

March 17TH Sunday service covering personal action on climate change through simplicity

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS– MEG DORSEY

PRELUDE – *A Simple Life*, Brian Crain

CHALICE LIGHTING & INVOCATION

This morning we light our chalice with these words from Henry David Thoreau

"Simplify your life. Don't waste the years struggling for things that are unimportant. Don't burden yourself with possessions. Keep your needs and wants simple and enjoy what you have. Don't destroy your peace of mind by looking back, worrying about the past. Live in the present. Simplify!"

Come, let us worship together.

Why I Seek Simplicity - BARB MUNN

I've been doing a lot of marching the last couple of years. I know that many of you have too. There are scores of reasons to march, but for me, the primary motivator is to demand action on climate change. My concerns about climate change are what prompted me to join the Green Sanctuary team here at SFUU, and it's why I stand before you now to talk about voluntary simplicity. Can choosing to live a simpler life reduce our carbon use and can it bring other rewards? This is what we will be considering today in this Sunday Service.

I know that to many, Climate Change is so big, so unimaginable and overwhelming that we just can't connect to it on a personal level. Surely, climate change is something that only the North Pole, or some small island in the middle of the Pacific has to worry about. But, that is NOT the case - all people on Earth face the growing impacts of climate change together, and the sooner we start doing something about it, the better off we all will be. So, how do we make a personal connection with this issue, how do we pull it out of the abstract, put it into our hearts, and let it guide our actions everyday?

In a few weeks the Green Sanctuary Team in conjunction with the Worship Committee and Children's Religious Education will be bringing the Climate Ribbon Art Ritual to SFUU to help explore what living in a world of climate change means to each of one us. This ritual was originally created for the 2014 People's Climate March in New York City. Since then it has been reproduced numerous times across the globe. I'd like to give you a little preview of this ritual.

Go here for a video about the Climate Ribbon Art Ritual: <http://www.theclimateribbon.org/>

What would YOU write on a climate ribbon? What would your children or grandchildren write?

In two weeks time, during the March 31st Sunday service, our Director of Religious Education, Adrean Dills, and the children of SFUU will use the *Story for All Ages* to begin distributing ribbons so that we can build our own 'tree' of memory and hope for the Earth and its climate. If you cannot attend that service, ribbons will be available for two weeks following that service. Then, our April 14th Sunday service will be devoted to completing the ritual. We'll choose ribbons from the tree and affirm our commitment to protect all that we hold dear about the Earth.

Over the next couple of weeks, we invite you to reflect on what you love and hope to never lose due do climate change so that you will be prepared to hang a meaningful ribbon on our tree starting on March 31st. I hope that you will join us for this powerful experience.

OPENING SONG: Sing It for the Creatures (written and composed by Sue Ribauld)

STORY FOR ALL AGES – *The Lorax*, by Dr. Seuss

A classic story written way back in 1971 at the beginning of the modern Environmental Movement in the United States. *[If you have not read this story, I recommend that you do! Some references to the words from this story do occur in the homily]*

CHILDREN'S RECESSONAL

A Traditional Navajo prayer for the Earth: ***Ancient Mother* - #1069**

PASTORAL PRAYER – MEG DORSEY

JOYS AND SORROWS - with Meditation Hymn **#1031 – *Filled with Loving Kindness***

GUIDED MEDITATION – MEG DORSEY

READING: Simplicity is Not Sacrifice

Simplicity is a transformational experience that asks us to live an authentic life, to take time out of our rushing, busy daily routines, to slow down and consider what matters in our lives. No matter why we choose a simpler life, by doing so, we will ultimately reduce damage to the Earth. This reading is from Duane Elgin's book *Voluntary Simplicity*.

"Simplicity that is *voluntary* – consciously chosen, deliberate, and intentional – supports a higher quality of life. Here are some reasons people consciously choose simplicity:

- Simplicity fosters a more harmonious relationship with the Earth – the land, air, and water.
- Simplicity enhances living with balance – inner and outer, work and family, family and community.
- Simplicity increases the resources available for future generations.
- Simplicity keeps our eyes on the prize of what matters most in our lives – the quality of our relationships with family, friends, community, nature, and cosmos.

Voluntary simplicity is NOT sacrifice:

- Sacrifice is a consumer lifestyle that is overstressed, overbusy, and overworked.
- Sacrifice is the stress of commuting long distances and coping with traffic.
- Sacrifice is global climate disruption, crop failure, famine, and forced migration.
- Sacrifice is the absence of feelings of neighborliness and community.

... Simplicity creates the opportunity for greater fulfillment in work, meaningful connection with others, feelings of kinship with all life, and awe of a living universe."

REFLECTION – KELLY CHANDLER

Simplicity. Meriam Webster says this is the state of being simple, uncomplicated or uncompounded. dictionary.com includes phrases such as freedom from complexity, absence of luxury, pretentiousness, ornament; plainness

Sigh. If only it were so simple.

My history with the notion of simplicity starts with my mother I think, though she wouldn't have called it that at the time— AND neither did I! She would have attributed it, proudly, to her frugal,

waste-not-want-not nature. She often told us to turn out the lights when we left the room, to not stand with the refrigerator door open, and to put more clothes on if we were cold rather than turn up the heat. Using throw-away paper plates was decadent. We never had plastic wrap in the house—always wax paper. She regularly salvaged and repaired other people's throw-always rather than buying something new. As I recognize so very often, she was way ahead of her time.

And yet, simplifying in today's world presents many complications. During one Social Action Committee meeting many years ago, when Sydney and Dennis were our ministers and we were discussing simplicity as a practice in terms of reusing/recycling/reducing, they pointed out that separating garbage into different recycling containers did not simplify life. And therein lies the rub. So much of what we must do to make a difference in terms of global climate change will not be simple. I ask myself all the time if the small changes I have made—using reusable containers for the kids lunches instead of disposable plastic bags for example—are just about me being able to feel like I am doing something or do they really make a difference? Do the resources that go into making and getting the reusable containers to me justify their use? What about the hot water and soap I need to use to clean them? AARRGGG!!! And this is just one teenie tiny example. The changes that have to happen to actually affect climate change are so big there is nothing simple about making them. This edited version of one of my favorite ways of getting through these difficult times will demonstrate my point. Here is Colin Jost and Michael Che from Saturday Night Live's Weekend Update:

[We only showed a very small, politically correct portion of this update. Here is a link to the full version of Weekend Update: *U.N.'s Climate Change Report – SNL*, if you want to see it: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=07oe1m67eik&feature=youtu.be>]

So what can we do? How do we not become paralyzed by the hugeness and weight of the problem? How DO we make the shift from angst to action?

One way that helps me to find a path to a healthy future is to look around and see what people are doing to navigate these turbulent waters more successfully than I have.

I can share one example with you of folks who have figured out a way to live more lightly on the earth than anyone else I know. Many of you know my niece, Katy, who lives with her family in Reno. Several years ago, Katy asked for an unusual birthday present. She wanted to try to live without electricity for two months. Her husband, Kyle, was game. I'm not sure if they had kids yet but Liam and Wylan would have been too young to vote anyway, so they did it. And, surprisingly, it wasn't as hard as they thought it would be. Shortly after that they went on a walkabout around the country, visiting communities that had evolved lifestyles based on the idea of radical simplicity and integral non-violence. Gandhian teachings are at the center of what they were looking for then and continue to be so today. After almost two years of searching and experimenting, they returned to Reno and found a house on 1/2 of an acre in an older part of town north of the downtown area. They crowdfunded the \$40,000 they needed to buy it and paid for it in cash. They never turned on the electricity, and their homestead has been fossil fuel and electricity-free since then.

Trying to live in alignment with their values hasn't always been easy; there have been burns and bruises, tears and frustration. But each of those setbacks has been matched and more by love, support, joy and creativity in charting a course just to the side of mainstream.

Now in the eighth year of their project they grow tons of organic food, welcome thousands of people to classes, tours, and work days, have started green businesses, and brought art, murals, and festivals to their socio-economically-diverse neighborhood. All this while living well below the poverty level.

Kyle has become an expert on natural building and travels around the world teaching how to build sturdy, efficient homes with Cob—a mix of clay, sand and straw similar to adobe. Katy has become a master gardener, growing food for her family and, increasingly, neighborhoods throughout Reno.

Their effort is called the “Be The Change Project” in honor of their roots in Gandhian teaching and their belief that individual actions are essential to positive transformation. I encourage you to look them up on line and shoot them an email so you can plan a visit and get a feel for what they are about. It may give you the hope and inspiration you need to also take action and be the change.

Go here for more about the Be the Change Project: <https://www.bethechangereno.org/>

OFFERING – MEG DORSEY

OFFERTORY – *Earth’s Teardrop* by VK

READING

What Was Once the Largest Shopping Center in Northern Ohio Was Built Where There Had Been a Pond I used to Visit Every Summer Afternoon – *Mary Oliver*

→ *Slide showing Earth Rise image from the Apollo 8 mission*

HOMILY: *Simplicity, Simplicity!* – BARB MUNN

In 1968, when I was 11 years old, an astronaut on the Apollo 8 mission captured this photo of the Earth rising over the Moon. CNN reporters recently wrote about how this photo created “a dawning appreciation of humanity’s common destiny,” and “inspired the modern environmental movement.”

Now, over 50 years later, there are 4 billion more people on Earth and we are facing the inexorable effects of climate change, a human-caused environmental disaster so large that it feels inconceivable. Perhaps I feel more connected to this issue than some because as a geology professor I teach the science behind climate change in a variety of classes every year. I taught it through all those years when everyone was arguing about whether or not climate change was really happening and who or what was responsible, and I continue to teach it in these more recent years when most accept that it IS happening and that we ARE responsible.

I first calculated my carbon footprint in the early 1990’s back when you had to do it by hand. Since then I have recalculated it multiple times, most recently during Allen’s climate footprint workshop here at SFUU. Every time I do this calculation, I rediscover that as an American, I consume many times more than my fair share of the Earth’s resources, and release many more times carbon to the atmosphere than I should as a ostensibly concerned citizen of the Earth. The rising global temperatures connected to our carbon-hungry lifestyle is clearly tied to the increasingly frequent episodes of drought, wildfires, severe storms, rising sea levels, food insecurity, water shortages, and species extinctions.

I have reacted to this threat probably the way that most of you have. I march, vote, donate to ‘green’ causes and candidates, drive a hybrid, switch out my light bulbs, turn down the thermostat, avoid beef, walk when I can, hang my laundry to dry, and reduce the number of times I flush and shower. I’ll bet that many of you do the same and more.

For our house, we insulated, replaced our single-paned windows, put up solar panels, installed a geothermal heat pump, and a heat as you go water tank. I felt so worthy and noble about my personal sacrifices and activism - yet, still my carbon footprint remains embarrassingly large. Duane Elgin calls what I have done so far “cosmetic simplicity,” superficial activity that allows us to feel good about ourselves as we continue on without making any real fundamental changes in how we live and work. So in other words, I am still part of the problem. Me, progressive, environmentally concerned, Barb: I – am – part – of – the – problem!

Wouldn't it be great if we could just ignore climate change and maybe it would magically go away? Or maybe we could continue to put it off for another day, or year, or decade when we have more time and passion for it? The scientific consensus is that we do NOT have the time to put this off; that we need to act NOW.

So, I have come to understand that to have a significant impact personally, what we really need to do is change our lifestyle. Instead of biggering and biggering and biggering, we can protect the earth by simplifying, simplifying, simplifying!

Recently I've been weirdly preoccupied with looking around my house and sighing about all of the STUFF that I have. Just like Mary Oliver, “I have more clothes, lamps, dishes, paper clips than I could possibly use before I die.” Do I really need all of these things? Are they making me happy? My son learned in the second grade that there is a fundamental difference between wants and needs. Shouldn't I be applying this grade school concept to my own life?

Simplicity is a lifestyle that grows out of considering what we truly need to be happy on this Earth. Simplicity is NOT about sacrifice and giving up your stuff, it is about reshaping your life to live with a different kind of abundance. It is about slowing down and considering what really matters in your own life - is it the things that you buy and fill your house and yard with, or is it the connections you make with the people around you. Is it the paycheck you receive and then spend, or is it the passion you bring to what you do to earn a paycheck? Do you have everything you need right now? Or, is there something more that all of your stuff does not provide?

In an essay written for the anthology *Less is More*, Ernest Callenbach made the observation that “the car and television and iPod ... enable us to isolate ourselves from each other and interact with machines instead. But ... Simplicity (fewer goods, less mobility, less space and fewer choices generally) will motivate us to share, to cooperate, to understand each other's needs and priorities. To become little by little, in short, better people”

This is actually something that I appreciate about SFUU - this community makes me a better person – you ALL make me a better person. Your very presence here encourages me to act, and learn, and live up to my values. Right now the spiritual practice of simplicity is calling to me, and I hope that some of you might consider exploring this practice along with me. I may not go as radical as Kelly's niece, but I start taking steps in that direction.

We can begin by joining ‘simplicity circles’. Cecile Andrews, who wrote *The Circle of Simplicity* describes these as groups of 6 to 8 people who “gather ... to help each other simplify their lives – to support each other, to think together, to exchange ideas on ways to live differently.” She goes on to comment that “when you're working with like-minded people, talking with kindred spirits, exploring with people who share your values, it's easier to make changes.”

Adult RE has taken on the task of organizing simplicity circles here - how many circles we form depends on your interest level. Janie Evans and Robert Archer [Jan and George Lowry] from Adult RE will be available to talk to you after the service both this week and next. So, if this is something you want to pursue, seek out an adult RE member and sign up to learn more.

These circles are not limited to just SFUU members, so feel free to invite friends to participate. Each circle session will explore a theme through personal stories, reflection, and readings, ending with a commitment to take one small step to simplify your life before your circle meets again. What you commit to do is totally up to you. As Cecile Andrews says, “there is no one way to simplify; rather, each person’s unique way grows out of an analysis of his or her own life.” Thus, in a simplicity circle, you will be called to truly know yourself – to determine what you value, so that you can live the life that reflects your core being while caring for the Earth.

Last month, two 13 year-old girls on a school climate strike in the UK talked about how the older generation is just borrowing the Earth. One of them said, “I wouldn't borrow something from a friend and then completely wreck it before I give it back. I would treat it with respect.” It may take our children and grandchildren to shame us into examining our own lives and the many ways that our everyday habits and decision-making add carbon to the atmosphere.

I encourage this community to continue to put the Earth first as we make purchasing and scheduling decisions for ourselves and for the church. We will be replacing the roof on this old church building soon – will we go for the cheapest option, or will we consider using green roofing materials? Will we think twice or thrice before using single use plastics for church events? Will we consider giving up some measure of independence and convenience and get to know each other better by carpooling to church events? Can we raise our collective consciousness so that every committee and every member thinks through decisions with an eye to how their choices might impact the Earth and all that live upon it.

I know that I am just one person out of 328 million other carbon-hungry Americans, but I have to have some hope that I can make a difference, that I can be the change too. Will I have the personal strength to follow my convictions with simpler living? I think I can, I know I can with your help. For, unless people like us care a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better, it's not.

Blessed be and may we always care.

Closing Hymn: #16 *'Tis a Gift to be Simple*

BENEDICTION - BARB

Please join hands in closing. Feel how you are connected to the people on either side of you and, how through them you are all connected to everyone else in this room, and beyond. We are connected. We are living together on this Earth, which we can feel through the soles of our feet. May we be open to the gift of true simplicity - an opportunity to know ourselves, to enrich our relationships with others, and to live more lightly on this Earth. May it ever be so.

CLOSING WORDS