

It Does Matter What We Do!

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April 27, 2008

There are times – moments, sometimes days at a time, when I feel an immense sadness as I contemplate the reality of what apparently, almost certainly, is happening to the earth and to life on earth... and this means to us.

Do you feel that sadness sometimes too?

Yet... I choose not to be disheartened – not for long anyway – not to be disheartened about all this. Not even about President Bush's new and ludicrous goal of ending the *increase* of our greenhouse gas emissions seventeen years from now – way past the time when leading climate scientists are saying we must have begun to reduce emissions and to reduce them dramatically. Our president proudly announced his goal in the White House Rose Garden – he might as well have been wearing the proverbial rose-colored glasses.

But though I can't stop myself from sometimes feeling this sadness, sometimes anger... I can *choose* not to be disheartened. You see, I wouldn't want to stop the *feeling*. Because I know the value of feeling, of touching if you will, my sadness about it all – because I know that this is also a way of feeling and touching my *love*, my love for the earth, for life, for each living being – for the warm spring breeze, for the poignantly beautiful new green of the maples, for the volunteer daffodils growing from our compost pile, for the redwing blackbirds at World's End...

For it is my *love* which drives and will drive my passion to save what can be saved, to live into new ways of living and loving together on this dear earth.

And you know what? In spite of how grim things sometimes look, I would still bet on life, even bet on human life. The record is pretty good after all. We *may or may not* survive or thrive as a species over the next few hundred years or even the next few decades – there *are* no guarantees. But so far we have managed. Yes there have been disasters, wars, plagues. But the human race races on. I would still bet on us.

And though it is not a sure bet, we have the power to stack the cards in our favor. In other words, it matters, it really does matter what we do.

Now, I know that you already know many of the things that we can and ought to be doing if we wish to stack the cards in our favor and be more likely to live into a sustainable civilization on this, our home planet. But before I say a word about what we can *do*, I want to suggest that we are more likely to *do* these things we know we should do if we first notice who we are and what we are actually already doing here on the earth each day.

Who are we? Well, that's a big enough question for a lifetime of sermons.

I'll just say this. Though there is much to quarrel with in the creation stories in Genesis, we can at the least embrace the part that teaches us we have grown from, been created from, the very mud of the earth itself. This means we – every creature and part of the creation – *are* all family; so of course we ought to care for one another as families are meant to care for one another. Which means in turn, *not* subduing and conquering (as Genesis would seem to have it, through the common English translation of “dominion”) but as stewards, caretakers and partners (as Genesis *must* be re-interpreted for our age).

Who are we? We are of the earth. Chief Seattle said it too, that “the earth does not belong to us, we belong to the earth.” Buddhism teaches too the reality of the interdependence of all things. The evolutionary and ecological sciences teach all this too.

So, first may we notice and remember who we are.

Second – can we notice what are we doing?

I don’t mean on the grand scale – we all know the headlines (or what should be the headlines) of climate change and other present and looming environmental challenges and catastrophes. My question is: Do we really notice what we are doing each day?

Notice.

Do we notice that each time we start our car – even if we have a low-emissions hybrid or other high mileage car – we are adding to the load of climate changing greenhouse gas emissions?

Do we notice that each time we turn on a light – even if it is a high-efficiency CFL bulb – we are adding to the load of climate changing greenhouse gas and other dangerous toxins as well?

Do we notice that every time we use our phone, watch TV, turn on our computer, check our email (write a sermon...) – we are adding to the load of greenhouse gas and other dangerous toxins as well?

Do we notice that every box of cereal on the shelf, every vegetable or piece of fruit in the bin, every bottle of juice or milk, every can of beans, has a carbon footprint?

Do we notice? You get my drift.

I don’t say all this to make us feel *guilty*. There is enough of that going around without my adding to it.

I do say it to help us *feel* the *reality* of our situation, to help us really *know* that we all do bear a portion of responsibility for the situation in which we find ourselves. This is where ethics and morality begin, with really knowing what we are doing and with accepting our share of responsibility for the effects of what we are doing. Because climate change and the other huge interrelated environmental and social justice issues – hunger, war, torture – are not problems *over there*. *They are the reality in which we are right now living*.

And we *are* in the midst of a crisis of unprecedented proportions. It is not a crisis looming somewhere else or in the distant future. It is now. Though every bit of odd weather, every drought, every melting glacier, every food shortage, every spike in oil prices... is by itself mere anecdote... there is simply no question that taken together we see that the overall crisis is now, and more rapidly upon us than almost anyone predicted – and most rapidly upon the most vulnerable and poorest among us.

So we had *better* notice. Notice not only these large scale changes and threats of even greater changes to come. But notice that we *are* part of the problem. *Not because we are bad people. But because we are alive at this time in history.*

But it is not all bad news.

For since we are part of the problem... we also are part of the solution. We *can* stack the deck. Having noticed and really taken to heart the many ways in which we contribute to global warming and related crises on the planet today, we are all the better able to notice the impact of each thing we do (or stop doing) in the direction of meeting the challenge.

Yes, each small thing positive thing we do – as writer/activist Michael Pollan reminds us in a recent article in the “New York Times Magazine” – will have practically no impact. But, as he also reminded us, we must still do each small thing. We *do* need to change a light bulb. And turn them off more of the time. And drive less, walk and ride the bus and train more. And unplug power-draining appliances and electronics when we’re not using them. And eat lower on the food chain (become vegetarians if you ask me – we are told it can make as big a difference in our carbon footprints as switching from an average American car to a high mileage hybrid). Eat locally grown produce. Grow some of our own food. Buy locally. Buy less of everything. Recycle and reuse more of what we have.

And since we will not successfully live into a new era of sustainable life on earth without larger scale responses as well, it is also up to each of us to support these larger scale responses – to vote for politicians committed to serious responses to our challenges: cap and trade, carbon tax, subsidies for new technologies; to support these new technologies if we can afford it by being “early adopters” of alternative energy sources, solar and wind; and if we have investments to find ways of supporting through our pension funds or other investments these essential new technologies. And join with others – globally yet also locally through Hingham Wind or Sustainable South Shore or the Hingham Farmer’s Market – join with others who share our concerns and share our desire to imagine our way and live our way into a different kind of future, a sustainable future for life on earth.

As Michael Pollan also affirmed in his article, though changing a few light bulbs or driving a Prius or voting or any of this won’t make much of a difference all by itself... *social change is viral* – one person as an example for another and another, and then for a town, a city, a nation... the world.

This is why, for example, we really ought to change all these light bulbs – not just because of the marginal savings of energy and reduction of emissions, but because social change *is viral*, catching in the best way. And all the more likely to be catching when visible – and what could be more visible than these lights?! Unless it is the bike rack on the front lawn of the Parish House encouraging us to get to church emissions free if we are able, encouraging others passing by as well.

Yes, these can be sad times, disheartening times. The antidote? Love for one another and for the creation of which we are part. Love that can move us to open our eyes and hearts so that we *notice*, so that we then open our hands to act.

The antidote for the disheartened soul? Heart! And heartening participation.

What, then, do we do next? There is plenty to choose from.

I’ll conclude with the words of storyteller and poet Clarissa Pinkola Estes:

If there is an ancient secret to caring for and mending the significant lacerations to this “Oh-my-dear-God-beautiful” earth we’ve been given, by soul’s light it might be just a tiny four-word prayer from Creator to humanity:

“Please, just start anywhere.”

So may it be.