

## AN AUSPICIOUS DAY

Ten / Ten / Ten

is something of an auspicious day.

Not scientifically – there is no scientific evidence  
that this day is any different than others.

It just doesn't come around that often  
when the month and day and year are the same number.

It catches our attention.

Even so - numbers were important to the writers of the Bible

The number ten is all over the place:

Who can give examples of ten?

Ten Commandments – Moses dealt with ten plagues -  
ten percent of one's income as God's portion to be returned.

Ten nations are the whole of the nations  
that Abraham will possess. (Genesis 15:19).

The Lord's Prayer has ten clauses.

It goes on and on.

Ten meant something about the divine order or a number of completion.

Ten lepers healed – one returns in gratitude.



This day of tens has been chosen to be a day of attention  
to the healing and re-balancing of our environment.

Today people from all over the world  
are part of a grassroots movement  
to get us thinking what we can do in practical ways -  
to redirect our ways of living to be more healing to the earth.

Both science and justice demand it.

The grassroots effort is also a way to let our leaders know  
that we are beginning to understand climate change.

It is a time of consciousness raising  
about what can be done and needs to be done.

Not unlike the consciousness shown by the tenth leper  
when he came and gave thanks for what had happened to him.

So – if you did not know it from the papers or friends  
today is a global work party.

And – it comes from the leadership and passion  
of a United Methodist layperson  
and Sunday School teacher in Middlebury, Vermont - Bill McKibben.

If you do not already have plans  
to join in one of the activities here in our valley -  
you might find one of interest - or simply create your own.

THE MEANING OF 350

Why?

And here comes another number.

The reason is 350.

Let me explain.<sup>1</sup>

I met Bill McKibben a year ago last October.  
He was the keynote speaker at a United Methodist  
Christian educator's conference in Albuquerque.  
He taught us something about climate change - and about 350.

Bill is the author of one of the first books  
on global warming for the general public.  
He understands science but does not write and speak  
in so scientific a way that we non-scientific minds cannot understand.

He told us these things:

Beginning in the 18<sup>th</sup> century –  
humans began to burn coal and gas and oil to produce goods and energy.

When we did that -  
the amount of carbon in the atmosphere began to rise -  
at first slowly and now more quickly.

Many of the activities we do every day like turning the lights on -  
cooking food or heating or cooling our homes  
rely on coal and oil as their energy sources.

But coal and oil emit carbon dioxide  
among other things into the atmosphere when they are burned.

We are taking millions of years worth of carbon –  
stored beneath the earth as fossil fuels - and releasing it into the atmosphere.

We are putting more and more carbon into the atmosphere.

Scientists say that for most of human history  
the amount of carbon or CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere  
was 275 parts per million of carbon dioxide.

But we keep pumping a more and more carbon into the atmosphere.

And it will reach a tipping point somewhere -  
and life as we know it will decline.

Bill McKibben gives us this number: 350

350 is where we need to head as a planet to survive.

350 is the safe upper limit for carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

Would anyone like to guess where the scientists say we are now?

The scientists say we are at 392 parts per million.

Unless we are able to return to below 350 parts per million we will be in trouble.



Since we have something of a theme of numbers today

let's just give them perspective.

275 parts per million of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere  
existed for many centuries of world history.

350 is all we really can tolerate for life as we've known it.

392 parts per million is where scientists say we are now.

Now that is a sobering thought.

That's why this grassroots initiative is happening.

It's about calling attention to the matter -  
getting us thinking about the many things we can do  
to turn our lives on this planet toward health -  
toward healing.

#### THE TENTH LEPER

What does this have to do with our ten lepers?

Maybe nothing –

except for the one who turned around

grateful for what had happened -

except for the one who took the time to notice

there was healing in the works -

except for the one who made the choice

not to take for granted what God had put in place

for his own healing and life.

It may just be one in ten people in this country  
who are willing to change the way they have been living  
and pay attention to the news that we can change things.

The way we have lived

since we discovered how to use fossil fuels

is not sustainable.

We can live in a way that nurtures this earth  
rather than destroy it.

We've been reluctant to shift -  
not because it is not possible to develop other methods  
but because of our vested interests  
in the commercial use of fossil fuels –  
big business – big trade.  
We always find change hard to do.

And perhaps also - our lack of courage  
and willingness to believe we have a role  
in taking care of our planet – our world.

We have been satisfied with the status quo.  
Sometimes we are just lazy.

We just don't want to take the time -  
maybe a little like ten lepers who received a great gift  
but just couldn't be bothered with thanksgiving.

#### GRATITUDE

But there was one.  
And he stepped out away from his friends  
and gave thanks for something he thought was extraordinary.

Gratitude may be almost as important as breathing  
for an outstanding life.

Gratitude infuses us with an energy  
that connects us with something in the universe.

Let's call it God.

Remember the photography that Masaro Emoto did  
of water and water as it froze to become ice crystals?

He took water in all kinds of places.  
The water subjected to chaotic conditions and pollution  
often does not form crystals at all.

Water was exposed to words -  
words of thanks or words of criticism or hate.

The molecular structure of water  
responds to emotion – to tone – thinking and feeling.

Water responds to gratitude.

So must the Earth.

What that says to me is that it is time  
to let the message of an old, old story like  
our tenth leper turning back in gratitude

connect with our new stories  
of our own turning toward the earth  
in gratitude on a day like today.

Thankfulness is an expression of faith.  
That's what the story in Luke is about.

It is just that only one in ten  
really took it seriously.

I invite you today

as you encounter opportunities  
to take part in the grassroots initiative -  
and to take more seriously  
and more often your gratitude toward the earth.  
For gratitude toward the Earth is also gratitude for its creator.

10/10/10 is a symbolic way to get the word out to more and more people.  
It is also a time to get a little work done - on all kinds of projects.

What we are trying to do  
is bring 392 parts per million of CO<sub>2</sub>  
down to 350 parts per million of CO<sub>2</sub> -  
even in what will seem like small, insignificant ways.  
Just remember - the earth will be grateful  
and it will be here longer for us to enjoy.

Our story for today and the events of this day are both about gratitude.  
They are about gratitude for the abundance of life we enjoy.

The pictures of water molecules teach us  
that even the molecules in earthly things like water - will give thanks.

It is not just the person healed who gives thanks - it is the earth itself.

So let's be a part of something good.  
For there is no doubt the earth will give thanks.

Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Resources for today include the website 350.Org and Peter Sawtell's *Eco-Justice Notes*