

Creation 2C  
Peace, Seattle  
June 23, 2019  
Genesis 2:8-9, 15  
Revelation 21:1-4, 22:1-2

## **RETURN TO THE GARDEN**

They emerged in early autumn from mothballed trunks and museum closets—rare white deerskins and dentalium-shell necklaces; obsidian flints and headrolls lined with red woodpecker scalps—regalia passed down from generation to generation among the people of the Hoopa Tribe.<sup>1</sup>

The time for the White Deerskin Dance had arrived; an ancient cycle of ceremonies that moved from site to site along the valley floor, and ended high up on Bald Hill.

For 30 days nothing was more important; and people found their way back home from wherever in the world they happened to be.

For 30 days Dancers lined up under the bright autumn sun; chanting, swaying, deerskins on poles, following the rhythm of the lead Dancer, singing for Earth's renewal—for the restoration of the world to a place of balance.

**TEACH US TO DANCE!** they cried, **THE WAY YOU DANCE IN HEAVEN!**

Being a witness; watching all this unfold, stirred something deep within me—an echo, perhaps, of our common heritage as members of the Tribe of Human Beings, who as the ancient story tells it, emerged as earth creatures<sup>2</sup> from the soil—humans from the humus—the very breath of God in our lungs.

**Whatever the origin story; whatever our tribe, we forever endeavor to return to the beginning. To get back to the time when the design was fresh and the world was new. To that time before the world fell out of balance.**

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**It all started with a GARDEN—so the Bible says. With EDEN—the primordial GARDEN—where all things were ordered and all needs were met.**

**But the PARADISE that was EDEN didn't last.**

The curiosity of those earth creatures, the tale goes, overwhelmed their ability to stick to the boundary God had set. A different voice caught their ears, and choices were made that ruptured their relationship with God, with each other, and with the Garden itself. They must leave the Garden, forbidden to return.

The story of Scripture that follows this age-old drama reveals God's relentless longing to repair what has been broken; to enter into covenant, moving closer and closer until—in the riskiest move of all—God enters the world through Mary's womb, offers himself in love on the Tree of the cross, and unites earth with heaven once more.

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<sup>1</sup> This opening story is based on my personal experience of the White Deerskin Dance while I served as Director of Lutheran Ministry with Native Americans in Northwestern California from 1986-1991. It is not an exact description, but a recollection. The Dance is very complex and has many elements.

<sup>2</sup> "Earth creature" is the translation of the Hebrew word "a-dam" used in The Inclusive Bible, the text of which was used for this worship service.

It all started with a **GARDEN**, and if we trace the **ARC** of the story to the very end, to the final chapters of Revelation, it ends with a **Garden**, too.

For after the cataclysms are over and all the battles have ceased, the ultimate vision of God for this universe is revealed as a dream of EDEN restored:

Then I saw new heavens and a new earth...  
and the holy city coming down out of heaven from God...  
and I heard a loud voice calling from the throne,

“Look! God’s dwelling place is among humankind!  
God will live with them; they will be God’s people,  
and God will be fully present among them...”

Then the angel showed me the river of life-giving water, clear as crystal,  
which issued from the throne of God and of the Lamb...on either side of which  
grew the tree of life with its twelve fruits...  
and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

God’s vision, the trajectory of life’s whole long journey, brings us back to the Garden.

And we join God, sisters and brothers, we participate with God in this dream when we hold as sacred our relationships with one another; when we hold as sacred our relationships with the creatures with whom we share this planet home; when we hold as sacred our very first calling to be Earth tenders and keepers.

This year’s Season of Creation has us discovering—marveling!—at the intimate and symbiotic relationship between pollinating insects—bees, beetles, butterflies and others—and flowering plants, many of which end up on our dinner tables. (By the way, every person here today will have the opportunity to take with them a pollinator-friendly plant to put in the ground.)

Last week Jen Paur did an awesome job introducing us to the juicy fact that each particular species of flower on this planet has a special relationship—forged through time—with each particular species of pollinating insect; they are made for each other!

Poet Kahlil Gibran describes this arrangement in eloquent terms:<sup>3</sup>

Go to the fields and gardens, and you shall learn  
it is the pleasure of the bee to gather honey of the flower.  
But it is also the pleasure of the flower to yield its honey to the bee.  
For to the bee a flower is the fountain of life.  
And to the flower a bee is a messenger of love.

Re-capturing our sense of WONDER as we behold the exquisite details in the natural world around us is part of what is needed today. But with human impacts threatening the existence of a million species—including our own—WONDER is not enough.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *The Prophet*.

<sup>4</sup> See United Nations report in May 2019, which speaks of one million species at risk. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2019/05/nature-decline-unprecedented-report/>

In his book, THE DREAM OF THE EARTH, Thomas Berry writes:

“We have lost our sense of courtesy toward the earth and its inhabitants, our sense of gratitude, our willingness to recognize the sacred character of habitat, our capacity for the awesome, for the numinous quality of earthy reality.”<sup>5</sup>

- We can break the mountains apart; we can drain the rivers and flood the valleys.
- We can turn the most luxuriant forests into throwaway paper products.
- We can tear apart the great grass cover of the western plains and pour toxic chemicals into the soil and pesticides onto the fields until the soil is dead and blows away in the wind.
- We can pollute the earth with acids, the rivers with sewage, the seas with oil—all this in a kind of intoxication with our power for devastation at an order of magnitude beyond all reckoning.”<sup>6</sup>

Yet within this world we are reshaping, “we have no functional cosmology to guide and discipline our...use of all [the] knowledge and skill [we’ve acquired]... We really do not understand the new story of the universe or its meaning.”<sup>7</sup>

**A new cosmology is needed to change the trajectory of our destructive path, says Berry.**

A more sacred, mindful, and grounded way of being than that which has brought us to the crossroads where we now stand. Such a new cosmology will ground us ever more deeply and firmly in Earth’s story, its origins and its evolution through 13 million years of deep time.

**Theologian Ilia Delio says it this way:**

We humans are not transients, renting a home in the cosmos until we can move to a more permanent one. Human life is not extrinsic to cosmic life, a strange species in an otherwise natural world. We are the latest arrivals in an evolutionary universe; we emerged from the whole and are integral to it. Evolution becomes conscious in us so that our task is NOT to leave the world but to see it in its divine depth.<sup>8</sup>

**Every indigenous community I know of has rituals and ceremonies** whose purpose is to reestablish the connections between life grounded in their experience of the natural world and the pulsing force—the divine heartbeat—that undergirds and sustains it.

**Sisters and brothers, we too, have such traditions that link us to the Earth planet home!**

**We call them SACRAMENTS – holy, sacred, embodied practices linked to water and oil, grape and grain – that yoke the power of the spiritual realm to the earthly realm of our bodies in space and time and in community—making them ONE.**

If the water of our font doesn’t evoke in us affinity for the waters that flow through our watersheds and into the Salish Sea, there is something wrong.

If the grain and grape of the Eucharist don’t evoke in us affinity for sun, soil, seeds—and the labor by which they make their way into our company—there is something wrong.

All of life is a sacrament—a sacred offering in love—given by a gratuitously gracious God. And our practices and rites are meant to awaken that truth within us until it reverberates to the very marrow of our being!

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*, page 2.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, page 7

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, pages 111-112

<sup>8</sup> Ilia Delio, *Unbearable Wholeness of Being—God, Evolution, and the Power of Love*

In the beginning God planted a Garden in Eden, and on the 8<sup>th</sup> day of creation, when the sun dawned on that now empty tomb, the Risen One was mistaken as the Gardener himself—and so he is, for through him the Garden is being restored.

“A new commandment I give you,” said Jesus in his final hours with his followers, “that you love one another as I have loved you.”

To return home to the GARDEN is to return home to our true selves; and to return home to our true selves is to commit ourselves to walking a path that brings healing to the nations and healing to the Earth through the energies of love.<sup>9</sup>

That journey begins now. Amen.

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<sup>9</sup> See Teilhard de Chardin, “The Evolution of Chastity,” in *Toward the Future*, trans. Rene Hague (New York: Harcourt, 1975), 86-87. “The day will come when, after harnessing the ether, the winds, the tides, [and] gravitation, we shall harness for God the energies of love. And, on that day, for the second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire.”