

Surviving the Storm
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We live in-between.

In-between birth and death,

in between each other,

in between joy and sorrow.

E.B. White said "If the world were merely seductive, that would be easy; if the world were merely challenging, that would be no problem. But I wake up each morning torn between a desire to save the world and a desire to savor the world. This makes it very hard to plan the day."

We live in-between the seductive, beautiful world, the world of joy and hope, and the world of challenge, of oppression and pain.

We're talking about resilience this month, about the power to stand fast in the midst of change, and the ability to change despite the power of inertia.

We're talking about inner strength and the power of community.

We're talking about being in-between - strong, but not brittle;

loving, but not sentimental;

powerful, but not over-powering.

In between the beauty and the lamentation.

In between honest concern and genuine hope.

This is where we live.

We are not delusional.
Nor are we cynics.
We are people of reason and people of love.
And before the mystery of life, we offer our
thanks, our praise, and, yes, our silence.
We celebrate while we honor the complexity of
existence.
Such is religion.
Such is real life.
Our first reading, and then our anthem, are in the
spirit of mystical celebration.
For this earth.
Apple-blossomed, wondrous, real.
Worthy of our love.

**Celebration: “This is Our Earth”
 by Mark Belletini**

This is our earth.
It falls through heaven like a pearl in a glass of plum
wine.
There are no other earths that I know of.
There are no other skies that we have mapped.
This is our earth.
The Oneness who gave birth to it
remains nameless.
There was no midwife then
to bring us word of the birth-cry.
We only rejoice that it is.
This is our earth.

Ice caps its head. Glaciers clasp its feet.
Warm wind, like the breath of a lover,
breathes around its breast.
Mountains thrust up to the clouds, bringing joy.
Storms blow across its shores, bringing fear.
Silvery fish capture sunlight and haul it down
into the deep, as on shore, valleys spread
with ripening fruit. Cities teem with the
poor and disenfranchised in the shadow of
golden towers. Children live and also die.
Highways throb. Monks sit in silence. Mothers
work. Crickets chirp. Teachers plan. Engineers
design. Fathers write letters.
People marry
with and without the blessings of law.
People cry.
They laugh, and brood, and worry and wait.
This is our earth.
There are no other earths.
Before its wonder, philosophers fall silent.
Before its mystery,
poets admit their words are shadow, not light.
And all the great names religious teachers
have left to us
Ishtar, Shekinah, Terra Mater, Suchness, Wakan Tanka,
Gaia
suddenly refuse to announce themselves.
And so we too fall silent,
entering the time where words end
and reality begins.

Celebration: The Good Earth
Whitman/Williams

Smile O voluptuous cool-breath'd earth!
Earth of the slumbering and liquid trees!
Earth of departed sunset — earth of the mountains misty
top't!
Earth of the vitreous pour of the full moon just tinged
with blue!
Earth of shine and dark mottling the tide of the river!
Earth of the limpid gray of clouds brighter and clearer for
my sake!
Far-swooping elbow'd earth — rich apple-blossom'd
earth!
Smile, for your lover comes.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

—

We begin with our love, and our thanksgiving, for
the earth, our hope.
We begin with awe and mystery and holy-smokes-
wow.
The rose that opens after the long winter.
We begin here, with powerful affection for this,
our home.
And since it is only those creatures and places
which capture our heart

over which our heart can also break,
we must admit:
our heart breaks.
Our heart breaks for the earth's wounds, it's pain
and ours,
for the consequences to life - human and
otherwise -
caused by our actions and inactions.
Our heart breaks.
Once, it was acid rain and the ozone layer,
rivers on fire and forests cut to stumps.
But now the great danger, the present reality,
is bigger, harder to understand, so terrible we are
sometimes paralyzed.
I mean, of course, climate change.
The consequences of a rapidly warming planet,
with changing weather patterns, rising seas, and
all the attendant food, refugee, and energy
consequences.
Today is the beginning of the Climate Justice
month - between now and Earth Day at the end of
April,
a time to commit to respond to the crisis and the
moral imperative to change our society and our
lives
before it really is too late.
But I decided to preach on climate change today
before I knew the month kicked off today -
it really is coincidence.
I decided because we are talking about resilience.

And if we are going to slow the rate of climate change, and survive it, we will need communities and lives of resilience in a way few of us have ever known. Our second reading, then.

Crisis: From “This Changes Everything” by Naomi Klein

We know that if we continue on our current path of allowing emissions to rise year after year, climate change will change everything about our world. Major cities will very likely drown, ancient cultures will be swallowed by the seas, and there is a very high chance that our children will spend a great deal of their lives fleeing and recovering from vicious storms and extreme droughts. And we don't have to do anything to bring about this future. All we have to do is nothing. Just continue to do what we are doing now, whether it's counting on a techno-fix or tending to our gardens or telling ourselves we're unfortunately too busy to deal with it . . .

What concerns me is less the mechanics of the transition—the shift from brown to green energy, from sole-rider cars to mass transit, from sprawling exurbs to dense and walkable cities—than the power and ideological roadblocks that have so far prevented any of these long understood solutions from taking hold on anything close to the scale required.

It seems to me that our problem has a lot less to do with the mechanics of solar power than the politics of human power—specifically whether there can be a shift in who wields it, a shift away from corporations and toward communities, which in turn depends on whether or not the great many people who are getting a rotten deal under our current system can build a determined and diverse enough social force to change the balance of power. I have also come to understand, over the course of researching this book, that the shift will require rethinking the very nature of humanity’s power—our right to extract ever more without facing consequences, our capacity to bend complex natural systems to our will. This is a shift that challenges not only capitalism, but also the building blocks of materialism that preceded modern capitalism, a mentality some call “extractivism.”

Because, underneath all of this is the real truth we have been avoiding: climate change isn’t an “issue” to add to the list of things to worry about, next to health care and taxes. It is a civilizational wake-up call. A powerful message—spoken in the language of fires, floods, droughts, and extinctions—telling us that we need an entirely new economic model and a new way of sharing this planet. Telling us that we need to evolve.

Twenty-five hundred years ago, the people of Israel were conquered by an invading army, and some of them were taken off to a strange land to

live as refugees, exiled from their homes. They
sang a song of lamentation,
gathered by water of that strange land - Babylon -
they wept for their homes.

We weep too, for the refugees of violence and
rising seas, of storms and drought,
we weep for life lost and difficult futures. Let us
sing.

**Lamentation: Singing "By the Waters of
Babylon" (1042)**

Prayer of Sorrow and Commitment

Reflection: Surviving the Storm

We live in-between.

In between birth and death.

In between each other.

In between beauty and tragedy.

In between dreams of creation and visions of apocalypse.

In between celebration and lamentation.

And I was torn, thinking about what to say about this this
morning.

I was torn between the seduction of the world, and hope,
and technological fixes, and so forth,

torn between that on one hand, and the challenges of the
world on the other,

the massive, existential threat of climate change.

I was torn.

there are folks who talk only about the challenges:
the disaster, the trouble.
If we hit 4 degrees Celsius warmer, on average, and
that's 7 degrees F,
folks expect a 1-2 meter rise in sea level.
2 meters - that's almost six feet.
Miami. New York. Boston. Sao Paolo, home to millions of
people.
Mumbai. Shanghai.
New Orleans.
Gone. Underwater.
The desert grows, the people starve and flee,
states fail, war grows.
This is a possible future.

This is not the worst case scenario.
It isn't.
This is the middle picture, and increasingly the most likely
one.
The worst case is 6 degrees C.
10-15 feet of sea level rise.
A half billion refugees.
Mass extinction of animal life.
Ocean die-off, and massive desertification.
The Sahara, everywhere.

This isn't science fiction, I'm afraid.
This is real, and it is already happening.
It is a moral wake-up call for our civilization as a whole.

Not just individuals -
it's not enough for us as individuals to live differently.
If everyone in this country used as little energy as the
average conscientious Unitarian Universalist,
we'd have a dramatic reduction in carbon emission.
It'd be great.

But it wouldn't be enough.

We need changes in public policy, in power generation
technology and consumption patterns,
changes in international law and municipal building
codes.

Personal behavior can help, but it isn't enough.

And so that was one option for this sermon:
be really, brutally honest about the challenges before us,
talk about the danger and the need to rise up against the
powers that be,
or, frankly, head for the hills, plant your back-yard
garden, join the commune and try to survive.
That was one option.

But if you read another set of people, you get a very
different story.

And I do not mean the climate-science deniers.

Those that deny the reality of what is happening are not
remotely credible.

I understand the impulse: sometimes the problem is so
bad we refuse to look at it.

The environmental department of Florida has had an informal policy of refusing to use the words climate change for the last few years.

As if refusing to say Voldemort will make him go away. No, I don't mean climate science deniers, their heads stuck in the sand.

I mean, when I speak of a different story, those who take the problem seriously, but have hope.

I mean folks who see the rapidly falling prices of solar and wind power,

who see a rising movement of change,

who see possibilities of a carbon-free energy future,

a dramatic slow-down in warming, such that we can, with intention and purpose, help the most vulnerable

survive,

even build stronger societies and networks,

and, in fact, build a better, fairer, more just economy and world for all people;

that climate change, in fact, leaves us with no choice but to reinvent our economies,

our definitions of success and power,

the way we live on and with the earth,

even, maybe most of all, to change our spiritual orientation towards creation and life itself.

To move from busyness to simplicity

and from extractionism to joyfulness.

Those who have hope believe that we can and are changing things.

They believe that if we band together, and rise up together,
and embrace new technology, we can do remarkable things for the planet and the climate.

Naomi Klein doesn't find her hope in technological fixes or changing corporate governance like these folks do.

But she does end her book on a hopeful note, too: she says that what will save us, in the end, and it is only a possibility, is love.

Love of place, of the earth, and each other.

A powerful passionate love that will motivate a mass movement for change.

A movement that will change our economy from extraction to sustainability,
change our politics from winner-take-all to the common good,

and change our story from conquering to co-existing.

That's a big hope, but such things -

abolition, women's suffrage, civil rights, the first wave the environmental movement,

such things have happened before.

A group of people stand together, work together, and change the world.

So these are the choices I faced as your preacher:

go with the brutal truth, or talk more about hope.

Make you scared, or reassure you.

It makes it hard to plan the day.

I spent a lot of time thinking about which way to go, but
in the end,
there is only really one answer:
keep on loving.
Love; not naive or sentimental, but love of place and
justice and life.
Yes, things are not good.
Warming is happening, and it is bad.
It might be worse.
So we will need to build a different kind of society, a
different kind of economy,
just to survive the coming change.
We need local food, local power, local sustainability.
But here's the good news:
if we act as if the worst is coming, if we become resilient
in the face of this threat,
it is our very chance to stop the worst from happening.
And do more than that:
create more justice, more beauty, in the world.

The city is abandoned. Concrete.
A love of beauty, a cultivation of one local place,
a little garden,
but look what happens?
The whole place changes.
If you had said to our little gardener,
"make this whole city bloom"
he would have said, "that's too much."
But that's what he did.

We have to do things in our own individual lives.
Garden. Eat less, or no, meat. Install solar panels. Walk.
Vote.

And so forth.

You know the list.

By itself, it won't change things enough.

But thousands of people buying panels brought down the price,

so more folks can buy them.

You never know how your choices might ripple through the waters of life.

Build the resilient community that we need to survive food shortages from drought;

build the democratic structures we need to challenge the systems of extractionism;

build the affordable housing we need to welcome refugees from climate-affected cities and countries, who will be coming to the upper-Midwest;

build the resilient community - where folks can walk places, where we know our neighbors, can count on each other -

do that and two things might happen:

one, we will have better lives, with more meaning, fairness, and beauty.

Two, we might stave off the worst of the coming changes, and make climate change difficult and not disastrous.

One of the nation's foremost climate activists is a man named David Roberts.

My sister, who has been working on these issues for, my goodness, 20 years, introduced his work to me.

We were sitting at her dining room table in Seattle last New Year's, talking about this.

She has been in that hopeless place: worried about six degree warming, about the inability of our political structure to challenge the systems of power, about the deniers and the skeptics and how they prevent forward movement of any kind; she's been in the hopeless place.

But she gets up every day, and she goes to work doing energy efficiency planning for a city of 133,000 people, reducing emissions by tons and tons of carbon every day, and saving the taxpayers money at the same time. And she's making progress.

She shared with me this article by David Roberts about where we find hope.

And it is in this: the passionate love of place, and people, and justice.

And that we don't know what will save us, so we should try as much as possible.

Roberts writes:

we are stuck between the impossible and the unthinkable.

the impossible: changing our system and acting together, internationally, on an unprecedented scale.

the unthinkable: not acting, not changing, and the end of a functional civilization as we know it.

Where does hope, then, come from?

And Roberts writes this:

If you say, "There will be a series of brilliant innovations that make clean energy cheap," or, "There will be a sea change in public opinion on climate," or, "Young people will take over and revive politics," you sound like a hippie dreamer. Those aspirations are a matter of faith, a triumph of hope over experience.

And yet: things change! . . . Things can appear stable for years and years while tensions gather beneath the surface, hairline fractures develop, and the whole system becomes highly sensitive to small perturbations. . .

Some choices, if they happen at just the right moment, could be just the perturbations that spark cascading changes in social, economic, or technological systems. Some of those choices, in other words, will be *incredibly significant*.

Which ones? That we cannot know. It could be any of them, any time. Precisely *because* we cannot know — because any one of our choices might be the proverbial butterfly's wings — we must act. We must take advantage of every [affordance](#), grasp every opportunity.

We don't know when history might unlock the door, so we have no choice but to keep pushing on it.

And really, what else are we going to do?

Remember, there is no "too late" here, no "game over" — it will be a tragedy to shoot past 2 degrees to 3, but 4 is worse than 3, and 5 is worse than 4. Being unprepared for any of those will be much worse than being prepared. The future always forks; there are always better and worse paths ahead. There's always a difference to be made.

When we ask for hope, then, I think we're just asking for fellowship. The weight of climate change, like any weight, is easier to bear with others. And if there's anything I've learned in these last 10 years, it's that there are many, many others. They are out there, [people] of extraordinary imagination, courage, and perseverance, pouring themselves into this fight for a better future.

You are not alone. And as long as you are not alone, there is always hope.

As long as you are not alone, there is always hope. The way is hard and the stakes are very high. Take courage friends, for deep down, there is another truth:
you are not alone.

Look up, others garden to turn the abandoned city into beauty.

The earth itself sings with beauty and lamentation, and we sing with the whole of creation.

This is our home, our planet drifting in space, our only world,

and we love it, and because we love it, we shall not let it go down without a fight.

Shake off your despair, for it is not helpful, and it is not true.

We don't know what action will make a difference, but something will,

so let's try it.

Speak up, call and write to those with supposed power, and don't stop

until the whole work wakes up,

rises as one,

and remembers that no matter where we live, or what we do with our lives,

we share this blue boat home together;

we are all kin, one family, together,

and if we are to survive the storm,

we will do it only together.

Let us be bold in our living and our loving,

be courageous, be hopeful without turning away,

and build the lives, the communities, and the world we wish to live in,

for this day and for all the days to come.

