

CLIMATE TALK

LET'S BIND TOGETHER

Mark R. Johnson



One of my spiritual mentors was fond of saying that a root of the word, "religion" means "to bind together."

Looking at our world and the current impact of religion, one would conclude that "religion" is doing anything but that. In our own country, we see not binding but dissension over religion. Even in the Christian Church, we have bitter divisions. I have relatives that no longer talk to me because we differ over some of the social issues of the day.

I believe that, at base, Jesus' ministry was fundamentally that of breaking down dividing walls of hostility within the human family. The church is most faithful when it embraces the diversity of what it means to be human and celebrates it.

But there is another wall that needs to come down whether you consider yourself spiritual or not: our relationship with the environment. The earth needs to be treated with the same compassion with which we treat those we love and the same sense of connection we feel toward activities and interests we hold most dear.

I love to fish. I do it because, for me, it's fun. But there is something deeper. Fishing meant survival for our earliest ancestors. No doubt they enjoyed it, but it was much more than recreation. The enjoyment was connected with survival. Every time any modern human wets a line, he or she, aware of it or not, is connected with those ancient ancestors. If they hadn't fished, we wouldn't be here.

All life is absolutely dependent on its environment. Because of the enormous abundance of the environment of earth, we humans have been able to ignore this in the age of industrial expansion. We have been able to waste resources because they were so plentiful. We have been able to dump waste because there was so much space in which to dump (and we didn't understand the consequences). We have been able to pollute air, because most of us, especially we who are so privileged to live where we do, could go out the door and breathe deeply of its abundance. We have been able to ignore the consequences because the environment was so efficient at covering our ignorance.

We have finally exhausted the environment's ability to shield us from ourselves. The reality of global warming demonstrates that we cannot be disconnected with the earth any longer. Today, we need to connect, to be "religious" if you will, in our relationship toward that which sustains all of life. No matter what your connection to formal religion (or lack thereof), we need now to be "religious" in our connection with the earth.

This certainly needs to be a matter of personal practice: recycling, limiting the use of energy resources, planting gardens and trees and shrubs, practicing earth wisdom in every dimension of our life-styles. It also needs to be a matter of supporting community, government, business practices that will heal and preserve this great gift that we have been given.

Some say that concern for the environment is a liberal issue. I disagree. It is the ultimate conservative issue. We must conserve that on which life depends. We have no other choice.

So, I ask you to consider what a spiritual connection means in these days of environmental crisis. We can continue to live disconnected at our peril and the peril of future generations. But it's clear -- we cannot do it for long.

(Mark R. Johnson is a retired pastor after 35 years of ministry. He lives in Iron River where he fishes, cuts wood, fixes old boats, and enjoys going to Bulldog hockey games.)