

## **“My Epiphany: My Shalom for the Ages”**

**Sermon by Pastor Dan Harrison, Church of the Covenant, 1/12/20**

*Job 12:7-10; Isaiah 11:6-9; Revelation 22:1-2*

Ten of us gathered to retreat into corporate silence here on the grounds yesterday for a Winter retreat, which wasn't so wintery. If anything it was warm and rainy. But in the spiritual sense, it was marvelous as usual. The day turned into an amalgamation of synthetic and single-story reflection for me, a day spent introspecting and temperature taking, a day of self-critique, brokenness, and renewal. Sitting on the Church House porch, smelling the faint mixture of pine needles, damp bark, and the aromatic residue of life all around—I felt connected, watching our mother earth (*Hushki*) carefully watering herself with a gray, refreshing mist. She was healing her wounds, I surmised, like a hurt animal licking its painful cut. Compensating for the parts of her that were subjected to the worst kind of brutality, the glimmering mist invoking a healing salve with each drop. Even now, on the other side of her great body there was much pain and suffering, destruction and loss: A fire ravaging her skin and killing her living/breathing parts, much like someone suffocating another, choking the life out of them. She needs to breathe but can't seem to find enough clean air to do so. She is dying gradually. No one even questions this reality anymore it seems. Even our president who has been in adamant denial suddenly admitted this truth the other day; “Climate change is real,” he said. His words spilling out as if a secret had suddenly found its revelatory way into a conversation without meaning to.

I was being called out from the manufactured refuge of the porch. I followed the beckoning mist into its grayness, finding my way to the large towering saints that dot the landscape, whose bark and limbs remind me of the leathery skin of an ancient sage, standing naked like a prophet before the world, begging for my attention. “Lend me your ear...” I could almost hear them say. I embraced each of these elders with a hug and kiss. My soft lips touching their equally soft, damp bark. I could almost feel the energy exchanged, like it does between any two intimate beings full of life, and whose touch inevitably serves as a conduit of transfer of built-up energy, like an unintended electric shock crossing the bridge we have forged by our proximity, when our skin touches another's. I realize in that moment that this intimacy boils down to choice: My choice. These forest dwellers from their start maintain a posture of invitation, inviting anyone to embrace them, to climb them, to enjoy their natural shelter from the sun or rain. They have been this way from the beginning, but it is up to us whether or not to engage. As I stood there contemplating this very thought, my shoulders loosened, and my body shifted while balancing on the slippery roots beneath my feet, allowing me to lean into, or better yet slip into the arbor goddess—letting my forehead rest on the coolness of her skin. And there, I wept, falling deeper into her presence—letting my weight carry me there. I had made a connection; I had made a friend, a part of a much larger whole. Her name is *Hushki*. This is the Choctaw word for *mother*. May I never forget it, because no one should disrespect or abuse or even forget their mother, right? This is a universal value and an instinctual truth.

The word Ecology, or the study of the environment comes from the same Greek word as *Oikos*, which means “home.” *Eco* and *Oikos* are related. Often when we think of the environment, we are thinking of something outside of ourselves, while in reality we are talking about ourselves and those with which we are geographically and biologically connected—where our anatomies find symbiotic connection and mutual survival goals. We need one another, and this includes all organics within our biosphere. In the oldest scripture found within the Bible, in the book of Job—a story which is several thousand years old,

the main character recognizes the ancient understanding that even the other members of our biosphere, the animals and the plants, have knowledge to give for they, like us, have evolved from the same source of creation itself. We are united in a shared story of survival. We are all parts of a greater whole on this earth, together.

Thousands of years after Job, the prophet Isaiah would envisage a world that would make peace with itself, where animals would stop eating one another and instead be friends, because the knowledge that we would have would finally be enough to make a lasting peace: A Shalom for the ages. He said our knowledge would then be as “the waters that cover the sea.” We would be immersed in it. Are we there yet? Or are we still so blood-thirsty that we cannot see beyond our next meal?

There is a great dis-harmony in the world today, and we know it. We can feel it. Can't you? Do you not see how we treat one another with suspicion, treat our animals with disaffection, and our plants with burdensome loathing. We cannot seem to make peace anywhere, so somewhere along the line many of us stopped trying. I ask us to reconsider this for a moment, though, and try again. One more time, two more times, three more times. Don't give up! Over a billion creatures killed in the Australian fires. Do our hearts ache? Does the lion ever weep for the lamb? Does the predator stop seeing others simply as prey?

Why in revelation is Jesus, our Lord, given the title “The Lamb of God?” As we see in that passage, throne of the Lamb... how is it that a Lamb is ruling and not a Lion? Jesus in fact embodies both the Lion of Judah and the Lamb of God at once. He symbolizes the peace we seek, where the lion no longer is interested in eating the lamb. Instead, they live in harmony. Some will say “that's crazy talk.” Yes. Then call me crazy. The vision in revelation of the river flowing from this great harmony between the Lion and the Lamb with the Tree of Life on its river banks, we can surmise that LIFE IS FLOWING out of this Shalom for the Ages. May this be the peace we seek in 2020. May we instead of life-taking become life giving to one another.

Not to miss the opportunity to play on the idea of 20/20 vision and the fact that we are in the year 2020, let us see ourselves in this world more clearly this year and be willing to carve out a space of peace within its unfolding. Satish Kumar writes that, *“As we are urged by the Gita to live in harmony with the natural world, soil, we are also guided to live in harmony with ourselves, with soul. As we are at war with nature, we are also at war with ourselves. Making peace with ourselves is a prerequisite to making peace with the earth.”* So, I ask us to engage in the passing of the peace to one another this morning. Please take a moment and find those around you and share the peace with them. Tell them “peace to you,” or if you prefer simply, “shalom.” Meet each other's eyes, and bless each other.

Now let us say to the earth around us in an ancient language spoken on this continent for tens of thousands of years, in my own people's native tongue of Choctaw, “Chi Hullo Li, Ashki.” Which means “I care for you, my mother.” Repeat after me. “Chi” “Hullo” “Li” “Ashki”. Let her hear us use words we hope she remembers. Again, Chi, hullo, li, ashki.

Let us make everlasting peace this year a top priority, with one another, with our Creator, and with the Earth.” A real shalom for the ages.

Shalom