

## What We Need Is Here<sup>1</sup>

Rev. Myke Johnson

November 5, 2017

Allen Avenue Unitarian Universalist Church

*Opening Words* From “Seasons”

Parker Palmer<sup>2</sup>

Parker Palmer reminds us,

In the human world, abundance does not happen automatically. It is created when we have the sense to choose community, to come together to celebrate and share our common store. Whether the “scarce resource” is money or love or power or words, the true law of life is that we generate more of whatever seems scarce by trusting its supply and passing it around. Authentic abundance does not lie in secured stockpiles of food or cash or influence or affection, but in belonging to a community where we can give those goods to others who need them—and receive them from others when we are in need.

*Reading:*

The Wild Geese

Wendell Berry<sup>3</sup>

Ecologist Wendell Berry wrote a descriptive poem that invites us into a picture of the abundance of our natural world. I invite you to turn your attention inward and imagine the scene with me.

Horseback on Sunday morning,  
harvest over, we taste persimmon  
and wild grape, sharp sweet  
of summer's end. In time's maze  
over fall fields, we name names  
that went west from here, names  
that rest on graves. We open  
a persimmon seed to find the tree  
that stands in promise,  
pale, in the seed's marrow.  
Geese appear high over us,  
pass, and the sky closes. Abandon,  
as in love or sleep, holds  
them to their way, clear  
in the ancient faith: what we need  
is here. And we pray, not  
for new earth or heaven, but to be  
quiet in heart, and in eye  
clear. What we need is here.

---

1 Copyright 2017 by Rev. Myke Johnson. Permission must be requested to reprint for other than personal use.

2 <http://fetzer.org/sites/default/files/images/stories/pdf/seasonsbook.pdf> p. 25.

3 From *Collected Poems 1957-1982* (North Point Press). Find at <http://writersalmanac.publicradio.org/index.php?date=2003/08/05>

## *Sermon*

What is abundance? Is it the absence of scarcity? Is it having enough, or more than enough? For me, today, abundance is how the kale plants keep growing new leaves. I have eighteen kale plants in a ring around a baby cherry tree. Each morning, I go out and cut six or seven of the biggest leaves. The next morning, I go out, and more big leaves have grown. *Still* are growing. Previously, I ate kale from the store. So I had assumed if I planted kale, I'd get a bunch of leaves from each plant, and that was it. I had no idea that the plant would keep giving and giving. Every morning I feel such a gratitude to the plants. What we need is here.

When I think about abundance, I always think about the earth. All that we need to live is right here on this planet. Food, medicine, shelter—human beings have thrived for thousands of year on the bounty of the earth. Empires have risen and empires have fallen, yet our reliance on the earth remains.

Some of you participated in our Permablitz yesterday here at the church. The more I study permaculture, the more I grow in awareness of how, when we work *with* the earth, when we learn the lessons that *nature* can teach us, we can provide for our needs. The three principles of permaculture are care for the earth, care for the people, and share the surplus. When we follow these principles we discover what abundance is all about. What we need is here.

Now if you know me, you also know that I can never just approach a topic in a straightforward way. If the topic is abundance, I must also think about scarcity. I must also think about greed. If you were here last week, you know I talked about climate change and our potential for ending our own species with our ignorance and destruction of the natural world. My heart has been in that heavy place as I look around at the way things have been going. I wonder, What has happened to our species that we are not satisfied with enough, that we are greedy and keep wanting more? What has happened to our species that we crave and crave, and are afraid to share? All of the research shows that sharing creates more abundance, and yet we seem so afraid to share.

I imagine human beings must have experienced a large measure of famine and scarcity in our long history. I imagine we carry an epigenetic trauma of not having enough. Perhaps that is what is happening even now. Our ancestral fears of scarcity warring with our ancestral social impulses to care for each other. Or perhaps it is working differently now—perhaps people are filled with fear imagining future catastrophes, and a kind of pre-traumatic stress is triggering an epidemic of hoarding—the hoarding of wealth, the hoarding of power, the hoarding of things, along with the mistrust of anyone who is not ourselves.

But today, I want to set aside for a moment the despair that might well up in us because of climate change and ecological disasters on the earth. I want to set aside the human propensity to greed and denial, and ask, what if it *were* possible to save our habitat and our species? What if we had the will to do it, what then?

The impetus for these questions comes from a recently published book called *Drawdown*.<sup>4</sup> Edited by Paul Hawken, *Drawdown* is, “The Most Comprehensive Plan Ever Proposed to Reverse Global Warming.” Seventy people—researchers, scholars, scientists—from twenty-two countries, “gathered a comprehensive list of climate solutions and winnowed them down to those that had the greatest

---

4 Paul Hawkin, editor, *Drawdown*, (Penguin Random House, 2017) See more at <http://www.drawdown.org>.

potential to reduce emissions or sequester carbon from the atmosphere.”<sup>5</sup> They compiled research and developed detailed climate and financial models for each solution, and then reviewed all of the results with another 120-person Advisory Board.

They ended up with 80 solutions that use proven practices and technologies to reduce our emissions and ultimately draw down atmospheric carbon levels. These solutions also “lead to regenerative economic outcomes that create security, produce jobs, improve health, save money, facilitate mobility, eliminate hunger, prevent pollution, restore soil, clean rivers, and more.” A small number of the solutions are temporary stop-gap measures that have some detrimental spillover effects. But the vast majority are what they call “no-regrets solutions, initiatives we would want to achieve regardless of their ultimate impact on emissions and climate, as they are practices that benefit society and the environment in multiple ways.”<sup>6</sup> Caring for the earth, caring for the people, sharing the surplus.

In the final analysis, their models show the possibility of reversing greenhouse gas emissions in the next thirty years.<sup>7</sup> “Drawdown” is defined as “that point in time at which greenhouse gases [in the atmosphere] peak and begin to decline on a year-to-year basis.”<sup>8</sup> To achieve that goal, all of the 80 solutions would need to be enacted. In one modeling, 1,442 gigatons of carbon emissions could be avoided, and there would begin to be a net reduction of carbon in the atmosphere by 2050.<sup>9</sup>

It is not pie in the sky, or simple, or quick. But it was tremendously moving to me to read about the solutions that are included in the book. To know that there are so many people devoting their research and efforts to leaving a livable earth to our children.

Let me share with you some of the highest ranked solutions, to give you an idea of what they are proposing. These are the ones that would have the greatest impact in terms of gigatons of carbon dioxide or its equivalent in the atmosphere.<sup>10</sup> The first one might surprise you: refrigerant management. The chemicals that enable us to have refrigerators and air conditioners are all highly polluting and contributors to global warming. Merely by preventing leakage and capturing and destroying the chemicals at the end of the product life cycle, about 90 gigatons of carbon could be reduced in 30 years.<sup>11</sup> There is already an international accord to phase out the worst refrigerants.

The second most important solution is onshore wind turbines. They compute that “an increase in onshore wind from [about 3] percent of world electricity use to [about 22] percent by 2050 could reduce emissions by [about 85] gigatons of carbon dioxide.”<sup>12</sup> Each solution presented includes computations of cost, gigatons reduced of carbon dioxide or its equivalent, and net savings over 30 years. Almost every solution ended up earning much more money than its initial investment required. The numbers are important in that they model the achievements possible and create a blueprint for action. I noticed that, in fact, the proposals seem quite modest. It was never, you must do 100% of such and such for it to work, but only required moderate, achievable increases.

---

5 *All further references are from Drawdown, and I will reference the page number only.* p. x.

6 *Ibid.*

7 p. 220

8 p. x.

9 p. 220.

10 The ranking lists are on p. 221. Individual solutions each have their own pages.

11 p. 165

12 p. 4.

The third solution on the list is reducing food waste.<sup>13</sup> In lower-income regions, this is primarily achieved through improving infrastructure for storage, processing, and transportation. In higher-income regions, interventions are needed at the retail and consumer level to reduce waste.

The fourth solution is closely linked to it, plant-rich diets. Eating with a smaller quantity of meat in our meals reduces emissions. Plant-based diets also preserve forested land that might otherwise go into livestock production. Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh has said, making the transition to a plant-based diet may well be the most effective way an *individual* can stop climate change.<sup>14</sup> If 50% of the world's population reduces meat consumption overall, they estimate at least 66 gigatons of emissions could be avoided.

The fifth solution is about preserving and restoring tropical forests. Perhaps no surprise there. In fact, “Stopping all deforestation and restoring forest resources could offset up to one-third of all carbon emissions worldwide.” When forests are destroyed, carbon dioxide emissions occur. So preserving forests stops that from happening. But forests are also actively *sequestering* carbon, pulling it from the atmosphere in the process of photosynthesis. Hawken writes, “There are two means by which to achieve [drawdown]: a radical decrease in human-caused emissions and widespread adoption of proven land and ocean practices that sequester carbon from the air and store it for decades and even centuries.”<sup>15</sup>

In their analysis for the book, they broke down the various types of forest solutions into separate projects, but note that, “When you add up the impact of carbon sequestration and storage, forest protection and tropical and temperate forest restoration together are the most powerful solution available to address global warming.”<sup>16</sup>

The sixth and seventh most important solutions are intertwined—educating girls and family planning. It turns out that empowering women, while great for its own sake, is also dramatically positive in its impact on global warming. Women with more years of education have fewer, healthier children. The education of girls is “the most powerful lever available for breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty, while mitigating emissions by curbing population growth.”<sup>17</sup> They note that “Two hundred and twenty-five million women in lower-income countries say they want the ability to choose whether and when to become pregnant but lack the necessary access to contraception.”<sup>18</sup> While there can be dangers of paternalism or coercion from developed countries, the best results actually come “through meeting women's expressed needs, with empowerment, equality and well-being as the goals; the benefits to the planet are side effects.”<sup>19</sup>

The eighth-ranked solution is solar farms, followed closely by the tenth-ranked, rooftop solar. Currently, only .4 percent of global electricity is utility-scale solar, and .4 percent is in rooftop solar. If these grow to 10% and 7% respectively, by 2050, we can avoid almost 62 gigatons of carbon emissions.

---

13 p. 42-43.

14 p. 39-40.

15 p. 107.

16 p. 111.

17 p. 81.

18 p. 78.

19 p. 78-9.

The ninth-ranked solution is silvopasture, which is the integration of trees and pasture into a single system for raising livestock. Practiced already on the Iberian peninsula, and now in Central America, intermingling livestock and trees has profound benefits for sequestering carbon. Pastures that are strewn with trees sequester 5 to 10 times the amount of carbon as treeless pastures, and can produce more gains from livestock at the same time.<sup>20</sup>

There are dozens more solutions presented, but these are the ones with the top results. Refrigerant management, wind power, reducing food waste, increasing plant-based diets, forest protection and regeneration, the empowerment of girls and women, solar energy, and silvopasture. You might notice that very few of them are something done by individuals. Most of them require action at the level of communities and industry and governments. As Paul Hawken concludes:

Climate solutions depend on community, collaboration, and cooperation. At the end of the day, every solution in *Drawdown* is initiated and promoted by groups of people forming new and perhaps unlikely alliances: developers, cities, nonprofits, corporations, farmers, churches, provinces, schools, and universities. Food and land-use solutions focus on how to cooperate with nature in order to sequester carbon and improve the quality of all life. Educating girls and family planning are about communities the world over recognizing and supporting the potential of girls and the power of women. Energy and material efficiency arise from architects, engineers, city planners, activists and inventors working as a team...

[He goes on,] Science knows that virtually all children exhibit altruistic behavior, even before they can talk. It turns out that concern for the well-being of others is bred in the bone, endemic and hard-wired. We became human beings by working together and helping one another. That remains true today. What it takes to reverse global warming is one person after another remembering who we truly are.<sup>21</sup>

Pope Francis wrote an encyclical letter called “On Care for Our Common Home,” an excerpt of which is included in *Drawdown*. He reminds us that

Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it... Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change. We lack an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone... A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal. We must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world, and that being good and decent are worth it.”<sup>22</sup>

I was reminded, while reading *Drawdown*, that climate change is not primarily a scientific problem—there are scientific solutions that could be used to change course. In fact, the book also documents 20 new innovative solutions that are not yet proven, but also offer promise. Rather, climate change is deeply a spiritual problem of our time.

---

20 p. 50-51.

21 p. 217.

22 Quoted on p. 191.

I come back to that thought I invited us to set aside at the beginning of the sermon. Our society's leaders are stuck in greed and willful ignorance, with no desire to come together to make the changes needed for the habitability of our earth. They seem content to let everything be destroyed as long as they can accumulate more profit individually.

This is the very reason that faith communities are so important. It is our purview to be a force for the *common* good. As Parker Palmer reminds us, “In the human world, abundance does not happen automatically. It is created when we have the sense to choose community, to come together to celebrate and share our common store.”

Being a part of A2U2 is one way we all are voting with our feet to say that community matters. We remind each other to give primacy to gratitude, rather than consumption. We encourage each other to choose sharing over hoarding. We hold up these values. Care for the people, care for the earth, share the surplus.

Talking about climate change, even to name solutions, can evoke fear and anxiety. I want to acknowledge that. But what better place to talk than here, with each other. Our faith community believes in truth—the quest for truth is our sacrament. We want to face what is real in our time, so that we can approach it and sort out what to do together. I am grateful for our *permablitz* work party yesterday. About 25 people, both from within our church, and beyond, came together to work on projects on our land. We had a good time. We got a lot done. Thank you Sally for organizing the day.

We created a sacred circle space across the little wooden bridge on the front lawn—go check it out. We built up soil for a planting bed near our front entrance sign and also our main entrance to our building, to welcome pollinators and to welcome people. And building the soil sequesters carbon too. We installed more posts for solar lights along the walkway. Care for the people, care for the earth, share the surplus. I felt a sense of generosity and abundance during the day. People shared their energy and skills, and welcomed each other.

Perhaps the most important work we can do, in the face of climate change, is to keep opening our doors and our hearts, to create community, to share what we have, to care for each other. What we need is here.

I invite us to root down in meditative chanting to remind ourselves of that truth.

*Chanting Meditation: What We Need Is Here.*<sup>23</sup>

#### *Closing Words*

Once again, the words of Parker Palmer,  
In the human world, abundance does not happen automatically.  
It is created when we have the sense to choose community,  
to come together to celebrate and share our common store.

---

23 Chant by Amy McCreath, at <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/music/what-we-need-here>