

**“Report from the Frontlines”**  
*with Guest Minister Ariel Aaronson-Eves*  
July 25, 2021

**Welcome and Lighting of Chalice** - Worship Associate Barbara Lubin & UUFES Youth

**Centering Music** - “The Earth is Our Mother” (from the Hupa tribe of northern California)  
*The Earth is our Mother, we must take care of her;*  
*Her sacred ground we walk upon with every step we take.*  
Played by Shana Aisenberg, UUFES Director of Music

**Shared Affirmation**

**Hymn** - “Rising Green”

**A Time for All Ages** - Marion Posner

‘WHERE ARE OUR DICTIONARIES OF THE WIND, of the grasses?’ wrote the poet Norman MacCaig. You know how it is when you are captured by something you read? You turn off your usual path and are impelled to explore, drawn by this new thought. So it was with me when I read that, some years ago, the Oxford Junior English dictionary took out some words. Exited, cancelled them.

These words? Well, for me, and I am sure for many of us, these words are jewels in the treasury of our natural world:

.....Acorn, almond, ash, beech, blackberry, bluebell, buttercup, dandelion, fern, hamster, heron, herring, holly, ivy, kingfisher, lark, lobster, minnow, otter, ox, oyster, pasture, raven, and willow. These words and more had been replaced by blog, broadband, bullet-point, chat room, and voicemail, among other familiar designations of digital life. Necessary, but instead of.....!

I look at my granddaughter at three and half and know, know for absolutely sure, that she must not lead an exclusively digital life, a vicariously lived life. No, she must continue, as she does now, to draw pictures in the sand with a stick, to lie on the cool evening grass and watch the moon rise, to wonder at the imprints of her bare feet on the wet sea shore sand, listen to the whirring of a dragonfly’s wings.....

Now the loss of words is a very serious matter. There are many that have been lost over the years, unremembered, abandoned. Here is a quote from Wendell Berry, who connects language and successful conservation: “...[people] defend what they love, and to defend what we love we need a particularising language, for we love what we particularly know.”

I was brought up in Scotland, two miles down a dirt road from the main road. A childhood rich in wildness of a kind. I discovered more recently that some of my ancestors came from the Isle of Lewis, an island in the Outer Hebrides off the West coast of Scotland. We visited it. The day was stormy, windswept, rain sleeted. With rare sun, cold Atlantic waters thrashing the cliffs, many tourists are a little challenged. It was glorious. Our son Tom hiked for miles, alone, solitary.

A few years ago, a company proposed a large development that would cover the island's interior, change its moors forever. The company in choosing Lewis for its operations described the moorland of Lewis as "a vast dead place," a wasteland, worthless, a *terra nullius*, a land of nothing.

What to do? A small group of local people against a corporation? How to engage everyone on Lewis, and many beyond, to support the fight to preserve their moors? How to alter people's perceptions of the moors as a *terra nullius* 'to a beloved place, a place that its inhabitants would, in a sense, reinhabit.'

Well, here is what happened. A small group of people looked to the power of a vocabulary of words, paintings, drawings, poetry, memories, stories...the power to shape sense of place, to invite intimacy with the moors. They looked to create it, but discovered, to their amazement and delight, the legacy of their ancestors. They discovered that much of this vocabulary existed already. Created, and lived, for hundreds of years by people living on the Isle of Lewis. A rich and profound vocabulary that goes beyond words, deepens and elaborates the meaning of the word vocabulary ~ that elegantly, minutely, focuses attention. It excites a dynamic, passionate, relationship between people and the earth.

They won that battle — a conspicuous and optimistic victory. The moor lives in its mists still, still...Since then, many lost words have been found in stories, songs, carved into stone...and I want to read to you a few of the ones that were re-discovered on Lewis. I hope they will speak for themselves, by singing to you about the most exquisite of details in this precious planet we live in and must protect.

A *caochan*, for instance, is "a slender moor-stream obscured by vegetation such that it is virtually hidden from sight," while a *feadan* is "a small stream running from a moorland loch," and a *fèith* is "a fine vein-like watercourse running through peat, often dry in the summer." Other terms were striking for their visual poetry: *rionnach maoim* means "the shadows cast on the moorland by clouds moving across the sky on a bright and windy day;" *èit* refers to "the practice of placing quartz stones in streams so that they sparkle in moonlight and thereby attract salmon to them in the late summer and autumn," and *teine biorach* is "the flame or will-o'-the-wisp that runs on top of heather when the moor burns during the summer." 'Ammil is a Devon term for the thin film of ice that lacquers all leaves, twigs and grass blades when a freeze follows a partial thaw.'

I have begun to pen words that now come to me as I wander our local landscape, here

(I read just a few):

*Long ago tellings* ~ aging stone walls glimpsed through the forest floor, telling stories of hope and striving

*Water skin music* ~ the musical script writ on the water's surface as the wind conducts its orchestra

*Caterpillar camouflage* ~ the symphony of startling gems that we rarely notice

*An enthusiasm* ~ as in robins when they gather busily and eagerly on the ground after snow melt

*Dappled dance* ~ the dappling of light danced by sun and shadow in the forest

*Water intricacy* ~ a cobweb traciered at the water's edge

*Marsh murmurings* ~ the moments of theatre if you stand quite still near wetland and allow the curtains of your senses to open

*Wing whispering* ~ flight songs sung by the wings of birds and insects.

*Dragonfly delicacy* ~ the magic of kaleidoscope in a dragonfly's wing.

*Trees translating* ~ the poetry of the trees

Words ~ elegant, precise, witness to glorious detail, words that fight elegantly for conservation.

I urge you to walk, pen, paint, imagine and protect.

(With thanks to Robert MacFarlane and others, some of whose words I have quoted and referred to in this piece, and who have inspired me with their writing and activism.)

### **Reflection, Part 1** - Ariel Aaronson-Eves

In the days leading up to Tuesday's space flight, while Jeff Bezos was likely giddily preparing himself, I was looking up at the stars, unaware of that anticipated event. I was in the woods of northern Minnesota, a place where the stars shown much brighter than they do at my home in Dover, NH, yet not as bright as they might have, as they once did. Although the tall trees obstructed my view of the horizon and any accompanying glow from cities and towns, the nightly noise of Enbridge's crews drilling under the rivers made it clear that industry had made a profound and unpleasant mark on this corner of the world. Yet what I found, in that corner, in that camp, even amidst the growing irritability and tension and mistakes that come from unending and exhaustive struggle, from living in the shadow of increasing police harassment, was hope. Not hope that we will succeed in stopping Line 3, though I pray we do, and we might. But a post-apocalyptic kind of hope that people can and will survive and thrive outside of the modern consumerist paradigm we have been trained to be comfortable in; hope that we can find a way, where there is no way, to do better, for ourselves and each other.

I flew into Minneapolis two Wednesdays ago, on July 14. I got a ride from a young indigenous leader who was headed back up to camp after a few days near the Twin Cities. As we drove, I asked them a few questions to help get a sense of what exactly I had gotten myself into. The truth is, until a few weeks ago, I knew very little about the Line 3 pipeline, and the struggle to resist it. I was aware of what was happening, sort of, and knew where I stood. As a board member with the Unitarian Universalist Ministry for Earth, I had supported our signing on to the Stop the Money Pipeline campaign, which embraces financial tactics such as divestment to help resist pipeline construction. But the truth is, I didn't actually stand anywhere. I was barely even an armchair activist.

And then I had brunch with a friend who was talking about Line 3, and how they didn't have a life they could up and leave for a little bit to join the struggle in Minnesota. And I realized that for a week in mid-July, I actually could drop everything and go. And so I did. I reached out everywhere I could, for contacts in the camps and for possible travel companions. After a few days, I bought a plane ticket and made plans to go to the camp where the daughter of a friend was staying. I attended an online orientation, which covered a lot of ground and directed me to a lot of reading material, but still didn't give me much of a sense of what I was actually in for. I

took in what I could; and without doing much discern on whether I was prepared to be arrested or not, or what other issues might arise for me in the midst of that consideration, I was off to the frontlines.

I had Googled the camp I was headed to, but really all I learned was that there had been a recent and unresolved confrontation where the local police had blockaded the driveway of the camp. The article I read implied that no one could go in or out of the camp by car because of the cops, but clearly, here we were, planning to drive in. What I learned that day, and over the course of the following ones, was that while generally the cops weren't stopping anyone from entering the camp, they were making a habit of pulling over folks who were leaving the camp and writing them a citation for trespassing on county land, denying the right- of-way of the only vehicular entry or exit from the camp through a few yards of county-owned property. The county sheriff was very much serving the interests of a Canadian oil company over those of local residents, and the camp's lawyers were building a case against the sheriff's department. As of Friday, the lawyer succeeded in getting a restraining order against the Hubbard County Sheriff, finally bringing an end to this particular form of harassment, at least for now. Meanwhile, at another camp in a different county, the police just closed 8 miles of road leading to the camp, attempting the same tactic on a larger scale, and arresting 20 people in the process.

While I was at camp, the police intimidation, although not constant, was always present. The cops were somewhat successfully using this tactic to instill fear and frustration within us, making it harder for folks who might just want to get out of camp to swim in a nearby lake or do laundry in town. And they were offering themselves justification to pull over anyone, giving themselves more opportunity, illegally, to investigate whether we were up to no good. Which begs the question, what is good? What is legal? Why are some folks ticketed for taking the only path off their property, while other folks are allowed to shoot themselves through the commons of space?

I don't have answers, but let us take a moment to breath, and hold these questions, these discrepancies, in mind, as we move on through our service.

**Joys & Concerns** - Midnight on the Water (Luke Thomasson)

**Hymn** - "Spirit of Life"

**Meditation/Prayer** - Ariel Aaronson-Eves

(Adapted from "A Prayer for Standing Rock," by Diana Smith)

Spirit of Life,

We hold in our hearts the peaceful protestors of all tribes and faiths who are gathered [in Minnesota, resisting Line 3], protecting sacred water and land.

They ask for respect, they ask for our government to help protect their sacred lands and the water that sustains their lives, [they ask for our government to honor its treaties.]

We know that the quest to build this pipeline, and the actions of those building and funding it are fed by our thirst for oil and the legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery, [and the ongoing impact of colonialism]. This weighs heavily on our hearts.

Spirit of Grace, please help all of us find a new path forward, away from the wrongs of the past and the life-denying legacy of oppression.

We pray for peace, light, and grace for the Water Protectors.

Spirit of Love, help us find ways to stand with the Water Protectors, with the Seventh Generation.

We pray for the safety of the Water Protectors and all who are involved in this struggle.

Spirit of Life, help us help Mother Earth heal, and in return heal ourselves.

We pray for strength, courage, and steadfast patience for the Water Protectors.

May their strength and perseverance lead to the protection of these sacred lands and waters, for Water Is Life. Amen.

**Reading** - “All Water Is One Water” by Mel Hoover, Rose Edington

Water unites us. All water is one water, shape-shifting as it goes on and on in its unending cycle. The stream we gather by unites us with all the waters of the world, for all of life depends on water.

That's why this common, everyday element on which our very lives depend is sacred.

In our thankfulness for water, let us remember to honor, cherish, and care for it—for our own lives, for all life touched by water, and for those who come after us.

**Reflection, Part 2** - Ariel Aaronson-Eves

Enbridge, the Canadian pipeline company that is building Line 3, which is a longer and larger replacement for an existing pipeline, is interested in finishing this pipeline as quickly as possible and with as little responsibility as possible for the environmental consequences. Just this week water protectors encountered a spill of drilling chemicals that Enbridge employees were ignoring until public attention led them to try to clean it up. Enbridge has found a way to use the law and law enforcement as a bludgeon to protect their interests. When I arrived at camp, I was told that there were no longer any roles that were safe from arrest. This was in part influenced by the urgency, the kinds of actions needed to actually stop this pipeline from being completed, by standing in its path or by locking one's body to the machinery. But also by the fact that recently a group of about 30 water protectors, peacefully assembling with signs along the side of the road, were all arrested. For those activists who choose to risk arrest more directly, the charges have gone up. Those who lockdown on equipment are often facing charges of “felony theft,” on the basis that by delaying Enbridge's completion of the pipeline, they are stealing productivity.

When I heard this, I had no words but “ridiculous” to respond to this travesty, tragedy, of justice. Most folks getting these felony charges are having them later lowered or dropped, but there is no guarantee on that. This whole charade, though, feels like felony theft of tax money to me. I tried to make a joke about the police department committing felony theft against the taxpayers by spending their resources on writing citations for water protectors, instead of helping old ladies cross the street. But really, what was becoming clear to me, was the need to defund the police. The militarized sheriff's departments, in counties across Minnesota, are using their resources to harass and intimidate water protectors, often in questionable if not clearly illegal ways, and never

in the interest of the general welfare, the common good, the ecosystem, the people, the communities, the water, the future.

I started out by mentioning hope, and so let me return there. Let me zoom back in to life at camp. There are a number of camps along the pipeline route, though I only spent time at one. From what I heard, the cultures vary across camps, and many folks spend time at different camps as they find the place that fits them best. What I sensed in this was a clear understanding that this struggle requires multiple tactics from different autonomous groups. Some camps are more intergenerational, with children run about and elders leading ceremony. Some may be more dedicated to welcoming people into the movement, such as the aptly named Welcome Water Protectors Center, or hosting larger rallies; others are focused on planning nonviolent direct actions to actually stop the drilling. The camp I was at was run by the Giniw Collective, “an Indigenous women- and two spirit-led collective to protect the land and water.” We were predominantly young and queer, and we were committing our bodies to this struggle, to this water, in a range of ways.

For me, that meant a lot of pumping and hauling water, and washing a lot of dishes. It meant helping the camp run, meeting the basic needs of people (and animals) living together in that space. In some ways it felt like being at summer camp; in many ways I was reminded of living and working on Star Island. The key difference was *why* we were gathered. We weren't there for vacation, or a job. We were there because we chose to be there, because we were - they are - committed to doing whatever we can to stop this pipeline. The *future* is what is at stake, yours, theirs, mine, ours, as is the past. We believe that we can do better. We are willing to work harder than I have ever seen anyone work for money, with the hope of stopping the forces of extraction, with the hope of honoring the sacred, honoring the land and the water and each other. Many in American culture as been trained to believe that we need to earn and invest and hold tightly to money so that we have it for the future, for ourselves and our children; the people at camp are choosing to invest in the rivers, so that we have them for the future, for ourselves and our children. There's joy in the struggle too, the pleasure of each others' company, naps, still-warm homemade challah on a Friday night, watching a duckling run atop lily pads, the rewards of living in and with your body and in community, so drastically different from the life I returned to, of countless Zoom meetings and endless scrolling in search of connection.

Camp life is far from perfect, and I could definitely sense how easy it would be to burn out, but there's an intentionality to it, to creating the world we want as we fight against the world that is harming us. The group agreements for life at camp specifically name that the -isms and -phobias, such as racism and sexism, that harm and hinder our lives on the outside are not welcome. Of course they still show up; none of us are perfect, but being humble as we learn and being open to transformation is key. I was told of white folks who found themselves struggling in a BIPOC-led space being asked to leave. Even I had to confront some of my own white fragility around what space in the camp I had access to and how, and what was the appropriate level of initiative to take around what I had to offer. I am still processing that part of the experience; at camp I was able to bring my frustrations and angst to the water pump, finding a way to both be useful and help myself feel better.

Nothing about this was easy, but nevertheless this is where the hope resides, in this voluntary association of people, eating bread and drinking tea, pumping water and watching dogs, sharing pronouns and back-up phone chargers, taking naps, locking themselves to drilling machinery, and providing jail support for arrested comrades. We looked out for each other and trusted each other, not perfectly but as well as we could, helping meet each others needs so that we might meet our shared goal: stopping Line 3.

The struggle is far from over. Enbridge continues to drill, using outrageous amounts of water in the midst of a drought. There is a role for all of us in this struggle. And there is a better way of living being offered to all of us, through this struggle. May we find ways to embrace it. May we find meaningful ways to contribute to the struggle. May the waters be protected.

**Special Collection** - Carroll County Adult Education with Crystal Sawyer, Program Director

**Anthem** - “Ancient Mother” (Navajo song)

### **Community Response**

What emotions are arising in you on hearing my reflection? How are you feeling called to respond?

**Closing Words** - Ariel Aaronson-Eves

Holding these big goals is good...and finding the little ways we can do something, anything, helps move through that. And that sense of community is where that hope arises – not just doing it alone, because there’s more power in numbers and also because there’s more of a sense that we are a part of something that helps sustain that, that makes it harder to be overwhelmed. Yes, we can still burn ourselves out, but working towards a common goal is generative. We all can help make a difference and stop this pipeline and help support the people who are putting their bodies on the line. I hope you’re able to find a meaningful way to do that and find meaning in whatever way you are able to contribute to the cause.

*For info about going out there and other ways you can help (instagram is super helpful), Ariel shared this link: <https://www.stopline3.org/take-action>*

Hymn - “There’s a River Flowin’ In My Soul”

### **Benediction**

Some came here to be blessed with answers in a tumultuous world. Let us hope too, however, that many of us have been blessed with questions to direct us with a clarity of mind to steer our logic towards kindness and justice always.

- Ma Theresa “Tet” Gustilo Gallardo, President of the UU Church of the Philippines

**Postlude** - “Red River Jig”

(Metis fiddle tune - among the most well known First Nation fiddle tunes)

This service can be viewed until October 11 at:

<https://uuma.zoom.us/rec/share/2fOEU4iq102QN15lfs7sgDJAGeBMUPa-Q11wY1ZYf3GWwWdEhFzHcTnfpdd0gogE.CygaofqDyivCxpJz>

Access Passcode: .6EpxDU1

Note: For copyright reasons, some of the music was not recorded.

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