



## Thoughts from the Garden - August 2015

I have been challenged by a twenty year old college student named Ester. She was part of the “Our Children, Climate, FaithSymposium” that I recently attended in Strafford, Vermont. Ester is an activist who comes originally from the Czech Republic. Towards the end of the symposium, she stood before us and explained that she could tell us any number of facts and statistics about climate change; she could describe ocean acidification, talk about the three hundred thousand people who die each year due to climate change, and answer numerous questions about the effects of the increase of carbon in the atmosphere. What she could not do, she realized, was tell us how climate change made her feel. Nor is it something that is discussed at any of the multitudes of meetings she attends about the climate crisis.

Ester’s observation hit home for me. I have feelings, sometimes overwhelming, about climate change and the related issues. I have experienced sadness when seeing images of glaciers disappearing and a grief in understanding, as Elizabeth Johnson writes, that in causing mass extinction “the behavior of the human species is killing birth itself.”<sup>1</sup> These are expressions of God in the world that will never exist again, and I feel that loss. I feel fear when I read about droughts, wildfires, hurricanes, tsunamis, and other severe weather events that are increasing rapidly. Anger arises when I learn about the practices of large companies that are exploiting entire cultures and ecosystems for financial gain. When I look into the eyes of a child, I am sometimes overcome with shame at the way my life continues to lack the radical changes and deep authenticity required to heal and reconcile our species’ relationship with Earth and one another. When I meet people like Ester, who are giving over their whole lives for the sake of life on the planet, I am filled with gratitude, and hope hangs on.

I experience these feelings, but I don’t talk about them much. Instead, when I talk about climate change, I stick to the facts and the statistics and hope that they will strike a chord. Even in talking about the interconnection of all things, something that fills me with awe and wonder, my discourse is not typically personal. I realize now that this is not enough. Jay O’Hara, one of the keynote speakers at the event, shared that we need experiences of contagious transformation for social change to occur. While the facts are startling, they do not transform. My experience is that relationships transform; love transforms, and that requires a deeper sharing than factual information provides.

The invitation here, for me, is to enter into my own affective experiences, to share them, and to invite others to do the same. Through the acknowledgement of my own internal processes, I am more in tune with the processes of those around me, and I enter into life and God more fully. When I am in touch with myself I am led into more meaningful action, more profound relationship, and more authentic living.

In his talk, Jay declared, “Changing the world has to be uncomfortable.” Perhaps we can begin by entering into the discomfort of our own emotions. We are in the midst of a major crisis of seismic

proportions. How does that make you feel? Let us look this crisis in the eye; let us be vulnerable; let us grieve; let us hope. Together, may we feel, share, love, act, and change the world.

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1 Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ, Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love

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