

A FUSIT Sermon: *The Climate Crisis and Spiritual Growth* by Ann Rhodes, October 8, 2023

In what ways is the climate crisis calling us to spiritual growth?

In the middle of everything falling apart, what is coming together?

What does the climate crisis have to do with love?

I think the crisis of climate change is, at its core, a spiritual crisis. Let me explain.

First, what is spirituality? I am not a religious person, but I do feel my life is guided by a sense of spirituality. But what does that mean?

To me, it means **awe, and wonder, and a sense of interconnection**, which brings humility, gratitude, and a feeling of love. Maybe that resonates with how you feel about spirituality.

Awe, Wonder, Interconnection, Love.

What do I want to share with you about those –aspects of spirituality?

Taking awe and wonder first –

Of course, there is our amazing little planet, in a mid-sized galaxy, among millions of galaxies and massive unknown realities and spans of space and time. Some galaxies are billions of light years away from us – how do I even conceive of that! Awe. That changes my sense of who I am.

But coming closer to daily life - Whatever we look at closely enough can bring us to awe. Anything we look closely enough at.

Taking a drink of water, for example. Looking more closely ... it comes right out of the tap! Amazing. The well goes deep down into the earth! There is water flowing constantly way down there! This water is part of a vast body of water that circles the globe – always joined to itself, a global unifier, through oceans, moving, evaporating, freezing, thawing. All the water present with us on Earth has been here forever. There is no new water. Awe.

Look closely at a patch of weeds, at the migrating geese, at the full moon, at your cell phone, at your own hand. Awe and wonder.

Wonder. Why is there life? How did life happen? Every breath I take. Every step I take. Trees talk to each other in their underground network? Salmon swim upstream to spawn? Certain whales habitually congregate in one area of the ocean to compose a single piece of music together? Honey bees exhibit a high degree of fidelity to a specific patch of flowers. Muscle memory isn't something that exists in the mind, like a mental memory of how to do something, the memory actually exists in the muscle fibers. Wonder is everywhere.

When I pause to contemplate these things I am humbled, it changes my sense of who I am. I find myself in another mindset, another space, shifted out of my scheduled, distracted life. To me, that is a spiritual place. Of course I can't live in this space all the time. I do have to clean the catboxes. But it's there.

And how about **interconnection and Love** as part of spirituality.

I would like to propose a **redefinition of Love**.

Think of the phrase "I love you," and how that is played out in our culture. It usually signifies romance and sexual attraction. Or how we feel about someone we know well and feel connected to. That's one level of love.

Then there is the love in families – we love each other, even if we don't always like each other or get along or agree, or if we can't stand each other. But there is something deep there because we are family. That is a different kind of love.

Something real is there, that we can't turn our back on, even if we are not close with our family members. Now, why is that family love so strong, enduring? Because **we came from each other**, we are cellularly and genetically, physically connected. We are literally made of each other.

And Now, think about how, over millions of years, the entire **web of life** on Earth is cellularly, organically, chemically, physically connected. Trees, flowers, insects, fish, coyotes, birds, water, air, soil – we all literally evolved together over billions of years. We are all, the whole web of life, all made of each other, made for each other.

Trees evolved to breathe out oxygen and breathe in the carbon dioxide that we mammals exhale. So that we can both live. We depend on each other.

All plants evolved to interact with the microbes and other life forms in the soil, cycling nutrients, mutually benefitting each other, depending on each other.

Flowers gradually evolved, over thousands of years, with shapes and colors that attract pollinators and offer them food in exchange for reproductive services.

All life forms cycle water through our bodies and exchange chemicals through the air. All life forms depend on each other, and of course on the light and warmth of the sun. We are all related – on such a deep level.

I would propose that this deep, ancient connection with the whole web of life is the deepest form of love. The interconnections and interdependence are so profound, so essential, so pervasive, so ancient. The web of life is an unfathomable miracle. And we humans are inextricably woven into it.

Being an old hippie, I can say - that blows my mind.

So ... There is **no such thing as independence**. There is no such thing as not belonging. We are all part of each other, the whole web of life, all made from each other, sustained by each other. There is a profound reality of belonging, if we can remember to feel it. If we pay attention to it. And as we sit beside each other, or meet each other's gaze, or share bread together, we can see in each other that belonging, mammals that we are. I see that you are part of the web of life, as I am. We are in this together. Compassion. I think that is deep love, and I think that is spiritual. I think that is how the climate crisis is calling us to spirituality. When we see this amazing web, that we are so intertwined with, when we see that endangered, I think that calls us to respond spiritually. Calling us to a spiritually-guided, communal, necessary transformation.

So here we are. Right now. In this beautiful room.

Look around you – all these people. Real people. (Even if you don't always get along.)

And with an amazing day outside.

And someone's hand is right next to you.

And you are sitting on a bench that used to be a tree.

And this building is resting on what used to be a marshy wetland, where mink, racoons, beavers, turtles, herons, ducks, osprey, muskrat and the Gayocohono people lived together for thousands of years.

Maybe this sense of deep history, inescapable interconnection, awe, belonging, and love could be what brings us all together when everything is falling apart.