

**Coming home to our true nature**  
**Homily by Peter Holmes – Oct. 20, 2013**  
**Unitarian Universalist Church of Columbia, Missouri**

Congratulations for getting here for a third Sunday lay led service. By your actions you are changing the world. Give yourself a round of applause.

Greetings fellow travelers on this space ship Earth. (Earth with a capital E just has Peter has capital P). We have come a long way in the past 200 years and have made many amazing discoveries and advances. We have created cars, radio, television, telephones, computers and the internet. We have built the atom bomb and hydrogen bomb and we now have the power to destroy our world if we so choose. We have unlocked the puzzle of genetic structure and are capable of intervening in the creation of new life forms. We can travel anywhere on land and sea with ease and can communicate around the world in an instant. We have developed an incredible body of knowledge and made it accessible through the internet to everybody on Earth. Human kind has been on a glorious journey of exploration that would be incomprehensible to our ancestors. But this journey has taken us away from our roots in the Earth, from our roots in nature. In our enthusiast search for understanding, in our reaching for the stars, we are beginning to discover that the secret to the Holy Grail of peace, connection, and meaning is right on our own doorstep. This secret was known by ancient cultures including the American Indians and is summarized in this quote from Chief Noah Sealh

This we know. The Earth does not belong to us, we belong to the Earth.  
This we know. All things are connected like the blood that unites one family.

All things are connected. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons and daughters of the Earth.

We do not weave the web of life. We are merely strands in it.

Whatever we do to the Earth, we do to ourselves.

In other words the ground of our being is in the Earth, in our interconnectedness with all the animals and plants on this precious planet. The Earth is an extension of our mind and body, or our minds and bodies are outgrowths of the Earth. We are the Earth, the Earth is us. If we lose touch with the Earth we lose touch with ourselves, with our true nature.

So I have a dream. I dream that we can turn the mighty force of our intellect and longings back to the Earth, our one and only true home, and, as TS Eliot wrote, “the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and to know that place for the first time.” Having seen the Earth from space, if you like having seen ourselves from the outside, we can now truly grasp the uniqueness and preciousness of our amazing Blue Boat Home. We can open and acknowledge “the beast deep within each of us that is shouting that the Earth is exactly what we always wanted.”

The journey that I am talking about, the searching, the gaining of perspective, the coming home, seems to me to describe a natural cycle by which individuals and cultures gain spiritual wisdom. It has certainly been true for me in my life. I feel very lucky to grow up in a small town called Rye on the south east coast of England. I have very good memories of my childhood. The weather in England is gentle compared with Missouri. It is never very hot or very cold, there were no ticks or chiggers, and, as a child, I spent most of my spare time outside. (I also did not have television or computers to pull for my attention). As Richard Louv says in *Last Child in the Woods*: “I knew my woods and fields; I knew every bend in the creek and dip in the beaten dirt paths. I wandered those woods even in my dreams” I remember the lost hours that I would spend with a net and jam jar chasing newts, tadpoles, frogs and dragon fly larvae in the ditches. I remember how I would be so engaged that I would lose track of time and, for me this was extreme, not notice that it was time for lunch. I remember crawling through the grass during some exciting hunting game, feeling so attuned to my senses that

I could have been a rabbit or fox. I remember the wildness and exhilaration of the sea shore in winter. I remember such a vivid feeling of connection and belonging.

As I grew older I became interested in physics, astronomy, and scientific discovery. I wanted to know how things worked. I graduated from college with a degree in Physics and Mathematics and began teaching high school. I began sharing the wonder and excitement of scientific discovery and understanding with young people. I was going to be part of the movement that, armed with scientific knowledge, was going to create a brave new world. Over the years my perspective gradually changed and I became more interested in psychology, in what was happening inside myself rather than trying to find answers in the outside world. Now it feels that I have come full circle. Now, having learned about myself and the world, I can come back to where I started as a child and stand in awe and wonder at the magnificence and richness of my true home in nature.

For some years now I have gone to the woods every month to meditate. This is where I was this morning. To me this is a way for me to reconnect, to come home again to that feeling of belonging that I felt as a child. It is not always easy to let go of the constant busyness of my mind and for the first half of an hour's meditation I often find myself somewhere else other than in the woods. It takes me time to be present and reconnect with the plants, the trees, the birds, and the insects and begin to feel at peace in the wilderness. Eventually I do get there and begin to feel reconnected and recharged.

I have always felt at home, at peace in wild places but I know there are people who find this more difficult. The unfamiliarity and discomfort of wild places can be just too off-putting. Casey, my wife, doesn't have the love of raw, wild nature that I have and she will often prefer a walk through downtown neighborhoods rather than a walk in the woods. She certainly has an appreciation for plants and trees but in their relationship to human living situations. Some people live in urban areas with little

opportunity to experience wilderness. However, there are plenty of initiatives to plant vegetable gardens in the inner city and inner city dwellers love their parks and green spaces. My sense is that all of us have a natural affinity and appetite for contact with animals and plants and there is no doubt in my mind that, as a culture, we have become disconnected from our roots in nature. Richard Louv coined the phrase “nature deficit disorder” and appealed for an effort to work on reducing this deficit by healing the broken bond between our young children and nature. Not just the health of the Earth is at stake but our own mental, physical, and spiritual health is at stake too.

This is my dream for myself, our church, our culture, and the human population of this planet: that we can come home to our true place in nature, that we can heal our broken bond with the Earth and create a peaceful sustainable future. We have now gathered so much information, solved so many problems, and begun to unravel the intricacies of the ecology of our planet. We have the ability and the insight to redesign our lives to be in harmony with the Earth’s natural systems. We have the ability to build zero emission houses and use algae as an energy source to heat buildings. The knowledge and technology is there as it has never been before to make the changes that we need to make to live more sustainably. It just needs determination and action from each individual to make it happen. It needs groups to come together, to work together and make the change a reality. We have come to the point in history where we can combine our high flying intellect with our soft warm feeling body that is intimately connected to the Earth to create a secure home for ourselves and future generations.

Our new UU mission statement reads: In the spirit of courageous love, we forge a community of radical welcome and deep connection that moves us together to heal the world. And a section of our vision says: The Unitarian Universalist Church of Columbia grows in environmental consciousness and advocates for the health of the Earth and all living things. With this as our starting point, I would put to you that our church can take a lead in remaking a deep connection with the Earth, and in

doing so we can model a path to wholeness and renewal. I would like to see this as a central part of our congregational life and worship – that we come to love, cherish, and honor the Earth as an integral part of ourselves and our church. Let's really get radical and make UU a home for a new 21<sup>st</sup> century Earth-centered spirituality.

Repeat after me

The Earth is my home

I love the Earth

Give yourselves a round of applause