

*The Oneness of All Things*

Reading & sermon preached by Reverend Carolyn Patierno

November 4, 2012

From *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy* by Joanna Macy & Chris Johnstone

Something very interesting occurs when a group of jazz musicians improvise together. A number of separate individuals, all making their own decisions, act together as a whole. As the music flows, any of the musicians can take the solo spot, that leading role gliding seamlessly between the players. Who decides when the piano or trumpet player should come forward? It isn't just the person playing that instrument, for the others have already stepped back just a little to create an opening. ... No one person is in charge; the players act freely while being guided by their intention to serve the purpose of the group. For musicians to improvise together, they need to listen very attentively, expressing their individuality in a way that contributes to the overall sound. When they tune in to the group and become connected with it, it is as though the music itself plays through them.

We stand at an evolutionary crossroads, and we, collectively, could turn either way. Our own choices are part of that turning. ... When our central organizing priority becomes the well-being of all life, then what happens through us is the recovery of our world.

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Talk about standing at a crossroad, Friends. Here we are. Six days after a huge storm battered our nerves just as sure as it battered our shoreline, neighborhoods and for some of us, our homes. But the Yankee spirit is resilient. We are grateful that it wasn't worse. Even those for whom it WAS, indeed, much worse we hear expressions of gratitude that it wasn't worse still.

We will be living with the effects of this storm for a long while which will require great patience. More importantly, the storm's effects may well inspire in us an even more determined effort to curb the ways that we contribute to the Earth's demise.

And as though that isn't enough we are two days short of a national election the outcome of which will change the course of our national history. Hyperbolic? No. The difference between the two candidates couldn't be more stark and dramatic. This is what I know: no matter the outcome, our liberal religious values will prevail. Values that place us on the side of love; that honor the worth and dignity of all people; that put faith in the democratic process in our congregations and in the world at large; that encourage a search for meaning; and that yes, values that honor the Earth – the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. These values will prevail because they cannot fail. And this is what else I know. No matter who is our next president, we will have a great deal of work to do.

Because it seems to take a natural disaster for us to remember or to realize that we are one. It seems to take a tsunami of loss to overcome overwhelm. Because in the aftermath of a natural disaster, when common sense would suggest that we have no control, our sense of overwhelm ebbs as the tides flow. We know to do the simplest of things to offer help. To recover.

I invite you to observe these images ...

A front stoop in Hoboken, NJ. There is an extension cord running from inside the apartment, through an open window to the sidewalk with a sign that reads: "We have power. Please feel free to charge your cell phone."

Stranded residents of a flooded neighborhood desperate for relief. The rescue vehicle is difficult to board. But there at the base of the truck bed is a National Guard volunteer on all fours making a step stool of himself as individuals step up into his back to climb up and into the truck.

8200 people – it bears repeating – 8200 people, many of them little kids - streaming into the Mystic Aquarium for an event planned only 24 hours earlier in order to "save Halloween." See a genie staring intently at the turtles. Spiderman petting the sting rays. A lot of children having a good time after days of being trapped indoors and going a little stir crazy.

And this image: the most amazing one of all. New Jersey Governor Christie and President Obama looking like the best of friends. And I would like to believe that it is sincere regard on both of their parts.

We are one. Don't forget. We are one.

What a great book title: *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy*. That's a book you want to take off the shelf. Very briefly: the authors lay out the ways we've gotten ourselves into this mess and it all seems to circle back to one deadly sin: greed. We want more. And because we want more, we have diminished the Earth ... her precious resources. Last week we had a front row seat to a storm system that passes over warmer waters. It will happen again, is the warning. It will surely happen again.

This warning may make you want you to fold and step away from the table. But the stakes are too high, Friends. There's a jazz combo in the club and it is from this corner of the room that we muster our inspiration and active hope. How? Listen more attentively, for there are things to learn. As it took a great deal of effort to create the level of environmental destruction around us; it will take as much effort to counter that destruction with reconstruction and preservation. There are things to learn. No one person is in charge rather, we must all be guided by an intention that serves the whole. What would it be like if indeed, we lived like jazz musicians ... as though the music itself is playing through each one of us ... in tune with those around us ... making an opening for others to shine and stepping up when it is our turn to play the melody?

It is a compelling metaphor ... easy to get caught up in ... glide seamlessly along with until ...

“Start drilling!” screams the bumper sticker on the car before me. As if any amount of oil from the depths of the weary Earth could satisfy our hunger for more. We could surely do with less and share more. Share because we are one. Because our 7<sup>th</sup> principle may well be the one that saves the Earth ... that saves us.

Macy & Johnstone make their plea:

*We stand at an evolutionary crossroads, and we, collectively, could turn either way. Our own choices are part of that turning. ... When our central organizing priority becomes the well-being of all life, then what happens through us is the recovery of our world.*

The recovery of our world! Can you imagine? It is within our hands. The Souls who make up our Green Sanctuary team have been working tirelessly to hold up the mirror to our individual lives and that of the congregation as a whole. They are helping us to be better stewards of our Earth home. They are helping us to better respect the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. *Of which we are a part.* Have you been paying attention to their efforts? Have you made a few changes in your life to lessen your carbon footprint? If you have, have you contemplated how may make a few more?

Alas, we are as impatient as we are overwhelmed. How we love the quick fix. But the recovery of the earth won't happen quickly. We are dug in too deep. But if we begin to shift our priorities ... our perspectives ... our *hearts* it may begin to happen in Gabrielle, Sebastian, Chole, Seamus, Arianna, Gabriel, Cordelia, Isabelle, & Campbell's lives. And if we do our work well, they will be part of a new generation that has at its core a different kind of respect for the interdependent web than the generation that came before them. And we will have helped make that difference – one generation connected to the wholeness and holiness of the next and the next and the next. We are one.

And we are at a crossroad.

Post storm we will help each other and our neighbors here and wherever destruction laid its course. On Tuesday we will vote with our liberal religious values and work harder to build a world that has justice and peace at its core.

For we are one.

Amen. Blessed be.

Benediction ... and chalice lighting:

In the words with which we kindled the flame this morning:

We belong to this world.

The web of life is calling us forth at this time.

We've come a long way and are here to play our part through the strength of our hearts and our love for life.