

What is it that spurs me to work for the environment?

Well, this Sunday's readings from Isaiah and Matthew about the vineyard go right to the heart of the matter. Our magnificent universe has been given to us in trust. Implicit in this gift is the responsibility to care for it in every way we can imagine, from the cosmic to the sub-atomic. Still, there has been a long history of failure in that regard. We humans have so often taken the command to be good stewards to mean the right to exploit, to dominate, to rape. This has been especially true for those of us who come from what we call the Western World culture. By and large we have been big consumers, not careful protectors, of this beautiful home planet of ours.

Perhaps it was a somewhat romantic view of our indigenous peoples, but I remember that as a little girl in elementary school I was deeply struck by stories of how those whom we called "Indians" in those days revered the earth and the animals that lived on it with them, how they took only what they needed to live. Perhaps that lurks in the shadows of a lifetime of tending gardens, loving the animals and admiring God's handiwork wherever I have been. Later, I have come to understand that the slogan, think globally, act locally, echoes another deep truth: when a butterfly bats its wings in Indonesia it has an impact on my little bit of the world here in Maine. We are so deeply connected it is breathtaking.

In more recent years, I have seen photographs and films of the devastation wreaked on the land in Northern Alberta in our greedy pursuit of yet more oil to fuel our way of life. By some fortunate collision, or collusion, of events, I dwell in a house one block away from the Portland Montreal Pipeline that was slated to connect me to that terrible devastation if I did not do something about it. There were, of course, others who shared a determination to not let that happen in our town, in our lives, on our watch. We raised a ruckus, rallied the town, organized a campaign to thwart the plans to bring dirty tar sands oil from Alberta to pollute our air and water. We chose not to be complicit in the destruction of our precious earth. And we won. We passed the Clear Skies ordinance in our city in 2014. Now we are raising money and beating the drum to help our city defend this victory in court against a suit brought by the Pipeline soon after, alleging violations of the Interstate Commerce clause.

This success has sensitized our little group of activists to ways we can use the power that goes with that success. We have worked with our city to pass another ordinance, this one banning the use of toxic pesticides on gardens lawns, playing fields and ultimately golf courses. We have helped a densely populated neighborhood defeat a misbegotten plan to build an LNG terminal in their midst. We have sponsored renewable energy workshops and participated in fairs. We work with the sustainability coordinator to bring to our fellow citizens education and training about organic methods for maintaining our gardens and lawns. Above all, we organize, organize, organize. We are like leaven, but the real power lies with the voices and actions of our neighbors.

There is another message in this Sunday's readings that resonates with me in these troubling times. It comes from St. Paul's letter to the Philippians where he exhorts them - and us - to stay focussed on "whatever is true...whatever is just...whatever is lovely." This has become a daily discipline for all of us who live in the maelstrom of today's attacks on immigrants, on regulations that protect our environment and on initiatives for global cooperation. It is a reminder that, as Genesis tells us, that we must pay attention to our beautiful world that our Creator looked upon and declared was good. When we do so, we join our loving God in the ongoing task of co-creation given to us.