

## “Sermon” - Whither, Mother Earth?

For as long as I can remember, I’ve always loved the outdoors. I mean, I really love it. I would rather be out there right now than in here. Let me say, out there right now **-with you**, than in here with you.

I was concerned that I was going to make this too much about me, because Dave Hudson says, and I’m paraphrasing, we each have only one story. It just changes a little a bit each time we tell it.

I grew up in a lower middle class, or upper lower class, family in rural New Jersey. My parents had eleven kids in 20 years, and we couldn’t all fit in the house at the same time, unless we were posing for a picture, sitting at the large dining room table, or asleep in our beds. So, we spent a lot of time outside. We walked down the hill through the cow pasture to the pond, where we skated in the winter and swam in summer. A stream, or a brook, as we called it, fed the pond, and we played in the brook, turning over rocks to see crayfish, building dams, fishing, but mostly just communing with nature. I mowed the lawn and pulled weeds from the flower and vegetable gardens. We picked wild berries, red caps and black caps, we called them, different from blackberries and raspberries – and cherries, too. We knew the names of most of the plants and birds.

I liked the wild berries. I learned later that the red ones were invasive exotic Chinese Wine Raspberries

When I was 15, my parents moved us to Florida. I spent a lot more time outdoors, hiking and canoeing and learning new flora and fauna.

After a couple years out of college, I moved to California and hiked a lot and gained a supreme appreciation for the balance of nature. I visited Death Valley, Yosemite, Joshua Tree, the Central valley where a lot of our country’s food is grown, Muir Woods, the Redwoods, all the beaches, skied at Mammoth and Big Bear, each a lot of fun, but also increasing my appreciation for nature and science and adding to my online database (tapping temple with forefinger).

I also became more aware, socially, and of the senseless, to me, consumerism and the damage it was causing. Other people seemed to know what landfills were, but not really understand what that means. There were a couple Winters when there was not enough snow to ski. And where did the water for 20 million people come from, since I knew from the song that, “It never rains in Southern California.”

That's how I got to be a nature boy, and why I care about the earth and climate change.

OK, so bigger picture, this is my take on the causes of the climate and resource crisis on Mother Earth.

"Whither mother earth?" means, to me, "to what end will we deliver our mother, Earth?" We can also turn it around and assume that mother earth will take care of herself, which makes the question, "To where will Mother Earth deliver us, when we've worn out our welcome?" Some will say that we are mere pawns, too weak, small and inconsequential to really have caused the changes we see in the climate.

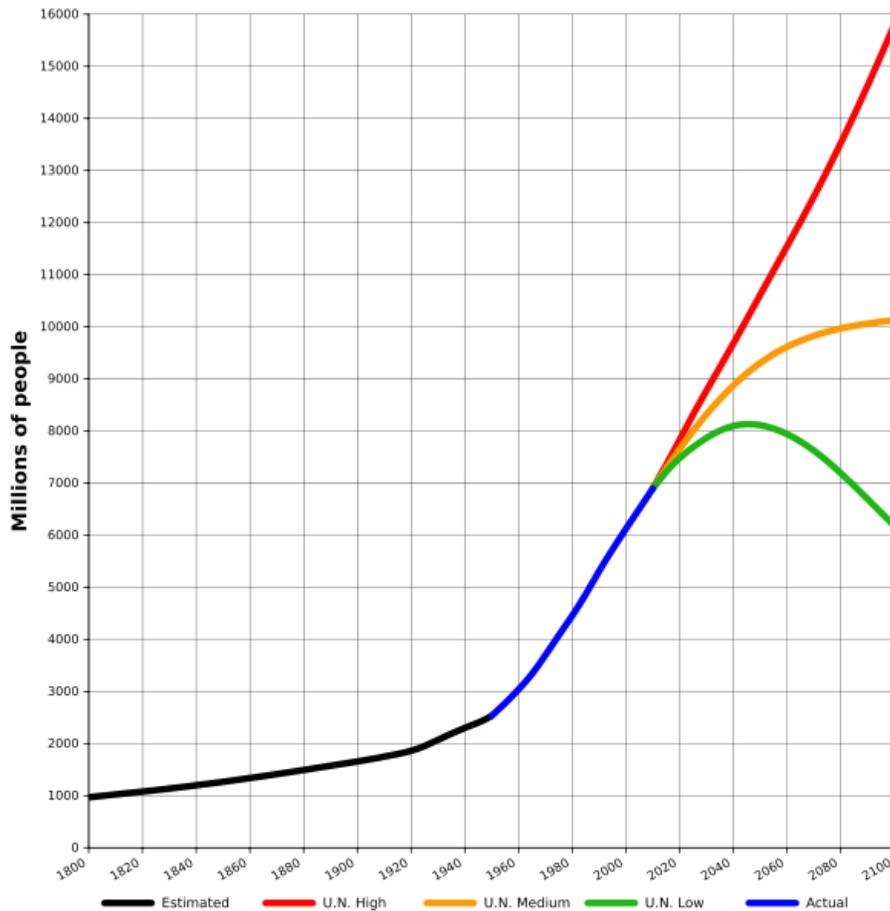
I think we all know the origins of the current mess we're in. Of course, it all starts with the industrial revolution, or maybe with man getting a reasoning brain and a lust for power.

There's too much focus consumption. It seems that the American dream of realized worth by spending time with family or loved ones or contributing to community or honest hard work has been replaced by "buy lots of stuff." There's a web site called the story of stuff at [storyofstuff.org](http://storyofstuff.org). You may be familiar with it. The idea started with a [20-minute video](#) nine years ago, and the video, The Story of Stuff, talks about how we're extracting resources from the earth, fashioning the resources into stuff, games, toys, gizmos, phones, electronic devices, plastic crap, transporting it long distances, sometimes half way around the world, consuming it, and, before long, disposing of it. Or maybe we keep the product for a while, but in many cases, the product's packaging is significantly resource-intensive, as well, and that goes right in the landfill.

Some of the stuff is stuff we do not need. Bottled water is a sensitive topic, I know, but we really only use it for convenience. It's no healthier or safer than the water coming out of our faucets. You know how many bottles of water it takes to make a bottle of water? Three! And, we have a shortage of fresh water.

Another big contributor to the climate and resource crisis on our dear planet is population growth. It turns out humans are pretty good at procreating, and the industrial revolution made us even better. The population of humans on Mother Earth was kind of steady until about 750 years ago. After the Great Famine and the Black Death of 1300s, the population was 370 million. It hit a billion in 1804, two billion 123 years later in 1927, 3B by 1960 and 7.4B as of March.

I have a graph:

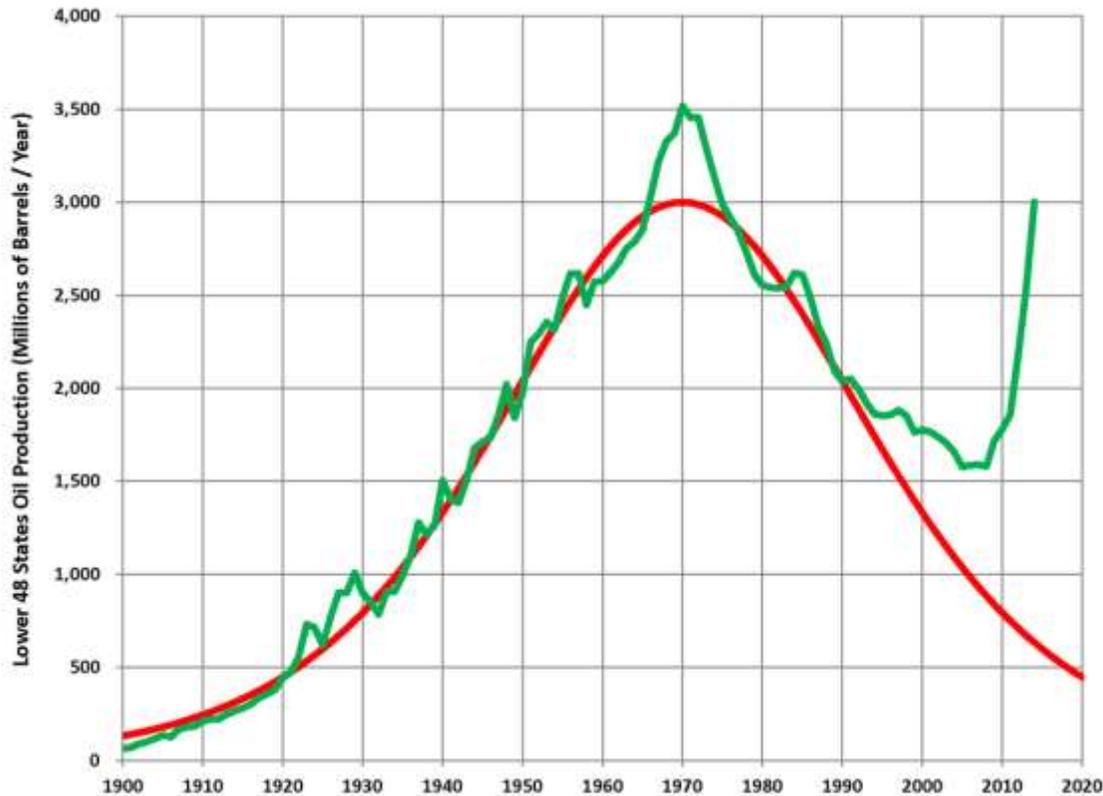


But the biggest cause of climate change is our consumption of fossil fuels. There are alternative sources of energy now that we all know about: solar photovoltaic, which is making electricity from sunlight, solar thermal, using sunlight to heat water where hot water is needed and wind power! There is nuclear power, too, but it reminds me of a character my little sister read about when we were kids: Terrible Horrible Edie. When nuclear is safe it is very, very good, but when it's not, it is aww-ful.

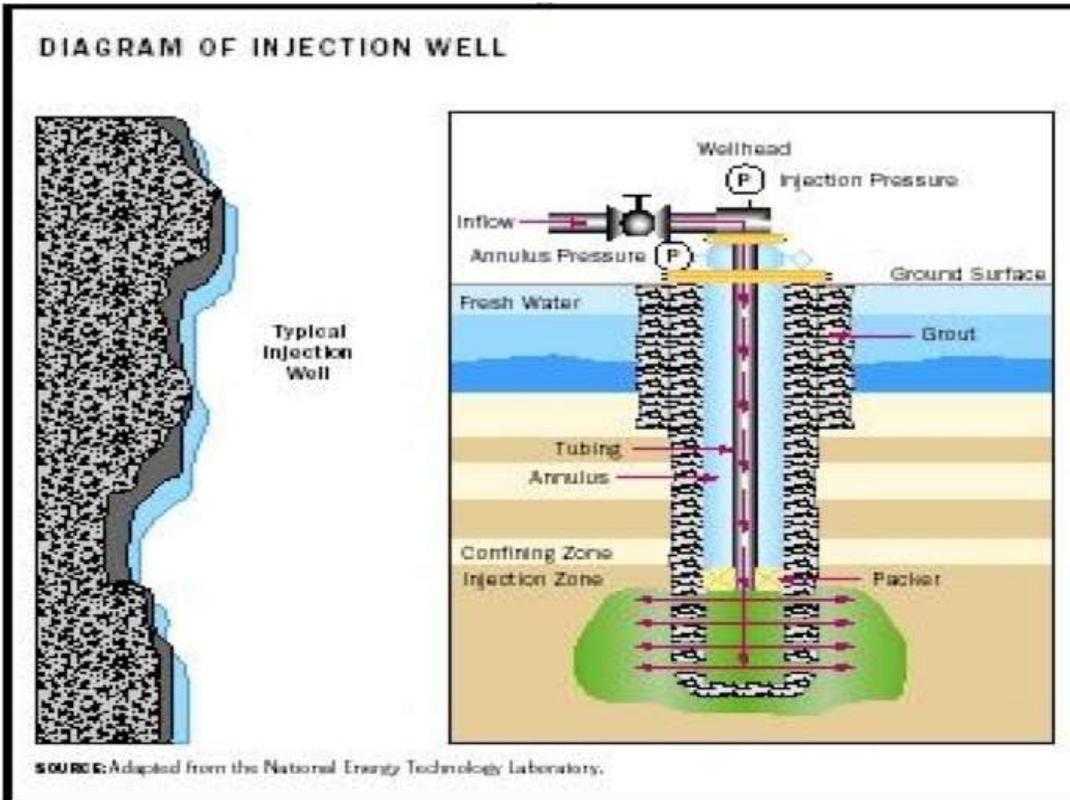
What we have going on in our country and the world is a few people at a few oil and coal companies, their downstream partners, i.e., power and chemical companies, and the political representatives in their states, colluding to prevent these newer, safer, cleaner energy alternatives from being introduced, researched, developed and used to their full extent, while they squeeze the last vestiges of oil from the ground with the concomitant fracking and deep-well injection of toxic, befouled water.

You've heard about "peak oil." It's a theory about industry's efforts to get oil out of the ground in an economical fashion, and that, at some point, we'd get all the oil that was worth getting and the market, extraction and consumption would follow a bell curve.

The guy who developed the peak oil theory was M. King Hubbert. The peak year he predicted was 1970, and he nailed it. I have another graph:



The market curve actually followed his prediction very closely from its start in about 1900 to the peak in 1970, and down until about 2005. Since then it has spiked up, due largely to fracking and deep-well injection, which also has been credited with the recent drop in gasoline prices.



From energy sources, we move to energy consumption.

Power consumption is surprising and complicated. But briefly, the world wide per capita average consumption is about 259kWh per month. In the U.S., it's more than four times that worldwide average. Canada consumes a little more; the stable oil producing countries in the Mideast more still. The Norse countries use about twice what we do and Iceland more than four times as much as we do.

There are a lot of things we could to be more efficient. Buy local produce and other non-food stuff. But it's more expensive to produce a lot of products here than in other countries. Somebody smarter than I am has to help me with that one. That's a tough call. We could buy less stuff. If we bought less stuff trying to chase the bad American dream, we would need less money and we'd use less energy.

Okay, so, if there's any doubt that the climate is changing, May 2016 was the 13<sup>th</sup> straight month that was hotter than the same month the previous year. The average global temperature for the month was 1.57 degrees above the 20th-century average for May, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Bridge

Of course, our seventh principle is the one that helps know how to treat the earth. And we're all allowed to decide how we show "respect for that interdependent web of all existence of

which we are a part.” We’re already doing some things as a congregation that you might not know about.

## **The Green Sanctuary Program is one.**

I’m going to read here from the description of our green sanctuary on the green sanctuary page at UUMAN.org: In April of 2013, after a rigorous five-year process involving two exhaustive applications, fourteen projects, and the efforts of many to shift old, comfortable patterns of behavior to more sustainable ones, the UUA granted UUMAN official accreditation as a Green Sanctuary.

The [UUA’s Green Sanctuary Program](#) provides a path for congregational study, reflection, and action in response to environmental challenges. The program partners with congregations to address climate change and environmental justice. Congregations that complete the program are accredited as Green Sanctuaries in recognition of their service and dedication to the Earth.

UUMAN is proud to be recognized as a Green Sanctuary. As one, we live with a deep awareness of our climate crisis and the deep environmental injustices of our time. We commit to four practices, grounded in Unitarian Universalist principles:

- **Environmental Justice**
- **Worship and Celebration**
- **Religious Education**
- **Sustainable Living**

## **Other Efforts**

When we built our new sanctuary, we paved our roads and parking lots with pervious pavement, significantly reducing run-off.

After an extensive energy audit by Georgia Interfaith Power and Light, we replaced all of our incandescent lighting with CFLs.

We installed a highly energy efficient commercial dishwasher (with a two minute cycle) and bought enough china dishware for the entire congregation, allowing us to significantly reduce our reliance on disposables.

We provide cloth napkins for all events that involve food or drink.

We serve Fair Trade, sustainably-grown coffee.

As part of our being accredited by the UUA, for our Green Sanctuary, we created a [Sustainability Policy](#) to guide our efforts to reduce our carbon footprint.

Here are a few snippets from that policy: Follow guidelines set by the Department of Energy for setting thermostats at 78 in summer and 68 in winter. Set our water heaters at 120 degrees and ensure they are wrapped in insulating blankets. When replacing appliances, furnaces, air conditioners, purchase the most efficient, low-energy usage and low-impact lifecycle products we are able to afford.

We encourage the use of tap water rather than bottled water on our campus in order to preserve the human right to water and to reduce plastic waste and energy usage. We will provide pitchers of water and/or large insulated water coolers (available in each building) whenever feasible.

I was the chair of the sustainability committee/green team for a while, and I'm still on the team, but now we have new leadership, in the form of Gus Hadorn and a new name; Earth Ministry and we're serious. He hosted his first committee as chair and had a really good turnout. We're really excited about some of the things we're gonna do. Those will include opportunities for you to live our principles beyond our walls. Tubing, rafting?

So that's what we do as a congregation.

You might be wondering,

"What can we do – and by that you mean what can **you** do - to help contribute to limiting or reducing the climate and resource crisis on the planet?"

Does our green sanctuary commitment apply to only while we're here, or do our UU principles, and UUMAN's mission statement require us to apply those principles both here and outside? Do they further compel us to work to encourage others to do the same?

I think they give us permission to share our values out in the community.

This week, we had a zoning request before the Milton City Council, to allow a builder to leave 35 acres in a natural state in 65 acre development. I stood up before the council and a lot of Milton residents in a packed house and asked them to allow the non-standard approach.

There are lots of opportunities for us to do just those types of things. The Earth Ministry will help you.

The Earth Ministry has a number of things for you to think about, and we're gonna find out more in just a few minutes and throughout the year.

---

## Closing words

For the closing words on gonna double up on the Edward Abbey, because I like him and this book so much:

“May your trails be crooked, winding, lonesome, dangerous, leading to the most amazing view. May your mountains rise into and above the clouds. May your rivers flow without end, meandering through pastoral valleys tinkling with bells, past temples and castles and poets' towers into a dark primeval forest where tigers belch and monkeys howl, through miasmal and mysterious swamps and down into a desert of red rock, blue mesas, domes and pinnacles and grottos of endless stone, and down again into a deep vast ancient unknown chasm where bars of sunlight blaze on profiled cliffs, where deer walk across the white sand beaches, where storms come and go as lightning clangs upon the high crags, where something strange and more beautiful and more full of wonder than your deepest dreams waits for you — beyond that next turning of the canyon walls.”

- Preface (dated June 1987) for 1988 reprint of *Desert Solitaire*