


Order of Service  
*The Beauty of the Earth*  
April 25, 2010



**Call to Worship and Chalice Lighting**

The salvation of our world  
And the healing of our planet  
Depends more than anything else  
On a new relationship with place.

Place as home.

Place as alive.

Place as nurturing of person and community.

Place, whom we serve in return.

Such a place is our Fellowship home,

Where we learn to nurture and be nurtured,

So that we may, in turn, bring compassion to each and every

Corner of our lives.

**Meditation and Prayer**

Some of us know this place called Evergreen

Like the back of our hand.

Others are newer to the Fellowship

And are learning all that is possible here.

In either case, we return because something draws us.

We remember something that touched us

And we come back for more.

Some connection with people  
Or comfort and support in this sacred place.

Let your memory turn now  
To a moment of meaning you have felt  
At some time, in this community.

(silence)

And may it be that many such moments  
Are your gift from this place,  
Now and for years to come.

Amen.

## Readings

“For the Children,” by Gary Snyder

The rising hills, the slopes,  
Of statistics  
Lie before us,  
The steep climb  
Of everything, going up,  
Up, as we all go down.

In the next century  
Or the one beyond that,  
They say,  
Are valleys, pastures,  
We can meet there in peace  
If we can make it.

To climb these coming crests

One word to you,  
To  
You and your children:

Stay together.  
Learn the flowers.  
Go light.

“A Vision,” by Wendell Berry

If we will have the wisdom to survive,  
To stand like slow-growing trees on a ruined place,  
Renewing, enriching it,  
If we will make our seasons welcome here,  
Asking not too much of earth or heaven,  
Then a long time after we are dead,  
The lives our lives prepare will live here,  
Their houses strongly placed upon the valley sides,  
Fields and gardens rich in the windows. The river will run clear,  
As we will never know it.  
And over it, birdsong like a canopy.  
On the levels of the hills will be green meadows,  
Stock bells in noon shade.  
On the steeps where greed and ignorance cut down the old forest,  
An old forest will stand, its rich leaf-fall drifting on its roots.  
The veins of forgotten springs will have opened.  
Families will be singing in the fields.

In their voices they will hear a music  
Risen out of the ground.  
They will take nothing from the ground they will not return,  
Whatever the grief at parting.  
Memory, native to this valley, will spread over it  
Like a grove, and memory will grow into legend,  
Legend into song, song into sacrament.  
The abundance of this place,  
The songs of its people and its birds,  
Will be health and wisdom and indwelling light.  
This is no paradisaal dream.  
Its hardship is its possibility.

**Sermon** The Beauty of the Earth Rev. Bruce Davis (2100)

In the course of my life almost everyone I have known has been moved by the beauty of the Earth. Those who distain a bright sunrise or a calming sunset are few and far between. And yet... And yet even the powerful beauty of our delicate planet is not enough to keep us all on a path of advocacy for its preservation.

We have as a species taken another path, of comfort, safety, and consumerist abundance. Few would wantonly destroy a wetland habitat. But once the shopping mall is built, and the ducks and grasses are replaced by acres of concrete for parking, and we are drawn by the familiarity and convenience of McDonalds and Starbucks, do we not ourselves participate in the destruction of the natural world?

There is a vision of the integrated beauty of Earth in James Cameron's recent box-office hit, *Avatar*. This is neither a plug for nor a review of the film, which for me was something like "Bambi Meets the Transformers." It is the vision of place that draws me in this film, not its sometimes gratuitous violence.

Pandora is a planet far distant from Earth. Having depleted earth of natural resources and denuded the planet of its natural plants and animals, people are now

conquering other worlds. The Company has laid claim to Pandora to mine the impossible metal, Unobtainium, and will go to any length to get it. At risk are the indigenous beings of that forest planet: plant, animal, and humanoid.

The vision here is quite wonderful. Each species of plant and animal lives in a deeply interconnected web. Each tree communicates to other trees nearby through the tiny fibers at the end of each root. Each plant, each animal, is entirely interdependent with others. And the Pandorans are not only fully aware of this interconnection, they participate in it with the fullness of their being. At the center of the community's life is a great and beautiful tree, the Home Tree. The tree is mother and protector. It is beauty and it is love. As it cares for them, they care for it.

The subtle connections on Pandora, one being to the next, create an uninterrupted network of living parts that reaches across the biosphere of that small planet. Each connection acts like a neural synapse, so that energy and intelligence are shared from one life form to the next. The resulting inter-being is analogous to the human brain, in which each cell is in touch with all cells through delicate synaptic connections. And like the human brain, a wholeness is created that is greater than the sum of the parts. That being, within and between and beyond all these Pandoran life forms, the sentience of the whole, is Eywa, the mother goddess.

The connecting energy within this dance of life is subtle. In the film, it is represented as light. At a deeper level the interrelationships are love and beauty, connecting each to all. Delicate as it is, how can this beauty stand against wanton destruction in the name of greed?

Using fantasy as his vehicle, Cameron presents to us our own earth. Beautiful. All beings interdependent. A subtle balance of needs. The wholeness of our biosphere, a living conscious being. The web of life. Mother Earth, or Gaia, is as real as you and I are.

Some of us connect with this reality, especially our poets and wise ones. This from Black Elk. Notice how the great tree is central to his vision, as well.

For I was seeing in the sacred manner  
The shape of all things of the spirit.  
And the shapes as they must live together

Like one being.  
And I saw that the sacred hoop  
Of my people  
Was one of many hoops  
That make one circle,  
Wide as daylight and starlight,  
And in the center grew  
One mighty flowering tree.

Marge Piercy is another poet moved by the oneness of interconnection. Her image of the tree is in the roots reaching out in all directions.

Connections are made slowly,  
Sometimes they grow underground.

You cannot tell always by looking what is happening.  
More than half a tree is spread out in the soil under your feet.

...

Weave real connections, create real nodes, build real houses.

...

Keep tangling and interweaving and taking more in,  
A thicket and bramble wilderness to the outside  
But to us interconnected with rabbit runs  
And burrows and lairs.

...

This is how we are going to live for a long time: not always,  
For every gardener knows that after the digging, after the planting,  
After the long season of tending and growth,  
The harvest comes.

Denise Levertov, in her poem, “Beginners,” suggests that we are all family in our inter-connected natural world.

*Even the weariest river  
Winds somewhere to the sea—*“

But we have only begun  
To love the earth.

We have only begun  
To imagine the fullness of life.

How could we tire of hope?  
—so much is in bud.

How can desire fail?  
—we have only begun

to imagine justice and mercy,  
only begun to envision

how it might be  
to live as siblings with beast and flower,  
not as oppressors.

Surely our river  
cannot already be hastening  
into the sea of nonbeing?

Surely it cannot  
drag, in the silt,  
all that is innocent?

Not yet, not yet—

there is too much broken  
that must be mended,

too much hurt we have done to each other  
that cannot yet be forgiven.

We have only begun to know  
the power that is in us if we would join  
our solitudes in the communion of struggle.

So much is unfolding that must  
complete its gesture,

so much is in bud.

Do you hear, in these expressions of Earth's beauty, a deep sadness? Yes it is beautiful. And yet, it is transitory. The beauty is especially challenged by our neglect. When we power forward to get things done, ignoring the vulnerability of our earth, damage is done that cannot be healed. We have more babies, grow more beef, cut more trees, build more houses.... In themselves these are not bad things. But, ignoring the life that is our beautiful Earth Mother, the consequences of this drive for more are dire.

What are we doing in our era on Earth? What have we already done? Surely the river of humanity is not already hastening into the sea of nonbeing? We don't want to hear this. And yet it may help us to awaken.

Tom Toles is a Washington Post political cartoonist whose work is familiar to many of us. He entitles one cartoon, "The Reading of the Will." A family, sitting in folding chairs before an attorney, is listening as the will is being read. This is what it says:

Dear kids,

We, the generation in power since World War II, seem to have used up pretty much everything ourselves. We kind of drained off the resources out of our

manufacturing industries, so there's not much left there. The beautiful old buildings that were built to last for centuries, we tore down and replaced with characterless but inexpensive structures, and you can have them. Except everything we built had a lifespan about the same as ours, so, like the interstate highway system we built, they're all falling apart now and you'll have to deal with that. We used up as much of our natural resources as we could, without providing for renewable ones, so you're probably only good until about a week from Thursday. We did build a generous social Security and pension system, but that was just for us. In fact, the only really durable thing we built was toxic dumps. You can have those. So think of your inheritance as a challenge. The challenge of starting from scratch. You can begin as soon as—oh, one last thing—as soon as you pay off the two trillion dollars debt we left you.

Your parents.

When you put it all together like that, it's a heavy legacy we offer future generations, isn't it. It's easier not to think about it. Certainly *I* haven't done this. And *I haven't* directly. I've done it *indirectly* by living the great American consumerist life style. I didn't see the effect my choices were making. I really didn't. None of us did.

So, what will we do? Alan Durning, author of *How Much Is Enough* and *This Place on Earth*, offers this advice.

If we attempt to preserve the consumer economy indefinitely, ecological forces will dismantle it savagely. If we proceed to dismantle it gradually ourselves, we will have the opportunity of replacing it with a low consumption economy that can endure.

During writes about an experience in the rural Philippines several years ago.

I was interviewing members of remote hill tribes about their land and livelihood. On a sweltering day in the forested terrain of the Banwa'on people, a gap-toothed chief showed me the trees, streams, and farm plots that his tribe had tended for centuries. It was territory, he insisted, they would defend with their lives. As the sun finally slid lower in the sky, he introduced me to a frail old woman who was revered by the others as a traditional priestess. We sat

under a sacred tree near her farm and looked out over the Ma'asam River. She asked through an interpreter, "What is your homeland like?"

She looked at me with an expectant smile, but I was speechless. My eyes dropped. Should I tell her about my neighborhood on the edge of Washington, D.C., the one where I then lived with my wife, Amy, and our son, Gary? The one where we could not let Gary play outside our apartment because of the traffic?

She repeated the question, thinking I had not heard. "Tell me about your place." Again, I could not answer. Should I tell her about the neighborhood we had previously fled, the one where the dead bodies of young men kept turning up in the alleys? The one where police helicopters were always shining their spotlights through our windows? The one that had since erupted in riots and suffered the psychotic nonchalance of a serial killer. I said nothing.

Finally Durning shares the sad truth with this wise woman. That in our country we don't have places, we have careers.

This sad story has a happier ending. Durning moved back to his family home here in the Pacific Northwest. Enjoying the beauty of this place, his place, he has become a tireless advocate for its ecological well-being.

The Beauty of the Earth happens best right here, in our own place, where we belong. Notice the plants in your own back yard. Walk in the park nearby. Skip stones at the lake or the Sound. Watch the eagles and the snow geese. Look at the infinite sky that stretches above this finite place that is our home.

Wendell Berry puts it this way,

If we want to keep our thoughts and acts from destroying the globe, then we must see to it that we do not ask too much of the globe or any part of it. To make sure that we do not ask too much, we must learn to live at home, as independently and self-sufficiently as we can. This is the only way we can keep the land we are using and its ecological limits always in sight.

Finding your place. Living in your place. Nurturing the natural world in your place. Planting in your place. Playing with the children in your place. Resting in your place. Fixing up your place. Planting trees in your place. Eating fresh food and drinking clean water in your place.

It would truly be enough if, world wide, each person, each tribe, each community, really understood the beauty of their unique place on earth. Loved their place on earth in a way that there might be no environmental harm. Took care of their place. And passed their place on to the dear ones who remain when it is our time to go.

The Northwest is my place. At times I awaken to the light and love that connects all beings here. I was sitting in a grassy field near a river with friends not long ago. Far across the field I saw a butterfly, and I realized it was flying slowly toward us. When it was still a hundred feet away, I held up one finger and just noticed the beauty of the place. It came closer and closer, and finally it landed on that outstretched finger. And it lingered there. Why did I hold up that finger? Why did it come? How very delicate, how extraordinarily subtle, are these connections.

Amen.