

# Order of Service Creating Paradise

Sunday, January 17, 2010

9:30 AM and 11:00 AM

Welcome and Announcements: Board Host

Choral Introit

Chalice Lighting

Opening Words

Opening Song: #1000 "Morning Has Come"

Reading: from *The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community*  
by David C. Korten

Celebrating with Music: "Song of Community"

Sermon: "Creating Paradise"

Sung Response: #1017 "Building a New Way"

Spoken Response

Candles of Joy and Sorrow/Offering

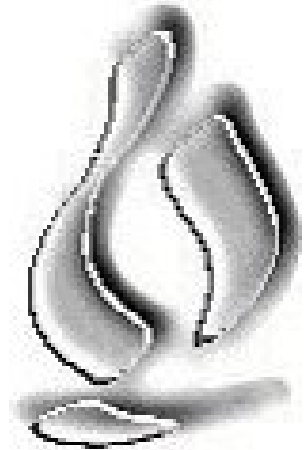
Prayer and Meditation

Closing Song: #1018 "Come and Go With Me (verses 1 & 2)

Closing Words

Closing Song: #1018 "Come and Go With Me (verses 3 & 4)

Celebrants: Don Allen Hall and the Rev. Dr. Gretchen Woods



**Chalice Lighting:** Our Chalice provides the light and warmth to guide us to live by the values we share as Unitarian Universalists. Thus we continue our quest to create healthy religious communities where our "responsible search for truth and meaning" is possible. May its light so shine.

**Opening Words:** Come, come, whoever you are! Join us as we join together to study, to serve, to celebrate life; to encourage one another to find the best within each of us, to bring it out into the world as a gift and a blessing, to assist one another in overcoming our challenges and to honor each other for our successes, for the greater good of all of life.

**Reading:** from *The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community* by David C. Korten

Albert Einstein famously observed, "No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it." Our task is to bring forth the higher levels of human consciousness and recreate our cultures and institutions to align with our possibilities.

Throughout the twentieth century, most revolutionaries used guns to wrest control of dominator institutions from ruling elites in the name of justice. They missed the truth that violence begets violence, domination begets domination; and the dominator institutions are unjust no matter the party affiliation of the rulers.

Violent competition for dominator power is the way of Empire. And its practice affirms Empire. Societies based on the organizing principles of community, democracy. And live of life are created only by living them into being through the practice of community, democracy, and love of life.

A few of the twentieth century's greatest leaders, most notably Mohandas K. Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., worked with a higher-order vision of how truly transformational change comes about – not from the barrel of a gun, but from living the change we seek. Their vision and example inspired the great global social movements of the twentieth century that demonstrated the human capacities for radically democratic, non-violent self-organization and prepared the way of our current work.

The leaders of Empire use the power and resources of the institutions of Empire to motivate followers to submit to their personal authority, values, and definition of purpose. Leadership in Earth Community emerges through processes of mutual empowerment that encourage every person to recognize and express their capacities for leadership on behalf of the whole. Almost inevitably, this leadership comes from outside the institutions of Empire – from the growing millions of people with the mature consciousness that enables them to envision the possibilities of this human moment and to accept responsibility for bringing those possibilities into being. In Earth Community, leadership roles evolve and rotate in response to the needs of the situation and the skills and circumstances of the participants.

Although the leadership styles of Earth Community may seem chaotic and diffuse to those accustomed to the dominator styles of Empire, they fit the pattern by which all healthy living systems self-organize. This pattern of self-organizing, distributed power gives contemporary social movements their distinctive vitality and makes them nearly impossible to suppress. (pp. 315-316)



## Sermon

### **“Creating Paradise” by the Rev. Dr. Gretchen Woods**

Today, we complete the three part series of sermons about the notion of paradise with an exploration of principles for co-creating truly healthy community in our time, thus creating paradise in our own way, beyond any unknown afterlife. I choose to focus upon what I have learned as a student of healthy communities in present times, rather than trying to fit others’ religious theologies that may – or may not – provide good guidance for such a venture.

When, in 1987 I began to study what constitutes healthy religious communities as part of a doctoral program at the Northwest Theological Union in Seattle, Washington, I believed that answers to questions about producing healthy systems would be well researched and completely understood. I thought the fields of cultural anthropology, sociology, and psychology would have clear and complete answers for me, from which I could extrapolate to religious communities in particular, most particularly the congregation I was serving at the time.

Boy Howdy, was I wrong! I found in human systems a nascent field, mostly studied in psychological counseling systems. I found a field that was just beginning to understand what constitutes a “dysfunctional system” and that had little hope of telling us how to create a truly healthy system. While I appreciate the value of “putting the fun” in dysfunctional, I was more than a little frustrated when I tried to find resources for transforming sick systems, which seemed to be endemic. One writer, who shall remain nameless for the purposes of this sermon, asserted that 96% of families are dysfunctional, then seemed at a loss to tell me how to change that. Not particularly useful.

In the late 1980’s, I only found four books that offered processes to make positive transformation in human systems: Stephanie Covington and Liana Becket’s *Leaving the Enchanted Garden: the Path from Relationship Addiction to Intimacy* (more on that later), Parker J. Palmer’s *The Company of Strangers: Christians and the Renewal of America’s Public Life* (His description of healthy public life was remarkable for the time.), M. Scott Peck’s *The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace* (He made it clear that a group has to go through chaos to get out of pseudocommunity and into true community.), and Starhawk’s *Truth or Dare: Encounters with Power, Authority, and Mystery*. It is fascinating to me that the most useful book was written by a self-proclaimed witch. Those of you who have listened to my sermons over the past decade have heard what I learned from these books. I turn to other, more recent resources and more recent personal experiences for this sermon.

Those of you who listened to the first two sermons in this series already know the thinking of Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Parker. Let us turn instead to David C. Korten. In his book, *The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community*, he synthesizes from many sources ideas that offer a way for our human communities to be healthy and whole: in essence, ways to create a paradise. He emphasizes learning from nature offered by biologists Janine Benyus, Mae-Wan Ho, Lynn Margulis, and Elisabet Sahtouris, as well as other top biologists who recognize several “organizing principles for the partnership societies we must now create to enjoy paradise on earth in our time.”<sup>1</sup> These principles are as follows:

1. **The Principle of Cooperative Self-Organization** – We see that life has a way of establishing and maintaining a positive and . . . “energetic dance of mutual influence, self-regulation, and adaptation that maintains a balance of individual and collective needs at each of life’s many levels of organization. . . .”<sup>2</sup> Further, each individual is an entity in its own right, with “. . . its own capacity to choose in the interests of both self and whole.”<sup>3</sup> Thus Korten asserts that individuals need not choose between self-interest and the needs of others. He adds a most powerful statement:

According to Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan, one of life’s most important lessons is that the species that survive and prosper are ultimately those that find a niche in which they meet their own needs in ways that simultaneously serve others.”<sup>4</sup>

Sahtouris makes an even stronger point that cooperation is better than unbridled competition. In fact, ruthless competition now poses a threat to our own species, as well as to many others on our planet. What a surprise! We had best learn more and better ways of cooperating in all of our human systems. This could involve learning and practicing compassionate communication within this congregation and with outside organizations. Maybe we need another round of such training soon. I know I constantly need refreshers. It is truly difficult to overcome habits of our families and cultures. I am also reminded to reread the Covenant of Right Relations that we developed in the last decade.

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<sup>1</sup> David C. Korten. *The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community*. P. 291.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p.292

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

2. **The Principle of Place** – “Life has learned to organize into complex multi-organism ecosystems that adapt to the most intricate details of the microenvironments of their particular locale.”<sup>5</sup> For example, Korten reminds us how dangerous invasive introduced species have turned out to be in many varying ecosystems. I think of “the holly and the ivy” here in the Pacific Northwest, the “possum” in New Zealand, Walmarts in local economies. We must learn to live “. . . as members of cooperative living communities exquisitely adapted to the microenvironments of our particular place on earth.”<sup>6</sup> We should become more aware of the context in which our human community is set and how we may better interact with that larger context. We might consider how we may work together with other UU congregations in Oregon and with other religious organizations here in Corvallis.

3. **The Principle of Permeable Boundaries** – Life has learned that to maintain the coherence of its internal energy flows, it must bound itself at each level of organization with a permeable membrane by which it can manage the intake and dissipation of energy and matter from and into its environment, and exclude predators.<sup>7</sup> Talk about needing healthy boundaries! This clearly asserts that our healthy human systems, our religious communities, need to be able to welcome and engage new members, while being careful to manage those who are damaging to the health of the system.

This may confuse UUs who believe that every single person, especially children, should be allowed to express themselves in whatever way they deem positive for her or him as an individual, no matter how much pain or distress this expression may cause others in the system. We fail our children when we teach them this.

Our UU Purposes and Principles set up a series of value-driven norms that make it clear that not all behaviors are acceptable within our communities. These norms encourage the health of our systems and allow us to discern those who may need to be set outside the community until they are able to respond to our values. One example is child-molesters. Another is people who promote violence as a solution to human problems. We need to develop healthy and permeable boundaries, so that dangers may be dealt with wisely and positive influences welcomed.

4. **The Principle of Abundance** – Life has learned that frugality and sharing are the keys to abundance for all.<sup>8</sup>

There is no better example of this than our annual Rummage sale in which we offer good things that each of us has found no longer useful to those who may find them exquisitely useful. When we know that we have more than we need and do not allow our “things” to own us, we also know that others may well use what we no longer need – and vice-versa. Parker J. Palmer puts it this way: “Scarce resources are shared and abundance is generated.”<sup>9</sup> Korten adds: “True abundance depends on frugality, mutuality, and sharing.”<sup>10</sup>

We should recognize the limits of our resources, be they human or financial, and also learn to share more fully so that those resources can reach more people. We continue to find ways to bring funds into the ministerial discretionary fund, and we also need to recognize that our staff is hurting from cuts in pensions, professional expenses, and health insurance. Balancing various needs requires economies of scale and concern for all of life, if we are to create paradise.

5. **The Principle of Diversity** – Life has learned that the greater the diversity of the bio-community, the greater its resilience in times of crisis and the greater its potential for creative innovation in the pursuit of new possibilities.<sup>11</sup> We need people with different experiences, cultures, genetic make-up, for the health of the whole society. As Korten adds:

. . . a diversity of age, gender, culture, religion, and race provides an invaluable contribution to the resilience and creative potential of human communities. We humans have yet to learn to celebrate, cultivate, and harvest the benefits of diversity long denied by our many chauvinisms.<sup>12</sup>

Clearly, we need to recognize the incredible diversity already within *this* religious community (cultural, theological, philosophical, and political), *and* we need to go further in honoring that diversity, before we can begin to bring in more diversity.

Given these basic principles, *how* can we change our world for the better? As noted before, we need to practice compassionate communication and peacemaking in all of our relationships, so that we provide our selves and our children with models for problem solving that go beyond violence.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. pp. 292 – 293.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 293.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 294.

<sup>9</sup> Parker J. Palmer, *The Company of Strangers*. P. 19.

<sup>10</sup> Korten. P. 294.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

Furthermore, Korten insists that we must develop new stories that tell us how to co-create healthy communities. We need to tell stories of prosperity that “. . . depends on life-serving economies that satisfy our basic material needs, maintain a sustainable balance with the Earth’s natural systems, strengthen the bonds of caring communities, and support all persons in the full realization of their humanity.”<sup>13</sup> These stories will have to be new and creative to overcome the powerful cultural tales of competition as the only successful way to create paradise.

There are many more ideas to help rebuild healthy communities, our version of paradise here on earth. The Syracuse Cultural Workers offer a rich and varied beginning in their poster, “How to Build Global Community”:

Think of no one as “them.”  
Don’t confuse your comfort with your safety  
Talk to strangers.  
Imagine other cultures through their poetry and novels.  
Listen to music you don’t understand. Dance to it.  
Act locally.  
Notice the workings of power and privilege in your culture.  
Question consumption.  
Know how your lettuce and coffee are grown:  
Wake up and smell the exploitation.  
Look for fair trade and union labels.  
Help build economies from the bottom up.  
Acquire few needs.  
Learn a second (or third) language.  
Visit people, places, and cultures – not tourist attractions.  
Learn people’s history. \*\* Redefine progress.  
Know physical and political geography.  
Play games from other cultures. \*\* Watch films with subtitles.  
Know your heritage.  
Honor everyone’s holidays.  
Look at the moon and imagine someone else’  
somewhere else, looking at it too.  
Read the UN’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights.  
Understand the global economy in terms of people,  
land, and water.  
Know where your bank banks.  
Never believe you have a right to anyone else’s resources.  
Refuse to wear corporate logos; defy corporate domination.  
Question military/corporate connections.  
Don’t confuse money with wealth or time with money.  
Have a pen/email pal. \*\* Honor indigenous cultures.  
Judge governance by how well it meets all people’s needs.  
Be skeptical about what you read.  
Eat adventurously.  
Enjoy vegetables, beans, and grains in your diet.  
Choose curiosity over certainty.  
Know where your water comes from and where your wastes go.  
Pledge allegiance to the earth: question nationalism.  
Think South, Central, and North –  
there are many Americas.  
Assume that many others share your dreams.  
Know that no one is silent though many are not heard.  
Work to change this.

These are all very good suggestions. I know you can think of many more. In the end, the most valuable lesson I have learned is from Covington and Becket: Healthy human communities operate, not by rules, but through negotiating around shared values. Therefore, our UU Purposes and Principles are essential to our endeavor.

Finally, it boils down to how we learn to trust. Can we actually have faith in our selves and others so that we *can* truly co-create paradise here and now? Our choices here and now matter.

So Be It! Blessed Be!



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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p.303.