

**An Earth Day Message**  
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The first thing I would like to acknowledge is how blessed Brian, Eric and I feel to be members of this community. The love and support we feel has gotten us through some tough times in the last year. Thank you very very much.

I am pleased to stand before you today. First, a joke. So a scientist and Jesus go fishing in a rowboat. As they paddle along, the scientist drops his oar and Jesus walks on the water and picks it up returning it to the scientist. The next day in the lab, the scientist tells all his buddies..."don't ya know, Jesus can't even swim."

I come to you today not a scientist and not even an environmentalist but as a person of Earth. I actually don't like the word environment. That word "environment" comes from the French verb *environner* meaning to surround. We define the environment as that which surrounds us ...as if the only value of this wondrous planet is to surround us. I believe that this planet is important without humans. Wait, wait, is this all heresy?!? Well, if you believe Genesis, God made Earth first and made us from it. Genesis Ch 2 Verse 7 says we were made from the dirt. The name Adam actually comes from the Hebrew word for soil.

We are of Earth and our futures intertwine. This connection reminds me of what the Buddha said when asked about some of his followers neglecting their physical bodies and only focusing on their spirit. The Buddha told a story about a dog tied to a stake in the ground. No matter how hard the dog pulled and tugged, he could not move the stake. He said the dog was not content until he accepted that he was permanently held in that place. Only then could the dog begin to relax and see his bowl of food next to the stake. Like the dog, we are tied to this world and we can pull and tug and try to ignore the connection to Earth or we can accept this connection and change our world view.

Today, this day on Earth, we face several crises on a global scale. We have some very real life issues in front of us on this planet. Like how many people can live on this planet...right now, six billion people live on this small rock and we are headed to 12 billion. Please notice I did not say "live with this planet" or "live in harmony with this planet". I said "on this planet". We treat Earth as an infinite resource always ready to provide whatever we need and take whatever we throw away.

The good news is that we can in fact feed everyone if some folks would put down their guns long enough to get food into those areas. But the bad news is that we use fossil fuels to make fertilizer to grow food to feed everyone. And those fossil fuels are a limited resource and we will run out one day. Bah humbug you say!?! If you are of an age as I am, it seems we have always been running out of fossil fuels. Well the truth is that we are now not discovering as much oil as we used to. We find only one barrel for every 4 barrels we use. So we are now using up more than we are finding. The problem is that we will not be able to feed everyone once we run low or out of fossil fuels....we may only be

able to feed 2-4 billion. I don't know the date when this will happen but I do know we will run out of fossil fuels and I don't know how we will feed everyone.

How about another example, this planet has begun a significant warming trend at a time when we should actually be cooling and heading into an ice age. Yeah, yeah, I know many folks say Bah humbug to this also!?? Some say this climate change is bogus liberal environmentalist who-ha. I have read many of the scientific articles and personally believe we are clearly warming the planet by burning fossil fuels and altering the flows of water vapor in the atmosphere. But let us say that you don't believe warming is real... are you so sure you are right that you are willing to gamble with the entire planet? This reminds me of poking a lion with a stick hoping the loin does not wake up. Let us agree to put the stick down and reduce our greenhouse gas emissions.

On an equally important basis, in addition to our environmental problems, we are in the midst of a great spiritual crisis. And our environmental problems are related to our spiritual problems. You have no idea how often I want to scream "slow down, for Christ's sake slow down." But my words get enveloped in the noise of our culture. The noise of our culture...how often do we keep ourselves from being truly present with distractions like cell phones, television or medication or alcohol or drugs or shopping....In the book *Walden* written in the 1800's, Henry David Thoreau spoke of "lives of quiet desperation". Thoreau was a transcendentalist. He believed that one needed nature to quiet one's mind in order to truly hear God. "Lives of quiet desperation". His words still ring true today. We cocoon ourselves in comfort and distraction ignoring any new information that will challenge this way of life. We ignore those starving people in poor countries. We ignore Earth telling us that what we are doing is changing the basic rhythms of the planet.

It seems we work very hard not to be present in this moment. There's the rub. We actually only have this moment to really change anything. Until we decide to become fully present, the environmental movement is just an idea waiting to happen.

Now, I understand that it is hard to be present with environmentalism when we are saturated with images of humans causing ecological disaster. We are constantly shown Earth's dire situation. We are constantly running out of gasoline. We are constantly running out of water. We are constantly fouling the air and water. I feel guilt, frustration and even anger. I feel guilty every time I forget my canvas grocery bag and get plastic ones at the store. I was in Wal-Mart the other day. Yes, I occasionally go to "the big box den of evil". Honestly I am not sure they are any worse than Walgreen's or Target. But anyway, they had cardboard signs everywhere toting their environmental focus. The big signs had a picture of the Earth along with the slogan "Save money, live better". I was amused to wonder where all those signs would end up at the end of April. I don't know about you but I just want to throw up my hands and turn on "American Idol".

Now if you will trust me just a little. I would like to try something. I would like you to close your eyes and take a deep breath. Slowly I would like you to return to a natural place you remember from your childhood. Take another deep breath. Now try to visualize

that place...is it lush and green or dry and sandy, is it a windy day or a balmy one, is it quiet or humming with bird chirps...take a deep breath and remember the smells of this place. Now I would like you to return with me to this sanctuary and open your eyes. Now I want you to think about place as it is now. Is it still there or has it been destroyed? Or do you know what has happened to it? Most people feel a deep connection with the planet but that connection also contains some very real loss, some very real grief. We stay frozen in that time not wanting to face the losses we have experienced and continue to see everyday. We work hard to avoid these feelings and often fill our days with activity. I say it is a new day and we can find a moment to look ourselves in the eye and say I am present, I am conscious, I am powerful.

Today, in this season of renewal, we should consider a different vision of environmentalism and spirituality, a vision born of a deep respect for the Earth so that we might stop tugging on the rope and see our connection to this planet, so that we might turn down the noise and listen. I believe our religious traditions actually provide many ways to renew our connection to the Earth and this is no accident. Let us look at the celebrations of Christ's birth happening at the same time as the winter solstice. The winter solstice is the moment annually when we in the Northern latitudes get the least sunlight and every day after that we get increasing amounts of light. I guess returning to the sun can have a couple of meanings. And further, the arrival of Easter also brings the old fertility symbols of colored eggs and bunny rabbits and the Spring Equinox. The Spring Equinox is the arrival of greater natural warmth and sunlight leading to that wondrous annual reproductive frenzy. Our traditions have deep roots in the rhythms of the planet and that is the way it is supposed to be. We are supposed to acknowledge this planet and its great complex dance. Our religious traditions actually follow this natural calendar.

Now, let me tell you a little secret. I am not really worried about the planet. I am worried about these small creatures called humans. You see these humans have created this complex society which is highly dependent on a stable predictable climate on a stable predictable planet. Looking back on the history of this planet, it is clear these humans are in trouble far beyond what they know. The Earth has its own rhythms and flows. Did you know this planet regularly gets hit by asteroids big enough to make 10 years worth of winter. Ten years...I wonder how civilization could handle 10 years of winter worldwide. In addition, our planet experiences regular ice ages and human civilization has arisen in a time of relative warmth. Don't get me wrong. We have environmental problems which we must solve. But more importantly we also must begin to know this planet at a deeper level. If we are to survive as a culture and as a species, we must truly learn the rhythms of this little rock. Humans continue to live as though we are in charge of this planet when in reality we live within its sometimes dramatic changes. It is sad that we know more about war, about how to kill one another than we know about the rhythms of this planet on which we all depend. It will be ironic if as we point our toy missiles at each other, an asteroid hits this little rock.

Some say that we should simply pray for God to intercede and heal the planet. Or that this planet is merely a waiting room for those going to heaven. I am a big believer in

prayer and the simplicity of the waiting room idea is very attractive. But if this is a waiting room is it not ours but God's and who are we to mess it up? Regarding prayer for intercession, I ask myself why don't we stand on a railroad track with an oncoming train and pray for God to stop the train? I argue that we have been given minds to understand the consequences of our actions. We have also been given tremendous ability to adapt and change. Should we pray on those railroad tracks asking for a miracle or should we stand up and step aside allowing the natural sequence of events to transpire? Should we get a train schedule and know when to be off the tracks? Is it possible that now as we better understand the rhythms of this planet, we are expected to "step off the tracks" and learn to live in harmony with this planet. I often pray for clarity about this planet and I pray for the strength to overcome my fears that humans will not wake up in time. And finally, I pray to be truly present so that I might hear what the planet is saying.

In closing, I would like to do one more meditation. Please close your eyes and take a deep breath. Please open yourself to the deep love in your own heart. Please cover yourself in that tenderness. Take another breath. Now take that sphere of love and let it expand to the people just next to you. Take another breath. Now let that love expand to everyone in this congregation. Take another breath. Now let that sphere of love expand to include all humans on this planet. Now let that sphere expand to include all the furry animals on the planet. Now let that sphere include all the not-so-cuddly animals and even those pesky insects. Now let that sphere get as big as it can get. Now take a breath. Open your eyes. I hope in this moment you see the wonder of creation in all its complexity.

If we are to believe that God is still speaking, then we should all listen carefully to Earth. Earth was here first. If we can stop long enough to listen, humans will learn how to truly honor all life and we will learn to live WITH this planet in peace. Amen.

Scripture reading:

Genesis Chapter 2 Verses 5-8.