**Reflection for Sunday 26th April 2020**

**Blueing the skies – Earth Day, 22nd April 2020**

**Opening words**

Please light a candle or electric tea light if you are able, and think of all those who are also lighting a candle at this time.

On this wonderful earth this springtime, we are amazed by the myriad rainbow-coloured threads that are wrapped around us – the blue, grey, gold of the sky; the green, yellow, purple of the fields and hedgerows; the pinks, oranges, reds of the flowers.

These coloured threads weave themselves around us, through us, under us and over us, supporting us – they bring joy to our hearts, calm to our souls, peace to our minds, invigoration to our spirits.

The bible story of Noah and the destruction of human kind, followed by the blessing of the rainbow allowing a new start, may have new meaning for some of us – not that this is a plague wrought by an angry God, but that as the colours become clear as the fog and pollution lifts, we too have the opportunity to re-start our relationship with each other, and with the planet.

As we celebrate Earth Day, may we see the colours surrounding us, and be uplifted.

**Hymn**

In our purple hymn book, number 31 is by Edith Sinclair Downing, and entitled Earth is gift of God’s creation. These are the first and last verses.

Earth is gift of God’s creation,

Ours to nurture or neglect.

We are called to witness boldly

That all life deserves respect.

We are kin to every being,

Sharing space on earth, our home.

Yet we squander vast resources,

Seek to save ourselves alone.

Tending space within earth’s garden,

Honouring the future here,

We can serve with God as partners,

A community of care.

Strengthened by the rainbow’s promise,

Sign of God’s enduring grace,

Let us dare to live our calling

In our time and in our place.

**Prayer**

Spirit of Life and Love, today we would celebrate this dazzling, damaged planet, and give thanks for the beauty that it still gives to us, despite all our abuse of it.

From rich green and brown farmland and forests, to mysterious, ever-shifting golden deserts, blue-green oceans flecked with white, to inky-black night skies studded with shimmering stars, it possesses a strength and beauty that even with all our photographs and words and knowledge we cannot come close to expressing or experiencing in its fullness.

As our world has quietened its industry and slowed its pace, some of earth’s people are finally able to see its splendours without the pall of smoke that has choked us for so long. Seas are breathing deeply. And animals are exploring this quieter world too.

May we find a way to encourage those in power, and those responsible for industry, to really look about them, and see the colours calling for protection. May we be prepared to change our own lifestyles so that we consume less, travel less, and are more respectful of the needs of our planet. And when we ‘restart’ our world, may we remember the colours we have seen, and the quietness we have heard, and the slowness we have experienced, and be guided by it. Amen.

**Story – How the Colours made peace with each other**

This is a story originally written by Bill Darlison, and adapted by Kate McKenna. I was reminded of it when I was speaking to my mother this week – she was telling me about the walks she was taking each day, and the amazing colours that she was seeing in the brilliant sunshine that we have been experiencing. So here’s a story about – colours.

Once upon a time there were seven colours. They were all perfectly happy living by themselves on little bits of card, and actually they didn't really think much of any of the other colours. Each of these colours had their own names – red, orange, yellow, green blue, purple, and indigo. Now each of these colours thought they were just great. Whenever they came near to each other they quarrelled about which was the most important colour.

Green said, “Well duh! I'm the most important colour. I'm the colour of life and hope. I'm the colour of grass and trees and new beginnings. I'm the colour of the whole of the countryside. I'm the most important colour.”

But Blue wasn't having that. She said, “That's nonsense. I'm far more important. I'm the colour of the sky and the water and without water everything would die. I'm the most important colour!”

And Yellow said, “Oh you are all so serious! I'm the colour of fun and laughter and giggling. I'm the colour of sunflowers and the sun and the moon. I make people smile. I'm the most important colour.”

And then Indigo piped up “I'm subtle. I'm the colour of peace and reflection and silence and thoughtfulness. If it wasn't for me, you'd all go mad with busyness. I'm the most important colour.”

And then Purple started as well – “I’m the colour of kings and important things and majesty and ceremonies and royalty. People listen when I talk. I'm the most important colour.”

And Orange said “you're all wrong. I'm the colour of lots of fruit and vegetables and that's where you get vitamins from. I'm healthy and cheerful. I'm the colour of the sunrise. Without the orange sunrise it would always be night time. I'm the most important colour.”

And finally Red got angry. “You're so stupid. I'm the colour of blood and blood gives us life. I'm the colour of danger and warning and road safety and fighting and force. I'm definitely the most important colour.”

And then it started to rain. And the colours started to run around in a panic. And they all got in a terrible muddle. And you know what happens when colours get in a muddle. They can end up looking much less nice that they did before. In fact they ended up looking very muddy.

But then the rain spoke to them. “You silly silly things. Stop fighting, stop trying to make yourself sound more important than each other. You were all designed for different things, and you're all needed for your own purposes. If you work together you won't need to be that muddy brown colour – if you work together – you can make – a rainbow!”

And from then on, the colours stopped squabbling, started working together and every so often, when it rained on a sunny day they got together to make a beautiful display in the sky to remind everyone of peace and cooperation.

**Reflection**

Last Wednesday was Earth Day 2020. The first Earth Day, exactly fifty years ago, was a unified response to an environment in crisis — oil spills, smog, rivers so polluted they literally caught fire. On April 22, 1970, 20 million Americans — 10% of the U.S. population at the time — took to the streets, college campuses and hundreds of cities to protest environmental ignorance and demand a new way forward for our planet. The first Earth Day is credited with launching the modern environmental movement, and is now recognized as the planet’s largest civic event.

That first Earth Day in 1970 launched a wave of action, including the passage of landmark environmental laws in the United States. The Clean Air, Clean Water and Endangered Species Acts were created in response to the first Earth Day in 1970, as well as the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Many countries soon adopted similar laws. And Earth Day continues to hold major international significance: In 2016, the United Nations chose Earth Day as the day when the historic Paris Agreement on climate change was signed into force.

Despite the fifty years that have passed since the first Earth Day, we are still in grave denial about the environmental crisis that faces our existence on earth. Extinction Rebellion is the current movement to try to force us to face the consequences of our lifestyles and industry – there have been, and will be, others, I’m sure.

But, according to Seth Borenstein, Associated Press Science Writer, in their article dated 22nd April 2020 – this year’s Earth Day - an unplanned grand experiment is changing Earth.

Seth Borenstein writes, “As people across the globe stay home to stop the spread of the new coronavirus, the air has cleaned up, albeit temporarily. Smog stopped choking New Delhi, one of the most polluted cities in the world, and India’s getting views of sights not visible in decades. Nitrogen dioxide pollution in the northeastern United States is down 30%. Rome air pollution levels from mid-March to mid-April were down 49% from a year ago. Stars seems more visible at night. People are also noticing animals in places and at times they don't usually. Coyotes have meandered along downtown Chicago’s Michigan Avenue and near San Francisco’s Golden Gate Bridge. A puma roamed the streets of Santiago, Chile. Goats took over a town in Wales. In India, already daring wildlife has become bolder with hungry monkeys entering homes and opening refrigerators to look for food.

When people stay home, Earth becomes cleaner and wilder. “It is giving us this quite extraordinary insight into just how much of a mess we humans are making of our beautiful planet,” says conservation scientist Stuart Pimm of Duke University. “This is giving us an opportunity to magically see how much better it can be.”

Researchers are tracking dramatic drops in traditional air pollutants, such as nitrogen dioxide, smog and tiny particles. These types of pollution kill up to 7 million people a year worldwide, according to Health Effects institute. Meantime the air from Boston to Washington is its cleanest since a NASA satellite started measuring nitrogen dioxide in 2005. … Cleaner air has been most noticeable in India and China. On April 3, residents of Jalandhar, a city in north India’s Punjab, woke up to a view not seen for decades – snow capped Himalayan peaks more than 100 miles away.”

Don’t get me wrong – that’s not saying that I think the coronavirus is a good thing! But maybe it’s a silver lining to an otherwise very dark cloud, that through enforced quietness and stillness, we can literally see the difference that we are making, and that maybe it will help us re-evaluate just what we do and do not need to restart once this modern day plague has released its grip on us, and just how we can re-invent our lives in a much less destructive, much more compassionate way.

Do we need foreign holidays every year – or can we learn to value and explore our own country? Do we need fashion to be updated every month, leading to horrendous wastes of clothing and materials? While there will always be jobs that need physical presence, can some work be done from home thus reducing the amount of travelling done each day, and increasing the amount of time for family and friends? And can we finally learn to appreciate and value each individual for precisely that, their unique individuality, and find a way to make a universal basic income scheme both viable and compassionate?

Judith Campbell, a friend, writer and a Unitarian Universalist minister, recently wrote this reflection, entitled But Will We Continue:

We have learned to live with less...but will we continue?
We have learned to make do and mend...but will we continue?
We have put aside our calendars, our to-do lists...and our travel plans and we have turned to jigsaw puzzles and endless games of Monopoly at the dining room table.
The air and the waters surrounding our precious planet have started to clear...but will it continue?
We have learned how to have meetings and give virtual hugs on Zoom.
We have learned how to "unmute"....and more importantly, when not to unmute because listening is an acquired skill.
We are not born with it.
We have made friends with our kids and our parents,
And even ourselves.
We have listened to the sounds of silence and learned slowly how not to be afraid.
...But will we continue?

I hope we will continue. I hope that when the fear and the isolation and the grief are no longer uppermost, we will remember the blessings this time has brought us, and we will remember the glorious coloured threads that are woven through us and around us. And I hope we will learn to love this world – and each other – and ourselves – so much more.

**Blessing**

May the red thread of crackling fire impassion you.

May the orange thread of bright sunshine warm you.

May the yellow thread of waving corn feed you.

May the green thread of young shoots encourage you.

May the blue thread of cool waters soothe you.

May the indigo thread of deep midnight rest you.

And may the rainbow blessing of constant love surround you and uphold you and fill you, today and always. Amen.