

## EARTH DAY REFLECTIONS FOR APRIL 26<sup>TH</sup>, 2020

Larry Jacobson

Good Morning, my name is Larry Jacobson and I, along with the rest of Judson's Climate Justice Team, would like to wish everyone a belated Happy Earth Day! As you probably have heard, this year was the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

I would like to take some time this morning to reflect on the significance of Earth Day and draw some similarities between that Day in 1970 and the one we celebrated this past week. For those of you old enough to remember the first Earth Day, you probably recall that during the spring of 1970 the country was very divided, probably even more so than today. The big issue then was the US's involvement in the Vietnam War that sparked many protests on campuses and cities throughout the country. Also, there were still issues from the civil rights protests that the country experienced only a year or two earlier. Besides these issues, there was a growing concern that the environment was being severely harmed by industrial, agricultural, and governmental actions.

In January of 1969 a pivotal point was reached when a large oil spill occurred on an offshore platform near Santa Barbara, California. This resulted in oil-soaked beaches and killed many marine animals and fish in a location that was very visible to the country and world. As a result of this catastrophic event, two members of Congress, Rep. Pete McCloskey, a republican from California and Sen. Gaylord Nelson, a democrat from Wisconsin, formed a nonprofit group called Environmental Action in the summer of 1969. Later that year, this group organized and scheduled, what was called "Teach In" on the Environment classes on college campuses and high schools around the country. These grassroots

activities eventually lead to a final national event on April 22<sup>nd</sup> that became Earth Day. A number of us at Judson were in college during this time, including myself, and either participated in these events or heard about them on our campuses. According to news reports, an estimated 20 million people (or 10% of the US population at the time) participated in marches, demonstrations, or other activities on that first Earth Day so it was a major event around the country and world.

Senator Nelson, when asked years later what his goal was for Earth Day, said he just wanted the public to become aware of the issue. Well the event accomplished and even exceeding that goal, since within several months President Nixon signed a law that established the Environmental Protection Agency, and Congress passed within a year, new Clean Air and Water legislation that provided many of the environmental regulations we have today. The environmental movement grew rapidly and soon shifted down to states, cities, and local communities.

I know the Judson community has had a long history of environmentally consciousness. I joined the church in the mid 70's and recalled numerous members who participated in environmental programs that the church organized and/or supported. Several present members remembered a formal "green team" group that was active for a number of years that met monthly to share ways to conserve water and energy in their homes. Others in the congregation became interested in locally grown food and help organized community supported agriculture groups or CSA's.

The congregation took a major environmental step in 2001 by replacing our building's inefficient natural gas central boiler to an efficient electric geothermal / heat pump system for both heating and cooling.

Unfortunately, the geothermal part was not possible due to caves found

deep below the church from test wells, but the heat pump part of the system was installed. After adding the preschool and office areas to the system in 2014 we now have 20 heat pumps throughout the church that allows us to zone heat/cool various rooms and sections of the building saving energy and providing a more comfortable working environment for occupants. In the last five years, the church has repaired and painted many of our stain glass windows, built rain gardens to capture runoff water from our roof, added both regular and organic recycling, and replaced many of our old light fixtures with LED bulbs. Next month the congregation will have the opportunity to approve the addition of solar panels to our building's roof that will significantly lower our carbon footprint and produce an estimated 1/3 of our annual electrical energy usage.

As mentioned earlier, I believe we have a similar situation in our country today as there was in 1970. At the moment, we are dealing with the Covid 19 pandemic which is changing so many aspects of our daily life. Still there may be a silver lining to the quarantines, since scientists and others are seeing a measurable improvement in air quality, traffic, and lower carbon emissions because of the reduction in travel, commerce, and education activities. This could turn into an environmental renaissance like it did in 1970 that changed public opinion and spurred policy changes and actions that could improve our air and water quality and most importantly address climate change.



Now, I would like you to picture in your mind for a moment the popular “Earthrise” photo that Apollo 8 astronaut Bill Anders took on Dec 24, 1968 during their historic moon orbiting mission. It has the moon surface

in the foreground with the earth rising against the darkness of space. This was a compelling image that provided people, for the very first time, the opportunity to see that the planet's resources are limited and in need of conserving since there is only one earth out there. This "earthrise" photo became the unofficial symbol of Earth Day and many felt it played an important role in convincing people to participate and moved public opinion that changed environment policy in this country and throughout the world.

So finally, from this small corner of spaceship earth, I again want to wish you a Happy Earth day and please stay safe during these difficult times. God bless you and everyone and everything on our beautiful blue planet.