

# *FAITHFUL WORDS MEDITATION: ON BELONGING*

## ***Belonging to the Future***

*by Karen Hering*

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On the east side of Lake Michigan, about halfway up the shore, there stretches a treasure of a park and National Lakeshore called Sleeping Bear Dunes. Maybe you've been there yourself and seen firsthand its beautiful expanse of rolling dunes made of the finest golden sand. Most of the dunes are roped off and protected from the erosion caused by human traffic. But there is one dramatically steep and wide dune that drops straight down to the shores of Lake Michigan, and this one is open to visitors. People flock to the park just to experience the exhilaration of jumping over the precipice at the top of this dune, to leap down its sharp, sandy incline. When you do this, you feel like a super hero. It is so steep that with each step, you drop 10 feet down the hill your every landing cushioned by the shifting sand. It is like flying in a series of short little flights.

However, once at the bottom of the hill (which you reach in all of about five exhilarating minutes), you turn around and realize that the only way back -- is up. And the only way up is to do what you now notice all the others on the hill are doing -- you climb laboriously with hands and feet, each step gaining you 3-6 inches at most as your foot slips down in the loose sand, sometimes feeling like you haven't moved at all. The hill is so steep, you literally must grip it with both hands as you climb, and your progress is so slow that you cannot help but feel intimately connected to the hill and sand.

About halfway up this dune, when I had been climbing for almost a half an hour, by a small trick of the imagination, I suddenly felt I was not just climbing a hill anymore. Arms stretched high and wide and hands plunged into the deep, warm sand, I was hugging the Earth herself. I was holding her in my arms,, physically embracing the whole vast and spinning planet. Not like Atlas, holding it up with supernatural strength and triumph, but like a mother and child, hugging and holding one another in a simple act of love and belonging.

Today, as we welcome these new children into the arms of this community, we are reminded of the larger covenant of love and belonging that calls us all to take care. To take care of our children, to take care of one another, to take care of the earth and our shared future.

On Friday, we learned that in the first month of the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, up to 1.7 million gallons of oil each day were released in to the Gulf, possibly twice as much as previously estimated. The upward end of these new estimates would mean that as much as 8 times as much as the Exxon Valdez spill has already spewed into the Gulf – and it's not done yet. Surely you have seen the horrifying images, the growing plume of oil staining the gulf, the oil-coated birds struggling to survive. It's enough to make you break down and cry.

Is it enough to break our hearts open and make us take care, too? To break us out of our defiant stance of independence and indifference and prompt us to embrace the wounded earth, acknowledging our belonging? The earth's grave injury today begs us to consider: how might we care for the earth as we would care for an injured child? What are we willing to do, to give the earth – and our own children's future – a chance?

Many years ago, Martin Luther King, Jr. posed a challenge to us all, when he said: "We are witnessing in our day the birth of a new age, with a new structure of freedom and justice. Now, as we face the fact of this new, emerging world, we must face the responsibilities that come along with it. .... (W)e are challenged to rise above the narrow confines of our individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity."

In our own age of this new millennium, we are challenged to rise to the broader concerns of all humanity *and* all the earth.

So on this summer's day, as you step outside in the rain washed air, reach down and touch the earth with tenderness. And as you do, as you press a hand or a cheek or the soles of your feet to the earth's own green palm and face, in that simple embrace, ask yourself, what will *you* do to take care of her now?

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karen@unityunitarian.org