

First Nations and Pipelines
Sermon, etc. for May 21, 2017 Worship Service
Karl Perrin with music by Holly Arntzen

Opening Words (#550 in our Grey Hymnal)

Chief Seattle said: "This we know. The earth doesn't belong to us;
We belong to the earth.
This we know. All things are connected, like the blood
Which unites one family.
All things are connected.
Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons and daughters
Of the earth. We did not weave the web of life;
We are merely a strand in it.
Whatever we do to the web,
We do to ourselves."

.....Property. What is it? Theft? Freedom? Home? We are meeting
on the unceded territory of the Musqueam First Nation. "Unceded"—What does that mean?
Never conquered. Never sold.
Never given away. Never ceded to anyone.
Are we guests? Perhaps we are guests of guests:
our 2 and 4 legged relations, our finned and winged cousins,
the lords and ladies of the deep: the whales who inhabit this home.
We owe a debt of gratitude to all our relations. Thank you.

And now, you may recognize long lost cousins sitting right next to you. Please greet and
welcome your neighbours.

Chalice Candle Lighting

We light this fire, symbol of the warmth of community,
Symbol of the light within us, which leads to truth and meaning,
Symbol of the wisdom which shines down through the ages,
Symbol of action, and the fire of commitment.

And now, please open your grey hymnal to #203,
"All Creatures of the Earth and Sky"
We will sing only verses 1,2, and 3.

Meditation

"O bent by fear and sorrow, now bend down,
Leave word and argument, be dark and still,

And come into the joy of healing shade.
Rest from your work. Be still and dark until
You grow as unopposing, unafraid
As the young trees, without thought or belief,
Until the shadow Sabbath light has made
Shudders, breaks open, shines in every leaf.”

(Wendell Berry, “A Native Hill” 1968)

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Introduction: From a 1968 essay by Farmer and Poet Wendell Berry

“We have lived by the assumption
that what was good for us would be good for the world.
And this has been based on the even flimsier assumption
that we could know with any certainty what was good even for us. We have fulfilled the
danger of this
by making our personal pride and greed
the standard of our behavior toward the world. . . .
We have been wrong.

We must change our lives, so that it will be possible
to live by the contrary assumption that what is good for the world
will be good for us. . . . For I do not doubt
that it is only on the condition of humility
and reverence before the world
that our species will be able to remain in it.

Wendell Berry, “A Native Hill” (1968) “

Part 1: Robert Davidson and the Tri-Neg

In 1973, after a pleasant 3 weeks in our provincial prison,
I was riding my bike down Burrard. It was summer, 1973,
and I had been caught on the border with 3 joints of marijuana.
I pled guilty and went to jail.

Once in Oakalla, the provincial jail in Burnaby, I thought
“Well if inside prison is this good, outside must be really, really good.” And it is. This place is
paradise, and we are all enlightened,
we just don’t know it all the time. So said our interim minister,
Rev. Andy Backus, back in 2002.

We not only respect the interdependent web of all existence.

We are a part of it. We are inter-depending.
We are not only seekers of the Way. We are the Way,
or to make it a verb: we are Way-ing, we are doing the Tao,
paving the Path--with our footsteps.

So I was riding my bike down Burrard in 1973,
and I saw this store called "Images for a Canadian Heritage".
I looked in the window, and saw this beautiful print.
I was brand new in town and didn't know anything about Bill Reid
or Haida art, but I knew what I liked. So on the spot, I bought this print called "Raven and
Fetus" by Robert Davidson for \$16!
Welcome to Lotus Land!

Now there are two stories here. One is the death of my hometown Detroit, now a vast ghost
city. I was a refugee from Detroit.
The other story is the rebirth of Coastal First Nations,
led by artists such as Robert Davidson and Susan Point,
and political leaders such as Grand Chief Stewart Phillip.

I'll continue this second story,
the spiritual rebirth of Coastal First Nations.
Flash forward to the year 2004. By 2004 I knew that Robert Davidson was right up there with
Bill Reid as a great coastal artist.
So I went to an evening with Robert Davidson
at the UBC Museum of Anthropology called *The Abstract Edge*. Davidson declared that he is
not just a Haida artist,
selling trinkets to the tourists, he is an Artist, with a capital A—
an international force of nature ready for New York, London, Tokyo, and Paris. On that night,
Davidson had a new collection
which used the Haida alphabet of shapes, myths, and heraldry,
but deconstructed and reimagined with a 21st century global sensibility.
Some pieces of this new collection featured an old shape
with a new meaning, known in English as the "tri-neg" or "tri-negative", because it was
traditionally used as a three pointed filler in negative space, in background, to add fluidity to
the form lines, and to simply frame the foreground.
Robert Davidson's innovation was to take the 3 pointed "tri-neg" shape, and through colour
and position, turn it into foreground, into positive space, instead of negative space. At that
point I had a revelation:
We colonizers, we settlers, based on our cultural history,
had seen the so-called wilderness, the heathen, dark pagan forest,
as negative space: empty, devoid of Christian civilization,
devoid of...Europe, the only reality which made any sense
to our collective wisdom. And the denizens of this emptiness

were simply negative people—virtual zombies.
Robert Davidson, by putting his tri-neg space filler into a positive space, showed me that what is foreground, and what is background, is simply a case of cultural perception. European Christians saw First Nations as empty, negative space, lacking our blessings and the salvation of our Bible. We settlers saw them as un-settled. But as First Nations broadcaster, Candy Palmater, taught me, we are not “settlers”, because when we arrived this place was already settled. We didn’t settle anything. Likewise, whenever I see old Haida representations of white men, they look ridiculous, not intentionally ridiculous, but the hats and beards are odd, as if they were copied, but not understood. We were lacking Haida culture. We were negative space to them. We were the devoid and lacking savages. Lacking? No. ravenous for sea otter pelts-- for some weird reason.

I mean, imagine Captain Vancouver and his crew, sailing into so-called Burrard Inlet, on June 12, 1792. If you were Musqueam what would you think of this shaggy collection of Halloween freaks? Weird? Ridiculous? Uncivilized? Un-everything and therefore the negative background to your very clear and proper, very civilized foreground as a proud speaker of your beautiful Musqueam language? “Hey, what’s that thing on his head? A dead bird?” And once they learned it was a wig, the questions just multiply: “Why? A white—powdered--wig? WHY?”

PART 2: Seeing with a World View

You see, the physical photons emanating from George Vancouver on the deck of his ship, are the same whether you are his First Mate, or a Musqueam warrior looking up to the ship’s deck. The light reflecting off his costume, is still the same when it reaches the eye of the random eagle circling overhead. But the MEANING, my friends, the *MEANING* of that visual information is completely different when processed by the brains of First Mate, Musqueam warrior, or eagle: What do they see? Captain? Or Devil? Friend? Or Foe? Disgusting? Or maybe delicious? It’s all up to which brain is interpreting what it sees, because believe me friends, vision is 60% what we expect to see, and 40% what is out there.

I repeat, “vision is 60% what we expect to see, and 40% what is out there”, and that’s why we have optical illusions: our biased brains just insist that our eyes must be wrong, until proven otherwise. Usually we just categorize

what doesn't make sense, as simply "wrong",
and what does make sense, as obviously "right".
And what's wrong or right is determined by our culture, our language, our fashion, popular
history and mythology, our religion,
and sometimes by what is called our "slow thinking":
evidence and logic. Together they make our weltanschauung or world view. And world views
don't appreciate tinkering, or correction:
for example: Creationist vs. Evolutionary world views.

Our brains are more stupid than we thought,
but they're the only brains we've got. We are genetically determined to easily recognize
1000's of human faces,
but maybe 10 kinds of tree bark.

That's why we have science...because our brains
are species specific, and culturally biased. Our perceptions
are oriented to our own species as foreground,
and all other species as background. Without science
we would all be stuck in a Trumpian tribalism.

Part 3: Kinder Morgan Pipeline

Now what does any of this have to do
with Stopping the Kinder Morgan pipeline? Well it all depends
on how you look at it. Does another Oil Sands pipeline mean Development and Jobs? Or does
Tar Sands exploitation mean
corporate colonization--plundering our common ground,
killing our Mother Earth, bit by bit by bit?
It all depends on how you look at it,
your weltanschauung or world view.

A Musqueam Elder, known in English as Larry Grant,
attended a 2007 celebration of the 250th birthday
of Capt. George Vancouver. He said that many in his nation
opposed his attending, but he said, "We Musqueam
are generous to a fault". Indeed.
I won't review the litany of small pox, addiction,
residential school cultural genocide,
murdered and missing women and girls,
which has maimed First Nations. I just want to point out
the cumulative corporate colonialism, represented by the industrialization of Burrard Inlet, the
Fraser River, and the Salish Sea. Where is the "free, prior, and informed consent" to pollute
this unceded native land? Where is the respect for the Tseil Waututh clam beds, and the
Musqueam fisheries? Where is the invitation

from First Nations to dredge Burrard Inlet for huge dilbit tankers?
Who craves to turn so-called British Columbia into Detroit? Colonization, extracting the last drop of wealth from the soil,
is for the hubris of that Enron alumnus, Richard Kinder
and his billionaire buddies, no one else. I saw it in Detroit: exploit it, suck it dry, trash it and move on. And now, here we are,
on the edge of the Pacific.

As the 150th Anniversary of Confederation approaches, what did Tsleil-Waututh Chief Dan George say 50 years ago

at the 1967 Canadian Centenary? He said,

" (I) Lament for Confederation

*"When I fought to protect my land and my home,
I was called a savage.*

*When I neither understood nor welcomed his way of life,
I was called lazy. When I tried to rule my people,
I was stripped of my authority"*

And what did John A. MacDonald, our first prime minister,
say about Indians?

"When the school is on the reserve,

the child lives with its parents, who are savages,

and though he may learn to read and write,

his habits and training mode of thought are Indian.

He is simply a savage who can read and write.

It has been strongly impressed upon myself....,

*that Indian children should be withdrawn as much as possible from the parental influence, and
the only way to do that*

would be to put them in central training industrial schools

where they will acquire the habits and modes of thought

of white men." 1879

My goal in terms of stopping the Kinder Morgan

pipeline expansion project, is to speak truth to power. Our Unitarian fourth principle

encourages our free and responsible search for truth and meaning. And our seventh principle
is to respect

the interdependent web of all existence, of which we are a part.

My goal is to fulfill my vow to our son Benjamin Perrin,

and to his generation, that I will do everything, EVERYTHING,

in my power, to prevent his premature death due to Global Warming.

Still I know that, in spite of doing everything in my power

to prevent the collapse of civilization, our son's fate will be evident

by 2030. And in 2030, I will stop fighting climate change,

and I will say to my son, in all humility, "I did my best. I really tried to do my best."

Right now, this year, in this place, I have an opportunity to prevent a major increase in Greenhouse Gases, by stopping the Kinder Morgan pipeline expansion project. Prof. Mark Jaccard of SFU, determined the total GHGs of a completed Kinder Morgan expansion. Allowing for a maximum of 95% through put, and a realistic storage and shipping scenario, Jaccard estimated that the diluted bitumen would create the Greenhouse Gases of 20 million cars on the road, every day. Burnaby Mt., where I live, is the choke point for stopping 20 million cars worth of Greenhouse Gases. We will do our part to stop the insane expansion of the Canadian Tar Sands. If our atmosphere is going to plateau at 450 ppm CO₂, the 2 degree maximum, and then come down, we need to drastically cut emissions right now. There's no room for expansion of the Tar Sands. Expansion of infrastructure for the Tar Sands is beyond stupid, it's suicidal. That's not what our culture tells us, that's what science tells us. Five years ago, in the New York Times, Climate Scientist James Hansen said, "If Canada proceeds (to exploit the Tar Sands), and we do nothing, it will be game over for the climate." ... "game over for the climate".

So where is this "Paradise" I was talking about? How can I stand here, and tell you that I have hope? Well, when we look at our history as Unitarians, we've been here before. The last time an ethical truth overcame an economic success was slavery.

We Unitarians were conflicted on slavery, as we are now conflicted on First Nations and pipelines. The reluctant abolitionist Rev. Theodore Parker, broke the law, in order to shelter fugitive slaves in his home and church. We were conflicted in Selma, Alabama, when Unitarians Rev. James Reeb and Viola Liuzzo, knowingly took the risk of being killed, in order to actively support the emerging Civil Rights movement.

What will it take to stop this crazy Kinder Morgan expansion? Listen to this Coast Protectors pledge, first proclaimed by Grand Chief Stewart Phillip at last November's Stop Kinder Morgan march. **"With our voice, in the courts or the streets, on the water or the land. Whatever it takes,**

we will stop the Kinder Morgan pipeline expansion."

Over 21,000 of us have signed that pledge
on the Coastprotectors.ca website. Why?

We are protecting our home from invasion,
with our First Nations brothers and sisters.

We are protecting our children from global warming.

We are fighting for sanity, in an insane world, like those who fought nuclear weapons, tooth
and nail, in the 20th century.

We are fighting for our self-respect, to be smart, compassionate, grateful, and brave in the face
of overwhelming odds.

We've been here before, and we carry the torch forward
to a future that we create. This here and now is Paradise
because we have the opportunity to create our future,
because we have reverence for our children,
because we have conviction in our values,
in spite of our all too human brains and humble hearts.

We will all stand together in 2030, before our children, and tell them,
in all humility, "We did our best". That's all we can ask. We are trying to be brave. We are
trying to be wise. We are trying to do our best. And may it be so. "All My Relations"

And now, please look in your teal hymnal for #1028

"The Fire of Commitment" #1028

Closing Words

Take courage my friends.

The way is often hard, the path is never clear,
And the stakes are very high.

Take courage.

For deep down, there is another truth:

You are not alone.

As I extinguish this flame,

Let's join hands and sing together "Carry the Flame"