

The Northshire environmental justice group, Earth Matters, invites everyone to an Earth Day celebration on Sunday April 22 from 2:00 – 4:00 pm in Factory Point Park, Manchester.

The Challenge we face. Earth Day message: Alan Betts, April 22, 2018

That piece ‘Ode to Joy’ was written by Beethoven near the end of his life, when he was completely deaf! It is a reminder to us to be joyful in the face of our challenges; to be joyful and grateful for the Earth that nurtures us, and is our home. And be joyful for the coming spring that is so reluctantly approaching!

Beethoven was writing for all humanity in the quest for freedom of the mind and spirit in the face of repressive political conditions. So relevant for today and the vast challenges we face!

The first Earth Day speech I gave was around 1980 in an outside amphitheater to a crowd of students at Green Mountain College. Thirty-eight years have passed, and those students are in their late 50s; and I have worked all my life on climate issues. We know so much; we have seen some progress, but there is so much we have not really faced.

What are the issues we must face?

Our expanding consumer society driven by profit, with its growing waste streams, now has a global impact on the Earth. We have vast technological power, but it is not being directed towards a sustainable future. As Pope Francis said so clearly in 2015, power without responsibility, without a moral foundation, has led to the exploitation of the Earth and the exploitation of the poor here and across the world - exploitation for profit. We live by an economic system that worships current profits, and discounts the future, even though it is our children, and the poor, and life on Earth that will pay the staggering price.

Yet we now have the understanding and the tools to transform our society to one that is energy efficient, and powered by renewable energy rather than fossil fuels. We can stop the vast streams of plastic waste flowing into rivers, lakes and oceans. Saving the Earth for the generations to come is now possible. You know most of the things we need to do to change direction! Start by transforming your local world, your local communities, Vermont; and gear up for the political fight for a livable future.

Our society is so self-centered and disconnected from the Earth that it is still unwilling to make these choices without sustained pressure driven by focused wisdom and insight. As you all know the political party in power in Washington is being paid by polluting corporate sponsors to confuse and deceive the public. And is being paid to dismantle the EPA regulations for clean air and water that were an important step forward.

This is a challenge that will be with us for all of your lives. So what do we need to do? Clearly we need to find the vision and courage to drive change. How? This is my advice.

First, step outside this human world with its narrow, fearful vision, and reconnect as deeply as you can with the Earth. Go into the wilderness: sit, listen and connect. The natural world

accepts us as we are; part of life on Earth. We need that sense of connection to love and respect the Earth. Then we can see with gratitude the reciprocity of love. If we care deeply for the Earth, then the Earth will sustain us.

Then step back into this human world, keeping one foot in the interconnected natural world; and connect and plan with each other, and with your communities. Confront the challenges in your own lives and in society with clarity and courage, power and humor. Confront the political system. It took generations to get us into this mess, and it will take a generation to make the transition out into a sustainable world; not just for humanity but for life on Earth: on land and in the oceans. Don't procrastinate, but be patient, wise and enduring: the Earth has a long timescale.

You know what has to be done!

We need an energy-efficient society powered by renewable energy. When they say it is not 'cost-effective'; ask not cost-effective for whom? \$1 spent now on energy efficiency and the shift from fossil fuels saves \$50 downstream in costs for our children.

We need to minimize waste; and manage and pay for all our waste-streams. The downstream costs to life on Earth cannot be repaid.

We need efficient transportation. Electric-assist bicycles and enclosed tricycles are a 100 times as efficient as heavy cars and trucks, and a fraction of the cost. Why don't we give them for our teenagers so they can feel the effortless joy of pedaling uphill? Plug-in hybrid cars use five times less gasoline than your typical sedan. Why aren't we pushing them to go with our solar arrays?

To do all this and much, much more, we need to fight back against amoral belief systems that place no value on the future of our children and the future of life on Earth.

I want to echo what Frances Moore Lappé said to the opening meeting of the Farmers market group in Rutland a decade ago. Some of you will remember her books: *Diet for a Small Planet* and *Food First*. Reflecting on a lifetime of work on global food issues, she said she could sum up her perspective with a simple motto: **"Bold Humility"**. Bold because it takes courage to face change, and humility because you have no idea of what is possible until you try!

Once you start to work with the Earth, things became possible that you cannot envisage – and that will bring you both gratitude and Joy!

Thank-you!