

## FINDING THE COURAGE TO LOVE CREATION

I'd like to take you on a quick journey with me today, back to the 1930's and the little neighborhood in Kansas City, Missouri where I grew up. It's easy to fall in love with the natural world when you're a child. For me that world began in my backyard. It was the small backyard of a modest two-bedroom bungalow, but for me it was a virtual wonderland. There was a small peach tree and a cherry tree I could climb in...a flowering shrub bush where I could tunnel under its branches into a secret leafy cavern. And growing on the edge of a small hill was a giant oak tree with its massive roots twisting above the ground. I was small enough to tuck myself in between those roots and imagine I was part of the tree. Across the alley from the backyard was an empty lot with a path worn through the grass where we took a shortcut to school. I remember how thrilling it was to find the first violets blooming there in the spring which I would make into a bouquet for my mother.

Half a block from my house was a small city park which took up about four square blocks. In the summers, my mother would make brown bag lunches of baloney sandwiches and mason jars filled with kool-aid for my three older brothers and my younger sisters and I to take to the park where we would spend the entire day. I can remember every square foot of that park...the sidewalk that ran catty-cornered from the foot of the hill on our side of the park to the top of the hill on the far side...the little swimming pool where you cooled off when it got hot... the shelter where you could go to make crafts if it rained... the swings my brothers liked to fly off of...the meadow at the top of the hill where I would lie in the grass and gaze for hours at puffy white clouds, weaving stories about them in my head.

I'm sure that each of you has special memories from your own childhood tucked away in the corners of your mind...memories that still contain a sense of wonder and awe at simply being alive...a part of this miraculous planet.

The world seemed so much simpler when I was growing up. It was the depression era, of course, and by today's standards we would have been considered poor, but to us our lives seemed full and rich. America had not yet become the richest

nation in the world. We had not yet developed the affluent lifestyles that feed our current consumer-based economy. Our society had not yet been infected with the virus of materialism. There were no keys to the house I grew up in. My mother used to say "If anyone can find anything in there worth stealing, I'll help them." There is, strangely, a great sense of freedom that comes from knowing you have nothing to lose. However, when I look at the world around me today and what we are doing to it, I realize... we could lose it all.

It won't surprise any of you to know that I want to talk to you today about climate change. There's a reason that successful, well-educated people can still be climate-change deniers. Climate change challenges their core belief in the possibility of endless growth and unlimited consumption. They refuse to acknowledge that we live on a finite planet and are part of an intricately interwoven and interdependent web of life. They choose to ignore the reality that what we do to this planet, we do to ourselves.

Some of you may wonder what caused me to become a climate change activist. Actually, there was no sudden "aha" moment. My initial interest was triggered by my involvement in a local issue concerning fracking in a residential neighborhood near Naples. That experience made me more aware of potential environmental threats and I began an ongoing accumulation of knowledge and information that finally became so overwhelming that it was impossible not to respond...impossible to turn my back and say "It's not my problem...there's nothing I can do about it."

I'd like to share with you some of the writings that have influenced me...beginning with a 1992 book by then Senator Al Gore entitled "Earth in the Balance...Ecology and the Human Spirit." He wrote:

"I have come to believe that the world's ecological balance depends on more than just our ability to restore a balance between civilization's ravenous appetite for resources and the fragile equilibrium of the earth's environment; it depends on

more, even, than our ability to restore a balance between ourselves as individuals and the civilization we aspire to create and sustain. In the end, we must restore a balance within ourselves between who we are and what we are doing. Each of us must take a greater personal responsibility for this deteriorating global environment; each of us must take a hard look at the habit of mind and action that reflect – and have led to – this grave crisis.

The need for personal equilibrium can be described in an even simpler way. The more deeply I search for the roots of the global environmental crisis, the more I am convinced that it is an outer manifestation of an inner crisis that is, for lack of a better word, spiritual.”

Al Gore has shown extraordinary dedication and leadership in his quest to engage people everywhere in the struggle to preserve our world for future generations. Most of the world’s leaders have joined that struggle. Including the leader of the Catholic church, Pope Francis. His Encyclical Letter from May 24, 2015 is a compelling document. In it, Pope Francis challenges people to radically change their habits of over-consumption and self-indulgence, for they come at the expense of the natural world and of those less fortunate than themselves. I’ll leave a copy of it in the office for anyone who would like to read it. I’d like to quote a short section to you. Section 160:

“What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up? This question not only concerns the environment in isolation; the issue cannot be approached piecemeal. When we ask ourselves what kind of world we want to leave behind, we think in the first place of its general direction, its meaning and its values. Unless we struggle with these deeper issues, I do not believe that our concern for ecology will produce significant results. But if these issues are courageously faced, we are led inexorably to ask other pointed questions: What is the purpose of our life in this world? Why are we here? What is the goal of our work and all our efforts? What need does the earth have of us? It is no longer enough, then, simply to state that we should be concerned for future generations. We need to see that what is at

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stake is our own dignity. Leaving an inhabitable planet to future generations is, first and foremost up to us. The issue is one which dramatically affects us, for it has to do with the ultimate meaning of our earthly sojourn.”

These are questions, of course, which have been asked by theologians and philosophers throughout history. But they take on a new dimension of meaning when we consider the potential threat our current way of life poses for the continued viability of life on this planet.

Quite frankly, I didn't expect to reach this point in my life and find myself facing an existential crisis. Like most of you, I imagine, I've led the typical American lifestyle of comfort and abundance, and by the standards of the majority of the people on earth, one even of luxury and wealth. Only recently have I grown aware of the true cost of that lifestyle. I'd like to share with you some statistics about the relationship of economic inequality to global warming. These come from a recent report in the National Science Review Journal from a team of U.S. and Japanese scientists. “About 50% of the world's people live on less than \$3 per day, 75% on less than \$8.50 and 90 % on less than \$23. One effect of this inequality is that the top 10% produce almost as much total carbon emissions as the bottom 90% combined.”

The price the world must pay for the affluent lifestyle of those of who have lived in the developed countries is apparently climate change. Our industrial age has not only spewed carbon into the air and triggered global warming, it's polluted the worlds waterways with industrial and agricultural chemicals, dumped waste and excess heat into our oceans, destroyed most of our rainforests, degraded our soil and is now triggering what scientists are calling the 6<sup>th</sup> extinction...an end to much of life on earth, possibly including our own. Is that the legacy I want to leave? Is that what my life has been all about? Is that what your life has been all about?

Of course not. All over the world, people are asking themselves these questions, and challenging the status quo. Governments from most of the world's countries have agreed to work together to alter the course humanity has taken and to

protect our planet. President Obama helped lead the charge that led to the Paris Accord...a global climate change agreement that ironically came into force in November of 2016...just days before Donald Trump was elected to be our new President.

Judging from President Trump's first two months in office, the challenges that lie ahead of us have gotten a lot harder. If we truly love creation, we're going to have to find the courage to rescue it from the powerful and determined grip of the oligarchy now in control of our government in Washington and increasingly in many of our states as well. We must fight to let the world know that President Trump and the climate change deniers he has empowered in his administration do not speak for the American people. And there's only one way to do that. By speaking out about climate change ourselves. In the past it's been easy to just let it slide. To ignore it...to pretend not to notice. But if we continue to be silent we are in effect forfeiting our power, handing it over to the deniers, acquiescing to their lies. Edmond Burke, back in 1770, said it so memorably: "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing. Nobody made a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could only do a little."

If we truly love creation, we must find the courage to be its defenders. We must find within ourselves the mental and moral strength to challenge the status quo...to demand an end to the rapaciousness that is destroying our planet...to alter our own habits of consumption and wastefulness and learn to live in harmony with the natural processes of the earth.

Many of the world's largest corporations have already embarked upon plans to conduct their business in ways that foster sustainability and the health of the environment. Scientists and engineers are exploring new technologies to help mitigate and ultimately adapt to the inevitable warming of our globe. It turns out that we are living in a time of extraordinary scientific advances and great potentiality. The question becomes not can we alter the future of humanity, but rather, do we have the will to make the changes necessary to insure our survival.

I wish I could say to you that of course we will do what is necessary, but the reality is that powerful special interests are fighting to maintain the status quo and doing everything in their power to deny the reality of the threat we all face if we fail to act while we can still make a difference. I'm not sure who said it, but it bears repeating. "Ours is the first generation to feel the impacts of climate change and the last one who can do anything about it." Think about that for a minute. If those of us alive today fail to act, the window of opportunity to alter the future of life on earth will close and we will move inexorably toward extinction.

Incomprehensible....right? Don't let that thought paralyze you. Rather let it inspire you to become a part of the greatest, most massive grassroots movement the world has ever seen. Join with millions upon millions of other people from every nation on earth who are coming together to protect our precious planet.. Embrace the challenge of learning to live in harmony with the magnificence of Earth's creation and, I promise you, you will discover spiritual depths of feeling you didn't even know existed. Become part of the solution rather than part of the problem and you will discover a renewed excitement at simply being alive. Reach out to your children and your grandchildren and inspire them to join with you in the life-affirming process of regenerating the earth and returning it to its natural abundance and beauty.

My deepest and most dearly held wish is that future generations of children will experience as I did, the delight and wonder of the natural world and fall in love, as I did, with the mystery of creation. That will only happen if we reach deep inside ourselves and find the courage to stand up to power.

I'd like to share with you a poem I wrote last year. I gave it to my grandson on his seventeenth birthday and told him I wrote it for him to give to his great grandchildren. I call it "An Elder's Promise."

AN ELDER'S PROMISE

I don't know your name  
Or even if you're alive,  
But I'm doing all I can  
To make sure you survive.  
I'm your great-great grandmother  
Who lived a century ago  
In a world far different  
From the one you must know.

For I was given a world  
By those who came before me,  
That was abundant and beautiful...  
Miraculous to see.  
But we were arrogant and wasteful,  
Caring only for today,  
With no thought for your tomorrow  
Or the price you must pay.

Too late we understood  
All the damage we had done  
To the earth and all its creatures  
As the web of life unspun.  
Though my years now are waning  
This I promise to do:  
Fight the senseless greed and lies  
And try to save this world... for you.

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One thing I know for sure about this congregation: It is filled with thinking, caring, creative, talented and accomplished individuals who have each, in his or her own way, made a difference in this world. I'm asking each of you to examine your own heart and mind and find within the courage and the will to take action...to reach out to others in your family and your neighborhood...to join the environmental movement that is rapidly growing and evolving to meet the challenges of global warming and overcome the obstruction of those who seek only to cling to power.

There are so many ways to get involved. Add your name to the Climate Action Team mailing list and join in whatever activities call out to you. Get involved with our efforts to become a Green Sanctuary. Be sure, by the way, that you fill out the survey in your Order of Service and return it to All Faiths. Learn more about the many environmental groups active in our community and help support them. Get involved with politics. Whatever suits you best.

To put it simply, I'm asking you to engage...to act.

Ultimately, I'm asking you to find the courage to love creation.