

Gifts Of The Indigo Tent
Countryside Community Church
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Eearth, Part I: From Denial to Gratitude

On Sunday morning, a pinewood casket was carried down the center aisle of Countryside Community Church in front of several hundred puzzled worshippers. No funeral had been scheduled, and if there had been one, it wouldn't have taken place during Sunday morning worship. If not for the pre-recorded sound of a heartbeat playing in the background, you could have heard a pin drop. As the casket was set down in the chancel up front, the heartbeat suddenly stopped. You could practically hear people asking, "What **on earth** is going on?"

Actually, "what **on earth**" was exactly the right thing to be asking. Because Earth was inside the coffin. Little did people know, but we were holding a funeral for the earth that day.

As 350.org founder and climate activist Bill McKibben has stated, we no longer live on the same earth that our ancestors did. That earth has passed away, even as the planet has not. The planet we now live on is far more fragile than the last one. Literally in this century we could destroy much of the earth and its peoples either through a cataclysmic act of violence (WWIII anyone?), or through climate change. In this later regard, the most recent science is strongly confirming McKibben's prediction ten years ago that we will soon reach a level of carbon in our atmosphere that will cause enough warming to take place such that giant stores of methane and other greenhouse-producing gases will be released from below frozen tundra and ice sheets under our oceans. When this takes place, we can reduce our carbon footprint to zero and yet the earth will continue to warm. This is particularly concerning because we have already warmed the atmosphere by one degree. At two degrees a full 25% of all species on earth are predicted to go extinct. At three degrees, New York City will be under water, and at four degrees, literally half the animal life on earth will be extinct.

Because of scientifically verified facts like these, McKibben calls our present planet **Eearth**. **Eearth** is like Earth except its people must rapidly "**a**"dapt to changing conditions lest our wasteful and carbon-generating practices put a curse on future generations for centuries to come.

It seems strange, doesn't it, that we should be in such a predicament so fast? I mean, some people have been warning of climate disaster for decades, but for the most part, these people were associated with a crowd that most people called "tree-huggers" and "granola" people. They wore tie-die shirts and talked about energy vortexes, crystals, eating vegetarian (or even vegan) and unilateral nuclear disarmament.

I still don't know what to think of vortexes or crystals, but these "granola" folks were essentially right about where things were headed in the 60s and 70s. And as long as I'm giving credit where credit is due, I'd have to add the doomsday predicting fundamentalist Christians to the list of people who were at least partly right about the end of the world (or at least the end of the world as we know it) coming soon. Of course, they were wrong about who would bring

about their doomsday predictions; God's not going to destroy the world, we are doing just fine without God's help.

God is trying to save the world. I would venture to suggest that God has known perfectly well that we wouldn't pay much heed to either the granola folks or the fundamentalist folks, even as they were reacting consciously or otherwise to a dreaded set of events that might take place with increasing impact in the coming years.

Do you remember that song, "From A Distance"? I think this song gives a small hint into how God would want us to see our planet:

*From a distance
The world looks blue and green
And the snow capped mountains white
From a distance
The ocean meets the stream
And the eagle takes to flight
From a distance
There is harmony
And it echoes through the land
It's the voice of hope
It's the voice of peace
It's the voice of every man ...
... From a distance
You look like my friend
Even though we are at war
From a distance
I just cannot comprehend
What all this fighting's for
From a distance
There is harmony
And it echoes through the land
And it's the hope of hopes
It's the love of loves
It's the heart of every man
God is watching us
God is watching us
God is watching us
From a distance*

From a distance, I think God sees our 4.6 billion-year-old planet as if she were a 46 year old woman – a 46-year-old whom God loves beyond her wildest imagination. Do you realize that if earth time were compressed into 46 years, single-celled organisms would have arisen when she was 11 years old, and the first simple creatures like worms and jellyfish would have appeared for the first time when she was 40! The past 20,000 years of human history, from the world's first cities, to the Egyptian pyramids, to Abraham, Moses, Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed, to Joan of Arc, to Martin Luther King, Jr., to Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump would have taken place in the last *two hours* of her life!

And now, the Earth is like a 46-year-old woman who is in the process of having a heart attack. Do you know what most people do when they are in the process of having a heart attack? First, they experience symptoms that puzzle them. When the symptoms elevate, they look for other explanations than having a heart attack. They may claim that they ate something tainted, or

they have the flu. But then when the symptoms become so acute that it moves beyond their rationalizations, they still tend to be in denial about their severity. “Yes, I may need to see a doctor, but I can wait until the end of dinner” or “I can call a friend to drive me to Urgent Care.” What this person really needs to do is call 911. For how the 46-year-old woman responds in the next few minutes – or seconds – will largely determine her outcome.

While I don’t like the idea that we, on planet Eearth, are collectively experiencing Eearth’s heart attack, what I do know is this: Reality is our friend, just as reality is the friend of any person who is experiencing the clear signs of a heart attack. Moving out of denial does not put us in a state of depression so much as it puts us in a state of agency. And agency means we can make decisions now that are critical not only for our own survival, but the livelihood of our children, our grandchildren, and future generations who will be born on this planet for centuries to come. What we do right now will largely determine whether or not Eearth Woman had a 47th birthday, and whether Eearth Woman will be celebrating or mourning.

In the coming weeks, I will be writing and speaking about Eearth from the perspective of one who has moved far enough out of denial to be in a state of hope and optimism with respect to our situation – even as I suggest some bold actions that need to take place in the next few years, locally, nationally, and internationally. While some of our country’s scientific community has concluded that we have passed the point of no return already and that a “heart attack” is inevitable, I am cautiously optimistic. I’m optimistic because I believe that God loves all parts of God’s Creation, including us human beings, and that God has Created us in such a way that we do not accept making enormous changes in our lives without massive amounts of evidence to convince us to do so. Otherwise, the world would be in a constant state of chaos, with entire populations changing directions on a dime just because someone in authority said they should. So God has known we would resist making the necessary changes, and now God’s Eearth itself is providing us overwhelming evidence that we must change. Our scientists have weighed the evidence, and reweighed it for the better part of 40 years, and for all practical purposes, they speak with a united voice that Eearth is in the throes of an environmental heart attack and must act swiftly if we are to save ourselves. It is because we have doubted – and doubted strongly – that we can act now with confidence that we must check human civilization in to the emergency room for treatment.

You can grieve the state of Eearth all you like, but I suggest that the most productive emotion to hold onto is gratitude. When a 46-year-old woman experiences heart issues, it is her own love of life that moves her to take fast and decisive action. If she’s totally depressed about her condition, she may just spend so much time having a pity party that she fails to take the steps necessary to save herself.

So let me leave you with something simple you can do today before I conclude this reflection: Think of your very favorite spot on earth. For me, it’s our family cabin in Bandon, Oregon. Ask yourself, “What is likely to happen to my favorite spot on earth in the coming century if the climate continues to warm, oceans rise 6-10 feet, and half our species become extinct? What will I and others miss about this place?” Then, ask yourself this: “If I die and stand before God to answer for my life, is there anything I would want to be forgiven for with respect to what is going to happen to my favorite place if nothing changes in our collective behavior?” Then I invite you to ask God for forgiveness in advance of any of these things happening. After you do this, and feel like you have authentically been forgiven, ask yourself one more existential question: “What can I do now in *this* life that will make me happier to stand before God in the *next*?”

