

Earth and Ocean Day April 24, 2016. Nigel Taber-Hamilton
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Every time I step outside my front door I feel deeply blessed! Beautiful fir trees tower above me, part of a forest of green. By the top of my driveway there's a 500-year-old tree stump – the remains of an ancient tree that has acted as a 'nurse-tree' for a newer, vibrant fir, that literally grows right out of it and must be 100 feet tall. Other 'nurse-logs' are scattered among the still-standing trees, in generous death nurturing another generation.

Small creatures rustle in the undergrowth – a red squirrel here, a chipmunk there; deer abound; many different sorts of bird fly overhead.

At night, three different sorts of owl call back and forth, hooting and screeching.

At this time of year the rhodies are in full bloom, their ample flowers weighing down their branches. Tulips and daffodils suddenly burst forth. There's a moist, earthy smell that proclaims new life.

And last week....! Wow! When the sun shines warm and bright, and the temperature hovers around 70F there's not a better place on earth to be!

In 1999 Rachel and I drew up our moving list – or, actually, our two moving lists. One list was about the church: what sort of parish and diocese we hoped to find ourselves in. The other was our environmental list: it had two items on it:

1. No extremes of temperature.
2. Near water.

Not only do I find myself - do we all find ourselves - surrounded by the green glow of tree and bush, the many and varied mammals and birds and other creatures, we find ourselves surrounded by the green-blue waters of Sound and Ocean, where at this time of year Orcas and sea lions and seals begin to frolic, and waters are redolent with the promise of salmon jumping and flying.

We live in a place that's easily lovable. And we live on a planet – if we stop and take the time to look and listen – that's easily lovable.

Of course, we don't always remember this! Familiarity can breed contempt, if we allow it – a casual indifference that's sometimes the consequence of over-exposure. We take our island and our planet for granted, as if both are just things.

Yet the evidence is all around us that the earth – our planet – is not a hunk of nothingness, immobile, impersonal, static; the earth is alive and we are all part of it, we are not separate from creation but in a profound way part of it.

All these experiences are, for me, tantalizing images of rebirth painted across the landscape's and Oceanscape's canvas; there's an sacred echo of an earlier time, when the earth - when the land

and sea - was new and unsullied and all was fresh and right in God's Garden.

Genesis reminds us that this majestic creation is not just good but very good, that it's a reflection of its Maker, imbued with magnificence, and light, and joy. There is a life-force that permeates all, Genesis says, including us, a life-force that underpins all that is, and that life-force is God.

In this resurrection season there's a synchronicity for me between the transformative power of God in Jesus, and the irrepressible Life that is written everywhere in the Big Book of God's creation.

Down the centuries that 'irrepressible Life' of God-in-Jesus has been named and honored and connected to the life our planet and our universe by diverse native peoples. Celtic Christians, Francis of Assisi, Hildegard of Bingen, and many others see that connection through Christian eyes, but pretty much every Indigenous People make the same connection, and most other religions, most especially Buddhism.

God is incarnate in Jesus, we say loudly and often, but God is also incarnate in creation – something we say less loudly, and less often. Everything, Jesuit priest and paleontologist, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin said, is sacred and filled with the Life of God.

When you love someone, and they are suffering, it can be devastating for you, too. If we truly allow ourselves to love this fragile earth – our island home – if we allow ourselves to be connected to her, then it takes an effort of will not to know and feel her pain.

There's something that scientists call the "natural extinction rate." Species go extinct all the time. And over the history of our planet, there have been five times when that number is way above the average – by as much as 10,000 times. Scientists refer to these times as "extinction crises" and we are now in the midst of the 6th Extinction Crisis. The difference between this one and the five previous ones is that a single species - ours - appears to be almost wholly responsible. And we are quite possibly going to be numbered among the victims of our handiwork. As the World Wildlife Fund says, "There can be little debate that there is, in fact, a very serious bio-diversity crisis" happening right here, right now.

Lead in the drinking water of Flint Michigan didn't just happen, it was the result of the highly toxic nature of the Flint river, polluted with high levels of chlorides from local industry and road salt run-off.

The use of chemicals in the neonicotinoid family – like Round-up – are killing pollinating bees at such a rate that the food supply is under severe strain. Unchecked, it promises disaster for us all. When was the last time you saw lots of butterflies? Where are the Monarchs?

As our planet warms we watch in awe and horror as glaciers and ice sheets break off, break up, and melt.

How should we respond?

Our faith absolutely teaches us to name and confront the powers and principalities that have caused this despoliation. We are invited to name the idolatry that says we humans are the center of creation and it is all there for our taking. That idolatry goes by this name: Consumer culture. It's a message that is relentlessly proclaimed in the thousands of ads that assault us each waking hour.

Worshiping in consumer society means that, as with any idolatry, sacrifices are demanded. Sacrifices to the market. Sacrifices of the poor. Sacrifice of our children and their future. And ultimately the sacrifice of the whole planet for our greed. In the face of this culture our faith calls us to say "no" and proclaim the ancient truth that "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it" (Psalm 24:1) We proclaim this too as we celebrate Earth and Ocean Month.

Oceanographer Jacques Cousteau says, "People protect what they love." Without knowing and grounding ourselves again in God's original Blessings – the blessing for all people, all creatures, all of creation—we will not have the knowledge or strength or love to protect this planet our precious home.

And so on this day when we celebrate and remember our Earth and Oceans, I invite you to be intentional about this planet on which we live, and the creatures we share it with – feel the miracle of walking on earth, take in the beauty; delight and play. Get your hands dirty. Feel the heartbeat of God pulsing through creation. Receive Life's energy as you walk in green pastures. You are walking on holy ground. And walk beside the waters that surround us and mysteriously refresh our souls.

And do something! Become empowered – through the power of that Spirit of Life – to protect what we again have grown to love. Start by taking some simple action. I have planted *Asclepias speciosa* and *Asclepias Tuberosa* – Showy Milkweed and Red Butterfly Milkweed – both considered weeds in some quarters, both are butterfly magnets – butterflies use them to lay eggs. Let's consider setting aside some of the Bell Tower Garden to do the same. It's a small thing, but it's a step in saving our planet. After all, it's the only one we've got!

