

April 5, 2020
Kokopelli, Raven, Coyote, Wakdjunkaga
Rev. Dr. Matthew Johnson

Kokopelli is my favorite.

I mean, I feel in love with Raven first.

I grew up near Seattle, as some of you know, and Raven is a big part of the theological universe for all the Northwest Coast Indians –

the Puyallup, the Squamish, the Nisqually, and so forth.

Raven steals the light is an archetypal story,

Raven, the clever bird, the chatting one, the one who can work in teams,

and use tools –

did you know Ravens use tools?

Raven is often an ally to human beings and other creatures.

He steals the light, he teaches humans things that Gods know,

but he also tricks humans and other animals,

he messes with them for fun,

or to remind them that they aren't all that.

Raven stories and raven images are a big part of that part of the world,

but when I lived in Colorado for five years,

I fell in love with Kokopelli.

This is Kokopelli – they are one of the icons of wisdom figures

that sits on my coffee table down the hall here at church.

Kokopelli is a trickster deity, who shows up among the Hopi, Yuma,

and other nations in the Southwest.

He plays his flute, and is both a fertility god and a trickster.

He seduces maidens, but he also delivers infants and supervises the mating of game animals.

Sometimes he controls the rain.

This version is a westernized version, which is problematic – and we'll get to that – you can tell that it's sanitized because it is missing his most prominent feature in more authentic descriptions. This version is what scholars call "de-phallized."

I love Kokopelli because he is embodied, earthy, real, he reminds people that we are lusty, longing, real bodies who long for connection, play, life, touch, and laughter.

He doesn't care very much for social conventions, and often crashes the party of people acting fancy to get people to be real, authentic, and present.

Kokopelli is different from his well-known trickster kin, Coyote.

Coyote is a popular god in the stories of Indigenous People from California to Canada, Coyote is a creative trickster, he also steals the light for people, sometimes it is Coyote who names the animals, and Coyote is often credited – or blamed – for the creation of human beings.

These three trickster Gods are well known in the west, but trickster Gods exist throughout human culture. In Scandinavia, it is Loki. In western Europe, it is Reynard, the fox. In west Africa, Anansi, the spider. In Ireland, it is fairies and leprechauns, and for the Ho-Chunk nation, on whose land most of us now live, it is Wak-chung-kaka.

Wak-chung-kaka is a trickster God,
and one of the more important Gods created by Earth-
maker.
Earth-maker needs Wak-chung-kaka to help create, name,
and encourage
the creatures of the earth,
and he encourages fertility, humans, and the occasional
rebellion.
He also creates contests for other animals, goes on quests,
and, yes, seduces maidens and causes mayhem.

And he can be quite foolish, as we heard in the reading –
mistaking a tree for a chief, and imitating it.

What's all this mean?

What is the spiritual meaning of these stories,
especially now, when stories about Gods who cause chaos
feel . . . well, kind of horrible.

We don't need a God that does that, we have enough chaos
all on our own.

What meaning are we supposed to derive from these
stories,

and why have they stayed with us,
across so many cultures for so long?

I'll get to that question,

but before I do I want to say a word about cultural respect.

We hinted at this issue when it came to Kokopelli.

Sometimes, white folks take these trickster Gods
and we pretend they are ours for the taking,
but they are not.

These Gods are important to these cultures and traditions,
and they are not products for sale.

I'm nervous to even talk about them,

and confident that my summary is inadequate at best.

And yet, the Native folks who shared these stories with me
and others
want others to know these stories too – they want them
shared.
But there are . . . rules.

Here are the rules.

We recognize these Gods as cultural resources of the
nations that tell their stories,
not as things that belong to others.
we approach with curious respect, and not dismissive
distan.

we acknowledge that although some of you watching this
are of these nations,
many of us are not, and we acknowledge the history and
present reality
of cultural destruction, genocide, and land theft.

Just this week, the Interior Department moved to “decertify”
the Mashpee Wampanoag Nation, and strip them of their
lands in New England. Just this week.

This is wrong. I condemn it. Commitments to justice are
important.

We also make a gift in honor of these stories. – that’s why
the share the plate today goes to support the Native
American Awareness Council.

But I do think that it is worthwhile to appreciate the spiritual
lessons of these stories,
and to learn about them,
because by learning we become better neighbors and
people.

Not all indigenous people are of the same mind about these
things.

But my teachers have said, “talk about them, share
knowledge of them,
but do it with respect and humility.”

I've highlighted the Indigenous Trickster Gods of this continent,
and the trickster God is an archetype around the world;
each one is different, with different stories,
but this idea: that a divine power is earthy, lusty,
troublesome, chaotic,
mischievous, foolish and helpful all at once,
this idea shows up almost everywhere.

My late colleague Webster Kitchell,
who spent most of his career serving our congregation in Santa Fe,
wrote a set of books of imaginary dialogues with Coyote,
Web brings his high-faulting sermon ideas to Coyote,
who dismisses them as foolish human arrogance.
While eating donuts.
Coyote loves donuts.

You think the world makes sense, silly human?
It does not.
You think you're the center of the universe?
You are not.
You think your mind rules your body?
Ha!
You think you can explain what life is about?
Have a donut, howl at the moon, and let's dance.
Let's dance.

If nothing's wrong than nothings right.

My colleague Angela Herrera serves our church in Albuquerque,
just down the road from Santa Fe,
and her meditation
names this so well:
*Maybe you call your pastor and say,
What is this?*

What am I looking at?

What do I do?

*And your pastor comes and stands at the edge with you
and looks over.*

She can't hide anything either, she thinks,

*not even the fact that she doesn't know the answer to your
question,*

and she wonders if you can tell.

Tell me, wise one,

why doesn't the world make sense?

Why is there tragedy?

Why is there inequality and pain?

Why is there foolishness?

Isn't there a power that's in charge of everything,

isn't there a power of wisdom and kindness,

and why? why? why?

And the wise one says,

I have no damn idea.

Let me tell you a story about the trickster.

When we think that we know the answer

when we think the world makes sense

when we think that the world is fair

or that progress goes onward and upward forever

the trickster says

no.

When we think God is wise,

God is fooled by a branch and stands there,

pointing at . . . nothing.

When we ask God for answers,

they reply, can I have a donut?

When we think there must be a plan for all this,

things must happen for a reason,
God says
I don't have a plan! I'm not in charge! We're all making it up
as we go.

The Trickster God is a common feature in polytheistic
systems,
lives alongside the Earth-Maker, the Ancient Mother,
the Gods of thunder and harvest and so on,
one of many.

It is more difficult in a monotheistic system;
when there is only one God,
who do you blame?
I don't know.

One solution is to give God many names,
Spinner of Chaos,
Weaver of Stories,
Daredevil Gambler,
Lifegiving Loser.
There's more here than we can name or know.

God troubles the water, sometimes,
and the plagues come, and miracles and tragedy
and maybe
maybe
all we can do is stand on the edge of the cliff
with one another,
and cast our questions into the deep.

Joy and Sorrow are woven fine.
It doesn't make sense.
There's no plan.
It doesn't happen for a reason.

Trickster reminds us not to look for answers

where there are only questions.

And I get the temptation, right now, in the midst of this crisis,
to find meaning:
reductions in pollution, reminders of what matters,
a sense of solidarity and reflection.
And you can find all those things in this time,
and you can make meaning here,
and resolve to build a better world when we are on the other side of this,
but
it isn't a plan.
It's not.

It's just a mess.
It's just . . . chaos.

We rational folks have a hard time with chaos.
With the unknown.
It is a spiritual leaning edge,
which is why I think that attending to the trickster is important.
It counterbalances our logic,
sings do do do, da da da, and maybe,
maybe,
gets us to let go of our illusions of control.

We are not in charge.
Coyote isn't in charge.
Loki and Anansi aren't in charge.
Nobody is in charge.
We do the best we can. That's it.

But the Trickster doesn't just teach us
to give up control.

They also remind us what to do when we don't control the universe
and when our questions can't be answered.

You stand on the edge of the cliff,
and when you put down the shards of questions,
the armor of wanting to know,
you realize that you are shining with light.
The Universe in a Grain of Sand.

The Tricksters, with their seduction and their jokes,
their playfulness and their desire,
remind us too to live in our bodies,
the only true thing,
that we feel, we sense, we touch, we ache,
we are fragile and strong,
beautiful and hurting,
loving and dancing.
The loneliness right now is really hard for some of us,
and we are reminded that we need each other's touch.

All the tricksters love to dance.
Dancing and leaping, playing the music,
bobbing in the air with the light of the stolen sun.
Let it be a dance, moving in and out,
feel the rhythm.

So dance. Dance.

And steal the sun.
That's the other lesson of the tricksters,
all of them:
because though they dance with chaos,
and remind us what we know nothing,
they also can be, sometimes, helpful,
they steal the sun,
they bring the fire,

they teach and restore and name,
they shape out of clay,
and sometimes even correct injustice
and restore what is right,
so, steal the sun.

Trick the authority into making justice.
In the moment of chaos, ask,
what serves love and creativity right now?
When everything falls apart,
what new thing can be made?
Steal the sun,
and let your light shine for the world.
Love your body, dance, laugh,
live in the moment,
let go of your illusions,
and remember that you, too, are mystery.

April 12, 2020
Theo/a and Joshua
Rev. Dr. Matthew Johnson

Lean on me, when you're not strong . . .
Bill Withers, who wrote and sang that song,
died last week, 81. Not of COVID but of heart disease,
his family said that he was a very private man,
but he loved his close friends, and he loved the world.
Lean on me, when you're not strong,
and I'll help you carry on.
He also wrote "lovely day"

When I wake up in the morning, love,
something without warning
bears heavy on mind
then I look at you
and the world's alright with me
and I know it's gonna be

A lovely day

He holds that note at the end for 18 seconds –
don't try that at home. You'll pass out.

When something bears heavily on my mind
lean on me
and I know it's gonna be
a lovely day.

It is hard to not see one another in person.
And I see what happens to people's faces on zoom
when they see a friend, even an acquaintance.
When we have that "we are in this together" feeling.
When we lean on each other.

We are seeing now some of the extremities of human
compassion.

We see some who are there for each other,
who are abiding by the need to be physically distant,
who are getting groceries for elderly neighbors,
who are drawing hearts on their sidewalks,
employers keeping their people on payroll,
scrambling to get funds to do so, perhaps,
and we see, of course, health care workers and teachers
and grocery store employees who are trying their best
to make this work for everyone.

And, we also see those who are . . . not.
Employers who are not taking care of their people.
People not keeping their distance from each other,
and putting us all at greater risk.
Profiteers, scammers, zoombombers,
and those who would deliberately put the lives of voters at
risk
to try to win a state supreme court seat.
shame on them.

We see the best. And the worst.

Sometimes we wake
and without warning – or with plenty of warning –
something bears heavy on our mind.

And sometimes we see another face,
we hear another voice,
we connect,
and we feel less alone
someone to lean on
and we think,
even in the muck and the mud,
even in the grief and sorrow,
even in the waiting outside the tomb,
we can do this
and there is love in this day –
not sentimental cheapness,
but lovely deep down,
for we are there for each other.

The women – Mary, his mother,
Mary the Magdalene, his best friend, perhaps,
Salome, mother of James and John, some of his disciples,
they went together.

Together.

The gospel accounts give different versions
of which women went, and how many,
but they all agree: they went together.

And in so doing, they enacted what Delores Williams
names as his ministerial vision,
a preaching of the “abundant relational life.”

There are days like that.

And there are days not like that.
There are days when the despair grows,
and the loneliness is deadly,
or when the people around us
are not people we can lean on.

There are days that are too hard.
When the vision of an abundant relational life
seems like a cruel joke.

When we are separated from our friends and family,
or when our relationships with others
are not based on mutuality or kindness;
instead they feel merely transactional,
or worse
exploitive and abusive.

And Easter comes and says:
always something sings.

Really?
Really?

Alleluia? Really?
In the morgue?
In the isolation?
In the despair?

Something sings?

Easter answers, yes.
Forget the bunnies, even the tulips and daffodils.
Forget even the chocolate.

We're getting down deep now,
in the mud and scum,
says Emerson,

even there, something sings,
and he wrote these lines,
these lines of resilience and courage,
having already buried, in his life,
two of his brothers, when they were in their 20's
his father, when he was only 8
and his first wife
and his child

So these are not cheap verses,
not sentimentality.

Something sings.
This is not cheap.

Delores Williams reminds us that the salvation message of
Easter
is not death.

It is life.

She rejects the atonement theology that praises death,
and affirms that it is life, community, love that is worthy of
praise.

Death tries to destroy life,
Empire tries to destroy freedom
the cult of power seeks to obliterate difference
but the women came together to the tomb
and in the dark
in their tears
resurrection began,
which is to say,
community persisted,
they came together to grieve together
and in so doing
witnesses and continued the ministerial vision:
abundant life.

If the community fell apart,

if they just all went their own way,
if no one told the story,
and no one repeated the teaching,
then there would be no resurrection.

Resurrection isn't Jesus coming back to life,
it is the community still practicing his radical message
of incarnational love.

Every moment is a knife's edge.
A teetering between a cult of death and a vision of
abundant life.
Between a lovely day
and a day of despair.
And it is the choices we make –
including in our grief and sense of loss –
that hold us fast to the vision of abundant relational life.
This vision does not – does not –
deny the reality of grief, sorrow, and death.
Indeed, the vision of abundant relational life
treats these losses with gravity and sacred tears,
for each person matters, their life matters, and their death
is not a statistic, but a personal earthquake.

Treating each person as sacred,
seeing each moment as holy,
moving through the world with compassion, love, and mercy
for others:
this is the vision that we are called to,
and on Easter, when we celebrate the possibility of renewal
and the teachings of Joshua Bar Joseph,
Jesus of Nazareth,
we are invited into this vision, invited to treat
the stranger as our neighbor,
and to love our neighbors
as though they, and we, were incarnations of the divine.
Because we are.

Because we all are.

I titled this sermon Thea and Joshua
because I want to lift up
the intimate nature of the love between the holy and the
human,
the incarnational, familiar, close as the beating of your heart
truth
expressed in the way that Jesus –
a Greek version of Joshua, Joshua son of Joseph,
Joshua bar Joseph,
the way that Joshua referred to abba,
while is like papa, dada,
a term of endearment and love.

The teachings, over and over again,
in word and deed, as Delores Williams says,
point toward the close, relational care:
washing the feet, eating together, healing the sick,
feeding the people,
the intimacy of love between those who care for each other,
and the call to expand the circle wider and wider still.

The paradigmatic story: how the Samaritan,
the one others despise,
shows relational kindness and concerns,
when others pass by on the road.

Over and over again, Joshua offers to the people
what they seem to need: encouragement for some,
riddles for others, food for some, and healing for others.
Chastisement and the overturning of tables, sometimes, too.
Woe to you, sometimes.
Love is contextual and relational,
so if you are the kind of person who wonders what would
Jesus do:

they would stay home and call and text both strangers and friends
with jokes, kind words, and encouragement.
And they would mourn the deaths,
and cry out at injustice, profiteering, and the racism
which is making this crisis, like so many others, so unequal.

They would also remind us that we need one another.
To lean on.
When we grieve, when we feel alone, when we wonder
if we will ever get through, and how,
we need one another.

And that need of one another, and the responsiveness to
that need,
is one way in which the holy is manifest.
Straight-talking lover,
speaking the truth that refreshes and frees. . . .

What is God? What is divinity?
That's our question for April,
and those who experienced the community that Joshua led,
who learned from those he taught,
had an answer to that question:
Love.
If you have not Love, you have not God.

And what is that?
Love?

Well, it is real. It's gritty.
It is care and abundant relationship,
it going to the tomb together to mourn,
it is calling to say how are you,
it is keeping your distance to stay alive,
it talking it through when things are hard,

it is laughter and quiet, feeding each other and washing
your own hands,
even you don't wash someone else's feet at the moment.

It is lived out in concrete everyday acts of intimate love.
The process theologians say that God is a verb, not a noun,
and that we experience Thea, Theo, the intimate spirit of
love
in incarnational moments,
when our human need is displayed,
when we see each other –
face to face or across pixels and wires –
and recognize our common humanity,
the ache of our hearts, the joy of our smile,
the longing of our souls.

Something always sings?
Really?

Yes.

Yes.

In the mud and scum,
in the darkness before the tomb –
even if the tomb is not empty,
even when grief lays us low,
the presence of love can be made manifest
can be
can be

when our hearts reach for another
when we go together
when we care for each other
that's when love is stronger than death.

Sometimes Christians talk about what it means

to be Easter People in a Good Friday world.
Well, we're in a good Friday world.
And I don't want to skip ahead.
Loss and grief and sorrow are real.
Fear is real.

And you may feel alone.

But we are not really alone.
We are apart together – for each other.
The science is clear that what we are doing is working,
and so we need to keep at it.
But keeping each other safe . . . is working.
We are loving each other into more life.

What does it mean to be Easter people in a Good Friday
world,
when we understand the vision of relational abundance to
be the message,
the good news?
It means to love each other, fiercely, concretely
in this real world.
It means friendship that is deep,
it means lovers who respect each other,
it means families that are honest and compassionate at
once,
it means neighbors who look out for each other
it means mourning together
and smiling together
at the sweetness of memory

These everyday things let our light shine,
they show the divinity that is in each of us,
and is enacted in relationship
they let that light shine into the world.
Lo, the day of days is here!
And the new life of spring reminds us that after the winter,

life returns.
We're still in winter.
Emotionally, economically, spiritually,
we're still there.
So this Easter isn't a victory march,
but a reminder that the cracks are how the light gets in,
not a parade but a song that sings still in our heart,
not the end of the story
but a reminder of the vision we seek and try to live.

And isn't that true every year, really?
We're not there yet.
Love isn't cheap, and it isn't finished.
It gets down in the mud,
it wails together,
and it gets up together
out of the dirt
and picks up the pieces
and goes with us
into the new day
lives between us and among us
and sings,
always something sings
not a victory
a reminder
of how and why
we might love one another
this day and every day.

April 19, 2020

Gaia

Rev. Dr. Matthew Johnson

hush, writes Mary Grigolia, in the anthem Tim just sang:
Hush, and you will hear her tears,
Hush, you will hear she is trying to speak,
Hush, and Yes, and learn to sing as a chorus.

Of course we don't have a chorus here,
nobody wants me to try to sing along with Tim,
but I know that at home some of you might be singing
along.
Making a chorus across time and space.

Hush, writes Mary Grigolia, listen, so that you can join the
chorus.

Join the chorus of the earth and sing,
our joyful song of peace,
for the sun and rain and thunder
we raise our voices
for the bluegreen hills of earth.

That song was written by Kim Oler as part of the Earth
Mass,
the Missa Gaia, performed by the Paul Winter Consort
at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in 1982,
and performed each year since then at that congregation.
Sing praise for the earth, our blue green hills,
the home that gives us life,
and sing confession, too, for the wrong we have done
to our mother, our home, our selves.

Hush, listen, so you can sing the chorus.

It is the same Cathedral of St. John the Divine
that James Lovelock was invited to speak at
after he released his groundbreaking book,
Gaia: A New Look on Life on Earth.

He thought that the religious world would condemn his idea
and the scientific world would embrace it.
But the opposite happened.

Some scientists found the idea of earth as a living being to
be too much,

too wild, too mystical.
Some Christians, Jews, Unitarians, Buddhists, and many
other religious folks,
on the other hand, loved it.
The idea that we are all connected, part of one body,
part of the earth,
woven and intertwined,
one chorus with the birds and the wolves and the whales
and the crickets
they thought it was great.

And the pagans? And the indigenous people of the world?
Of course, they said, what they hell took you so long?
We've always known this.

Gaia, the Greek word for earth, is also a Greek goddess –
although my children would correct me and say, no, she's a
primordial,
before the gods even existed,
there was chaos and there was Gaia,
the mother of all of life.

She gives birth – sometimes all on her own, and sometimes
in consort with other deities –
to other gods, the sea, the land, the plants, to life.

The notion that the earth is a kind of life-giving mother, a
sacred power,
is held around the globe.
You will find in museums around the world ancient icons
and figurines of earth goddesses,
known by so many names,
some feminine, some masculine, some both, some neither,

Ishtar, Shekinah, Terra Mater, Suchness, Wakan
Tanka, Gaia—
Mark Belletini names them,

and reminds us that before the mystery of the earth,
before the wonder of it,
before the mystery,
these names

suddenly refuse to announce themselves.
And so we too fall silent,
entering the time where words end
and reality begins.
Hush, and listen.

Hush, and listen.

Entering the time when words end
and reality begins.

This is our earth.
This droplet in space.
This marble.

You know, when you experience trauma or crisis,
what happens to the body?
The body shuts down non-essential functions,
and it pushes cortisol and adrenaline into the system,
to make it so you can run or fight.
It gives you focus on the "right-in-front-of-you" crisis,
by blurring everything else.

So that's what we did – worked to shut down non-essential
things,
and focus . . .
but we can't do that for ever.
If you live in constant trauma, it wrecks havoc on your body
and soul and mind,
those chemicals and hormones that help you get through
moment,

if they stay in your system, they will cause life long health problems.

If you survive childhood trauma, or domestic abuse, or war,

then you know this.

You live it.

Some of you know it well

We can't do this for a long time.

So we are talking about re-opening, of course we are – because we think this will make the trauma go away.

God, I wish that were true.

I wish we could just open back up, be together.

But . . . friends . . .

a full re-opening will just cause another spike, another shut down, more trauma, more death.

Intermittent, ongoing trauma is even harder on the body and soul

than one event that we get through once.

I think there will be a little bit of letting up on the restrictions,

more curbside, more small offices that might open, visit friends and family, perhaps,

but large gatherings? festivals? crowded restaurants?

No.

In person church?

No.

I wish it was otherwise, but I think it's gonna be a while.

It's gonna be a while.

I'm sorry.

I don't want to be the bearer of bad news, but it's my job to tell the truth.

We're gonna be in this for a while.

When means we need our bodies and minds to switch
from a trauma response to a resilience response.
We need to switch from running a sprint
to walking in the park.
I'm not even talking about a marathon, to use that
metaphor.
I'm talking about slowing way down.

About breathing.
About being grateful for life, finding beauty, finding wonder,
finding those spiritual touchstones,
those moments of grace and divinity,
that lift our spirits and connect us to something much larger
than ourselves.

And there are lots of ways to do this.
I'm doing my weekly yoga practice at home at the same
time as the class I used to go to.
And weekly worship, this, right now, might be a touchstone
for you.
It's not the same, but I hope it still serves to ground you.
Some daily time to pray, meditate –
this is the time to do that if you can.
Start or renew a practice that works for you.

And, take a walk in the woods.
Take a walk in the neighborhood.
Roll around the block.

Reconnect with your earth mother, with life, with Gaia in her
many names,
and no name at all.

Get outside.
Look outside.
Especially, maybe, if it is snowing in late April – oy! –
looking is okay.

Rest in the earth, which is our only home,
of which we are part of,
which we are one with,
from which we come and to which we return.

In which we are held and to which we are responsible,
as members of one community – the community of Gaia,
the community of earth.

How do we move from a trauma response to a resilience
response?

Well, there are a lot of parts of that puzzle, and we'll be
talking about them

together over the next few weeks and months.

But the research into trauma and healing makes very clear
that connection with the earth, with the seasons, with
nature,

with something larger than yourself that you are yet part of,
is a vital way in which to heal.

And isn't that the best definition of divinity? of God?

Something larger than yourself that you are yet part of?

The Gaia hypothesis, that the earth is greater than the sum
of its parts,

that the seas and forests, the ice caps and the blue-green
fields,

the life that round the earth makes ours homes,

all this is connected, one, interwoven, a living, breathing,
wonder,

this idea has the potential to help us hold on, heal, get
through, and become wise

in this time of pandemic isolation.

How?

Well, nature can restore our equilibrium. When we breath
fresh air –

and there's more fresh air, these days, with less cars on the road –
when we open our hearts, eyes, ears to the world around us,
it literally recalibrates our stress response and helps us not be flooded with chemicals.

When we take the time notice the earth –
the way the buds on the trees get larger each day,
when we see the huge flakes fall,
and the way they outline the trees,
when we see the geese move over the landscape,
heading home again,
we are reminded, in Mary Oliver's words,
that whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
*the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting –
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.*

That's the point I want to make,
as we approach the 50th anniversary of earth day,
which is this Wednesday:
that the earth is our family of things.
The whole of it.
And we belong to the earth.
We are not its rulers, and not its masters.
We belong to it, are part of it, part of whole blue marble
and this is our home.
Sailing here with our ship's companions.

Earth day is designed to promote responsibility, ethics, and ecological thinking,
and that's all good –
and some of what we are learning, about how to travel less,
how to use less,

are lessons we might continue for the sake of our family of things,
but it is the spiritual lesson I think we need most right now.

You might feel isolated, apart, and disconnected.
But you are part of the earth.
Go outside.

Dig in the dirt, run the pavement or the trail,
sit in your front yard, or on your balcony,
and just notice.

Hush and listen to the sounds.

Join the chorus.

Breathe with the clouds,

weep with the rain,

soften the sounds with the falling snow,

rage with the thunder,

persist with the root,

hang on like the stubborn weed,

renew like the spring,

which doesn't feel like it will come, and doesn't, and doesn't,
and then it does.

And then, it does.

This is our home.

This earth.

We belong to no tribe, no nation, no ideology,
so much as we belong to the earth.

Sailing through the stars,

we are all companions to each other

we are responsible to each other,

the whole of life,

the whole which is larger than us and yet we are part of.

This is my invitation to you and to me,

to all of us:

as we start trying to move from trauma to resilience

remember that you are part of something amazing,
something so dynamic and beautiful and powerful,
something upon which we depend for everything,
something worthy of the label: divine. Holy. Goddess, even.
The earth.
Our home.
Our only home.

It is precious and beautiful and all interconnected,
and we are not visitors: this is us,
part of the family of things.

So slow down, and notice life, returning,
and breath in the air,
let the earth hold you and love you.
For you are holy too: you are part of this goddess,
this divinity, you are a small but interconnected part of it,
and don't forget,
don't forget,
to breathe.

As one of my favorite poets, Wendell Berry,
puts it, in words we can repeat like a mantra
in these times:

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.