

“All That Love Makes Possible”

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First Church in Boston

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I wrote this sermon while camping. In New England. In early April. And, yes, it rained.

Still, I had a view of the Atlantic through the window of my little trailer and could hear the waves tumbling rocks along the shore.

I love camping. I often return to the same campgrounds for just a night’s respite—and some quiet for sermon writing! Camping season in Massachusetts runs from April through November. On this early spring trip to [Horseneck Beach](#), the dune grasses were still yellow and dry, but the first green shoots were growing. Tight green buds were also emerging on the hearty beach roses. By midsummer, knee-high green grasses will cover the sand and specks of pink roses will appear along the paths. In the fall, the shrubs turn deep maroon against the golden grasses. In every season—as long as it’s not cloudy—an immense sky of stars dazzles overhead. Every short camping excursion reconnects me to the beauty of the earth and the cycles of life.

I love the earth with its endlessly surprising delights as well as its grounding predictability of tides, sunrises, and moon cycles. I have jumped in the icy waters of the Atlantic in Maine and hiked the dusty mountain paths of Colorado. I have been mesmerized by the eruption of geysers and silenced by the wonder of an unexpected vista. I have worked in the deep, soft soil of an organic farm and been startled by an underground nest of baby bunnies amidst the potatoes we were harvesting.

I cannot imagine a life without connections to nature. Can you?

Love is a powerful source for motivating action. We care for and protect what we love. In their book, *Saving Paradise*, Rebecca Parker and Rita Nakashima Brock link beauty, love, and ethics. They write, “The ancients called the power of beauty *eros*, or love.” (149) Experiencing beauty fuels a love that can elicit an ethical response. As they explain: “Beauty’s ethical power was its ability to educe a loving orientation toward the world.” (150)

When we think about climate change and social injustices, it can be easy to become mired in the ugliness of it all. From oil-slicked wildlife on beaches to starving and unhoused children in war zones, there is no end to images of suffering and degradation of Life. And

while it is important that we do not deny the realities of injustices and crises, to only focus our attention on what is *wrong* risks a demoralizing drain of energies that immobilizes action. To effectively remain engaged in social change, there has to be another path forward that sustains meaningful action.

Reviving our love for the planet and its creatures is one such path! Imagining a more beautiful world kindles a fire for ethical action.

Today's Climate Justice Revival invites us into a renewing and transformative experience of imagination. Our reading from the new book *Abundance* by Ezra Klein and Derek Thompson is an example of imagining a better future. Arguing that we need to build and invent more of what we need, they caution: "The nostalgia that permeates so much of today's right and no small part of today's left is no accident. We have lost the faith in the future that once powered our optimism. We fight instead over what we have, or what we had." (13)

Self-professed liberals, Klein and Thompson take aim at both the right and the left, Republicans and Democrats as they address multiple challenges facing us in this moment. Begun far before the outcome of the 2024 Presidential election, their analysis reflects wider societal and political problems than simply who is or is not the president. At least part of the problem is a failure of imagination.

Transformation is one of our values as Unitarian Universalists. "*We adapt to the changing world,*" our national Association affirms, "*We covenant to collectively transform and grow spiritually and ethically. Openness to change is fundamental to our Unitarian and Universalist heritages, never complete and never perfect.*"

First Church in Boston is itself an excellent example of our heritage of transformation. We were founded by Puritans whose efforts to correctly live out their Christianity too often motivated exclusion, oppression, and even violence against those who believed or lived differently. Today we honor our Christian roots while centering a Love that embraces the values of diversity, equity, inclusion, and pluralism. We exist as we are today because of a long story of transformation of values, beliefs, and practices.

Today we gather to hear the call for yet another transformation.

The full title of today's Climate Justice Revival is "Reimagine Together: From an Extractive Age to a New Era." The first time I heard this framing of "extractive" to describe our recent era of human society, I experienced one of those *a-ha* moments that disable your ability to

keep seeing the world in the same way. The label “extractive” enables us to perceive a created pattern of socio-economic interactions that relies on particular assumptions and values. An extractive era assumes there would always be “enough” without accounting for long-term consequences. An extractive era foregrounds values of “progress” and “growth” without attending to who is left behind *or* to who or what experiences the lasting outcomes from what is taken. In short, an extractive era consumes without addressing questions of balance and long-term sustainability.

Today we need a new model. Today we are called to imagine a new era.

In college, I learned about transformation on both a personal and philosophical level. Personally, I had been raised as a conservative evangelical Christian and slowly transformed my beliefs about science, the Bible, and more. As a philosophy major, I learned about transformation from the theories of Thomas Kuhn. Author of the 1962 book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Kuhn described a series of paradigm shifts that revolutionized how we understand the world—for example, changing from a view that the sun rotates around the earth to one where the earth rotates around the sun. While Kuhn’s theory is not without its critics, his core idea of transformative paradigm shifts continues to resonate with me. Sometimes we need to revolutionize how we perceive the world. Sometimes we need to be humble enough to let go of what we think we know and be ready to jump into new currents of thinking.

Could this be one of those times?

Today’s Climate *Justice* Revival asks us to consider how climate change and social justice are interwoven. Climate change does not just impact water, earth, and air; climate change impacts people and all earth’s creatures. Yet, it’s not simply “people” impacted. Rather, the negative impact of climate change is [disproportionately borne](#) by low-income folks and people of color—as well as by many poorer nations.

We cannot talk about climate issues in isolation from issues of migration, income inequality, racism, and all the other ways social systems seek to stratify and divide humanity. As the climate changes and life as we have known it inevitably transforms, people will need to (re)negotiate how we share the world.

What if we fell in love with a vision of a world with cheap, renewable electricity and abundant food raised in sustainable ways? What if we could invent and build our way to a world of abundance that didn’t leave us politically scrambling to combat scarcity of housing? What if we didn’t ask—or expect—the most vulnerable among us to bear the cost

of a world where there is not enough clean air, clean water, or safe housing to go around? What if there was enough for us all?

What if we cannot go back to the world we had? Or even the world we wanted? What if what is needed *now* is something that has never yet been? What if the path forward relies not on rebuilding old infrastructure or ideas, but on inventing new ways of creating and deploying resources from electricity to medicine to cement? What if we need to change the policies, regulations, and processes by which we build the spaces where we eat, sleep, work, and gather? What if we need to rely less on *memory* or on what we think we *know* and more on *imagination* and the possibility of *transformation*?

Part of my conservative Christian journey involved attending a Methodist camp meeting “revival” each summer throughout junior and senior high school. If you are familiar with “revivals,” then you know that no revival service ends without a call to action—specifically a call to transformation. Today, I end this sermon with a call to transform your vision of the future. In a moment, I invite you to use the paper and crayons here in the sanctuary (or whatever materials you may have at home) to create a “rich picture” of what 2050 could look like. A “rich picture” is simply letting your thoughts flow—what might a typical day look like? how has our community changed? what does your local watershed, forest, beach look like?

I don’t know when or where my last camping trip will be. And I don’t know if you or I will even be alive to see 2050. What I do believe is that love of the earth and all its creatures is the best path forward to a more just and sustainable future. So let us take a few moments now to enter into a ritual of imagination by drawing your own “rich picture” of a future where love, *not extraction*, is at the center. Let us begin.