

**“If the Earth Was Given as a Garden, How Come There is So Much Crab
Grass?: An Interactive Earth Day Sermon”**

“Here is the world; beautiful and terrible things will happen.

Be not afraid.

Because this is what we are about:

We hold hope for each other when hope is hard to find.

We plant seeds that will one day grow.

We are prophets of a future not our own.

We cannot do everything,

But we can do something.

So forget your perfect offering.

There is a crack in everything.

That is how the light gets in.”

Friends, this morning I invite you to be transported.

Because while our bodies are sitting here in our Puritan Pews,

All comfortable and cozy,

What I need us to do is imagine us traveling south-west

To one our nearby towns,

And imagine us standing together, all of us together somehow

On the porched stoop of a tidy little Colonial,

Blue-gray shingle,

Built in the 1800’s with steel square nails and hand-cut beams

Before there were nail guns or DeWalt electric drills

Or table saws or even The Home Depot with its miles of

‘I can’t find what I’m looking For’ isles.

Back when this home and others just like it were built
For the workers in the shoe factories in town – did you know Holliston
Was the shoe making capital of the country in the early 1800's? –
The world was such a different place.
On the stoop there let's just imagine together for a second what it was like –

Men in britches and possibly bow ties and brimmed hats walking past
After eating their 'farm to table' breakfast (because was there any other kind?),
Women in dresses and pantaloons moving past on the way to gather
Their 'locally-sourced' water (because was there any other kind?),
A time when cars were carts drawn by horses on dirt roads,
Still years before oil was mixed with rock to make asphalt
And Twitter was just the noise a bird made,
And Tablets were something Moses received on Mt. Sinai
After the Exodus in the first Passover,
And Apple was something you bought at Dowse Orchards here in Sherborn,
And Google was the noise a baby made after waking up from a nap,
And Face Book was the directive the teacher gave the students,
As in: put your face in your books!

Can we see it? And there's more:
The smell of wood and coal used to heat homes was the smell of progress,
And light, brought by the burning of gas, the vision of prosperity,
And the combustible engine, invented in 1882,
the sound and motion of possibility –
The word 'environment' more likely to appear on a spelling test
Than in anyone's consciousness,

Because the land, the ground, the sky wasn't so much thought of ours
To care for than it was for ours to use and subdue...
The preachers of the day translating creation as a place we had dominion
Over rather than a place we were intended to be stewards of...

This time still one hundred years before Rachel Carson sold 500K copies
Of her book *Silent Spring* that linked pollution to public health,
And still one hundred years before a huge oil spill in Santa Barbara,
A place like heaven on earth,
inspired Senator Nelson of Wisconsin to raise public consciousness about air and
water pollution with a day focused on environmental issues –
a crazy idea that worked, he called it – by enlisting support from Republicans and
Democrats (imagine that?), rich and poor, city folks and farmers,
Tycoons and labor leaders – all of them coming together to create Earth Day 1970,
which ushered the way for the creation of the
Environmental Protection Agency and the passage of the Clean Air
Clean Water and Endangered Species Acts.
And here we thought the 70's only gave us big shirt collars and Watergate
And the TV Series *Kojak* and leaded gasoline.

But all that is back in time – the 19th century, the 20th century, so long ago,
some of us not even alive!
And here we are together,
All of us under the covered stoop as we watch and listen as the next door neighbor
Yells across his asphalt driveway to our owner of the gray-blue colonial.
'Hey neighbor!' Hey neighbor, the owner replies back.
You're thinking: is this a Narraganset beer commercial?

And if you don't know that reference look it up on the thing that sounds like a baby noise (Google).

"Got 15 minutes to turn the soil in your front yard?"

Friends, how do we know its spring in New England?

Swan boats at the Public Garden?

Opening Day with the over-funded, under-performing Red Sox?

Snow in April?

All true, but the actual sure-fire way to know it is spring in New England,

There under the stoop, is the Saturday in April

When the said neighbor asks our owner to turn over the soil

In the owner's front yard...*a generous invitation*, you're all thinking

There under the stoop, *see the world isn't all bad...*

Until you realize that the neighbor offers to help because

His yard is Home and Garden magazine green, so green

You almost need sunglasses,

And the only thing that takes away from his yard's beauty

Is when you look next door at our owner's front lawn

And see it brown, dead, husking with last summer's

Remnant of what botanists call *Digitaria*....

but we all know as...what? *Crabgrass*.

It given this name for the way it sprawls and spreads out,

Choking out all other life.

Is that what humans do to the earth? Sometimes.

But this is why I want us there under the porched stoop,

To watch as the neighbor and our owner take to the task yet again this spring,
Soles of feet pushing against shovels,
metal rakes scraping the husks of crabgrass onto tarps,
the grey, salted and sanded soil from the winter plows
turned over and over and over to reveal brown, fat worms
and dark chocolate dirt, 8 inches down where the crabgrass seed
doesn't live.

Just an hour earlier our owner was inside with the morning paper
Reading Earth Day stories, such as...

How this March was the most abnormally warmest month in the history
Of records, 2.2 degrees Fahrenheit above the 20th century average...

And the story of how many folks feel apathy about climate change
Because it is bringing us warmer winters, which is nice here in New
England, and because some aren't yet feeling the negative effects...

And the story about the coral reefs getting bleached during this year's El
Nino...

But the story about the gas pipeline out in Western Mass not being built
After all because of the protests...

And the story of that victory fueling efforts to block a similar pipeline
Planned the heart of West Roxbury...

All of it enough to leave us feeling we need to be doing *something* to respond to all
The news, and wondering what can *any one of us do?* to respond
To the news.

Which is perhaps why the scientist Margaret Mead told us to never doubt
That a small group of committed people can change the world.

“Indeed,” she said. “It is the only thing that ever has.”

“If the earth...” says the owner to the neighbor as they drag
The tarp full of weeds past the owner’s two cars, cars that get
Good mileage, but let’s be honest, because we need to be honest,
Are still part of the problem.

*“If the earth...is supposed to be a garden then how come there is so much
Crabgrass?”*

‘Because your soil is crap,’ replies the neighbor, matter of fact.
Which is true.

And we need the truth.

We need people who will speak to us plain about what’s happening
To the earth and our part in it, even when there’s not much sugar to help the
medicine to go down.

But you know what’s also important? Hearing what we can do
To respond to that truth.

‘So here’s what we’re going to do,’ says the neighbor to the owner.
*We need to get you some new topsoil. Fresh earth. Farm to front yard earth.
None of that chemical stuff.
And then we’re going to get some high traffic grass seed,
And some fertilizer.*

Organic? Asks the owner. *You need to ask?* says the neighbor.

And now we do this, says the neighbor...after the new soil is bought,
Spreading with upturned rake the soil across the yard
The way you butter a slice of bread, all smooth and up close to edges,

And now we do this, says the neighbor

he grabbing fistfuls of seed and sprinkling them length-wise
and sprinkling them width-wise,

the way you might sprinkle sugar on top of cookies in winter...

and now we do this, says the neighbor

asking me to walk next to him, one foot in the front of the other,
pushing the seed into the soil with our boots....

And now we do this, says the neighbor

Turning on the water and turning a thumb against the opening

So that a fine mist covers all the yard, glistening in the sun,

And now we do this, says the neighbor,

Sitting on the stoop there with all of us watching.

What now? Says the owner.

We wait, says the neighbor.

Watching the owner and the neighbor on this little corner of the earth,

Let us wonder there on the stoop together:

Are these the practices of dominion?

Of making nature subdue?

Of control?

Or are these practices more about tending?

Nurturing?

Stewarding?

Might this little moment teach us something who we want to be, who the earth

Needs us to be?

Perhaps.

7 days later...and even though we've got all the tech and gizmos
And screens and battery cars and Facetime...still the most amazing
Thing, so amazing that the owner calls the children
And the neighbor and the spouse, saying LOOK!! LOOK!
What? they say. What?
LOOK! And there, if you lean close, you see the red young tips
Of baby, baby grass.
Amazing. Despite it all, the earth is amazing.

Can such simple tending and such simple wonder at what grows
From such tending help remind us of what is at stake?
We pray so. We pray hard. Remembering the prayer doesn't change things.
Prayer changes people. And people change things.
Even a small group of people change things.
Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

Because this is what we are about:

We hold hope for each other when hope is hard to find.

We plant seeds that will one day grow.

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