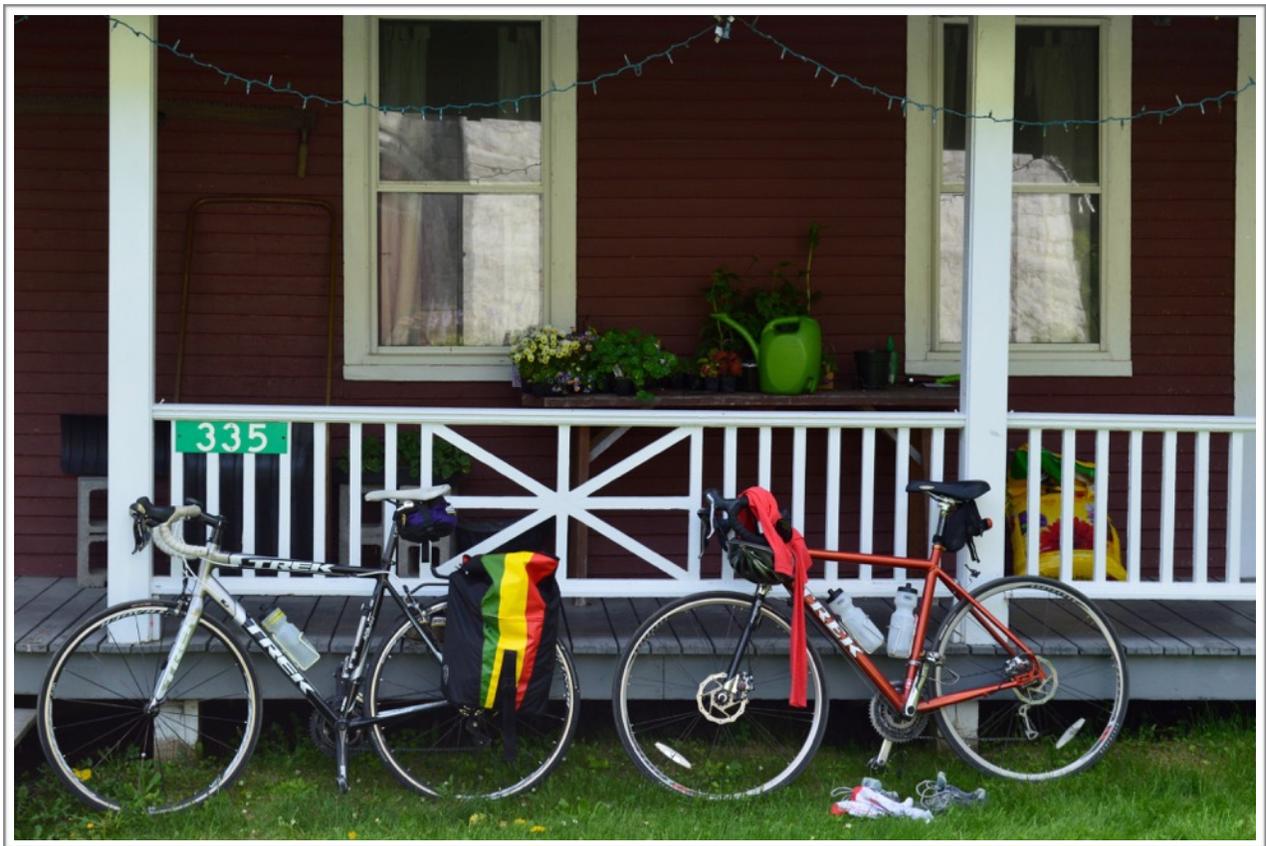


Pilgrimage for Earth

Sacred Places, Sacred Stories



Harpswell, ME - Burlington, VT

June 1st - June 7th, 2015

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Ever since I was a small child, — crouching and squinting carefully over plants and mushrooms while my dad explained to me what they were, or resting in the branches of trees, convinced I was invisible in the shade of leaves, — I've felt deeply connected to the natural world. As I grew older, that connection was forever present, but often distant, often quiet. It traveled with me through college and graduate school, through first jobs and first loves, skipping and humming patiently along, always a few steps behind, my focus elsewhere.

Unexpectedly, this lifelong connection to the earth caught up with me in a real, lived, urgent way several years ago when someone simply asked me to tell a story about it. I'll share the story I shared then another time, but for now, suffice it to say that telling that story brought my love for the earth to life. Somehow, telling that story churned up that quiet, innate love and multiplied it by a thousand. Made it something I couldn't forget, couldn't ignore. The idea for this project was one result of that remembering.

Pilgrimage for Earth: Sacred Places, Sacred Stories is a 6-week bicycle ride across the country — one week from Maine to Vermont, and five weeks from Minneapolis to Seattle — in order to churn up more such stories.

The human relationship to the earth is, in so many places, broken — in so many places unattended, in so many places forgotten. And in the telling of stories lies the potential and power to awaken sleeping things, to reignite ashes of long-ago loves, to remind us of important things we've forgotten.

And so the premise of this bike ride is: Can telling stories about the earth transform our relationship to the earth? Can telling stories about the earth be a first step in recalling a love and passion that inspires action for the earth? I believe it can. I hope you do too.

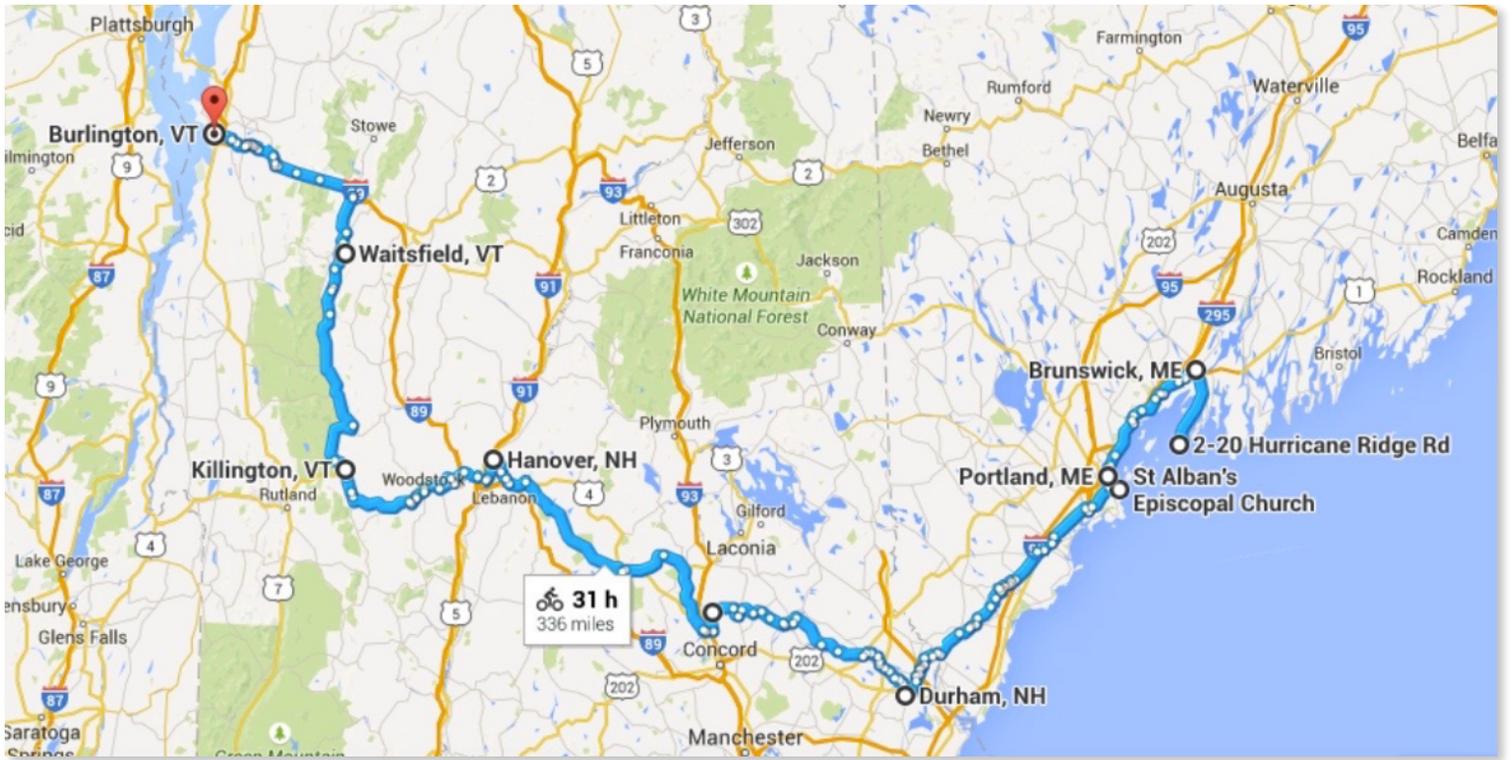
At the end of the ride, we will publish the stories, interviews, and photographs collected along the way into a book.

This 'mini-book' recounts the first week of the ride. (The next leg, from Minneapolis to Seattle, begins June 30th). Enjoy!

You can donate to the Kickstarter (we'd sure love it if you did!) **[HERE](#)**
or visit kickstarter.com and search "Sacred Places, Sacred Stories Project"

You can follow Chelsea's bike ride **[HERE](http://kairosearth.org/blog/)** (<http://kairosearth.org/blog/>)

Follow us on Facebook: Kairos Earth
Follow us on Twitter: @KairosEarth
Follow us on Instagram: @kairos_earth



Harpswell, ME — Cape Elizabeth, ME
 Cape Elizabeth, ME — Durham, NH
 Durham, NH — Canterbury, NH
 Canterbury, NH — Hanover, NH
 Hanover, NH — Killington, VT
 Killington, VT — Essex, VT
 Essex, VT — Burlington, VT
[376 miles of cycling!]

Dear Readers/ Storytellers/ Listeners/ Fellow Askers of Questions,

I was so impressed in so many ways as I biked from Maine to Vermont last week. I was impressed with my own strength and stamina (both of which I was fairly unsure of as I pedaled away from the Atlantic ocean on a rainy Monday morning, and both of which were sufficiently challenged as I continued on from there). I was impressed by how quickly the hours flew by as I flew along on my bike, even as I straggled up hills and struggled in the last hours of long days.

Most of all though, I was to-my-very-core-impressed with the people I met and the stories I heard. I was deeply moved by memories of land and earth recounted, by tears shed, by joys, griefs, enthusiasms shared. I was struck by the immediacy with which the idea of “sacred” resonated with both the most religious and the least religious that I met along the way. I was humbled by encouraging words spoken, tokens given, support offered, care shown, and by unprecedented kindnesses given without hesitation. I was delighted to find pieces of myself unfurling along with so many beautifully unfurling stories.

From the bottom of my heart - thank you to everyone who was present, who biked, shared, offered, received, well-wished, baked, advised, asked, cried, told, thought, felt, imagined.

I hope you enjoy this mini-book that I hope captures some of the adventure, the learning, and the beginnings of a pilgrimage that started with a week-long bicycle quest across New England and will continue with five weeks from Minneapolis to Seattle from June 30th to August 4th.

In gratitude,

Chelsea Steinauer-Scudder



Harpswell, ME — Cape Elizabeth, ME



Forty-six degrees. Pouring rain. Nerves. Excitement. Sand, gravel, shells beneath my feet. The unmistakable smell of fish and seaweed. These were some of the sensations of Monday morning, June 1st.

Tires reattached. Seat adjusted. Bike shorts under rain pants under reflective bands, over socks. Clif bars ready. Water bottles filled.

I palmed a small, heart-shaped rock that had been given to me an hour before: my first token.

The hour before the hour when I received this token, Steve and I were sitting in a small cafe in Brunswick, ME, both of us nervous, anticipating, a little baffled by what we had gotten ourselves into as we tried to think of more things to plan and map and figure out. There must be more to plan and map and figure! I was beginning to doubt what for weeks had been my optimistic response to people's slightly incredulous reaction to hearing I was to bike this far. I had laughed away incredulity and stood by my training, or at least by my positive attitude which, no doubt, would make up for any places where training had fallen short.

But on this rainy, cold morning which was to start my trip, — as I shivered pulling my biking clothes from the car to change, noticing how damp I was from being outside for all of 5 seconds and trying to stave off imaginings of how damp I would be after 5 hours of bike riding, as my mind moved beyond raindrops and raced ahead to the six-week

interview project that was now officially starting, to the book expected to come after it, to the questions grounding the project which had before been personal wrestlings that now must be presented to the world in the hopes that the world would understand, relate, respond — my positive attitude faltered.

Sufficiently daunted, spirits dampening along with my hair and shoes and shirt, I slopped back inside, feeling somewhat soggy through and through.

Steve and I met with two of his close friends and colleagues for breakfast. It was my first time meeting Tom and Mike but they immediately greeted me and hugged me with the warmth and familiarity of old friends.

And, with that, there I was, sitting across the table from two weathered and hardy conservationists, telling the story of this project for the first time.

I could see in their eyes what I've seen in my conservationist father's eyes many times — the perseverance, the resignation to some degree of inevitable cynicism that comes when you've committed yourself to fighting uphill battles all your life because you can't not fight them, you can't not stand up for what you believe in, even when you're standing alone or standing invisible. And I saw the familiar kindness too, the compassion that runs deep, the noble glint of the great defender of plants and animals and land and water.

And I wondered if they would understand me when I used the word "sacred."



To my surprise and delight, they both engaged right away. Mike launched into solid advice about approaching interviews and conversations openly and with no assumptions about what “sacred” may mean to any given person. Tom told marvelous stories about his childhood and his trek into the world of conservation.

After our coffee and breakfast sandwiches had disappeared, and after wishing me well on my journey, Mike took his leave. He walked several paces, paused, turned back. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a small stone that he said he had been carrying with him for some time now, as a reminder to be more open, to more readily show his heart. He said that he would like me to have it, to carry it with me. I could tell it mattered that he gave that to me, that it was not done lightly. I was speechless but managed a choked up thank you that felt like nowhere near a strong enough response.

An hour later, I boarded my bike. Steve handed me my second token: a mussel shell, the New England equivalent of the traditional scallop shell carried by the pilgrim. (These two tokens traveled the next 376 miles with me and will travel the remaining 2,100). Steve bid me farewell with a “blessings on your journey pilgrim!” and off I went, waving into the rain.

I pedaled away, remembering how much I in fact have always liked the rain, spirits raising, adventures beginning.

I quickly found a rhythm of thought and movement. I pondered Big Life Questions as I spun my feet. I thought about how loving the rain means getting the world to yourself. I carefully considered how — where life often lacks consistency, predictability, constant beats — biking provides repetition, focus, control, a different way and rhythm of noticing the world. You notice white lights unevenly draped over a wooden fence. You notice that there are 12 flowers there and 6 fallen leaves there. You notice the homes you pass as if eavesdropping on a conversation — small snippets of shapes and whispers of toys on lawns, just enough to catch you for a moment and make you wonder: who lives there and are they happy or stuck or lonely and why that color and what they do and how long has the hammock has been out. And pedals spin round and thoughts ebb and flow. And there I was, happy, hardly noticing the cold now, reveling at this newly found rhythm, wondering how to best articulate this aphorism.

And then an unnoticed crack in the pavement, a slip of a tire on a wet road, and suddenly my lovely, constant, controlled rhythms were those of sprawl, of creating new traffic patterns, of thoughts skittering away, of running blood, of ripped rain pants flapping in the wind.

I picked up myself and picked up my bike, washed off my knees, chucked my now useless pants into a pile of rubble from a gutted house, climbed back aboard, started to rethink this whole rhythm thing.

A few hours, some hot coffee, a warm lunch with Steve, and several bandages later, I biked through Portland and into Cape Elizabeth, pulling up to Saint Alban’s Episcopal

church in the late afternoon, tired but in good spirits having (mostly successfully) finished the first day of cycling!

Steve and I had a wonderful dinner and conversation with the Green Committee of the church. We discussed the idea of sacred as ritual — and whether ritual had to be human, or if animals and plants could participate in ritual as well. We discussed whether places of violence and destruction are sacred. Tears were shed over loved places recalled. Much pasta and cheese was consumed. A wonderful first day.



Cape Elizabeth, ME — Durham, NH

The rain continued to come down on Tuesday but the biking went smoothly, apart from a wrong turn and resulting several mile detour. Steve was always nearby with dry socks and hearty food which made all the difference.

At mile 55 we rendezvoused in South Berwick with Larry Brickner-Wood, Chaplain and Executive Director of the Waysmeet Center at UNH, and he biked the last leg of the day with me. It was a welcome change to have his jolly company and someone to laugh with about big hills and grumpy drivers.

We reached Durham in the mid-afternoon, I had a happy hot shower, and we headed over to the Community Church for our evening event.



The event was just incredibly rich, largely due to the passion and hard work of both Larry and Mary Westfall, Pastor of the local Community Church. Not only did they organize, host, and cater the event, but both of them had incredibly profound things to say regarding ways of loving the earth in and through community.

Participants were a mix of Waysmeet Center students and recent graduates, community members, and church-goers. It was a wonderful combination that produced a wide range of ideas and thoughts about what “sacred” means and how it applies to nature and earth.

The result was an evening full of thoughtful questions, excellent conversation, eager reflections, good pizza, descriptions of sunlight hitting front yards, of hands in soil, of white pine trees. Enough to make your heart swell.



Durham, NH — Canterbury, NH



Larry was kind enough to drive Steve's car out to Pittsfield on Wednesday morning so that Steve could bike with me and be free at last from the confines of the sag wagon and out in some fresh air. I was glad for the company, conversation, and commiserating, especially as we hit our first real, painful, steep hill. My goodness, was that hard! Even speed bumps were impossible, leg-burning things after that.

We met Larry and Molly (a former student) for lunch in Pittsfield and then biked onward into Canterbury. The sun was shining at last and made for a gorgeous ride as we passed by farms, fields, and silver toads.

We had an intimate feast in Canterbury with several Church of the Woods regulars, Canterbury locals, and friends. It was yet another marvelous conversation and exploration of how we connect to nature and what that connection gives to us, teaches us, asks of us.



In Canterbury and throughout this trip, I was consistently referred to and introduced as “The Cyclist,” a pronouncement which tempted me to look over my shoulder for the professional bicycle rider standing behind me in sleek sunglasses and muscular glory. And then I’d chuckle to myself when I remembered that they were referring to me, standing there awkwardly in my \$5.00 CVS purple sunglasses and poorly bandaged knees.

I’ve been on bikes since I could sufficiently balance on them, and long before that I was bouncing and whooping along in a small trailer behind behind my parents’ tandem. I bike for fun and commute on my bike, and have now done a week-long bike ride. I’ve never, however, considered myself a “cyclist.” An avid lover of bikes and bike-riding, yes, but “cyclist” sure sounds like it entails something very serious and entails someone very much in better cycling shape and form than myself.

So I was delighted in Canterbury to meet a real and true lifelong cyclist who seemed equally delighted to impart some of his wisdom and advice, all of which was readily accepted and incredibly helpful. My bike, (‘Ol’ Red’ as Steve has dubbed her), even got the thumbs-up, apart from a few small suggestions for improving efficiency.

Perhaps by the time I reach Seattle I’ll be one-half cyclist.

Canterbury, NH — Hanover, NH

We didn't have an event to get to on Thursday and it was a needed and welcome opportunity for a leisurely morning of coffee, catching up on emails and rest, and then taking our time to bike gradually up a long series of hills and into Hanover. Steve drove ahead, parked the car, and biked back to meet me and be my cycling buddy for a good part of the day. Route 4 was lovely and quiet and beautiful.

The pistachio gelato and mango curry at the end of the day were perfect and sleep-inducing.



Hanover, NH — Killington, VT

Church of Our Saviour, Mission Farm



Stella, pictured above, is the dog of Tim, who is the highly talented baker of Mission Farm Bakery, which is just about 50 Stella trots from Church of Our Saviour. Stella has a bit of a reputation around the Farm — ornery and overly energetic and entirely too happy to see everyone. I find her lilted gait and her tendency to forget to stop before she crashes into people fairly charming. But I only see her twice a year.

Mission Farm itself is unarguably and almost unreasonably charming and beautiful. It's one of those places where you would be hard-pressed to find something unsightly. Instead, your sight finds and scales the high and rolling treed hills rising on either side of the valley. Your nose finds blooming lilac. And then there's the old stone church, the trickling brook, the buzzing bees, the dandelions.

It is, as Lee Crawford, Rector of Church of Our Saviour, has described it, “a *thin* place.” A place where there shimmers something greater, something mysterious just out of the corner of your eye and perhaps well within the corners of your soul.

It was a fitting stop on this bicycle Pilgrimage for Earth, as Kairos Earth was here almost exactly a year ago for the Pilgrimage for Earth of 2014. This first Pilgrimage took place over four days in June and looked at Holy Week as if it was the earth being crucified. Mission Farm was the sight for ‘Holy Saturday’: a full day of workshops, liturgies, and resting in stillness and silence outdoors. It was quite beautiful and quite heart-breaking.

And it was quite wonderful to get to share this new Pilgrimage with some familiar faces and some new ones, to hear reflections and stories about how Mission Farm and Church of Our Saviour are holy places for so many who spend their time here. The church itself and the land surrounding it are a striking blend of the notions of “sacred” and “nature” and our conversation centered on people’s encounters with the sacred in the church, in the congregation, and in the surrounding landscape.



Killington, VT — Essex, VT



Saturday was our longest day — 93 miles to Essex! Steve and I biked the whole way and ate a whole lot of food. Mark was kind and patient enough to drive the car for the day and even provided us with a road-side ice-cream delivery.

We had a fantastic lunch conversation with Steve and Ruth - old friends of Steve's. They were energetic, good-hearted, generous. They do amazing work around the world and it was so inspiring to hear them talk about it.





The bike ride across Vermont was stunning and made all those miles go by surprisingly quickly.

We had a night off in Essex before heading into Burlington the next morning, which I took full advantage of by snacking all evening and getting ready for bed promptly at 8:30, knowing we had a big day ahead!



ii

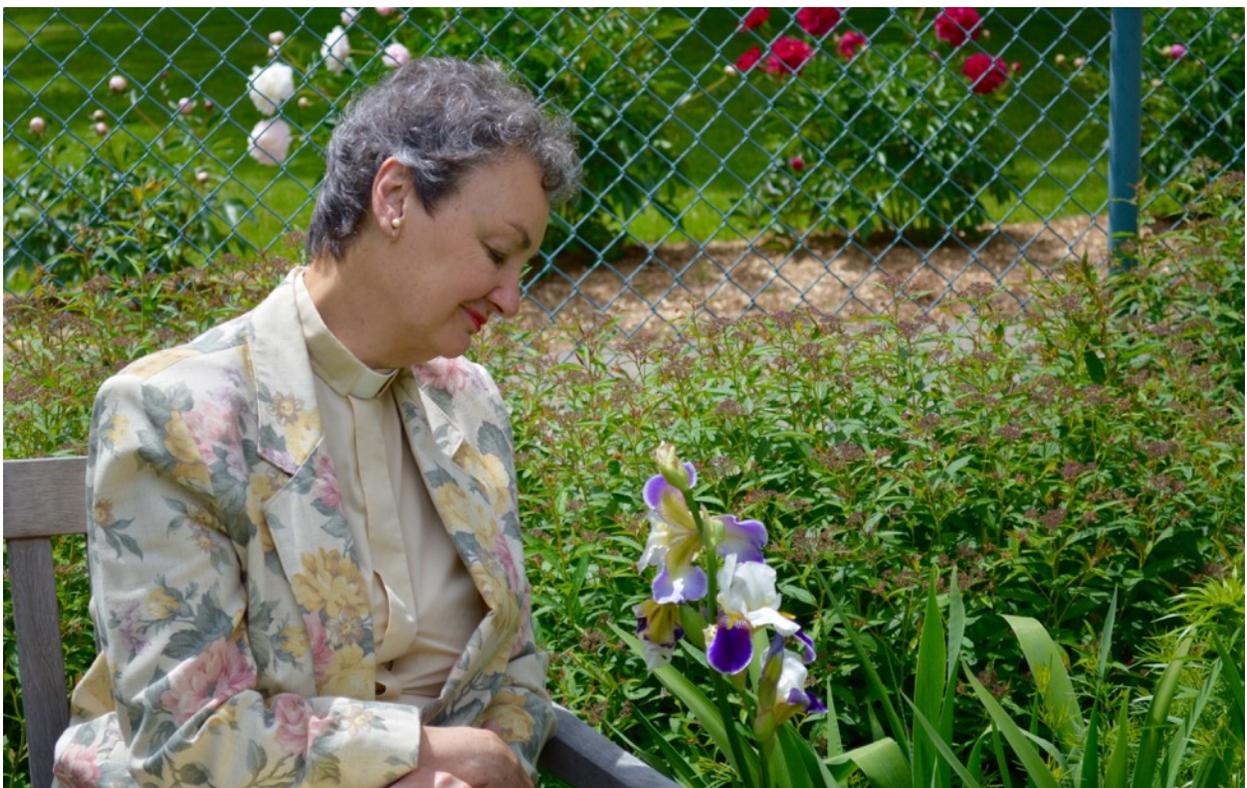
Breathe with unconditional breath
the unconditioned air.
Shun electric wire.
Communicate slowly. Live
a three-dimensioned life;
stay away from screens.
Stay away from anything
that obscures the place it is in.
There are no unsacred places;
there are only sacred places
and desecrated places.

iii

Accept what comes from silence.
Make the best you can of it.
Of the little words that come
out of the silence, like prayers
prayed back to the one who prays,
make a poem that does not disturb
the silence from which it came.



After the service, I shared my own story and a little about the project, Mark took us outside for a workshop on engaging with the earth, and I led the group in a time of reflection and conversation.



Sally and the community in Burlington made us feel so warmly welcomed and did so much to make this day-long event possible and successful. They had even collected photographs of feet standing on holy ground! (See below).

It was a marvelous close to a marvelous week.







Thoughts on Sacred: Shared & Collected

Throughout the week, our conversations were generally structured around three questions:

What does sacred mean to you?

What does nature/earth mean to you?

Do you see a connection between them?

We asked people to jot down any thoughts they had on notecards and to leave them with us if they were so moved. Below are some of the responses.

Sacred: Holy, special, infused with God. Where rituals have taken place.

What meaning does earth /nature/ land hold: Special, worth protecting, a gift from God, infused with God

Relation between sacred and the land: The earth is sacred and a gift from God and a place to encounter God, experience God, communicate, find comfort with God, feel God, grow in God, feel closest to God.

— *Unsigned*

Sacred: Something to be respected, cared for, revered. We cannot recreate it.

Earth: Home, beauty, magnificence, life-giving. But also fragile and easily abused and destroyed. All of the earth is sacred.

— *Unsigned*

Sacred: Holy, blessed, touched by God.

Earth/Nature/Land: Demands respect, Created by God, pure, basic, unadulterated therefore sacred, sacred in its unadulterated form

— *Unsigned*

Life is sacred.

- 1) Black Elk, a Sioux Medicine man, once said, “Anywhere is the center of the universe,” so to me, all is sacred, all is spiritual, good and bad, dark and illuminated.
- 2) Nature to me represents the vast diverse, chaotic, beautiful, mysterious masterpiece of the higher order whatever you may call it. Lessons and knowledge of our own inner being in millions of different manifestations of beauty and mystery.

— *Brady McGee*

Sacred means innately valuable. It is of such great value that there is no monetary value.

Earth is home.

They are the same thing.

— *Alex Binder*

Sacred: Special place (for all creation - for all creatures). Requires respect.

Nature/earth: It's home for me, home for all creatures, home for God and God's spirit

They are the same: All of creation must be treated with honor, respect, and gratitude.

— *Unsigned*

Sacred: Tribal, community, divine, connected to spirit

Nature: Home, ebb & flow of life, recharge

Greatest ease and comfort occurs when aligning with the sacred and nature — adjusting our lives to our natural surroundings.

— *Unsigned*

Sacred: Something that makes you feel close to God or spirit, the universe, moving, magic, spiritually emotional

Nature/earth: Untouched beauty, a mother taking care of us all that holds everything we need; clear, pure, how it should be

Relationship between the two: HUGE connection between the two. Many times I've felt these emotions or close to spirit when experiencing nature.

— *Alissa Brady*

Sacred: Essential, inviolate, irreplaceable, embodying highest value

Earth: Home of life, worthy of ultimate respect

Relationship: Since life is the highest value, the earth — as the only home of life we know — is itself sacred. The earth is to life as the chalice is to wine.

— *Unsigned*

Sacred is the state of connectivity with God.

Nature is any part of God's creation in which human-kind exists.

Nature and human-kind co-exist as part of God's creation.

— *Unsigned*

Sacred is anything held to significant importance to someone; purity, special, totally someone's own

Nature is usually the natural world, something also pure, special

I think that nature is sacred. I'm not sure I believe in a divine power, but I think that nature/earth is as close as it gets for me. Purity & soul of the earth.

— *Emily Balch*

The Earth and the natural world means and offers a place to feel complete gratitude for life in all forms, from a simple fern to a hearty oak or mystical white pine. These forms of life seem to offer us a place in the most simple forms. Just like you wouldn't want to take your mother for granted...you do not want to take Mother Earth for granted. Simply for the fact that it has given you life. That is what nature means to me.

— *Alison*

What does sacred mean? To me, sacred means a place of healing and light. A place to find solace in times of doubt.

What does nature mean? Nature means any element of the earth. Something or somewhere that reminds me of grounding and peace.

Connection? Most definitely. To me, nature is of the utmost sacredness.

— Erin Fitzpatrick

Sacred: Honored, respected, listened to, protected, essence, soul

Nature/earth: Where we come from (earth, sea, sky); weave continuing design

Relationship/connection: Listening and being, responsibility and stewardship, never-ending, life-giving

— Dea Brickner-Wood

Sacred: I think of this word in the context of native peoples

Earth & Nature: My foundation for feeling sane, place for peace, healing and deep questions

I tend to think of sacred and nature in the sense of native peoples' most sacred places. I am coming to see that the sacred is even more places than that — some places have a consistent feeling of sacred, some have moments.

— Cyndi Paulin

Sacredness, to me, is an experiential sense, a sense of reverence and openness to God, Life. Reality as manifest in some particular thing or place = a "sacred" place/thing

Earth: The physical form/ this planet in which we live our lives; our bodies, plants, animals, minerals — these are all of earth.

A place where these are connected? Everywhere, if our eyes and ears are open to it! In some places, that sense is stronger than in others — these are in rock formations, old growth forests in Vermont that evoke this form very strongly.

— Mark Kutolowski

For me, the earth, wind, water, air/sky, fire — all the elements are sacred and all have a different calling. As well as humans and animal kingdom, connections to all day or night, for the light and the darkness has its calling as do all of us. So for me, it is connected to all of God's green earth and all of the creation.

— *Unsigned*

A sacred place is any place where one can experience connection to the divine — which means, then, literally any place or any circumstance that God's presence is perceived, experienced, hoped or yearned for. I was in a sacred space in the glaring, humming, impersonal environment of the ICU when I was with my dad (his ashes are in the Memorial Garden [at the First Congregational Church]). It was not at all — from outward appearance — a sacred place. He had fallen two days before, and was rushed, with severe head trauma, to the hospital. I was 2,000 miles away. By the time I reached his bedside, he had been declared brain dead. But sitting there with him, in the last minutes...it was highly, almost excruciatingly, sacred.

Outdoors is the place I feel most whole and at home.

— *Lee*

Sacred is set apart. Touched by, infused with the creator. Set apart can be surrounded by "other" but specifically recognized by another, the divine within.

Earth/nature: All that is. First created by the source of life. Often manipulated by time and other elements of nature including humans, water, wind, animals,...Humans often think as if we are separate from nature, but we are part of and have an impact upon nature in ways that nothing else does.

It seems we cannot be whole if we do not or cannot acknowledge that we are a part of the whole. If we are to encounter the divine and to be in relationship with the divine how can we not embrace the love of God in all that is?

— Ryan Gackenheimer

Sacred: Awe to bring Awe, to know/feel God

— Danielle Rochford

Sacred: A special place; valuable; evokes a sense of deep and divine love

Many favorite childhood memories (perhaps most) are when I was one with nature — hiking and back-packing, swimming in a lake at family camp, playing in the snow with my sister.

Family camp in Maine is very sacred to me — the lake, the lily of the valley, ferns, the pine trees are embedded in my soul and all I have to do is remember how I felt when I was there, or remember a smell (pine trees), or a sound (loons; water slapping on the rocks; laughter), or a sensation (the warmth of the sun on my body when on the dock, the feel of the water, the brightness of the sun sparkling on the water).

— *Sally May*

Sacred: A place, experience, or feeling that evokes God's presence. As simple as candlelight, early morning stars, a loving person, a challenge that inspires my best self - the God within. Strengthening, life-preserving and renewing, necessary, inspiring.

Nature: Life, mystery, precious, ever-present

Sacred and Nature: Linked, beautiful, reassuring

— *Unsigned*

Sacred: A thing, time, place, person, being that must be treated with reverence. To which I can/ought to bow down. Increasingly, this includes everything. Certainly all the earth and nature is a bearer of sacredness, love, and blessing. Every bit is a sacrament — a tangible sign of the glory of God.

Sacred and Nature: An incarnation — a part of the physical world that is infused with spiritual truth. I am no longer able to, or interested in, separating the material from the spiritual. Instead, I seek to find each in the other, always.

— *Unsigned*

Sacred: Draws one into wonder, wholeness, peace, awe — awareness of wholeness outside regular consciousness (or deep within consciousness).

Nature is Earth. I grew up in Colorado. I know God was in the sun setting on the mountains and in church (the sanctuary and worship).

The sacred and nature are entirely connected — Nature is an icon of God “shining out like shook foil” - (Gerard Manley Hopkins)

— *Unsigned*

Sacred: Divine presence
Earth: Nurturing, giving & receiving
Connection: Life

— *Unsigned*

Sacred: That which is of, belongs to, reflects, reveals God/ the beingness beyond all being.

Earth: A physical manifestation of the divine energy and life, a bearer of divine life — the source of all life so far as we know — divine energy is revealed in physical form.
An incarnation.

— *Unsigned*

Sacred entails the presence of God's hopes — a good thing for life is all its forms.

Earth entails great beauty, an expression of god's imagination and capacity.

The relationship is real, tangible, and vital...it is emblematic of god's connection to all that is created.

— *Unsigned*

Sacred: That which is of special meaning, not to be diminished by human error

Earth, Nature: That which is given to us by an incredible coincidence and beauty, which we call God

Relationship: Very simple — this earth is sacred —to be cared for in stewardship which is in harmony with God.

— *Bill Bell*

Sacred: A place where I feel centered (often in church, sometimes in nature) and open to being thankful for all the blessings I'm aware of being given.

— *Howard Moffett*

The places that strike me as sacred are complete in their own way. Often large nature landscapes, or big trees, or ocean unbroken as far as I can see. They're never built - they just are, and I want them always to be the way they are.

— *Kelly Short*

The most immediate and accessible “sacred,” “earth” is right on my own porch overlooking my yard and bird bath...I am able to disappear into my chair and watch the most amazing interactions amongst God’s creatures — birds, squirrels, chipmunks, cardinals...watch the “couples” defer to each other...watch the robins become incredibly territorial...watch the squirrels and the chippies sipping daintily, taking turns with the birds.

— Andrea Chan

Sacred to me: an open, older forest of sugar maple, beech and yellow birch trees in a bowl on a north-facing slope; the early morning sun sends slipstreams of light through the leaves. The leaves underfoot are soft and the smell of the earth rises.

— *Charlie Levesque*

Concluding Reflections

The first week of this six-week project was just so wonderful. I was stunned again and again by the generosity, curiosity, wisdom, and kindness that I encountered.

Every time I felt exhausted, grumpy, too hungry or too tired to possibly be in a decent mood — someone would approach me with such warmth and such enthusiasm that it would immediately drive away anything but deep gratitude and vast wonder at how much good there is out there in the world.

The opportunity to try out these questions about sacred place was invaluable. I'm learning how much people welcome and respond to the simple gesture of being asked to recall and share a memory of place and connection to earth, a memory of being moved and changed by an encounter with something beautiful, something heartbreaking, something awe-inspiring. And I'm learning what it can mean to listen to and be changed by these stories.

What telling these stories will mean for the places they are told about remains to be seen. As Wes Jackson says, "the wilderness of the Sierra will disappear unless little pieces of nonwilderness become intensely loved by lots of people." The hope is that asking people to speak about their profound love for a place, to think about why that place is sacred to them, will result in that place — and places far beyond it — being treated as sacred, as loved.

As I prepare for the next five weeks of this quest of asking questions, both of myself and others, I'm looking forward to shared transformation, growing awareness of the incredible wisdom we can acquire from others if we are open to listening, and the power and potential for transformation that comes from telling and hearing stories about the earth.

And I'm looking forward to keeping in touch with you! Please feel free to contact me if you would like to share a reflection or photograph, be interviewed for this project, swap stories over a cup of coffee, or find another way to participate. I can be reached at chelseascudder@kairosearch.org.

You can follow the next leg of the bike ride, from Minneapolis to Seattle, [HERE](#).

We need your help to continue making this project possible, particularly in order to publish the book we are putting together. If you can make a contribution, no matter how small, we would be incredibly grateful. You can donate [HERE](#) or visit kickstarter.org and search "Sacred Places, Sacred Stories Project."

And thank you.

Thank You's

A big, huge **THANK YOU** to everyone who helped, organized, participated, biked, hosted, and supported us on this first week of cycling and events across New England. We could not have done it without you. You're magnificent.

We would like to thank a few people in particular:

Rev. Sally May, *Interim Associate Minister, First Congregational Church of Burlington*

Rev. Larry Brickner-Wood, *Chaplain & Executive Director, Waysmeet Center of UNH*

Dea Brickner-Wood

Peter Merrill

Deb & Jim Cavanaugh

Rev. Timothy Boggs, *Rector, St. Alban's Episcopal Church*

Rev. Kelly Moughty, *Associate Rector, St. Alban's Episcopal Church*

Rev. Mary Westfall, *Pastor, Community Church of Durham*

Rev. Lee Crawford, *Rector of Church of Our Saviour, Mission Farm*

Kelly Short

Rev. Peter Cook, *Senior Minister, First Congregational Church of Burlington*

Lucy Samara, *Director of Outreach Ministries, First Congregational Church of Burlington*

Rev. Steve Young & Ruth Young

Mark Kutolowski

Jenny Melville & Alex Abbott

Anyone we may have forgotten...THANK YOU!