

## **“Seeing Our Growing Edges”**

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**Scriptures: Luke 12:22-34, Qur’an 2:164, 41:53a**

Many years ago, in a phase of my journey when I was narrowly focused on finding meaning in sacred texts like the Bible, I first heard, from a professor of mine, the idea that there are “two books of revelation”—scripture and the natural world.

This was an enticing idea to me with a kind of scent of freedom—I felt it beckoning me to a truth I had once known but had forgotten.

The world of nature, including our own complexly beautiful bodies, is our primary source of meaning...it is the sacred stuff from which all metaphors, symbols, and language are drawn, whether in poetry, art, or sacred scripture.

Last weekend I was on retreat with Rev. Margaret Bullitt Jonas, an episcopal priest who began preaching on climate change in 1989, when the Exxon Valdez oil tanker crashed in Prince William’s Sound in Alaska, and public conscience was rocked as the tanker spilled 11 million gallons of crude oil over a few days.

A couple of years ago Margaret felt a strong calling to leave her work as a parish priest and transition to full-time faith-based environmentalism—she wrote up a job description, went to her bishop, and asked if he could hire her as such. He said yes quickly, though they would need to find the money. Just at that time, one of her parishioner’s sold some pipeline stock and donated the proceeds to Margaret’s diocese, and her work as “Missioner for Creation Care” began.

I want to share my experience with a practice Margaret led for the steering committee of our American Baptist Creation Justice Network (which I co-founded and co-coordinate).

We had spent the whole day meeting in a circle under bright lights, reflecting on the year gone by and the year ahead...it was now early evening and we gathered around a fireplace in comfier chairs, with a few lamps casting a low light.

Margaret invited us to pick one of a number of natural objects she had gathered—branches, leaves, acorns—and then guided us in a process of contemplation and meaning-making.

In my hand I held a fir tree branch, recently cut during some tree work.

It looked as though it were still alive.

We then spent about five minutes with each of these questions:

What have we here?

What does this mean?

What is God saying to me?

Finally, we decided on a token, one small thing we could do in the next day to acknowledge what we had learned.

As I observed and contemplated the branch, I was how the journey of human life grows out like a small branch from a great tree of life. The small cut branch in my hand was like a recently completed human life, fresh and alive in memory.

Looking at it I saw how our lives are made of so many tiny branchlets,

most of which fall off or break off—

each place where a branchlet had broken was healed and covered with bark.

At its outer, growing edges, the branch was bright green, with tiny leaves stretching toward the sun, and new buds ready to burst forth.

I saw that my own life is like this, my decisions forming a unique pattern of branchlets, a unique form of life groping toward light in many directions.

Our essential life force is not our own, but flows from that great tree of life—which, through our growing towards the light we have helped to feed.

And when our branches fall or are cut,  
that greater life continues to flow indefinitely...

What is this sap of life that flows through us?

Is it consciousness? Is it love?

Can we call this sap of life God?

Reflecting on the green vibrancy of life at the branch's outer, growing edges, I look to the growing edges of my own life...I can let the parts that need to die fall off and accept that they will heal over in time.

I look also at the life of our community, I see the buds, for example, of the "Natick Renewable Energy Leadership Campaign" a few of us are beginning to plot—this is a campaign to lead the Town of Natick into a 100% renewable energy future; there are many buds like this, and new leaves.

As a community, we are like a branch growing into the light,  
always with parts dying and parts coming to life.

Can you see our community as a branch, noticing our growing edges,  
as well as our base connection to the tree of life?

Can you also see the stubs of our failed experiments, now healed over with bark,  
forming part of the extending branch that is our unfolding story?

Can you feel the sap of life flowing through you, as it sends energy through us,  
through our hearts and minds, to our growing edges of life-giving action?