

Outline:

1. Our physical structure reflects the bone structure of beings far-flung in time and space. The dinosaurs have fingers and toes, ribs, spine, jaws and eyes. We are bound with these creatures in direct and intimate physical manifestations, giving direct and certain evidence of our connection to the web of all existence.
2. Environmentalism brings us out of ourselves, our daily struggle to maintain shelter from the rant of Mother Nature. We exist beyond time; we share the earth with the past, and with the future.
3. Sanctuary is not to be found by taming nature. The safety of our shelter, the value and permanence of our civilization is an illusion. Eventually, all we know and love will evolve into a reality that we cannot comprehend. Our sanctuary is to be found in the freedom of the spirit to transcend and embrace the wildness of our nature; embrace and celebrate that we are part of the great family of being.
4. Our effort to clean the environment, to slow the extinction of species, to change the pattern of global warming and all the rest is valuable. We value these efforts because the effort makes us feel good. Maybe it makes us be safer. The true value is that we give voice to our progeny, the grandchildren of our grandchildren speak to us through our effort to clean the world, to hand down a place where they too, have the opportunity, indeed the responsibility, to search for the great mystery of life. And pass it along.

The Minnesota Science Museum in St. Paul is built on the edge of a cliff, a canyon wall cut through layers of sandstone by the Mississippi River. In the building you descend from the bluff into the depths of a deep room traveling through eons of time. Turn a corner and hanging above you is the serpentine skeleton of a sea creature, Mosasaurus Conodon, Some 70 million years old the fossil of this species is considered commonplace by paleontologists. Mosasaurus Conodon was a 30-foot predator with a ferocious attitude and appetite for any marine reptile or fish he could catch. These creatures were a dominant species in their time, hunting very successfully in the oceans that covered much of North America for millions of years. The skeleton at the Science Museum is eerily lifelike. His eye sockets seem to follow you and his rows of teeth look eager to take a quick bite of you.

Mosasaurus Conodon sports a torso with a jointed spine and 32 pairs of ribs, four appendages, a long head with a snout full of sharp teeth and a very long tail-as much tail as anything else. (An artist's rendering is on the cover of your OoS) At the end of each of appendage is a hand-or flipper (remember this animal was a swimmer), with five jointed finger bones. Gazing across the museum gallery at that spine, those ribs, and fingers; I am struck by how those bones look a lot like mine.

I too have a torso with ribs and backbone, four appendages, two including 5 finger hands, a snout (well not much of one) and teeth that with the benefit of orthodontia fit in my face. And a tail? Well thankfully I only have the vestige of a tail, but still it is there.

I look at this fossil and notice anatomical features that he and I share. One part sticks out. On the cover of your Order of Service are photos of the bones of a flipper and a human hand. Do you see the resemblance? Some of you may not know which photo is a hand and which is a flipper. While there are many great differences, the similarities are striking and thought provoking. Mosasaurus had much of what we have: life, great skill,

and the will to survive. Mosasaurus stares across time and shows clearly through his bones that we are related. While not with us today, that fellow was an early inhabitant of our planet, our predecessor living here where we are, millions of years ago.

We are celebrating Earth Day this morning.

Senator Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin was the founder of Earth Day, first held on April 22, 1970. Senator Nelson said, "It had been troubling me that the state of our environment was simply a non-issue in the politics of the country". It took the interest of President Kennedy and the civic energy of thousands to make our ecology an issue in the politics of this country. Environmental activism continues today because decisions made by governments, industries and citizens continue to threaten the environment.

This coming Wednesday is Earth Day. Some of us will renew our will to participate in reducing environmental harm; we will plug in to the myriad ways to reduce consumption, reuse when we can and when we can't, to recycle. Earth Day helps us recognize that we each play a role in creating the environment we live in and that each of us has a moral responsibility to define our environmental legacy. What we pass along.

Personally I am on board; I try to recycle, I try to eat locally, I live close to work, I consider how my purchases contribute to my carbon footprint. But I am lackadaisical about it and think most of us are. I am concerned that Earth Day has become another Hallmark Holiday. A day to assuage our collective guilt in living a lifestyle that Mother Nature cannot support. A day when many of us declare and celebrate that we are bound into the web of all existence but after the celebration, a declaration that quickly passes as we return to extravagantly wasteful ways. And, as our economy stumbles, we are in danger of letting our attention to being 'Green' be overwhelmed by our concern for greenbacks.

In a recent hotel stay a card on the dresser said "Save the Earth" Dear guest; the bed sheets washed daily in thousands of hotels around the world use millions of gallons of water, and a lot of detergent. Please leave this card on the bed if you want your sheets changed. Thank you for helping us conserve the earth's vital resources. I put the card in the drawer and slept on used sheets. .

What impact does my effort to be Green have? Does it matter to the Earth, to Mother Nature if we conserve water and don't change the sheets every day? Does Mother Nature care if I bike to work, hold back on the 'print' button, collect my cans, own a Prius... Does it matter to Mother Nature how warm it gets on our globe?

What is Mother Nature? Some would say a metaphor for life itself. Mother Nature is everything from the smallest molecule to the great cosmos, but it all boils down to chemistry, biology and physics. Mother Nature works with a set of physical laws. We know some of those rules and scientists continue to work to decipher a better understanding of the laws of nature. We know that Mother Nature has a great capacity for adaptation and evolution. Her calendar is marked by epochs rather than days or years or lifetimes. It doesn't matter to Mother Nature if we change the sheets. It doesn't matter to Mother Nature whether we are here or not. The Earth will continue its evolution with or without humans. The card in my hotel room should say "use your sheets again to help preserve the environment that humans need to survive. Earth Day is about *human* survival.

Humans need many things for survival including safe & secure shelter from the forces of Mother Nature. Maintaining shelter is a driving force in human endeavor. And environmentalism is in part our desire to clean the house we occupy, the only house we will ever occupy.

We are animals subject to the same natural laws as other creatures. It is our self-awareness that enables us to transcend those laws and ask the question “Does it Matter”, and to consider and care about the answer. We are bio-organisms who seek shelter as well as sentient beings who seek a sense of purpose and meaning. Does it matter to Mother Nature that we try to improve the earth’s environment? No. Does it matter to us, to our bodies as well as the human spirit? Most definitely.

My Grandfather Ray Weld, was a Presbyterian Minister. He lived in a mountain cabin in the Sierra Nevada, and I remember early morning bible lessons next to the wood stove like this.

Geneses 1:28

And God blessed them, and God said unto them, be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

Dominion. In the Presbyterian universe man is the most important creature on Earth because man is the one creature made in the image of God. Grandpa Ray would go on to say that with the privilege of Dominion comes the responsibility of Stewardship:

Deuteronomy 22:6

If you come across a bird's nest beside the road, either in a tree or on the ground, and the mother is sitting on the young or on the eggs, do not take the mother with the young. You may take the young but be sure to let the mother go so that it may go well with you and you may have a long life.

Stewardship. Take care of God’s kingdom on earth. The Presbyterian God’s command permits—and even requires—the use of natural and living resources for the benefit of mankind. Take care of Mother Nature and she will take care of you.

Dominion, we have the right to take and use what we want in our daily struggle for survival.

Stewardship, we have the responsibility to take care of the gift of life.

This duality defines the tension between our American attitude of profligate consumption, and our desire to pass along our world to future generations?

My personal journey has lead me to discard the notion of humankind created in the image of god. I believe that mankind is not made in the image of God, but that mankind makes God in the image of man. But regardless of your personal theology, the tension between our understanding of dominion and stewardship drives to the core of what it means to be human.

The UU seventh principal "Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part" intentionally does not tell us what to believe about our place in the web. If you choose to be made in the image of god, ok. If you choose otherwise that is ok too. The seventh principle reminds us to have respect for the web of all existence because we are part of the web, bound by the same laws governing Mosaurus and all other life forms. But we are also more than other animals. We are sentient beings, our self awareness transcends natural law and takes us to a different plain. My favorite illustration is a quote from Albert Einstein: "you cannot blame gravity for the fact that people fall in love."

We humans crave sanctuary where we are valued. Many of us want a family that values our presence and a community that knows us. We want occupations that feel meaningful. We strive to find purpose in our lives. Grandpa Ray would tell us that we are made in the image of God and because of that we are more valued than all other life. God centered religions provide a useful tool for people to find purpose and meaning. What

better way to find purpose than to have God make you in his image and give you that purpose? Done, couldn't be better.

While I respect and admire my Grandfather I don't buy his Presbyterian theology. I cannot believe in a god-centered religion but still I crave sanctuary where I am valued and find meaning.

We choose to be environmentalists because we need shelter in a world that is livable. We need Shelter.

We choose to be environmentalists because we seek to be valued and find purpose in the stewardship of our planet. This environmentalism becomes a moral imperative, the right thing to do. Unitarian Universalists recognize this moral imperative from the guidelines of the seventh principal,

Reverend Fred Small, a UU minister *puts it on the line this way:*

"Today, people of faith around the world are coming to understand that threats to the environment are threats to the principles of justice and compassion at the core of every religion, certainly Unitarian Universalism.

Automobile fuel economy is an environmental issue. But when our dependence on cheap gasoline drives a tanker aground and the spreading slick deprives an Inuit family of seal meat that's an issue of justice and compassion.

Recycling is an environmental issue. But when a Chicago woman who's never smoked cigarettes gets lung cancer from breathing fumes from an incinerator burning recyclable trash, that's an issue of justice and compassion.

Deforestation is an environmental issue. But when tree root systems no longer hold soil in place and a mudslide sweeps away a peasant village, that's an issue of justice and compassion.

Energy conservation is an environmental issue. But when our tax dollars subsidize prison construction instead of green job training that could keep at-risk teens out of prison, that's an issue of justice and compassion.

Climate change is an environmental issue. But when people on the island nation of Tuvalu must abandon their homeland before the rising sea swallows it, then that is an issue of justice and compassion.

Threats to the environment that people cause are threats to the principles of justice and compassion at the core of religion, these are matters of deep moral concern.”

Shelter. We need clean air, water, food, room, and shelter from the elements in order to live. Sanctuary. We seek that peace in mind that gives purpose and meaning. Sanctuary makes shelter worthwhile.

We call this room a sanctuary for a very good reason. We want this to be a place where we seek spiritual connection with a community we know and love. We want this to be a place where we feel the safety and challenge to be in touch with our spiritual lives. Sanctuary. This church can be that community; where we celebrate the spiritual connection with our environment and where we bring our energies to bear on making this Earth safe and worthy to pass along to future generations. But it will not happen without our intention, our will to make it so. Sanctuary is found in community where our actions are valued and meaningful, where our spirit thrives. This place, our church, can embrace that power.

Do our actions matter?

There are clearly many reasons to say yes to environmentalism. Living a lifestyle that keeps our Earth clean is the best long-term economic choice, the best health care choice, the best social-action choice and just the right thing to do. But at the end of the day, the

best reason for environmentalism and our respect for the interdependent web we live in is that we give voice to our progeny. We hear the voices of the grandchildren of our grandchildren and beyond 7 generations as they speak to us through our efforts to clean the Earth, the Earth they will be born into. They call to us to deliver a world where they too have the opportunity to seek shelter and sanctuary; a world where they have the opportunity to wrestle with the mystery we call life. They call to us to deliver a world where they too can embrace the responsibilities we think about on Earth Day.

Our actions do matter. It matters greatly what we pass along...