

OUR MOTHER, THE EARTH

A Sermon by the Rev. Phyllis L. Hubbell
Paint Branch Unitarian Universalist Church
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SERMON

Two weeks ago, John and I went to Longwood Gardens. If you've never been there, Longwood Gardens is Pierre Dupont's former estate. It has extensive gardens, decorative fountains, demonstration gardens and a conservatory so that even February visitors can be reminded of spring.

We arrived on a lovely spring day. Green piled on green, that lovely first green of the season. I headed directly for the tulips. No dallying with other lesser sights. I wanted dessert first. Would they, could they, possibly be as lovely as I remembered?

We entered the gardens at the purple end. Hundreds, no thousands of tulips -- violet, lavender, burgundy, mulberry, eggplant, and some almost black. After we had seen a half block of the purples, we entered the warmer colors -- scarlets, tangerines and lemons. Then I turned around to go back the other way and saw the light shining through the petals, backlit by the sun. The flowers looked like fields of tiny suns, all aglow. A magical garden. I smiled so wide and so long my mouth ached.

There were other beautiful sights that day, water fountains, with playful jets, in some choreographed dance that had us both mesmerized, grand old trees

awakening to another spring, and lunch on a deck surrounded by green. But before I left I took one more slow walk through the tulips – taking mental pictures to hold in my heart.

Several weeks ago, John spoke about our rivers drying up in response to the climate changes. He spoke about the damage caused by global warming. This Mother's Day morning, I want to focus on the jewel that is our planet that we must save – our mother, the earth.

There are many urgent practical reasons for caring for our planet. But there is also a deep, spiritual call. Three weeks ago, when John spoke on our disappearing rivers, I found tears rising. The thought of something so grand, so beautiful, so essential, disappearing hurt my heart. There is an underlying interconnectedness that feeds us whether we are conscious of it or not. All the times we have spent lazy days on a kayak or an inner tube, on a water taxi or a cruise boat, fishing or lying on a dock looking up at the stars, have imprinted lakes, rivers and oceans in our souls. We are made up of water, we are born out of water, we drink water, bath in it, use it to water tulips, tomatoes and zucchini.

The ground we walk on, the still waters we lay beside, the breeze that cools us, the flowers and food that equally sustain us, the birds and animals who are our neighbors, all give us far more than we have given them back, even with all of our dams, fertilizers and mulch. This planet is a part of us. We walk on sacred ground, drink holy water, experience grace in a heron flight, hear mystery in a loon's call. We bless babies with water. In busy times, in

hard times, in desperate times, water restores our bodies and our souls. Our cups runneth over.

We are born out of this earth. The stuff of this planet gave birth to thousands of forms of life, which in turn eventually gave birth to our mothers' mothers' mothers. Earth feeds us and gives us drink. She provides us with shelter. She supplies us with medicine when we are sick. She offers us bird songs in the morning, sunsets before we go to bed. She bestows on us loving companions and protectors. It is she who sustains us, body and soul. She is food and breath, life and death. She is our mother, the earth.

We must take care of her.

This Mother's Day, let us remember our mothers, but let us remember as well the mother of all of our mothers, this great, holy earth. She is desperately ill now. It is our turn to bring her breakfast in bed, to let her sleep in, to tempt her with her favorite foods. It is our responsibility to follow the doctors' orders, whatever it costs. She is our mother. She gave us life.

Today, let us remember what sustains us. An author I cannot remember wrote these words:

It is not wealth.
It is not possessions.
It is not achievements.
It is not the praise of men.

It is this that [we] touch, the sacred soil, the fertile field, the living land, the holy earth.

Today, now, this moment,

Let us promise to sustain this holy earth, the mother of us all.