

**The Great Turning.** Sermon for April 6 2008 by the Reverend Lone Jensen

Two voices are heard from the back of the room:

“Apollo to Earth: Houston, we’re reporting a major carbon overload in the atmosphere. You’re going to suffer serious overheating if you don’t get it under control. Earth to Apollo: We hear you. We spotted it 20 years ago, but the White House tells us not to worry and keeps cutting our budget. Any bright ideas here? Apollo to Earth: Hello, Houston? We have a new development here. We’re getting clear visual signals, and they’re not from Earth. Can you give us five minutes? ...You’re not going to believe this, but it’s true: we’re not alone. We’re being fed material- from something called the Intergalactic Archives. They say that the warming crisis is quite normal on planets that have a large store of fossilized energy. They recommend a rapid switch to simple energy, starting with the sun, wind, earth, and ocean. They’re also telling us not to wait too long! Earth to Apollo: You’re creating quite a stir down here, Apollo. But that aside, how long do we have? There’s talk of an 80 percent reduction in carbon emissions by 2050—will that cut it? Apollo to Earth: ‘Fraid not, Houston. They’re saying 25 years, max, and similar planets that failed to make the switch suffered a 15 percent loss rate—total civilizational and ecological meltdown. Not a pretty picture. You really don’t want to go there, sir. Earth to Apollo:

Any advice that might help us? Apollo to Earth: Yes. It seems that the planets that went down panicked. The Archives show that advanced intelligences get energized by vision, not fear. It's like football, sir—you win by determination and passion, not by reducing failure. The planets that failed forgot how to work together. Inspiration stopped, and the breakthroughs dried up. As the panic took over, people started hoarding and stopped believing in the future. Earth to Apollo: You've got us rattled here, Apollo. Do they show any turnarounds? Any planets that were going down, that somehow made it? Apollo to Earth: Yes. The Archives show that successful planets transformed their carbon crises into positive evolutionary leaps. They stopped blaming. They stopped being fearful and defensive, and worked together to achieve a rapid transition. By re-igniting the creative impulse, they made the switch to new technologies and lifestyles far more easily. Earth to Apollo: Thanks, Apollo. Seems we've got our work cut out down here. Over and out! “ (Guy Dauncey wrote this article as part of Stop Global Warming Cold, the Spring 2008 issue of YES! Magazine. )

Minister: One of my very first memories is of sunlight illuminating and shining through the veins of a bright green Chestnut leaf that my father held up in front of my eyes. Look, he said, it has five fingers just like your hand does! Trees have shaded and sheltered me and fed my soul as long as I can remember. When I was six I would habitually hug

trees, run my hand over the rough bark and imagine that somehow in there with all the wood and sap rising there was a beating heart just like my own. Yes, I am indeed an unrepentant tree hugger and proud of it too! In some of the hardest moments in my life I have in my raw grief sought my refuge in nature. At fourteen when my grandmother died I leaned against an old tree heavy with apples under an orange August moon and searched the stars and the black night sky of eternity for her soul. When my father died I was 24, a student wife in Iowa, and far from home. I knelt on a grassy field and called his name. Only the stars answered, it was a deafening silence and yet, the wet grass and the wind connected me to something bigger that I would now call God. I knew nothing, or very little back then about deep ecology or the environment and its destruction. I only knew that we were connected in mystery and wonder to the rest of nature, to the enormous Universe and to each other. I sensed the harm we humans might be doing but I did not expect the changes to come so fast. The kind of old fashioned apples that grew on that tree I leaned against at fourteen are now nearly impossible to find. In markets the world over there are now only a few common varieties, shiny waxy green, yellow and red. Where it not for organic farmers and the world seed bank we would have lost even more of this precious crop and plant heritage. The cornfields that surrounded me in Iowa back then were part of the problem with their oil based fertilizers and the corn fed cows. But I did not know it back then. I cannot hand over to my

granddaughter the world I once knew and she may never taste the many kinds of apples I once picked. As Guy Dauncey wrote in the article we began this sermon with: "Houston we do have a problem! " The Buddhist author and activist Joanna Macy tells a story of how she went to what was then still the Soviet Union three years after the nuclear accident at Chernobyl. She writes: *"Our host lived in a fourth-floor apartment in a cement housing block. Covering one wall of their parlor was a beautiful woodland scene: sunlight flickers through birch trees into a grassy glade. In the room crowded with overstuffed furniture, that wallpaper vista provided a refreshing sense of space and natural beauty. I commented on it that evening, as I took tea with Vladimir Ilyich, our host's father. Sitting there with his ten-year old grandson, he was showing me the large Geiger counter he carries in his car; it shows him where the poison has newly appeared, and where to tell the children not to play.*

*Following my eyes, Vladimir Ilyich said, "That is where the children may not go, or any of us, for that matter. You see, the trees stay radioactive a long time. Our ancestors were of the forest. During the Nazi occupation, our partisans fought from the forest. Even in the hardest times under Stalin, we went into the woodlands every holiday, every weekend, walking, picnicking, mushrooming. Yes, we were always people of the forest." I asked him, "When will you be able to go back*

*into the forest?" With a tired little smile he shrugged. "Not in my lifetime," he said, and looking at his grandson, he added, "and not in his lifetime either." Then he gestured to the wallpaper. "This is our forest now."*

The story I will admit frightens me. Will our children's children still have woods to play in? We stand on the cusp of a great change, a shift in world paradigm and a sea change in culture. The last time humanity faced such an upheaval was perhaps the beginning of the industrial revolution. Sociologists, ecologists and theologians write about what this may mean for the future. Will this be a change for the better or a turn for the worse? There are reasons to hope even though we see so many signs around us of how thoughtless humans can be. The desert bloom was indeed glorious this and evident along the freeways but so were the papers, cans, food containers and the jetsam and flotsam of our consumer lives. David Korten's new book "**The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community**" has inspired an entire movement and this sermon. He holds up the possibility that instead of being remembered as "the generation that overcooked the earth" we could instead be remembered as the generation that woke up. Through an inner "great turning", a profound change of heart we can still restore our planet and change human society for the better. "*The most remarkable feature of this historical moment on Earth is not that*

*we are on the way to destroying the world—we've actually been on the way for quite a while. It is that we are beginning to wake up, as from a millennia-long sleep, to a whole new relationship to our world, to ourselves and each other. “ (Macy) Just look around you. There is a greening of the popular consciousness. Once we saw the photos from space of this blue marble Earth home, it became in our culture a sacred object, a symbol of life itself. There is surely a strong thread in our UU tradition that treasures our earth from the belief in Nature's God and the Deists through the Transcendentalist flowering and the early Feminist focus on re-embodiment of the sacred. But we have as much of a challenge “turning round right” as the rest of our culture. We have myths to debunk. My colleague Victoria Weinstein said: *That myth is that we are, above all, consumers—and that, as consumers, we are best served when we are barraged by a dizzying variety of products, and that our purpose in life is to choose from among those products based on purely individualistic, ego-based preferences, and that we should consume or use or join these "products" only to the extent that they please us and meet our own personal needs.**

*When we buy into this mythology (pun intended)—and it happens without our realizing it—we begin to regard everything around us as a product to consume—everything becomes a shopping experience! We become consumers not only of material goods, but also of relationships,*

*education, travel experiences, health care choices, and of course...religious communities.*

*The church of the 21st century must stand against this cultural sickness with all its might—especially, I might add—those churches that are located in the heart of middle-class, suburban America, to whom this mythology has been most relentlessly promoted, with the most spiritually toxic and morally paralyzing results. Source: UUA Worship Web, Delivered at the opening worship service of the Ballou Channing District meeting, 2004.*

Well I think she has issued quite a challenge here. The good news is that more and more of us are hearing the message. But it is not easy to change old habits of the mind. Escape is always a temptation. As in this old story: The shipwrecked mariner had spent several years on a deserted island. One morning he was thrilled to see a ship offshore and a smaller vessel pulling out toward him. When the boat reached the beach, the officer in charge handed the marooned sailor a bundle of newspapers and told him, “The captain said to read through these and let us know if you still want to be rescued.”

We are a meaning making species that reflects on the Universe and our own role in it. We can consciously choose what kind of world we want to create. Our participation gives value and meaning to our lives. We can't

leave well enough alone it seems, always tinkering and figuring out how things work. Answer this question: Alien beings from a highly advanced society visit the Earth, and you are the first human they encounter. As a token of intergalactic friendship, they present you with a small but incredibly sophisticated device that is capable of curing all disease, providing an infinite supply of clean energy, wiping out hunger and poverty, and permanently eliminating oppression and violence all over the entire Earth. You decide to: A. Present it to the next President of the United States. B. Present it to the Secretary General of the United Nations. C. Give it to the UUA. D. Save it for our May 10 Service Auction. Or E: take it apart. Supposedly if you answer E, that makes you a real man. I say it makes you human.

You may not agree with everything David Korten writes but when he speaks of the stories, the theologies or mythologies that shape our world and our behavior they have a ring of truth to them. This is the *Empire Security Story: We live in a dangerous world, filled with evil enemies. Our security depends on the aggressive use of strong police and military forces to control and eliminate criminals, terrorists, and other foreign enemies who hate us for our freedoms. Or the Empire Prosperity Story: Economic growth brings prosperity to everyone and creates the wealth needed to end poverty and heal the environment.* (Korten) For change to happen the turning must be political, economic, cultural and spiritual. Korten envisions it this way: *The*

*economic turning creates the necessary conditions for a turn from a one-dollar, one-vote democracy to a one-person, one-vote democracy, from passive to active citizenship, from competition for individual advantage to cooperation for mutual advantage, from retributive justice to restorative justice, and from social order by coercion to social order by mutual responsibility and accountability.*

*The Great Turning begins with a cultural and spiritual awakening—a turning in cultural values from money and material excess to life and spiritual fulfillment, from a belief in our limitations to a belief in our possibilities, and from fearing our differences to rejoicing in our diversity. It requires reframing the cultural stories by which we define our human nature, purpose, and possibilities.*

*In the Earth Community Prosperity Story healthy children, families, communities and living systems are the measure of real wealth. Mutual caring is the primary currency. I say sign me up!*

Once upon a time, a man found the egg of an eagle. It had been abandoned for some reason by its mother, but as it was still warm, the man took it and put it in the nest of one of his back-yard chickens along with the other eggs that were there being brooded upon. After a period of time the eaglet was hatched, and along with the other chicks from his nest he began to go about the back yard doing what the other chicks did. He scratched the earth for worms and insects. He looked for the corn that the man would throw into

the yard. He clucked and cackled as best as he could, and as he grew, he would, like the other chickens, thrash his wings and fly a few feet in the air.

Years passed in this way. Then one day he saw a magnificent bird far above him in the cloudless sky. It glided majestically among the powerful wind currents, soaring and swooping, scarcely beating its long golden wings.

The old eagle looked at it in awe and asked, "What is that?" The other chickens said: That's an eagle. You'll never be able to do that. Don't even imagine. The Eagle nodded his head believing this was true. So he thought there was open sky above him and no netting to hold him in he never flew free but spent his days scratching in the chicken coop. He did not know his true nature.

All over this world people are trying out their wings. My prayer is that we will choose wisely and that our great grand children will bless our choices. The Great Turning begins with us.