

THEME OF SERVICE: WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY

Environment, Ethics and Spirituality

Rev Dr Edgar Mihas

THEME OF MUSIC: World Environment Day with a Celtic/Pagan Flair

INTRODUCTORY MUSIC: World Environment Day Music (No Copyright Music)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B7kM4_fNjcg (to be played from 10:55 to 11:00, fully projected for the entire congregation, including on Zoom).

WELCOME: welcome into this safe space in a spirit of mutual understanding and reciprocal respect whoever you are and whatever your beliefs may or may not be.

OPENING WORDS: We enter this time and this place ..., by Rev Dr Linda Hart

We enter this time and this place to join our hearts and minds together.

We come to this place: the doors open, the heat comes on, biscuits are laid, the water heats, and you all come.

What is it that we come here seeking? Many things, too many to mention them all.

Yet, it is likely that some common longings draw us to be with one another:

To remember what is most important in life.

To be challenged to live more truly, more deeply, to live with integrity and kindness and with hope and love,

To feel the company of those who seek a common path,

To be renewed in our faith in the promise of this life,

To be strengthened and to find the courage to continue to do what we must do, day after day, world without end.

Even if your longings are different than these, you are welcome here. Even if you do not have the strength and the courage to pass along, you are welcome here. You are welcome in your grief and your joy to be within this circle of companions.

We gather here. It is good to be together.

CHALICE LIGHTING

This is our Chalice, a part of our tradition. We light this chalice, symbol of the Light within us and around us.

May our coming together for worship enlighten our hearts and our minds.

May the Inner Light of the Spirit be kindled by our time together and let us say Amen.

INTERFAITH AND SECULAR CALENDAR: Global Day of Parents (1st June), World Bicycle Day (3rd June), International Day of Innocent Children Victims of Aggression (4th June), World Environment Day (5th June), Russian Language Day (6th June), World Food Safety Day (7th June), World Oceans Day (8th June).

Trinity Sunday (4th June): a Sunday focusing on the doctrine in the 'mainstream' Christian church that God is three in one — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Race Unity Day (11th June – next Sunday): a holiday in the Baha'i faith that promotes racial harmony and understanding.

OPENING PRAYER BY THE Rt Rev Christine Hardman, Former Bishop of Newcastle
Creator God,

Thank you for the waters of the earth,
for the life-sustaining rains,
lakes, and deep oceans.

Keep us mindful of how precious these are,
and how vulnerable they are.

Help us to work together for clean water,
and for the sharing of it with those who have need of it today. *Amen.*

HYMN: 87 (P) Leave behind Your Bags and Baggage

PASSAGE for CONTEMPLATION, MEDITATION, REFLECTION by Lao Tzu

The best, like water,

Benefit all and do not compete.

They dwell in lowly spots that everyone else scorns.

Putting others before themselves,

They find themselves in the foremost place,

And come very near to the Tao.

In their dwelling, they love the earth;

In their heart, they love what is deep;

In personal relationships, they love kindness;

In their words, they love truth.

In the world, they love peace.

In personal affairs, they love what is right.

In action, they love choosing the right time.

It is because they do not compete with others

That they are beyond the reproach of the world.

SHORT STORY by Pedro Pablo Sacristán

There was once a little grey planet that was very sad. The people living there hadn't looked after it, despite them having all the inventions and spaceships you could ever need. They had contaminated the whole countryside so much with rubbish and pollution that there were no plants or animals left.

One day, a little boy was walking on the planet, when he passed a cave and noticed a small red flower inside. The flower was very sick - almost dying - so the boy carefully dug up the flower, with roots, soil and everything. Then, he started looking for a place where he could look after it. He searched all over the planet, but everywhere was so contaminated that there was no place the flower could possibly live in. Then he looked up at the sky and noticed the moon. It seemed to the boy that maybe the plant could survive there.

So, the little boy put on his astronaut suit, and climbed into a spaceship. He put the little red flower in the back, and off they went to the moon.

Far away from all that pollution - and with the boy visiting it every day to tend it - the flower started to grow. The flower was so well cared for, that it had soon germinated, giving birth to others, and these other flowers spread onto other flowers. Before long, the whole moon was completely covered with flowers.

That's why whenever the little boy's flowers open up for a few minutes, the moon takes on a soft red sheen, like a warning light. Maybe it's telling us that if you don't look after your planet, a day will come when flowers will only be able to grow on the moon.

CANDLES FOR CONCERN, CANDLES FOR GRATITUDE, CANDLES FOR SILENCE:

Within the next few minutes, anyone on Zoom or in Church will be able to light a candle (or ask us to do so on their behalf), having the opportunity to express their concern or gratitude, or simply to remain silent as the candle is being lit.

FIRST READING: Isaiah 24:4-6

"The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers, the exalted of the earth languish. The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore, a curse consumes the earth; its people must bear their guilt. Therefore, earth's inhabitants are burned up, and very few are left."

SECOND READING: Quran 7:31

“Children of Adam! Take your adornment at every time of Prayer; and eat and drink without going to excesses. For Allah does not like those who go to excess.” Allah created a perfectly balanced world on the basis of sustainability and circularity. This balance must be maintained by man acting moderately, thoughtfully and justly. Therefore, waste, pollution and destruction are the very qualities incompatible with Islam.

THIRD READING: the Ethical Role of Religion by Jonathan Clatworthy

Apart from modern secular society, all societies studied by sociologists have believed in some kinds of gods. There is a common logical structure. Every society has some way of engaging with its deepest questions: Why are we here? Who created us? For what purpose? By reflecting on the purposes for which we have been created we judge how we should live.

Unfortunately, recent secular theory obscures the connection. At the end of the seventeenth century, after the religious wars, peace was established by separating beliefs about God from matters of government. Later the separation expanded. Nineteenth century atheists believed the universe could be explained without reference to gods, or the beliefs and practices associated with gods. From their perspective these beliefs and practices served no useful purpose and could, so to speak, be put in a box marked ‘useless’. They needed a word to describe the box. They, therefore, borrowed the word ‘religion’, which had previously had different meanings. ‘Religion’ became an individual, private matter, nothing to do with the big questions facing society. Because we today have grown used to this meaning of the word, we easily fail to notice the practical implications of our own faith commitments.

HYMN: 128 (P) Our World is One World

REFLECTIVE ADDRESS:

Have we realised that Our World is One World? Have we realised that the Law of Cause and Effect has been and will always be there whether we like it or not whether we have a belief/faith/religion or none? Have we been fooled by false teachings and erroneous interpretations which somehow exonerate us from all our wrongdoings regarding our shameful conduct with regards to environmental degradation, including climate change, global warming and deforestation? These are not rhetorical questions any longer; they are literally a matter of life and death.

We saw that our SECOND READING (Quran 7:31) includes a warning: “Children of Adam! Take your adornment at every time of Prayer; and eat and drink without going to excesses. For Allah does not like those who go to excess.” A non-superficial interpretation of this verse will need to go well beyond overeating and overdrinking. A comprehensive and holistic interpretation will need to include all things done in excess as well as the underpinning principles, or rather vices, which include greed, selfishness, lack of care, lack of compassion and lack of empathy and, above all, lack of responsibility and accountability.

According to Sufism, the real issue is the reflection of our collective internal reality. Climate change is a reflection of what is inside us. In other words, we, our own selves, are running too hot and we are unconscious. We are not looking at what is causing problems in our world, and we are unconscious of them. Here is a difficult question: are we unconscious out of choice? Are we turning a blind eye? Are we oblivious to what we are about to reap as a collectivity called ‘humanity’? Are we even remotely aware of the magnitude, and perhaps the irreversibility, of what our agendas, priorities and actions have caused not only to humanity, but also to the entire ecosystem and, soon – God forbid – even outside planet Earth? Just one of those things are the most gross, outer aspects of things that we are doing, such as what we are throwing into our atmosphere and our waters, and things like that; but behind all this is really a reflection of what is driving the people to such shameful and destructive and self-destructive conduct.

OK. So, let us address this superficially simple question: what is it that actually drives people? Materialism. In fact, climate change can be seen as an outgrowth of materialism. Is it not our desire for money? Is it not our desire for what we want? Is it not our drive to generate excessive materialistic wealth at any cost? It is perhaps the inability to discipline ourselves. This is something we have to learn. Actually, the first step is to overcome materialism and our own personal desires for as much as we want. We have to realise that we cannot have everything we want; or, we can have it, but it will cause a problem or rather a domino effect of problems.

We can eat anything we want, but some of those things are going to cause cancer, COVID and many other conditions, diseases and illnesses. We can take what we want, but there are going to be outcomes for what we do. So, we have to start learning about those outcomes and we have to start being able first to understand the outcomes in ourselves and the choices we make, at the very least in the hope that we make wiser choices from now on. This is easier said than done and, thus, another question arises: how do we overcome materialism? How do we actually stop ourselves from our own desire nature and our own materialistic desire, the desirous aspect of our nature?

Sufism offers a threefold answer:

- Consciousness – Theosophy teaches that the Universe is ONE and this includes everyone and everything in it; us, too. We need to become conscious of that once and for all; no ifs, not buts.
- Awareness – Then we need to develop an awareness that whatever we do or fail to do has repercussions on the ONE Universe which obviously includes us; therefore, harming the physical environment means that we are actually harming ourselves and, in essence, the entire ecosystem. This leads to the realisation that the Law of Cause and Effect will not be suspended for our sake by anything human or superhuman, religion, belief or secular system, simply because no religion, no belief system, no political system, nothing is higher than truth and we had better face the truth with the urgency that the current situation warrants.
- Connection – If we are connected to God’s light, God will reveal to us very clearly within our own beings, our state of materialism and how we are damaging the environment and damaging ourselves. Now, if God is ONE and if the Universe is ONE, and we are all part of this ONENESS, then it would make sense to say that God is in everyone and everything but, just like beauty which also is in everyone and everything, not everyone can see it. Therefore, it becomes evident that our collective and personal conduct has put us in collision course with the entire Universe. Whether The One Universe coincides with The One God, this is immaterial. What matters is that what we do and fail to do cannot and does not happen in a vacuum; by contrast, it always has had and will have consequences. In other words, we can neither absolve ourselves of nor exonerate ourselves from our wrongdoings and the harm we have already caused to the ecosystem.

Is there still hope? Yes, there is, but only in the sense that hope dies last. It is high time we lived sustainably and always within our means. It is high time we stopped putting ourselves on a pedestal; all sentient beings are of equal inherent worth; all have a role to play, but no other sentient beings cause harm to the ecosystem than human beings. This folly has to come to an end IRREVERSIBLY ... or else!

MUSIC FOR CONTEMPLATION, MEDITATION, PRIVATE PRAYER, REFLECTION: 2min 52s
 Ar Eirinn Ni Neosfainn Ce Hi - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FsiZ87UKZLY>

PRAYER: Prayer for Strength and Guidance

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Eternal Spirit, in friendship with others and in loneliness, I give you my worries and my concerns. I ask for your guidance and your support in my efforts to make friendships as meaningful as they could possibly be. You see it all, the outer circumstances, the inner turmoil. I know that you understand my life, that sometimes my heart weighs heavy with trouble. Right now, I lay all these things before you. I breathe in, safe in the knowledge that I am held by the whole universe. I breathe out, knowing that I am held secure in your presence. You are all truth, you are overflowing love, you are a beacon of hope and a fortress of faith. Eternal Spirit, I choose to be attentive to your language, the silence, for it is in silence that inner voices become audible, as I journey onwards with you. So be it.

HYMN: 198 (P) We'll Build a Land

POETRY: The Way Through The Woods By Rudyard Kipling

THEY shut the road through the woods
Seventy years ago.
Weather and rain have undone it again,
And now you would never know
There was once a path through the woods
Before they planted the trees:
It is underneath the coppice and heath,
And the thin anemones.
Only the keeper sees
That, where the ring-dove broods
And the badgers roll at ease,
There was once a road through the woods.

Yet, if you enter the woods
Of a summer evening late,
When the night-air cools on the trout-ring'd pools
Where the otter whistles his mate
(They fear not men in the woods
Because they see so few),
You will hear the beat of a horse's feet
And the swish of a skirt in the dew,
Steadily cantering through
The misty solitudes,
As though they perfectly knew
The old lost road through the woods ...
But there is no road through the woods.

CLOSING WORDS: Now, by Andrew Usher
Now, through the rain and the sun,
Go your ways with gladness:
With Love in your hearts,
Peace in your minds
And Beauty touching your soul.

RECESSIONAL MUSIC: FAUN – Federkleid <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zOvsyamoEDg>