

## **Engaging Hope in the Great Turning**

Theodore Parker Unitarian Universalist Church

September 15, 2019

### **Opening Words** from the Rev. Peggy Clarke

This coming Friday, people all over the planet are going on strike. Millions of people are expected to walk out of work, of school, of the averageness of their days to make a clear and unequivocal statement to the leaders of this world: Act on climate now. Studies are clear. We have 11 years to make massive changes. After that, planet Earth, already showing signs of distress, already giving us a window into a dystopian future, will have passed the point of human aid. There will no longer be anything we can do. Eleven years. This worship service is designed to help us all shift into the reality of this crisis, to understand where the gardens of hope are most fertile and to propel us to action on Friday. Welcome.

**Story for All Ages**      “Click Clack Moo Cows That Type,” by Doreen Cronin  
(a story about barn animals striking for better conditions)

**Offertory**                “I Brought My Spirit to the Sea,” by Max Kapp

**SERMON**                **Engaging Hope in the Great Turning**  
The Rev. Anne Bancroft

How often do we bring our spirits to the sea, or the woods, or anywhere else out of doors? How often do we enjoy a sunrise, or gaze at the stars? How often do we notice a tree, a flower, a bird, a bee, a gift of this amazing planet in order to bring ourselves the sense of peace that our offertory suggested, in order to make our spirits whole – relying on the gifts of this beautiful source of life? That alone should make us realize how much we are in debt, shouldn't it? Even as we are spoiling this planet with our own wants . . . (needs?).

Well, that's not a very cheerful entry to this morning's good words, or what we like to think will be good words. In fact, our climate crisis is not a cheerful reality, and – as Peggy Clark reminds us – we need to feel that. It's important to feel the frustration, the sadness, though my hope is that we not get stuck there.

As our young friend Greta Thunberg reminds us, “We must all do the seemingly impossible” – to see the crisis, as frightening as it is, and not allow ourselves to be immobilized by it.

Medusa comes to mind, yes? The most beautiful of the three Gorgon sisters, from Greek mythology. She was born so lovely, with especially amazing hair, so that when Athena cursed her in a jealous rage

over Poseidon's attentions, Medusa's hair was turned to snakes, writhing all over her head. She had a vicious piercing gaze, a boar-like tusk, and her tongue lolled out of her mouth between her fanged teeth. We can imagine she was so horrid to witness, the very sight of her turned humans to stone.

The thing is, I don't think the ugliness we see, when we're brave enough to look at how we are spoiling our earth – I don't think this ugliness is only about the climate. The ugliness is not only about rising temperatures, or droughts, or bigger storms, or melting icebergs, or extinct species – though it is all of those things. I think a big part of the ugliness we see and want to avoid is ourselves, that part of us that takes without giving back, that consumes without thought, the one that has participated in a world of "take" that is our dominant culture. When we are brave enough to confront that face, the one we must confront when we look at the challenge we are facing as a global community – what comes to mind for me is the choice we have all made to follow the wrong master.

Does anyone know this reference?

I don't often quote scripture here, which is ironic, but Matthew 6, verse 24 comes to mind. And no, I don't know it by heart, I had to look up the exact chapter and verse, but here is what resonates in my mind from this current struggle that is, in truth, a very old struggle. "No one can serve two masters," Scripture says. "Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."

A slightly different translation of Scripture reads, "No person can work for two masters, for either they will hate one and will love the other, or they will honor one and the other they will ignore. You cannot work for God and for money."

Let's look more closely for a minute.

Have you ever worked for two bosses at the same time? Two bosses, that is, who have not just different styles, but you come to understand different priorities. How do you choose which one to follow? One says, do this for these reasons. The other says, do that, for their own reasons, and you're stuck in the middle. At some point, you have to choose, right?

And what if we imagine one leader, one boss, represents the good of the whole – generosity, inclusiveness, big-heartedness; the other prioritizes personal gain, perhaps at the expense of others, more assured individual safety and security without concern for the general well-being.

I am setting up a dichotomy here – well, the Bible actually set up the dichotomy – but in many respects it feels like the dichotomy we are presently facing. The Great Turning (the title of today's sermon) is not about the earth's rotation . . . it's about us, about our turning from an ugly culture of rampant

consumerism based on infinite growth, “money,” if you will, to a culture of sustainability for all beings, a culture of love. Our infinite resources – the idea that we can take for our comfort and our “needs” and our interests when those resources are not, in fact, infinite, and never have been. The Great Turning, as climate activist Joanna Macy offers it to us, “is the idea of a global awakening to the disease of our planet, [and a turning to] our love of life and the revolution that can heal our world.”

I noticed a site called ecoliteracy.org referencing this idea:

The ecological and social crises we face are caused by an economic system dependent on accelerating growth. This self-destructing political economy sets its goals and measures its performance in terms of ever-increasing corporate profits (read: money!) —in other words by how fast materials can be extracted from Earth and turned into consumer products, weapons, and waste.

A revolution is under way because people are realizing that our needs can be met without destroying our world. . . . Future generations, if there is a livable world for them, will look back at the epochal transition we are making to a life-sustaining society. And they may well call this the time of the Great Turning. It is happening now.

<https://www.ecoliteracy.org/article/great-turning>

Well, I hope they’re right. I hope the shift IS happening now. You’ll note they qualified their remarks – “Future generations, IF there is a livable world for them . . . .”

Did you know that Perseus figured out how to slay Medusa? According to the myth, he used the reflection of a shield like a mirror to avoid her gaze and was able to cut off her head as she slept.

Well, that’s a gruesome thought. Still, it was creative, and courageous. That might inspire us, though I do not think we can slay this dragon by avoiding its gaze.

The question is whether we have the strength to see our own participation and choose to be a part of the Great Turning that asks us to switch masters – to choose the “master,” the “wisdom,” the “love” that prioritizes the greater good, the collective needs – the ethic that reminds us we don’t get something for nothing, even though we have been encouraged to believe we deserve to.

We heard the words of Greta Thunberg earlier. This bold young woman, who self-identifies on the autistic spectrum, who shares so openly her experiences of depression about the world she sees, has captured our imaginations with her courage, her bold call for a different way of being in this world, a healing way of being. She inspired another youth in the last year or so – a young German woman named Luisa Neubauer. Neubauer speaks of herself as an unlikely climate activist but one who could

not do otherwise, faced with the crisis in front of us. She has started a concept called Fridays For Future, and asks that we join the student strike movement in order to raise awareness of the fact that we are all in this together – that we strike on Fridays, to make that happen. She offers four things that we each might do – four ways to have our own Perseus moments, perhaps.

First, she says, we need to “drastically reframe our understanding of a climate activist, our understanding of who can be the answer to this. A climate activist isn't that one person that's read every single study and is now spending every afternoon handing out leaflets about vegetarianism in shopping malls. No. A climate activist can be everyone, everyone who wants to join a movement of those who intend to grow old on a planet that prioritizes protection of natural environments and happiness and health for the many over the destruction of the climate and the wrecking of the planet for the profits of the few.”

Second, she says, is the need to get out of what she calls the “zone of convenience, away from a business as usual that has no tomorrow. All of you here, you are either a friend or a family member, you are a worker, a colleague, a student, a teacher or, in many cases, a voter. All of this comes along with a responsibility that this crisis requires you to grow up to. There's the company that employs you or that sponsors you. Is it on track of meeting the Paris Agreement? Does your local parliamentarian know that you care about this, that you want this to be a priority in every election? Does your best friend know about this? Do you read a newspaper or write a newspaper? Great. Then let them know you want them to report on this in every issue, and that you want them to challenge decision makers in every single interview. If you're a singer, sing about this. If you're a teacher, teach about this. And if you have a bank account, tell your bank you're going to leave if they keep investing in fossil fuels. And, of course, on Fridays,” she says, “you should all know what to do.”

Third, she acknowledges that “leaving that zone of convenience,” which, by the way I am suggesting is profoundly spiritual work, “works best when you join forces. One person asking for inconvenient change is mostly inconvenient. Two, five, ten, one hundred people asking for inconvenient change are hard to ignore. The more you are, the harder it gets for people to justify a system that has no future.”

“And number four, finally . . .” she says, “I need you to start taking yourselves more seriously. If there's one thing I've learned during seven months of organizing climate action, it's that if you don't go for something, chances are high that no one else will. The most powerful institutions of this world have no intention of changing the game they're profiting from most, so there's no point in further relying on them. That's scary, I know. That's a huge responsibility, a huge burden on everyone's shoulders, yes. But this also means, if we want to, we can have a say in this. We can be part of that change. We can be part of that answer. And that's quite beautiful, right?”

This woman is 23 years old. And she is asking for our help.

The question is: When we turn and see our own faces in this destruction, in the world's dis-ease, do we have the courage to respond? Because I think that is our hope, is it not? To see that we have followed the wrong master and must make a different choice.

I hope you will find time to join me this Friday downtown, or another Friday, perhaps – right out in front of Theodore Parker Church, to help encourage our communities to pay attention, to be engaged, to leave our zones of convenience and help heal the world.

It's past time we give back, yes?