

Footprints: Walking the Stations of the Planet

Whether it is finding enough sacrifices to keep the volcano from blowing, ...
to ending the plague,
or stopping Hitler's march across Europe

In every era, something rises to the top of concerns,
begging that attention be spent on it.

In our age nothing else matters nearly as much as figuring out how to hold onto all the good things we have cultivated as a species the comforts mostly we in the west enjoy,
and not destroying ourselves in the process.

(poignant still)

In our age nothing else matters nearly as much as figuring out how to hold onto all the good things we have cultivated over the years as a species, and not destroy ourselves in the process.

I hold above all else that this problem is the challenge of our generation, particularly of our culture.

I want you too as well.

Nothing else comes close.

Of all the things on our collective list of human improvements,

of all the things we ought to do.

From improving e-mail speed to ending hunger, protecting the earth is the only thing we need to do.

It is an odd task that we have brought on ourselves really. Being in a way too successful and all, that is.

Let's stop for a minute and reflect with a touch of irony that we have inherited from our fore-bearers and have done our part to build a world that gives us so much of what our ancestors prayed over, --worked toward-- and we now discover that collective effort is unsustainable.

If it were not so serious, it would be funny.

I think we really need one of those difficult family conversations. One not only with each other, but with the past 5-6 generations.

Such conversation, or intervention with the generation that began towards the start of the industrial revolution last century might go like this...

“The planes and the cars and the mines and the central air, and the frozen food, and all that you dreamed up and struggled so hard to put into place.

Thank you, seriously thank you, we are grateful.

That was an awesome transformation

But Now there are nine billion of us, and we all want to play.

And well,

I think you should sit down to hear this.

We have discovered that the life you have helped us build rests on the unexamined premise that the planet was infinite.

You could have never seen this coming.

You're not at fault

But we find its' true.

(Eyes down bashfully)

Please Forgive us if we feel the need to go another way.

(In tone end that dialogue)

The hard part is we are all in different places of acceptance of all that science has told us is true.

Look around, around the globe and around at people and you will see that we as individuals and as cultures are all in different places on this.

Although the science is pretty clear,

some of us have come to accept the biological limitations of our planet are real

Some of us are in denial, some of us are angry,

Some of us resistant.

It's all very Kubler Ross.

We need events,
and tools,
and rituals,
and metaphors
and new religious
images to pull us closer to acceptance,
so that we can begin to take seriously what each of us as
people, as cultures need to focus in on changing

The good is that there is potential for this, evidence of this
all around.

That change can happen quickly.

The very shift in the collective meaning of what our
footprint is itself an example of the speed of change.

Of a paradigm shift

Now with increasing frequency the image of what your
“footprint is” no longer immediately conjures up the mark
your sole and toes leave on the ground.

Or even the size of your houses foundation,
an indicator of the amount of carbon your life produces,
an indicator for how much a tax you as an individual
place on the planets most vulnerable area, ...its
atmosphere.

The footprint is a wonderfully palpable image to borrow.
And we need more.

As modern liberal religious people we need to introduce images that are powerful, that are intentional and that can emotionally move us to greater empathy with the planet.

The Maple syrup communion, that will follow this sermon, and fast becoming a tradition here is one.

I think I might have another one, another image that might work is something of an amalgam of the AA twelve steps and the Christian stations of the cross.

(Stations of the Cross)

Since Easter falls so often close to Earth Day, in addition to or for many rather than walk along with Jesus reflecting and reliving the highlights or lowlights of his brutal journey towards crucifixion,

We might with the same down-turned sober even tearful faces walk through the ways and the appropriate emotions not of how we mistreat Christianity's prophet, but the planet.

I imagine as in the original stations of the cross we follow a sequential series of different scenes that marking humans journey to industrialization, awareness, and finally right relationship

Like the intention of following the story of Jesus step by bloody step,

I want this tool to emotionally bond us with the planet, with our amazing progress as a people, and the clear need to pause take a deep breath and claim that we can't go on blindly.

(Start of the stations end of description)

In the first few stations we might see ourselves as simple hunters and gatherers, in bands of about 100,

In the next image set about 6 thousand years ago capture us as very early farmers and herders, ...in the next we are in the first cities in South American Peru making pots.

At station **four** we might see the peasants of Europe in the clothing we imagine worn when stained glass was invented People with plows, but no zippers.

At station **five** we move into the pre-dickens cities with the requisite Wagons and horses, street lamps to both greater comfort, and damage.

Nothing tragic quite yet, and then it turns. in the middle to later portions of our "ecology stations" we begin to see, maybe even we smell the toxic waters soot choked air, but to be fair also more comforts and entertainments.

Perhaps in this modern version of the stained glass window sequence

as we move forward in time the technology of each station shifts according to the era from papyrus sketches to wood-cuts to photographs to video and computers.

And accordingly as I dream this up, perhaps the place we view the display from shifts from a set that feels like a set from the movie land of the lost on through the cultural and industrial changes that led us to lazy boys, TV dinners and flat screen TV's I imagine all along in these hundred year or so jumps from station to station we witness the population of the world shift, perhaps a repeating dark/nighttime world map where light appears as the population centers and or carbon use of the earth grows.

In about station **six** I imagine us seeing a film of a beach in India where a massive oil liner is being poisonously deconstructed, by simple clothed, but modern Indian's. In another clip a cruise liner dumps its waste into the ocean, Then as we hit station seven it turns a little towards emotional theme

I propose window **seven** be dedicated to guilt. We will for this to work have to have time to be present with our Guilt:
Guilt that we live way too large.
Guilt that we as a globe produce on average 1 ton of

carbon per person into
and we as Americans average 5 tons per person.

At this mix of stained glass, and video we kneel and
absorb the truth that there are not enough atmospheres for
us to live our present day American lives.

We witness accounts of future tragedies that still might be
averted.

In one of these we see a map that shows Bangladesh, a
country we see to be about half the size of Wisconsin,
but with a population hovering about half ours 150
million wading waste deep in water by this centuries end.
Because in part we, YOU cannot stop driving.

At this station the images of what average families from
around the world out on their lawn have might be
displayed over and against the average Americans
goodies. It is all very dark. But we are not done.

Eight:

Station eight is dedicated to fear.

Fear that at present growth China adds the equivalent of
the Electricity California's uses each year.

Fear that every time we look, a new ice berg is ready to
float off into the ocean and melt

Fear that there truly is plenty to be afraid of.

Fear is respected, fear is encouraged. We need fear

nine

Station nine would be headed by the plaque that reads
“The best things in life aren’t things.”

Here is captured the truthful picture that
Despite our incredible affluence we are not incredibly
happy.

At station nine we are shown quite clearly that our
happiness cannot be bought.

Oddly, though this too is delivered as good news.

We find at station nine that our rates of expressing “I am
satisfied” on a standard survey peaked in 1956
and has somewhat steadily declined at the pace our stuff
has grown.

At station 9 we face that we now have tripled what we
had in the mid-fifties and are less satisfied

Station 10 will present how our unhappiness might
actually be readying us to a place of acceptance.

It gives us a chance to ask

What is the satisfying life? And what would it look like
to lead it.

Station **ten** is where we begin to define the way forward.
Here we really examine our relationship with earth,
And come to face and linger for a while the sadness that
our relationship with our planet over the last two hundred
years, the last three hundred years in particular is one we
have like no other time before is one we have taken for
granted.

At this-the tenth station we realize not how much we rely on this planet mother of ours for life, but that we rely completely and utterly on her.

At this station we come to realize the only solution is to understand and properly prioritize for good what is fixed what is essential, and what is a variable.

At ten we face that planetary health is a need, and economic growth is a want.

At this spot we are somehow faced with the difficult challenge that those that mostly call the shots gain their status and their resources, their identity and their wealth, their security and their beliefs on the back of what is a variable.

As blogger John Michael Greer suggests speaking about the environment says-

“If a solution is defined as something that will make the problem go away, the truth is missed.”

Eleven:

The next station

Station eleven is the station of flexibility, opportunity, and that old Unitarian and Universalist faith in progress and human ingenuity.

The bronze plaque below says on it- “*All that is possible cannot be foreseen.*”

Raise your hand if you separated your paper from your

plastic 30 years ago

Be honest.

Raise your hand if you now take the time to recycle.

That is a big change.

Change can happen fast. And Thank God for that because we need it to

I imagine the average literal human footprint set down by the Average American on the average day as few as eight generations ago (this I am guessing at) was set down on dirt.

A dirt floor, a dirt street, a forest, farm, or desert.

Not tar, tile, or hardwood.

So we have been a little misguided in building a world around an unsustainable idea of endless growth, oil, and the combustion engine.

You know where that puts us.

That puts us in the fine company of all other humans who have

Dedicated their lives to thinking the moon is made of cheese,

Dance for rain, and bind the feet of women, burn widows alongside husbands and stretch the necks of young people with rings, and every other bad idea.

At station eleven we come to terms with the fact that, lost with the momentum of our journey that, we have made a few mistakes, but always comforting and reassuring

ourselves that we have made some progress as well, and that we can turn it around.

That the world is finite and not irreplaceable, Here we remind ourselves that the occasional Star Trek remake and trip to the moon aside, we are earthlings. Born of this place and capable of living nowhere else.

At this station we are asked to remember that we are not witnesses to history,
(sweet baby) we are the authors of it.

Can I get an Amen-

And then

One of the last windows is this, you read this on a bronze plate:

(author- see Hymnal)

And then the last thing at the last station you do is press a button and there is a poem read to you this is what it says

“Come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought of grief.
I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day blind stars waiting with their
light.

For a time I wait in the grace of the world and am free.”

Dream it with me. Come on, you know you want to.
We can live within the confines of the planet.
Once we, like the addict that realizes he she simply
cannot drink or drug anymore
Then freedom comes.

On the way out the door like baseball players touch the
Babe's statue for good luck and the top of the door on the
way out of a football locker-room, they touch a plaque
that reads We Can Do This.”

And then there is time to reflect and share.

Amen