

How Do We Treat Our Mothers?

Shared by Rev. Ken Heintzelman on May 8, 2011
Based on I Kings 3:16-28

I remember as a young boy living in Ohio I loved to go exploring. I would walk across fields, through small patches of woods, eat green apples from some scrawny trees, and walk along the deep ditches lining the rural roads. When I got tired I would find a place in the deep ditches to sit down. The ditches were lined with tall grass and I was always able to find a place that fit my body just right. I could smell the grass, hear the bubbling water and feel the warmth of the sun on my face. It was like nature's Lazy Boy recliner.

As I prepared for my time with you today I have thought of this experience. It is a memory that keeps coming back to me and I want to pay attention to it because it may help me tie together some different images and dimensions of motherhood. When I laid back in the grass it was like being cradled by Mother Earth and I knew that everything was going to be okay. Even as a young boy I knew something spiritual was going on. I did not have the words for it but I had the receptive heart and mind for it.

I want to lift up the idea of a spirituality of the earth again today. Last Sunday, I encouraged us to see that earth spirituality or depth ecology was already a part of the Christian tradition. Jesus reference to the "sign of Jonah" was explicit in appealing to "the heart of the earth" as a way and a place for transformation. The heart of the earth is our origin, our ultimate return, and our ultimate rebirth.

I want to go further today. Let me be clear and let me blow your mind a little bit regarding the spirituality of the earth. I am not just talking about a unique religious or spiritual awareness about reality which includes an earth friendly component. I am not talking about our orientation toward the planet. I am talking about our planet's orientation toward us as a species and life in general. I am inviting you to think in terms of earth's spirituality; not our spirituality about the earth.

I am building on an assumption about life, the meaning of life, and how such meaning is captured, understood, and shared. **(I am saying this as I build on philosopher Paul Ricour's idea about the fullness of language.)**

The idea is that we are not born into a blank universe as a blank slate. Lots of things are going on before we arrive. When we pay attention to ourselves and to our children we notice that as human beings we grow and awaken to things in the world and things in ourselves.

There are many awakenings for us as we grow. For example, realizing that I am not the center of the universe was quite a rude awakening but an important one. I was not ever the center of the universe even before I realized that. It was already written. A more

positive awakening for me was that the whole of reality is grace and I do not have to earn God's love but I have always been loved even before I realized it. It was already written.

We awaken to a universe in which the cosmic script reveals itself to us in the rhythms and pulses of life. It was already written and the earth cradles us like a loving mother the way I was cradled as a boy in that ditch in Ohio.

We awaken to the written scriptures of many traditions as many human beings shared their own awakenings. They are already written and the earth cradles us and all of our religious traditions and spiritual journeys like a loving mother..

We awaken to a third script, a third holy writ, imprinted within our own being. The work of biology, sociology and psychology map out these internal scripts and show us that they are already written and cradled by the earth like a loving mother.

Think of each of these as their own scriptures; the cosmic, the written, and the interior awareness— each one responding, evoking, and dancing to the beauty and challenge of the other.

Thomas Berry writes of these three scriptures. He says, “These three together guide us in our self creation, our humanization. Out of these three scriptures the human cultures have been born and sustained and, when these cultures have declined, it is out of these three sources that they have been called back to life and renewed from century to century.” (p. 23). **Earth is the maternal source out of which we are born and sustained.** How do we treat our mother?

I have heard women say that they can tell a great deal about a man by how that man treats his mother. I think we can tell a great deal about us as a species by how we treat our mother earth. Do we treat her like a prostitute and just use and abuse her or do we treat her like the mother of us all that she is?

The story of the two women and Solomon's judgment reflects a definite progression regarding the personhood of the two women. Let me acknowledge the patriarchal and sexist worldview which can contribute to sexism and inequality in our society. We could focus on that and get lost but I want to use it as a springboard for our thoughts and our appreciation of mothers and qualities of motherhood.

Please note that the story begins by speaking of the two women as prostitutes and then speaks of them as women and finally at the end one of them is declared the honorable title of mother. It is in the breaking and the turning of her heart that she lives out the qualities of motherhood. It is in her surrender of the child to the other woman in order to preserve the child's life that the woman reveals some important qualities of motherhood. It is a kind of “not my will be done but your will be done.” It is in this instance of a

selfless act that earns her the reference, “This is the child’s mother”. Please note it is the selfless act of giving so the child may live that distinguishes the mother from the prostitute; not actual biology and matching DNA.

Technically I had two fathers. One cared for me and raised me and the other made a donation at my conception. I have no confusion about which one is my real father. In the Word About Life one woman was acting out of spite and the other out of love and care. There is no confusion about who is the real mother.

Earth is the maternal source out of which we are born and sustained. The earth like the mother in today’s story gives and gives and gives and like little children unable to put limits on ourselves we take and take. I know this is not a pretty picture of humanity but I believe in our potential to do better.

The beginning of doing better, I think, begins with an awareness that the earth’s energy as an organism is directed toward our good not directed toward our destruction. The earth’s energy as a complex organism is not passive but adds to a larger holistic life giving dynamic that gives birth to us all and sustains us.

The beginning of doing better is allowing this earth mother awareness to shape our consciousness and our relationship with the earth herself and each other. Align human energy and human spirit with the life of our planet to promote a balance between sustainable development and quality of life. Let us build economies around this potential harmony.

Like the spirit of the true mother who was willing to give up the child in order for the child to live we too must embody the spirit of the true mother willing to sacrifice our self interest for the life of our planet and the futures of our children.

To do better perhaps we should treat Mother Earth the way we would treat our biological mothers.

All of us who are parents know to some degree what it means to make sacrifices for the sake of our children.

The story reflects a positive progression of one woman who begins as a prostitute but is finally acclaimed a mom. This story reminded me of another story. It is a story that was presented in a Los Angeles newspaper. The story featured a young woman who had run away from home and as too many young people do she resorted to prostitution in order to survive. Her story was not only told as a narrative but it was captured in mug shots. The first picture showed a young woman full of life and potential. The second picture she looked defeated. The third picture she was beat up with a black eye and a broken jaw. The fourth picture showed a person who no longer had any life or hope in her eyes.

This story came to mind to an environmentalist as he was driving down the highway and thinking about all of the work and artificial supplements that goes into the soil to create a

crop

Part of the earth: earth as mother means everything is my sister and brother.
Too successful at dominating and less successful at harmony
Structures of life which are cyclical not hierarchical

What does it look like to be in right relationship with the earth? Certainly it has worked to objectify the earth and exploit its resources for to do so has given a small percentage of the world's population a great standard of life. It has given other people in the world something to shoot for. However, it is not sustainable and sometime, sooner or later if not already, it becomes detrimental.

The first North American Mother's Day was conceptualized with [Julia Ward Howe's](#) Mother's Day Proclamation in 1870. Despite having penned The Battle Hymn of the Republic 12 years earlier, Howe had become so distraught by the death and carnage of the Civil War that she called on Mother's to come together and protest what she saw as the futility of their Sons killing the Sons of other Mothers. With the following, she called for an international Mother's Day celebrating peace and motherhood:

*Arise, then, women of this day!
Arise all women who have hearts,
Whether your baptism be that of water or of tears
Say firmly:*

*"We will not have great questions decided by irrelevant agencies,
Our husbands shall not come to us reeking of carnage,
For caresses and applause.
Our sons shall not be taken from us to unlearn
All that we have been able to teach them of
charity, mercy and patience.*

*"We women of one country
Will be too tender of those of another country
To allow our sons to be trained to injure theirs."*

From the bosom of the devastated earth a voice goes up with our own.

*It says, "Disarm, Disarm!"
The sword of murder is not the balance of justice!
Blood does not wipe out dishonor
Nor violence indicate possession.
As men have often forsaken the plow and the anvil at the summons of war:
Let women now leave all that may be left of home
For a great and earnest day of counsel.*

Let them meet first, as women, to bewail and commemorate the dead.

*Let them then solemnly take counsel with each other as to the means
Whereby the great human family can live in peace,
Each bearing after his own time the sacred impress, not of Caesar,
But of God.*

*In the name of womanhood and humanity, I earnestly ask
That a general congress of women without limit of nationality
May be appointed and held at some place deemed most convenient
And at the earliest period consistent with its objects
To promote the alliance of the different nationalities,
The amicable settlement of international questions.
The great and general interests of peace.*