. It’s more that sometimes it’s difficult to discern where their pain ends, and my own begins. It is in those moments that I become like the greedy spider, vibrating to protect her web and herself. There’s a lesson in that also.

The relentlessness in nature is humbling. With each season we are reminded that life will go on, with or without us. We try to make sense of what we witness in the world around us. We do our best to accept the tragedies in life – the untimely deaths, pervasive illness, and so-called “natural” disasters. Nature defies a rational way of being. It is unpredictable, vibrant, agitated, and ever-changing.

Colors, tunes, and perfumes pour in endless cascades in the abounding joy that scatters and gives up and dies every moment (Tagore writes).
 (“Fearful Joy” by Rabindranath Tagore)

And as writer Toni Morrison observes:
 At some point in life the world’s beauty becomes enough. You don’t need to photograph, paint, or even remember it. It is enough. No record of it needs to be kept and you don’t need someone to share it with or tell it to. When that happens – that letting go – you let go because you can. (Toni Morrison, *Tar Baby*)

There is both beauty and despair to be found in witnessing to nature. The resurgence of spring contrasts and reveals the ravages of a harsh winter. There is beauty to be found in both. There is something in each season that makes us come alive. If we are receptive to its message.

Tagore writes:
 Is it beyond thee to be glad with the gladness of this rhythm? To be tossed and lost and broken in the whirl of this fearful joy?
 All things rush on, they stop not, they look not behind, no power can hold them back, they rush on.
 Keeping step with that restless, rapid music, seasons come dancing and pass away...
 (from “Fearful Joy” by Rabindranath Tagore)

We are partners in this dance of life and death. Sometimes we move with the rhythms of nature. At other times, we thwart nature’s intrusions. At all times, we are called to pour ourselves “in endless cascades in the abounding joy that scatters and gives up and dies every moment.” (Tagore, “Fearful Joy”)

On this Earth Day Sunday, let's pause to hear the earth's call to:

"Tread lightly upon (it), seeing,
understanding but never imposing. (To be) thoughtful,
independent,... gracious in victory and defeat.
(To be) free of possessiveness, so (that) ease of mind sweetens
(our) relationships...
(*Tread Lightly* by Surjit Singh, adapted)

with ourselves and others.

Our connection with the earth, as part of the interdependent web, is as ongoing as Earth Day. Each and every day, let us join together for the healing of the earth, the healing of ourselves, and the renewal of all life.

We start today by declaring a Sabbath – by creating a space for being and letting be. For learning how to live again. And when the time comes to let it go, to let it go.