

Keeping the Garden

the story behind the songs

Foreward

Welcome to this community of songs. I dedicate them to our mothers. At the release of this CD, my wife and I were suddenly motherless. Debbie's mother, Maribeth, had died a few days earlier in 2004 and my mother, Betty, in 2000. Both courageously endured ovarian cancer---the ultimate insult to motherness---one I choose to believe is no random evil, but the unnatural consequence of the rapacious habits our particular culture of humanity chooses in this time. Like all sins in the Garden---be they our toxifying of ageless waters, our ravaging of community-sufficient farming, or the warming that melts glacier's ancient ice---they bring their floods of ruin first on the most vulnerable of all Creation: the young, the already endangered, and yes, the mothers. *Our* mothers. What kind of balm will make for healing in this time? Another generation of humanity enslaves itself to the ground east of Eden. Is it possible once again to give ourselves to the wisdom of the Garden of Earth and come home at last to the abundant embrace of the Mother of All? These songs seek the answer. What will it take to serve this Mother? What does it take to keep Her Garden?

Debbie's mom taught her to sew. She learned from her mother who learned from her mother who learned from hers. Debbie makes many of our clothes. What an honor to put on garments of frugality and conscience. Debbie's mom taught her a deep faith in the fundamental goodness of all. All, no matter what. My mom taught me to love the Garden and make the best use of its produce, preserving everything from peaches to cow's tongue. She made room in the house to hatch the motherless pheasant nest we found in the field on our farm. A family picture shows a chickadee perched on her gentle hand. Long after she wasn't responding to much else, mom would rise to sitting in her cancer bed if we waved the fragrance of a Peace Rose near, her favorite of the Garden. Fundamental goodness! When she finally died in our farmhouse in Oregon, I was on the farm of my friends, the Podolls, in North Dakota. On that night (in late August, no less) we witnessed a display of aurora borealis like I've rarely seen, colors streaming, lights dancing to the top of the sky. I choose to believe, whenever anything happens to one of her children, Mother notices. All things are connected. All are good. So I dedicate these songs to our mothers, Debbie's and mine, and to the Great Mysterious Mother of All. Enjoy them. Use them. Learn from them. Help us decide what it means to serve and keep God's Garden. Will we learn to honor our Mother in our productivity? Will we bring enjoyment and fragrant economy or will we suffocate in our own waste? It is our choice in every moment. Sit up and take notice. Let us dedicate our lives to this time of decision. Will it be life or death, curse or blessing?

Keeping the Garden

the story behind the song

So I'm driving our electric car the other day. It's a ridiculously cute little thing. Called GIZMO, it has a white polymer body, two front wheels and one rear, one seat plus room for a few bags of groceries or a dozen well-behaved chickens behind, eight batteries beneath. It's made right here in Eugene by Neighborhood Electric Vehicle Company. I was going to the retirement center to visit some elders when, passing by the Mall, I felt a car following me. You know what I mean, the music was so loud I felt the vibrations before I actually heard the sound? Anyway, this car pulls up alongside. It was a carload of girls driving back to the high school after lunch. It was a warm day so I had my windows zipped down (they don't roll, they zip). They pulled alongside, rolled down their window and yelled at me, "Hey man, your car really rocks!" It really doesn't get any better than that.

Do I brag? Of course I do. I want people to see my family's efforts at a different kind of life. Long term the electric car may not be such a faithful alternative. It only costs 60 cents to recharge and I can go 40 or 50 miles with no emissions. It puts demand on vulnerable energy grids, contributes to warming God's Creation just the same. I tell you one thing though, we've driven this cutie 8,000 miles around our little city and, because it's in plain sight, I get into great conversations with people everywhere I go. We always get around to what it means to serve and keep.

Now this may seem a funny place to start introducing the title song. It's a big song: Creation groans, cranes circle, prairie dogs stand on tiptoe, grizzlies haunt, Adams and Eves choose. It's all about apocalypse and here I am discussing my little second in the eons of the Cosmos and a carload of screaming girls! Well here's the thing: I can sing my stupid vocal chords off, perhaps minstrel a little movement, but if I don't get off my consumptive butt and get a life, I am a noisy gong. And here's another thing: Global warming is the biggest threat to our Garden keeping. The facts can be overwhelming: Spring arrives earlier, migratory ranges of butterflies and birds shift northward, 50% of Earth's glaciers melt, warming ocean surface waters stop nutrient upwelling from the deep so zooplankton starve. So do the fish that depend on them and the birds that depend on them. Snowpacks in my country diminish by half so river flows and salmon runs languish; conflict over water uses for hydropower, food production and fish test harmony and tolerance. Whole cultures of our Planet's best indigenous earthkeepers flee as rising seas drive them from the Marshalls, Samoa, Fiji; malaria moves Northward. As the scourge of hunger advances, so does the desertification of cropland. As weather events and their impact intensify (longer droughts, stronger storms, more floods and landslides), so does our greed; insurance claims on property increase, premiums rise and with them, our inability to fund the things that will make the world a better place.

Earthfriends, "global warming are us." It would totally overwhelm me if my family wasn't trying to do everything we know how. If we weren't taking positive steps, I couldn't face the morning and my soul would shrivel up with fear. I still have fear, but learning to live in ways that put less demand on God's sacred earth brings me joy. For my Christian friends, I want to emphasize Jesus wasn't trying to make the rich man feel guilty. He didn't condemn. He didn't say the guy's life would go down the toilet if he didn't live with less. He did say it would be next to impossible for him to experience the real joy of God's realm. He did say those with great possessions will go away empty. He did say when you practice letting go, your neighborhood will grow (Mark 10:29-30). Our neighborhood has grown and so our joy. We heat our water with the sun. There's nothing more refreshing than standing in a hot shower I didn't have to do anything to receive or damage anyone to enjoy.

I feel connected to my neighbors. From May through October we don't use one watt of ancient fossil power to heat the water. We bought one of those washers that spins clothes at super high rpms. It gets so much more moisture out of the clothes! With our ancient set up, it used to take an hour to dry a load. Now 20 minutes. (Yes, we could hang our clothes on the line! We've got a long

Life and death.

2. Now the time may come when it's just too late for choosin'
If we will listen to the Gardener's truth revealed
Or if we'll eat the bitter fruit of our delusion
And keep on living as though the Planet could be healed
By our own power, through our own will,
With our technologies and our skill
And even still - still the whippoorwill...gives voice to twilight.
3. In the woodland, ruffled grouses drum their warning.
In the deep, migrating bowheads seek their way.
From the wakening desert, weary bats flee morning.
Beneath the tide, sea urchins wait uncertain prey.
See! The sandhill cranes are circling o'er the tundra!
In the riffle, remnant salmon wait their spawn!
On the prairie, sagehens hush at distant thunder
And the prairie dogs stand upright, still to dawn!
When will it be? Creation groans with a conscience all its own.
And do we dare that the grizzly bear...leaves hibernation?
4. Don't you ever doubt that a small but thoughtful delegation
Can change the world! Indeed that's all that ever could!
For can we wait for the grizzly's final hibernation.
Until the whippoorwill has left a silent wood
And the soils and watersheds become our booty
And the marbled murrelet can't find her home
And the spoils of affluenza yet benumb God's beauty
And our foodsheds bear the debt and rivers foam!
Here we stand again, and we can wait
Or we can enter through Eden's gate.
We can find the nerve, we can learn to serve, we can learn to serve,
We can learn to serve...and keep the Garden.

FINALE: Can humankind now choose between
 Can humankind now choose between
 Will humankind now choose between curse and blessing,
 Will we choose life and blessing?
 Will we choose life and blessing?
 Will we choose life and blessing?
 Will we choose life and blessing?
 Yes!!!

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That's My Farmer
Celebrating Community Supported Agriculture

the story behind the song

250 people? Why do they come? The fabulous door prizes promised?: \$200 off a CSA share, a flat of blueberries, a fresh warm berry pie? Or maybe we're fed up with food earning frequent flyer miles and dollars going to faceless supermarket and processor corporations, never getting to the folks who do the work. Maybe we're tired of being orphaned from our food, never knowing its source or parentage. Think of being able to point across the room and shout, so everyone can hear, "Hey, That's My Farmer!" It's like coming home. As a theme song, it is perfect for the That's My Farmer gala our church sponsors with a dozen other congregations every spring. People from all over Eugene and the surrounding area gather to meet the farmers of 13 local farms who practice Community Supported Agriculture or CSA. CSA is putting a neighborly face back on our food. People buy directly from local farmers. Households pay up front. This means we share the risk of the season with the farm families, while giving them much needed cash flow. In return, families receive a box of fresh fruits and vegetables each week (May to October)...even meat and eggs. It's the greatest produce on God's Earth and you get to know a farmer!!! That's My Farmer is faith communities getting involved in food system justice.

At the gala, we say "thank you!" to some of the farmers who grow our food. How often do we get to do that? Each farm has a display table. We sing songs, draw for door prizes. We have fun. We ask the farmers questions: "What keeps you going against the odds? How has your approach to farming changed since September 11? How do you experience the Sacred in your farming?" We show pictures of their farms on a big screen while they speak. Their responses are engaging, thoughtful. It's alot like holy communion. It's the way breaking bread is s'posed to be. From ticket sales we make \$1500 to subsidize the price of CSA boxes for our low income neighbors. Our goal is 500 households among the faith communities joining CSAs. At our church (1st United Methodist of Eugene), 50-60 families join farms each season.

At the end of the evening, we always gather all the farmers and their families in front of the hall for a group picture. One spring, as this was happening, one of our committee came to me beaming, teary and all choked up. She said, "Seeing those farmers up there with their arms around each other, in cooperation not competition: that was a real spiritual moment for me!" Don't you love it when spirit and economy meet? This is Gardenkeeping at its best. CSA really rocks!

That's My Farmer

Words & Music by John Pitney

REFRAIN: Oh, that's my farmer! Don't I have good taste?
 We're taking back our food system! It needs a human face.
 I just can't wait till Tuesday to see what's in our box.
 Community Supported Agriculture really rocks!
 Harvest bad? Harvest brisk? We share the bounty, share the risk.
 Cheap food gone berserk, we pay directly, those who do the work!

Now it's always an adventure to see what's in our share.
 The corn and beans and broccoli I know how to prepare,

But burdock root and eggplant would surely baffle me.

C
G7
Except here comes my farmer and she's got a recipe!

Now one time when the weather really gave our farm a test,
A few crops didn't do so well: our farmer was depressed.
He tried to give our money back. We kicked him in the buns!
If we didn't want to share the risk we'd go to Albertson's!

At Albertson's or Kroger, transnational food's the choice
Monopolizing shelf space, so we don't have a voice.
Our food dollars supporting corporate shareholders! That's grim!
So if my farmer doesn't mind I'll keep my stock in him!

Now friends this holy vision comes true when we have paid
And all are sitting under vines and fig trees unafraid.
Let justice roll like peach juice together down our chins,
Reminding us from out beyond the vision just begins: For...

CSA's must quickly grow into CSP's...
Community Supported Local Processing, and please:
We have to fund this vision while we feed the hungry poor!
If we can figure that one out, we'll learn what we are for.

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Local Market Band the story behind the song

As a pastor, I visit a host of 90 and 100-year-olds. What an education! A lot of olden-day tales of farming and food. All about community. As an advocate for food system justice, stories of distributed wealth and community sufficiency impress me. Stories of serving and keeping. They tell of a time when a diversity of farms and processing businesses made the commonwealth: scattered small dairies, creamery cooperatives, prune and nut dryers distributed across our county, "back of the bread" a locally owned flour mill, a baker and a grocer. Chet Kudrle, a child of Czech immigrants, died at 91. As a young man, he dreamed of owning a grocery. After the War he returned to his Sioux City home and quickly became the manager of the Council Oaks store, a locally owned chain. Chet managed there until a nationwide chain, called National T Company, bought them out. One time I asked him if things changed with the buy-out. He assured me they did. As a manager, Chet wanted to be out front helping mothers with their bags, hoisting children into shopping carts. After the buy-out he had to spend more time in back. He loved going to the warehouse to pick up things for his store. Before the buy-out, he enjoyed catching up with the employees while he did his business. Afterward, his loitering made the supervisors suspicious. Before, he received a big Christmas bonus. He could afford to buy gifts for his family. After, no bonuses. And less control over what he was selling and how he could sell it. It distanced him from his shopper neighbors. It broke his heart.

As we ship produce further and further from farm to table, we all feel the distance. A few years back, Cargill absorbed Continental Grain so they, along with Archer Daniels Midland (ADM), suddenly controlled two-thirds of the global grain trade. 85% of the food consumed on the planet is grain, so figure two companies now control half the food in the world! As recently as 1997, the traders and processors still ruled. Only a couple years later it's the supermarket chains who control the food system. Kroger, Albertson's, WalMart, Safeway and Ahold USA (Giant stores), the Top 5, get 50% of our retail dollar. They now leverage the others. Their instrument of dominion is the sale of premium shelf-space. They now make more money selling shelves than food. Cargill, ConAgra, Philip Morris and the like make long term contracts so no other brand but theirs will be sold from the shelves they own. For instance, in 2001 it cost Steinfelds (a Philip Morris brand) \$100,000 to display one jar of pickles on eye-level shelf space in just 4 stores of a Top 5 chain in Tampa, Florida.

As a pastor, I see many elders with Alzheimer's. They have lost their memory of the special kind of community for which my friend Chet yearned in his particular role in agriculture. Visiting in a unit one day I heard the woman in the next room crying out. A care giver went to her asking, "What's the matter dear?" "The cows are out," she replied. "Who will get them in?" The daughter said we would. After awhile she settled down. Do you think we have a kind of cultural Alzheimer's? Hasn't something gone terribly wrong? We've lost the memory of who we are. Who will bring us home?

Chet got his dream. He and his wife moved to Oregon. They bought and operated one of the last neighborhood groceries in town, until his retirement. For the memorial service, his family painted a mental scene of a typical moment in his store. It was like a Norman Rockwell. The checker greets a mother with shopping cart filled to the brim with big sister, little brother and the groceries. Brother has shaken a pop bottle till it explodes, sending a stream of root beer aloft. It hovers in freeze frame over the checker's head. Brother smiles at sister mischievously. Sister scowls back. Mother and checker look at each other with horror. Chet, dressed in grocery whites, a feather duster in his back pocket, looks over the whole scene. Hands on his hips, a smile plays on his face: "This too will be alright." A portrait of the past or an image of the future? This song is about much more than saving local farmers. If we want to reclaim our orphaned food system, we must adopt it all. We must make neighbors of local farmers, workers, processors, school cooks, restaurateurs, master gardeners, grocers and those who hunger and take them all into the family. Look around you! There's a great food revolution going on. EE Haw!

The Local Market Band

Words & Music by John Pitney

C G
Are you're tired of eating produce grown full half way 'round the world,

G C
Average 1600 miles from farm to mouth? (Can you believe it?)

C F
Do your eating habits ruin rural lands and rural poor,

C G C
All the way from Idaho to Chile going south?

F C
REFRAIN: Buy local! (BUY LOCAL!) Adopt a farmer! (EE HAW!)

G C
Make a neighbor (MAKE A NEIGHOR) Like no other. (LIKE NO OTHER)

F C Am
Buy local! (BUY LOCAL!) Adopt a farmer! (YES WE CAN!)

F G C
Won't ya come and join the local market band (BRING A NEIGHBOR!)

2. Are those little baby carrots earning frequent flyer miles?
Do they look like sharpened pencils in your hand?
Is your lettuce getting truck lag? Does it nod off during lunch?
Then come and join us in the Local Market Band!

3. Philip Morris says they are the biggest food firm in our land.
A reason for great confidence, oh you bet.
Makes ya wonder. Do we need a special filter for their food,
Just like the one that brings good health to cigarettes?

4. If our agriculture makes the most abundant cheap supply
Of food God's whole Creation's ever seen,
Then why are there more hungry every minute in our country
While we mine the soil to feed this food machine?

5. Now someday when our foodlands lay asphalted, housed and malled
And the fuel supplies for trucking produce wane,
When your grandkids ask, "Now Grandma,
Where'd we get that stuff called 'food'"?
Then you can sing those kids this olden-days refrain...

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The Wages Cry Out

the story behind the song

In his potato field on the Snake River Plain, an Idaho farmer worries about his neighborhood. The price he will get from ConAgra won't cover his expenses, but he'll take it. ConAgra's the only game in town. Once local business thrived. Now the towns die. In a cucumber field near Mt. Angel, Oregon, a grower kicks the dirt. He had a pickle contract with Steinfeld's. He got his loan, fertilized and planted. Before the crop came up, Dean's Foods swallowed up Steinfeld's. His contract walked. In Eugene, a harried suburbanite hurries through the checkout, in a store of the 2nd largest supermarket chain in the country. Her cart is piled high with Idaho spuds, pickles and more. As she swipes her plastic through the slot, she remembers how her grandparents used to own a corner grocery in the neighborhood. Shopping was meeting your neighbor, catching up on community news. In Portland, a homeless woman sits on a curb outside another store of the same supermarket chain, holding a cardboard sign: "Will Work for Food." The chain closed and fled her low-income neighborhood on the other side of the city. There's no profit in feeding the poor. In Klamath Falls, an angry cattle rancher storms out of his local branch of the nation's largest banking conglomerate. They turned down his loan to build a meat processing plant and market the meat of local producers. He remembers how the loan officer used to be a member of the community. He'd visit the ranch, attend your church, care about the common wealth.

In Wapato, a farm worker puts his monthly earnings in the mail to his mother and brothers in Mexico. He yearns to make enough to move them up here some day or stay home himself. In a house on a cul de sac in Yakima, built on once fertile farm ground by a developer funded by our same banking conglomerate, a group of Yakima church women meet to study the Letter of James, a servant of Jesus Christ, and lament. Houses used to greet each other with big porches not SUV sheds. Once upon a time, children played together in the street, not alone on computers. Families sat together around dinner tables to share daily bread, but no more. Above it all stands the ghost of a Duwamish chief. With a tear, he laments our slow death of a great "loneliness of spirit." Is this all empty nostalgia for a time that never was and never will be? I used to wonder. But "nostalgia," as it turns out, was the name physicians gave a malady they described at the time of European encroachment on the Great Plains. Patients, far from their homelands, looked pale and lost. It means "home sickness."

Don't we all, farmers, consumers, those who hunger, entrepreneurs, field workers, yearn for home? And not just for nebulous places that may not exist, but for home economics that protect and enhance the kind of neighborhood that makes us who we were created to be, that keep and serve the Garden? All who suffer from the greed of the powers - all of us - must stand together solid and speak with one voice. National labor law gives certain rights to all workers equally, except those who harvest our daily communion.

Several years ago I wrote this song when I read James 5. The local farm worker union had asked the churches to join a boycott of the products of a processing co-op. They were asking for the right to hold union elections in the fields of the farmers who were co-op members. I headed a church task force to study this matter. After 3 of the most excruciating years of my life, in a process of interviewing all parties, I changed my mind on the boycott and urged our church to join it. Farmers who thought I was their friend felt deeply betrayed. The communion table James calls us to join is no picnic. I have come to believe some members will never sit down at the negotiating table unless they are given economic incentive to do so. It will take more than my lifetime to know if I made the right choice in this matter. This much I do know: every day I ask for forgiveness, every day I ask for healing of my ignorance, and, every day, the wages still cry out.

The Wages Cry Out

Words & Music by John Pitney

Am
 Refrain: The wages you don't pay the ones who work your fields,
 Dm Am
 Who work your fields, who work your fields,
 Am
 The wages you don't pay the ones who work your fields,
 Dm G Am
 Cry out, cry out against you.
 Dm Am G Am
 They cry out, they cry out, they cry out, they cry out!
 Am
 The wages you don't pay the ones who work your fields
 Dm G Am
 Cry out, cry out against you.

El pago que no das a quien te trabajó y cultivo tus campos fiel,
 El pago que no das a quien te trabajo alza su voz contra tí!
 Y grita y clama y exige y condena
 El pago que no das a quien te trabajó alza su voz contra tí!

People listen now. Workers need a voice.

If they organize or not should be their choice.
Til labor law is changed, contract is the salve,
Giving the protection other workers have.

Farmers listen up. You who live in fear,
Knowing not if you can farm another year.
Yes the farming's hard. Markets have no grace.
What's a better time to sit down face to face?

Consumers hear the word! No ifs, ands or buts.
Arrogance and greed make cancers in our guts!
Privilege doesn't hear workers as they weep.
We just want to know our daily food is cheap!

And the cries are heard and the cries have roared.
Yes, the cries have reached the ears of the Lord!
Now let them pierce your privilege too. They cry, they cry against you.
So leave your suburbs and walk the fields. See the squalor of the camps.
If your conscience doesn't yield, then take a friend and listen again!
They cry, they cry for you.

Now a final word, the future could be mean:
Field crops and conscience managed by machine.
But we'd rather see workers, by their choice,
Standing tall with farmers, speaking with one voice.

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Aguas de Justicia
the story behind the song

We serve and keep 14 hens. Their eggs are wonderful, but, as we partake of the nourishment, we also enjoin the darker side of chickenworld. Pecking order. Last season we added some immigrants to our coop. There was a fierce struggle: wings beating, beaks pecking, breasts bumping. The weakest, a small white hen, was terrorized and bloodied. Bottom of the order. She never recovered. We buried her beneath the asparagus bed. Those who smuggle humans over the border into Arizona are called "polleros" or chicken ranchers. Those they smuggle are called "pollos" (chickens), a testament to their rank in the order. Polleros, like the "coyotes" in this song, charge \$1500 to smuggle a Mexican across the border. \$4000 for a South American. The rates have tripled since September 11. Smuggling humans is now as profitable as running drugs.

I wrote this song when I read the story of 14 men and boys whose scorched bodies were found on the "Devils Road," a common smuggling route across the Arizona desert. The story said they were coffee farmers who left family-owned land in Veracruz because the market was flooded and they couldn't sell their coffee. They were abandoned by the smugglers (coyotes) they had paid to guide them to safety. Stories of this kind anger me. Pollo culture is bad enough, but journalists rarely tell us why it is so. 'Free Trade' agreements (NAFTA, GATT) routinely challenge national price supports and tariffs instituted to protect small landowners. So the Monsantos, Cargills and ADMs can flood marketplaces with beans, corn and coffee, unhindered. Rural folks can't compete with the low prices; they can't afford to feed themselves, so become dependent on the food of the corporations. Land and market reforms have driven 2-3 million Mexicans from their land since the late 1980s. 1,600 now cross the border every day! Humanworld shouldn't be like chickenworld. This song is an angry

prayer for waters of justice and amnesty to roll down and quench parched immigrant futures; for the thirsty ground of intolerant policy, oppressive economy and empty conscience to gush with springs of resistance, compassion and hope.

Aguas de Justicia

Words & Music by John Pitney

Refrain: C G
 Aguas de Justicia! Aguas de vida!
 Am G F
 Justice, justice to bring
 Am F G Am
 Where the thirsty ground becomes a spring!
 G Am
 Aguas de Justicia!

Am F Am
Fourteen die on the Devil's Road,
Am F C
Thirsting for justice in the Promised Land.
Am F G
Begging for water where the hot winds blowed,
C G Am
Abandoned by coyotes in the burning sand.
Am F Am F C
Coffee corporations drive prices low, citing the myth of oversupply
Am F G
Fathers and brothers leave their farms and go
C
Their wives, mothers, children,
G F G Am
While we drink our cheap espresso wonder why.
C
Their wives, mothers, children,
G F G Am G
While we drink our cheap espresso . . . wonder why.

Broccoli pickers moving fast,
Chasing that machine no matter how tired.
Simple breaks for water all they ask.
Making that request may get them fired!
Now workers may live but 48 years,
Picking the food that lengthens our days.
Easily replaced like worn-out gears,
Our spoiled suburban children don't do broccoli or justice anyway!

Why should seventy men, do you suppose,
Why should they share one leaky shower?
Drinking their water from a muddy hose,
Dignity sold, they have no power.
From houses of privilege we deplore,
With righteous indignation we complain.
But how can we help these working poor,
Unless we somehow leave our plenty behind and feel their pain?

Walking for Justice

the story behind the song

“What do we want the Church to do? We don’t ask for cathedrals. We don’t ask for bigger churches or fine gifts. We ask for its presence with us, beside us, Christ among us. We ask for the Church to sacrifice with the people for social change, for justice, and for love of brother. We don’t ask for words; we ask for deeds. We don’t ask for paternalism; we ask for servanthood.”

Cesar Chavez—Speaking to the United Farm Workers, 1966

I have said how difficult it was to choose whether or not to encourage my church to join the farm worker boycott. Serving and keeping the Garden isn’t idyllic innocence in Paradise. I don’t like controversies and I like to be liked. Deciding for the boycott, I felt a deep shame, because I betrayed the farm community of my birth and rearing. But I have felt no guilt. I haven’t felt wrong. I chose the boycott, even as a last resort, because my listening and reflection led me to two fundamental, if yet preliminary, learnings: 1. When you are trying to get unequals to the table, it may always require political and economic leverage to get the party with the most power to join. Boycott is a nonviolent lever. 2. Paternalism is not justice. After 3 years of study, I finally heard Chavez’ words. This group of farm workers was not asking the church for paternalism. In our task force, the more we spoke of programmatic and legislative solutions (visiting labor camps, teaching ESL, working to change laws in place for decades) the more our pastor and farm worker friend, Eleazar, would glare at me saying, “But they are not asking us to do any of these things. They are asking us to stand with them.” I finally got it. Any other choice was an insult to human dignity.

I wrote this song for the first Walk for Farm Worker Justice held in our Valley. For a week, we walked and spoke to workers and farmers in fields and labor camps, held workshops, danced and ate great Latino foods. At week’s end, 350 of us stood in front of the PictSweet mushroom plant in Salem, listening to the testimony of mushroom workers (considered farm labor so exempt from NLR Law). Several from our church were there. We will never forget Enrique. He spoke through a translator, motioning with the stump of one arm. An employee for 10 years, he lost his limb in a forklift accident. He says it happened because PictSweet refused to pay a few cents more an hour to train and hire experienced drivers. Workers wear headlamps to plant and pick mushrooms, in raw compost, in the dark. Many have worked years, with only a few-cent raise. Complainers have been fired or deported. As our church people returned to the comfortable suburbs, we agreed the smell outside that plant was rancid, but didn’t compare to the stench of Enrique’s plight. We all agreed, “Suddenly we lost our appetite for mushrooms.” Many words inspired this song, but these, spoken by Cesar Chavez at the funeral for Nagi Dalfullah, a Palestinian farm worker in California in 1973, stuck with me: “Each time a man or a woman stands up for justice, the heavens sing and the world rejoices. Each time a man or woman stands up for justice and is struck down, the heavens weep and the world mourns.”

C E m
 We're walking for justice, come take our hand.
 F G
 We're standing together, with the poor of this land,
 C E m
 To sit at the table, their sovereignty claim,
 F G
 To bargain their future, their freedom our aim.
 C
 We're walking for justice.

Justice for workers, hands calloused deep,
 It's time to be walking, when talking is cheap.
 Generations exploited, by their labors have borne
 What we eat at our tables, in the night and the morn.
 We're walking for justice.¹

Our sisters and brothers, migrant and poor,
 Grandfathers, grandmothers, have walked here before.
 They hoed the same crop row. They had the same fears.
 And the camps haven't changed, no, not in all these sad years!
 We're walking for justice.²

So come to the table, farm owners all.
 The body is broken, economies pall.
 Till bargaining's welcome it's the farm worker's fear
 To lose their employment by inviting you here.
 We're walking for justice.

Each time a woman, each time a man
 Stands up for justice (and anyone can)
 The heavens are singing, the whole world rejoices.
 Walkers for justice, lift up your voices.
 We're walking for justice.¹

Cada vez que un hombre, o una mujer. Clamajusticia,ypueda cualquier
 Los cielos cantando, el mundo se goce. Peregrinos levantan, levantan sus voces
 Clamando justicia. Que no nos cansemos. De siempre clamar
 Que florezca el alma. Corazones amar.
 A los que nos odian. Y juntos logramos.
 Que sin violencia. El mundo que amamos

Pueda cambiar

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Beneficial Bug Song

the story behind the song

Paul's Buxman's place, on the edge of Dinuba, is Eden: heaven come to earth in the San Joaquin. At Paul's, the peach thrip is a major pest. It nibbles the peach blossoms in spring. The

But ladybugs and lacewings came to munch
And gobbled those aphids for their lunch.
I'd've sprayed those suckers but now I see!
This Garden has more brains than me!

Now slugs have et my plants for years
And I've tried to get 'em with baits and beers
And grapefruits rinds and toxic jellies
And woodstove ashes to scratch their bellies.
But ground beetles crave what the Garden serves:
Slug filets with slime hors d'oeuvres!

Now Trichogramma wasp moms need a nest
And the eggs of the corn moth work the best.
So inside those moth eggs they lay their germs
And the eggs hatch wasps instead of worms!
And now those corn worms can't excrete
And poop and spew on the corn we eat!

If dominion means to "serve and keep,"
We must learn from the bugs that crawl and creep
And eat each other by God's design
And keep the Garden balanced fine.
O Garden God in thee we trust.
Let the wasp and mantis prey for us!

John Pitney
The Earth Does Not Belong To Us
the story behind the words

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But ask the beasts and they will teach you; the birds of the air and they will tell you; or the plants of the earth and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you. Who among all these does not know the hand of the Lord has done this? In Creator's hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all humankind. Job 12: 7-10

There she was, in my face, blocking my vision, her hands folded as if in prayer. I was teaching earthkeeping at a conference for the churches of our denomination. 1200 people were gathered at St. Louis in a slick hotel convention center across the street from the Memorial Arch on the west bank of the Mississippi. I already felt ambushed. I was asked to teach stewardship of the Creator's gifts and frugal living, but the whole culture of the conference was an affront to the Garden. We used towels and sheets once before they were laundered. We ate every meal on throwaway tableware, used a different disposable cup at every program break. The army of immigrants who picked up after us were clearly of another class, probably working less than full time for minimum wage and no benefits. I began to wonder if I was the only one who noticed. Obviously someone else was watching.

I was the speaker at a banquet that night. I would tell dominion stories and sing. The regular stuff I do. I got up early and walked across the street to the park where the arch reaches into the heavens. I wanted to clear my mind. Maybe the place would speak to me somehow. I have always been inspired by the lofty arch and our ingenuity to imagine and engineer such things. It is truly a monument to the American Dream. The sun was already glaring off the polished steel as I walked toward the place where the southern foot emerges from the ground. I'd decided to walk around, turn my head sideways and lay my eyeball on the outside weld. I wanted to follow that magnificent line as far as I could see, slicing 540 feet up into the firmament. I wanted to be part of the goose bumps of the thing. Goose bumps I got, but not for reasons I expected. I laid my right eye on that sucker and looked up. What I saw startled me. I began to sweat. My breathing quickened. I can't explain it. I was surprised at myself and a little embarrassed. I've heard people say, if you spend enough time in a place, the spirits might start talking to you. But I was an accidental tourist, just passing through, with no intentions of really serving the place where I stood.

It was no accident. Straddling the weld, blocking my view of glory, was a praying mantis. Five inches long, she stared at me with empty big eyes. It seemed she wanted me to find ingenuity in some other view. Still sweating, I walked frantically over the grounds, searching for whatever I could see. I quickly stumbled over a nondistinct little stone with a plaque on top. It told me this was the Thomas Jefferson Memorial To Westward Expansion. A memorial to expansion. Well that made sense. Very American. I'd thought it just an arch. I think by destiny, I went and stood under the vast gateway facing west. Directly in front of me, I saw the aforementioned hotel culture. Directly behind, across the Mississippi, East St. Louis, one of the saddest neighborhoods in Creation; rising from it the elevator of Continental Grain, one of the transnational grain giants who terrorize economies all over the Planet.

150 years ago this year, my own ancestors traversed this gate. Huddled in their prairie schooners, imagining the Kingdom of God, they struck out for the next Eden. In their wake, they and theirs left a New England denuded of trees and the ghosts of perhaps 40 million people who died on their way from Africa to secure our landed democracy, under the patronage of keepers like Mr. Jefferson. Before them, the swell would leave a thousand Trails of Tears, dozens of wasted aquifers and the graves of a million bison, a billion salmon and several thousand grizzlies. Their charter of manifest destiny would require the slavery of several waves of Okies, Chinamen and Braceros to ratify it. I stood there for a long time thinking. The museum below the arch was just opening, so I went there for refuge. One of the first things to catch my eye was a placard quoting Thomas Jefferson. He said, "We will not take one foot of this Western Territory without the consent of the people who live there."

As I composed this song, the ash of the Trade Towers was still warm and we were still shaking our heads wondering why the rest of the world hates us so. These lyrics weave the words attributed to Chief Sealth (Seattle) of the Duwamish clan with those attributed to Job of the Hebrew clan. I have found in them the beginnings of an answer. In the decades after the landing of the Mayflower, British newspapers were full of glowing descriptions of the New World, coaxing those of means to come buy real estate and experience a new brand of freedom. Frederick Turner, in his book *Beyond Geography: The Western Spirit Against the Wilderness* (New York: Viking Press, 1980), makes this observation:

"Wherever they came inland they found that these announcements had been in no way false: the land, wilderness though it was, was a rich riot of color and sound, of game and luxuriant vegetation...Had they been other than they were, they might have written a new mythology here. As it was, they took inventory, around the margins of which one feels the spectacular presence of America."

I have been criticized, sometimes, for too much lament and too little solution. I am actually a great optimist. I believe, at any moment, Americans could choose to write a new mythology of culture here and become more than mere takers of inventory. I believe we could, once again, allow for human communities that enhance the geography and live within its bounds rather than imposing our designs and appetites on sacred places and merely counting the spoils of gross national product to prove the virility of our place in history. But just as the words of Job may seem dark and pessimistic, except to those who understand, I don't think the solutions are going to come from human wisdom. When I ascended from the museum beneath the arch that day, I returned to see if my friend was still straddling that weld. Indeed she was. I still picture her there, diverting our gaze, praying for us.

The Earth Does Not Belong To Us Words & Music by John Pitney

Refrain: B m A B m B m A B m
 The Earth does not belong to us. We belong to the Earth
 B m A B m B m A B m
 The Earth does not belong to us. We belong to the Earth
 D A B m A G F #
 Oh, let the animals teach you, the birds of the air the plants declare!
 B m A G G A B m
 The Earth does not belong to us. We belong to the Earth.

 B m E m A D
 Tell me, who has made the measure of the Earth you call your home?

 E m F # B m
 Tell me, who prescribed the boundaries? Surely you know?

 B m E m A D
 Is it all for human pleasure the oceans crash and foam
 E m F # B m

And the rivers source the storehouses of snow?
 E m A F # B m

Can your mind comprehend the vastness of the Earth?
 E m A D

You did not weave the web, you're merely a strand.
 E m F #

Were you there to lay the cornerstone?
 B m A G E m F #

Was it you who drew the line, beyond...which we cannot understand?

Do you miss, amid your clatter, the sound of rustling wings
 Of the dragonfly gone hovering over the bogs
 And the lonely cry, what does it matter, of the whippoorwill as she sings
 And on the pond at night the arguments of the frogs?
 Oh human can you frame a covenant to tame the wonder and the mystery hid from the start?
 When every thicket, every wilderness, when all the rivers look the same,
 You'll die...with a loneliness of heart.

If you lost your great possessions, would you understand the lie
 That salmonkind and hawk find equally odd;
 That with all your proud progressions, you could buy and sell the sky
 Or the sparkle of the waters, even God?
 But it's by another's wind you soar your privileged flight!
 You have forfeited your life to master the earth.
 Now you're the saddest progeny to ever walk upright,
 While salmon know to spawn and die inside the very riffle of their birth.

Like the sap whose lifeblood courses up the maple from the ground
Recollecting ancient wisdom in the trees,
So the memory of the peoples, who, long before you came around,
Teaches all who come to listen Earth's decrees
That all life is joined like the blood of one clan. All things are connected, like body and soul.
When we spit upon our Motherland, we contaminate ourselves!
But healing any strand of God's Creation means a healing of the whole.

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Sandia Holy Day
For the People of Las Placitas Presbyterian Church

Earth Sunday, April 18, 1999
Arranged by John Bullock

The back patio of the Las Placitas Presbyterian Church in Placitas, New Mexico, looks up to the mountains called Sandia. Rifted up in the midst of a great highland desert, they stand sentinel to centuries of inhabitation. The Sandias watched as Anasazi, Hopi, Navajo, Pueblo, Spaniard and Conquistador, past and present, struggled either to subdue the land or make societies to match the landscape. A hike to the top takes you through five climatic zones and a layered museum of the eons of Mother's care, if you pay attention. The wolf and bighorn have long since vanished for human encroachment. Many years ago, the families named in this song climbed to the place called Las Huertas. They cut pines and milled them to make the rafters (vigas in Spanish design) to shelter the prophetic church still standing conscience to their place.

When I was a guest down there, we began our worship for Earth Sunday with this song. Crowded on that patio with the Sandias at our backs, we sang it for the first time. You see, Charles Little is a member there. Now there's a piece of work! A crustier human you will not meet. To my peril, he'd found me at an Environmental Justice event of the National Council of Churches! Charles, his wife Ila, their pastor Jane and others have moved their congregation to witness for ways humankind can live most appropriately in that place. Gadzooks! They've even written a kind of Earth Covenant to be their guide. But crusty. First, Charles calls and tells me I'm going to come. He did not ask. Not knowing him, I agreed. Then, shortly before this event, he called saying he'd had to get publicity out in a hurry and didn't have time to check with me, so he hoped it was alright. Reading to me over the phone I heard, "...and this wonderful day will premiere the song John has composed, just for this occasion, "Sandia Holy Day." I hadn't heard I was writing a song! And with a title already?! I really love Charles, but now I have begun to ramble.

The worship was awesome. We sang songs from this collection. Worshipers brought symbols of sacred places. In our procession from the patio, the children came last, bringing these symbols to form an altar up front. Two young brothers spoke. One carried a slice of a tree. His grandfather taught him to count the rings, just before he died. What I remember most were the opening bars of this song arranged by John Bullock of the Placitas congregation. The clear notes of a flute echoed like a falcon's cry across the morning and, in reply, a clarinet. Then back and forth, call and reply. It seemed to me the whole discussion rose on the quiet Sabbath breeze, up the Sandias past eons of beauty, calling the ghosts of wolf and bighorn, calling generations past and future. It seemed to say, "Listen."

There is some confusion about the meaning of Sandia. Some will say it refers to a holy day. Some, the squashes and melons that flourished here under Pueblo care; others, the brilliant watermelon-colored sky that often embraces the Sandias at sunset. Whatever it means the call is clear: serve and keep. Serve and keep.

is one we all should read and discuss. Many years ago, I was leading a discussion in junior high Sunday School, of the story of Jesus and the rich man. All of us were children of wealth. I was pressing our class to explain why the Teacher's act of love toward the wealthy one was to tell him to give all his possessions to the poor. We talked about the camel and that eye-of-the-needle thing. The more I pressed, the more frustrated one particular girl became. Finally she exploded, "So let's say my family gives everything to the poor people. Then they become rich and we are poor. The world really doesn't change then, does it? So what's the point?" Listening, I risked a deeper question. "You really don't trust us, do you?" I asked her. She didn't understand. "If you became poor, you don't think the rest of us would take care of you," I said. "I don't think you would," she replied.

This song is explicitly for North American Christians, called to witness for Christ as part of the 6% of the population of the world who possess 59% of the wealth and produce an even greater share of global carbon emissions. The top 20% of us account for 86% of private consumption. The bottom 20% share 1.3% of the pie (U.N. 1998). Living on a planet where our behavior warms the climate, threatening the life of all God's creatures, being a follower means trusting God's extravagant abundance. This abundance may scare the bejeezits out of us, because it's like the "Parable of the Great Feast." It's a table to which anyone and everything is invited. Our survival depends on the generosity of others. That scares us. It's a lilies-of-the-field-who-neither-toil-nor-spin-yet-God-feeds-them kind of abundance. It's a 5-loaves-and-2-fish-to-feed-a-multitude kind of abundance, whose miracle is less about some magic the Divine works in the pantry of the world, than it is about the courage of 5,000 people to live within their means so all might have enough. In this kind of abundance there are always leftovers.

My friend Thelma will soon celebrate 101 years on this planet. 3 weeks after the atrocities of September 11, she was remembering a conference she attended in Denver as a young woman. Couldn't get it out of her mind. Women from many nations spoke. She recalls their consistent message: "In the next few decades," they urged as with one voice, "the rest of the world isn't going to like the U.S. very much." Today those voices still speak. The kindest of them denounce the evil of the 9-11 attacks. Then they go on to remind us that, horrid as it was, this kind of violence is daily routine for much of the world and the thousands killed in the attacks still pale in relation to the millions who routinely die from the systemic violence wrought by our consumptive economies. In the aftermath, we can choose to become more afraid, believing the lie of security in isolation. Or we can start making choices that bring us to reclaim our membership in the Body of Creation. True security comes with community. It has become a terrifying epiphany to find we are not alone.

In her book, Sallie McFague says it's not about individual guilt. Most don't rise each morning planning to hoard, pillage and plunder. We're all caught in systems that make environmental ruin and injustice. Most feel powerless, swept along by advertisers who tell us we will never have enough and economic systems that prove them right. McFague believes creating "cruciform" economy is our Christian calling. It means "in the form of the cross." It means sacrificial economy. It's less about making sacrifices as individuals, more about creating economies and communities that by culture and policy allow us to live with less so others can simply live. The world calls us to do justice with equitable retribution. On the other hand, cruciform economies call us to do justice with equitable distribution.

In spite of the evidence, there is reason for great hope. While I say this, I realize how easy it is for a big-mouthed songwriter to rail against the rich and demand cruciform choices without explaining what I mean in practice. Because, in a real way, my Sunday School friend was right. Just dumping your possessions doesn't change much. So let me give you some examples of cruciform action and the sacrifices and benefits that go with them. On a personal and family level, our witness starts with our choice to live in a small house of 1200 square feet. The sacrifice?: we can own less stuff, we're more cramped, we build less equity for our future security. It may also mean our kids never want to

hang out at our house because their friends all have big family rooms with pool tables and video games. But this choice means a smaller house payment, so both adults don't have to work full time. This gives us time for family. It gives us time to volunteer for community movements that couldn't function without volunteers. Smaller payments also means more money to invest in solar systems (even with dubious payback), more funds for the causes in which we believe. We and an increasing number like us, find these kind of happy sacrifices give us a freedom we might otherwise never find.

Cruciform movements abound at the community level as well. Let me give you four examples:

1. The "cohousing" movement is slowly but surely sweeping the land. In this arrangement, families choose to live in close enough proximity so each don't require their own car, lawn mower, garden or child care. They pool their resources, share property. The sacrifices are obvious. Who would live this way? You give up much personal freedom. You must answer to a whole community in some of the most important decisions of your daily life! But this cruciform model typically uses half the energy and creates half the waste. That's a happy sacrifice for all of us.

2. My home state is the hungriest in the nation. It's a problem of distribution. We create more service sector jobs than industrial, family-wage jobs. Increases in housing costs have outstripped wage increases. The gap between Oregon's rich and poor has grown 4 times faster than the national average. While the gap grows and hunger increases, we tax the wealthy less. We even wave taxes to coax low-wage industries to move into the communities of our state. But a huge coalition is building for tax reform. Cruciform taxation will "allow" us of greater means to sacrifice for the common good.

3. The Interfaith Global Warming Campaign, through our faith communities, teaches families to conserve energy and curb emissions, works with church building trustees to audit and steward energy and lobbies congress for policies that will shape a renewable culture. In this movement there is really little real sacrifice and much to be gained.

4. A huge movement in food system reform is calling many in our country to get involved. We know food travels an average 1900 miles from farm to table, farm to school, farm to restaurant, hospital, college and supermarket, with vertically integrated transnationals getting most of the profits, while local farmers sell their farms to developers in order to survive. There is a huge movement of food circles and food policy councils in local communities across the country. They reconnect local farms to school-hospital-college cafeterias, develop local processing businesses and locally owned groceries. They create farmer's markets, community gardens and community supported agriculture. Some of the sacrifices?: we might have to give up some of the convenience of one-stop shopping; individuals and institutions will have to spend a larger percentage of their budgets to pay the real cost of food; people of means will incur higher taxes to fund the poor. But these cruciform transactions keep money and wisdom in our communities so economic and cultural value doesn't go to absentee owners and stockholders so quickly. Wealth circulates and gets redistributed around the community.

On the international scene, the whole world is calling for our government to get serious about the Kyoto Protocol. It is just one of a number of ways the rest of humanity is calling us to join up. With the Protocol, all our citizens and businesses will be called to sacrifice. The huddled masses continue to raise their voice in protest wherever the World Trade Organization and its partners meet. In South Africa, Geneva, Washington D.C. and Cancun, the voice will not be silent. If reforms are created, these may reduce the value of our personal investments, but these sacrifices will save our very lives. They will make a cleaner, safer, more secure world.

I will not ask any of you to make the same kind of choices my family and I are making, if they are not appropriate to your community and place. But I will never hesitate to ask you what you are doing. And you ought to be asking me. We owe that much to each other and to our sacred world.

So there you have it. My humble attempt to put my actions where my lyrics are. This is the most hymn-like song I ever wrote. It may not sing well in your sanctuary, but I hope it gives you courage. Let's work together on this as Christians and human beings. I believe with all my heart, when all is said and done---divided and shared, there will be enough. Enough for all. Don't make a liar out of me.

Enough For All

Words & Music by John Pitney

A D A B m G A
There will be enough in all Creation,
D B m C/A
When the people of privilege know their place,
G A F# B m G E m A
When we the few, the lucky ones choose to join the human race.
D A B m G A D B m C/A
When Americans learn to face the terror, of economies run on fair exchange,
G A F# B m G E m A
Where equal distribution rules and global justice reigns
F# B m A G A D A
And the share we keep must change for all. There will be enough. Don't you see?

1. With cruciform conscience let's go shopping.
With integrity, junk our SUVs!
When politicians vote for peace and we join prosperities;
Don't you see in the sickened skies & clearcuts,
In the melting of glacier's ancient ice,
As rising oceans flood, first, the poor, don't you see the blood of Christ,
A cosmic sacrifice for all? There will be enough. Don't you see?
2. Then up from the ash of flaming towers,
Help us, God of Creation, find the nerve
To break our violent vengeance soon, all Creaturehood preserve.
Even though all the evidence seems hopeless,
May the children of Eden ever roam.
By sharing Earth's dominion, we will find the Great Shalom,
Security of home for all. There will be enough. Don't you see?
3. There will be enough in all Creation, when we finally accept Creator's grace
And in her image, we behave like members of this place
Of incredible elegant abundance, one extravagant banquet set for free!
The winds and woodlands all hold their breath. The silent specie's plea:
"Will this communion be for all?" Will there be enough?
Will there be enough? Will there be enough?
There will be. Enough.

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Blue Heron Fly

A Song of Hope for Anne and Michael

the story behind the song

My friend Anne talks to herons. They to her. She and her husband Michael live in the Skagit Valley of Washington. Anne serves and keeps a place where the Sauk and Skagit Rivers join: Blue Heron Farm. I didn't say they own the place, though they do. This they know: the ownership went way before. It goes way beyond them even now. It will continue long after their ashes are kicking up garlic in the river bottom. On a July day, in the summer of 2002, there was a fire. It consumed the building at the heart of their place. It was their shop, barn, garlic dryer, machine shed. It housed and maintained the old John Deere tractor, without which their future would be in deep peril. It was more than a center of operations. It was a gathering place for the neighborhood, for fiddling and bluegrass, good talk and sanctuary. A week before the flames took it all, the community celebrated the wedding of two dear friends within her walls. An ancient cedar had stood near, keeping watch for 300 years. Scorched and scarred she had to go. For several months, each time Anne walked by the remains of her tractor, she sang the little song I have put in the heart of the refrain: "Old John Deere I'm gonna miss you, you shouldn't have died this way." Anne's words and tune.

But before the flames had died down that day, a Great Blue Heron appeared. On graceful wings she circled the pyre of their dreams three times and disappeared. You might say this is mysterious, no? Maybe. But not to Anne. There is "Something" in the Earth she knows and deeply trusts. Always present. Just is. Neighborhood happens. You plant garlic. Herons come. You just know. And Blue Heron Farm isn't her only realm. People all over our nation know Anne. She's a fighter, a coalitioner, a passionate voice...for this "Something". As she told me this story, Anne quoted the poem of our lovable Norwegian Dakotan farmer friend Terry Jacobson. Titled "Of Community" it begins: "We need for you to survive friend; your survival makes our survival more likely." In early fall, a new foundation was poured. Friends milled the fallen cedar to make siding for a new place. Great Blue came again and, circling once, apparently left satisfied. Scarcely had she gone when great joy arrived on other wings: from the wedding, a child would be born! Surely that child is up to no good by now! With Debbie driving, I finished this song in the car on the way to a benefit concert, in Mt. Vernon, for the tractor fund. The community packed the old downtown theater full of love for Anne and Michael. This song is a gift to them and all those who, in the face of fire or human foolishness, might be tempted to stop believing. Fly Blue Heron. Fly.

Blue Heron Fly

Words & Music by John Pitney

Blue Heron fly! (Blue Heron fly!) Blue Heron fly! (Blue Heron fly!)
Out of ashes, out of nowhere, circling 'round the fire, you graceful flier.
Old John Deere, I'm gonna miss you. You shouldn't have died this way.
Blue Heron fly!
Why was I surprised to see you there? Long before the Sauk and the Skagit
Laid the silted valley where we farm, safe from harm;
Long before the people of the longhouse paid the price,
Long before the elk & the salmon gave their sacrifice for our care, you were there!

2. You've been standing here at least 300 years!
Scorched and scarred, you sing along
When I sing that song to my John Deere.
Then I see. You're in the tree.
May we take your cedar spirit, take your heartwood for the wall?
May we bind your timbered beauty and, with kindness, do it all without fear.
May we have no fear!
3. There is something circling far beyond the pyre.
More than ever, now, we dearly need each other to survive.
We need to touch, more and much.
We must find community in the harvest and the toil.
We must find what really matters, teach the children,
Yes, and honor the soil and never tire!
4. It's a simple act of courage, planting garlic in the fall,
A harbinger of better things to come.
Like pouring a new foundation, making babies, saying, "Yes!"
You always keep that nest for the day those babies wander home.
And I may plant my garlic in the shadow of the moon.
The neighbors know I'm looney anyhow!
But if we stop believing, then our future has no wings.
Blue Heron, Great Blue Heron don't you dare desert us now!

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The Leaves of the Tree

the story behind the song

Then I was standing on the highest mountain of them all, and round about beneath me was the whole hoop of the world... I saw the sacred hoop of my people was one of many hoops making one circle, wide as daylight and starlight. In the center grew one mighty flowering tree to shelter all the children of one mother and one father. And I saw that it was holy. Black Elk

From the vision of Black Elk (Black Elk Speaks, by John Neihardt; U. of Nebraska Press:1961, 43), to Micah's promise of a time when all will "sit beneath their own vine and fig tree with none to make them afraid," many of the traditions that dare to hope against all contrary evidence, are rooted in trees. Our local Rabbi Yitzhak loves to quote this Hebrew wisdom: "if you are out planting a tree and someone tells you the Messiah is coming, finish planting the tree, then go meet the Messiah." I wrote this song as I studied the demise of Boreal forests in Alaska, Canada and Russia. The Boreals, comprising a third of earth's remaining forests, are home to black spruce, larch, birch and aspen; peat bogs and woodland caribou, migratory birds and the indigenous peoples who depend on their biotic gifts for survival. The same firms, so ruthless in the tropics, have moved north. Clear cutting loses cultures and species, but more. Without trees, permafrosted tundra thaws and decays, releasing deluges of climate-warming methane and decimating some of the most important terrestrial carbon sinks on the planet.

I have seen the healing power of trees: in my fall garden we compost leaves others rake and waste. Piles have become microbial classrooms for schoolchildren. Over the years, many have come to gather around the piles and warm their hands on the 145 degree serendipity of bacteria and microfunguses. Often, we have buried jars of hot chocolate and packages of wieners in the piles and, the following day, returned to snack on composted warm desserts. We never cease to marvel at the energy generated when we learn to serve the systems that work while we sleep. Weary gardensoils are healed, children reconciled to ground. I have seen the healing power of trees: before the green revolution, ancient rice paddy culture was an elegant panoply of fruit, nut and berry trees, fish and frogs in paddy waters along with the rice. In recent years, even the experts concluded that this traditional way produced just as much as the rice monocultures brought by the hybrid Revolution. In addition, though, the diversity of nutrition of the old way made for much less disease and far greater community wellness. I have seen the healing power of trees: before huge equipment co-opted farming on our Great Plains, shelterbelts of trees and shrubs caught the snow and saved its moisture for the crops. Their leaves and branches slowed the winds to inhibit erosion. But the shelterbelts are being ripped out to make room so machinery can be more easily maneuvered. Now who will face the eroding winds?

It is time for us to join the healing. Kick back. Enjoy the hot cocoa fresh from the pile. Stand with treed cultures from all around the Earth whose timeless wisdom has fed their communities for generations without our intrusion. Grab your shovels. Plant back the ruined riparian margins. Renew those brave shelterbelts. Rejoice in the produce of leaves and bones and mushroom tears. Even though they tell you the Messiah comes, finish your work.

All these songs announce the promise of healing if we will but believe in the capacity of the Garden to regenerate itself with the restrained servanthood of the human community. The legend begins in Genesis with the Very Goodness of the Garden and, in the center of it, the Tree of Life. Then the curse befalls this goodness because we humans thought ourselves so smart. In Revelation 22 it ends:

Then he showed me the river of the water of life, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side, the Tree of Life with twelve kinds of fruit yielding each month; And the leaves of the Tree are for the healing of the nations. Rev. 22: 1-3

And the final word?: “Never again will anything be cursed!” Oh if we would but believe it.

The Leaves of the Tree

Words & Music by John Pitney

Refrain: C C/B Am C F C G
 The leaves of the Tree are for the healing of the nations
 C C/B Am C F C G C
 And the leaves of the trees are for the healing of the land.

C C/B Am C F C G
 If a tree or forest falls, and if no one's there to hear
 C C/B Am C F C G
 The clear cut buzzing chainsaw calls, did they really disappear?
 Am G Am Am G F
 God, we see the teeming Amazon climes made into hamburger plains.
 C C/B Am G F C G Am G F
 Help us see increasing treely crimes done 'round the Earth for short-term gains.
 C G C
 God help us heal the pain.

2. The same old ones who clear the Amazon, now cut the Boreal, and why?
As greed for paper pulp grows ever on, there is the biggest supply.
Lord, as we waste more paper each day,
Your larch and birchwoods lie bare,
No more to breathe pollution in and cool the warming atmosphere.
Your trees could heal the air.
3. God, once your trees surrounded rice paddies:
Elegant polycropped fields, where fish were raised
And moms & daddies & children ate elegant yields
Of fruit and nuts and fish and rice, then the Green Revolution was spread
And the hybrid rice's pesticides killed the fish and trees,
But, the experts said, "They're all now better fed."
4. God help us toil with firs & banyons, with cypress and alder anon,
Whose roots keep soil from silting canyons
And streambeds so fishes can't spawn.
God help us stand like shelterbelts brave, to face eroding winds
And slow the greed so the trees can save Creation from arboreal sins
And your trees can heal again.
5. We place our faith in those two inches that build each thousand years
Beneath your trees of leaves and finches and bones and mushroom tears.
Invest us God in things that renew, sustaining treely grace.
We die to humus, satisfied. Our lives are holding ground in place!
God, heal your land in place.

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It Is Very Good
A Northern Creation

the story behind the song

In 1853, my clan came from Missouri on the Oregon Trail, in a wave of invasion and pilgrimage. By a shallow sovereignty they claimed inhabited land. The Kalapuyans had been there for centuries. Like the Athabascan, Navaho, Nez Perce, Anasazi and Cree in other gardens, their dominion was serving and keeping, their God a spirit moving across the waters, in all. Their tribal clan was "all my relations." They knew they were guests here. Our people have struggled with these notions of dominion and community. The first few notes of this song came to me with the words, "When the Earth lay without form and dark was the face of the deep." I was a guest of Fred Kirschenmann and Carolyn Raffensperger's in North Dakota at the time. Sitting in their furnace room in deep winter, the song began and I cried. I don't know why, but it touches me still. It was months before any more music or words would come. When I finally wrote the final verse I was spent: "Now the earth was Sabbath, all was rest. Sap migrating, hibernating bees and even humans stopped their quest: greed abating accumulating ceased." I believe in that time. Every time I sing these words I choke. I long for Sabbath. I long for the day when the divine words of the first Creation story in Genesis become imprinted in our cultural genetic code: "It is very good!" I want you to long for that day, invest in it, teach it. If these songs move you to awaken and act, my time as a guest in this realm may amount to something.

Then a Grinning Thunder joined the fun
Hurling stars awonder 'cross infinity
And spinning earth around the sun
Tilting her in gracious gravity.
Casting high and higher rays,
Then longer shadows and shorter days,
Summer, autumn, winter, spring,
It did amaze!

IT IS GOOD
IT IS GOOD
IT IS GOOD
VERY GOOD
IT DOES AMAZE
IT IS VERY GOOD!

Then the Spirit upwelled and the waters they leaped
With monsters and fish and the land crawled and creped
And winged things a'feather did fill up the sky
Migrating with the weather and singing. A new day was nye.

And then the plates trembled and the continents fled.
All life reassembled and the species were spread.
As granite crust twitches made mountain divides,
The planet in niches bore fruit and multiplied.

Then dinosauric imperfections and Cenozoic resurrections
Evolutionary re-selections did see
The planet down across the ages bear fruit in fits and starts and stages
Til the Earth we know today came to be:

With a gam** of grey whales & a flight of cliff swallows,
A gang of wapiti in high mountain wallows;
A pod of ringed seals and a sloth of brown bears,
A pride of proud lions and bobcats in lairs;

A skulk of red foxes and a knot of horned toads,
A cast of fast falcons in cliff-top abodes;
A cover of mudhens and a hover of trouts,
Some line dancing honeybees dancing pollen routes;

A tidings of magpies and a murder of crow-ses,
A vigil of mantis prey aphids on roses;
A descent of woodpeckers and a prairie dog town,
An unkindness of ravens just hangin' around;

A nest of jack rabbits and a walk of jack snipe,
A charm of goldfinches on bull thistles ripe;
A siege of green herons and a colony of ants,
A matched pair of common loons do an uncommon dance;

A parliament of elf owls and a skein of snow geese,
An exhaustion of salmon in a riffle at peace;
An inking of squid, even skunks understood:
They spelled it and smelled it: "Creation is Good!"

A richness of martens and a party of jays
Are swooping and squawking and talking in Praise,
These wild celebrations coaxed even the sharks
That all of Creation is one Invocation
A Wondrous Sensation a Standing Ovation
Like an Exultation of Larks
Yes a Wild Celebration, a Vast Congregation, a Sacred Vacation
Like an Exultation of Larks!!!

Then Great Mysterious said, "Of this world,
Of all relations let us form humanity:
Athabascan, Navaho,
Nez Perce, Anasasi and Cree."
Earth their Mother, Wind their prayers,
Sun their Brother, all are heirs.
Whate're befalls Earth, befalls their kind
Earth is not theirs.

IT IS GOOD
VERY GOOD
IT IS GOOD
VERY GOOD
IT IS NOT OURS
IT IS VERY GOOD!

Now the world was Sabbath. All was rest.
Sap migrating, hibernating bees
And even humans stopped their quest:
Greed abating, accumulating ceased.
Now the ducks were molting,
The salmon had run.
Their children smolting, they die in the sun,
Their Body feeding the slumb'ring trees.
Now all was done.

IT IS GOOD
VERY GOOD
IT IS GOOD
VERY GOOD
IT'S NEVER DONE
IT IS VERY GOOD!
IT IS GOOD
IT IS GOOD
IT IS GOOD
IT IS VERY GOOD!

*E major played from 2nd fret and same fingering in 9th fret.

**Words like gam, flight, gang, pod etc., were used in the 1400s and 1500s to describe groupings of particular animals. The songwriter has borrowed many of these freely and invented some others!
(Source: An Exultation of Larks by James Lipton, Penguin Books, 1977).

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Afterword

After mom's memorial service, our clan gathered at the farm to scatter her ashes. Mom, too, came as a guest to that land. A town girl, she married into a tenured family. Her ashes were in a favorite cookie jar. We walked and shared and scattered. A daughter fertilized that Peace Rose, a nephew left a memory by the parlor where she'd milked a million cows. As we neared the plum thicket where our descendants first built log cabins and received their inheritance, I squatted so the young children could reach in the jar. They reached and scooped and immediately mother was everywhere, aswirl on the wind. The finale came when young Hannah, the daughter of good friends, came running to her mother, brushing the dust from her good church dress. Knowing her mother's bent for cleanliness, she apologized. "Mom I'm sorry!" she said. "I've got Betty all over me!" May we all be so anointed. May the Great Mysterious bless and keep us all. May we never have to apologize for our behavior.

Great Thanksgivings

Producing music is an act of humility. I was fairly satisfied with my music and words, plainly composed on my single guitar. But then I gave them to this amazing troupe of musicmakers! I had the serendipitous pleasure of watching these songs take on a life of their own. If they were ever mine alone, which I seriously doubt, they are no longer. They now are truly songs of this community. As we offer them to you, I offer great thanks to the heroes who made this happen:

John Hakes is an amazing musician, arranger and friend. Taking the lead as our local producer, John gave literally hundreds of volunteer hours laying down tracks on his computer, creating choral scores, working alone and with me to shape arrangements and make ready for recording. His enthusiasm for my music and patience with me were amazing. The gracious anchor he gave us through long and arduous sessions was acknowledged often by all. I appreciate most, the genuine joy of music that exudes from John's blood, bones and soul. It puts a smile on every chorus. I must also give great thanks to the whole Hakes family for welcoming me as I so often invaded their homelife to use John's studio.

Nathan Walker has stuck with me now through the production of 3 CDs. I can't imagine doing this with any other. True, he's the one with the contract and the expensive equipment, but he gave much more than he was paid, a testament to his friendship of me and devotion to the message. Nate is a genius with sound, a wizard when it comes to creating harmonies on the fly and a clown-like presence whose humor keeps arrogant songwriters from taking themselves too seriously! He lives a charmed life and God only knows what it cost him to fit this work among myriad other commitments and from Utah. I thank his long-suffering family for sharing him with us.

Andrea Allen Sis is the one whose inner beauty has flowed out in watercolor to paint the flying image on our cover. Her laidback brilliance and her fingers did all the graphic design and formatting you see. She bravely recruited and indoctrinated their son, Griffin, for the broccoli and boogars dialogue and fit all in between diapers, discipline and single-parenting as her husband Joe was called to active military duty. I will never be able to trade her enough landscaping labor, chicken compost and garden advice to repay her devotion to this project so she'll just have to accept my enduring friendship.

The Waiting-To-Be-Humus Hummers! This is the name our troupe made for themselves. And just so you know: "humus" is pronounced "hew-muss" not "hummus" like the garbanzo bean dip. Gives you a better idea of where we're headed. It is no random coincidence that all the singers, including John and Andrea, are members of our local church, Eugene 1st United Methodist. Ours is a faith community rightly regarded as a keeper of activism, tolerance and hope in our city and adventurous enough to embrace and sustain ministries like "That's My Farmer!"

Their eager minstrelsy and collaboration in my music brings me goosebumps and tears of joy. I especially thank Tom Grimsley for sharing his school studio with us and Laurel Stiller for her duties as food monitor. You must have food to keep the hummers happy.

Community Supported Album-culture! My apologies to CSA farmers everywhere for this awful pun, but great thanks for all of you out there who pre-paid to help us fund this effort. As in real CSAs, you shared the risk of the season with me and that means a lot. I give special appreciation to you who gave extraordinary gifts including: Fred Kirschenmann and Carolyn Raffensperger, Laurel and Mike Stiller, Wali and Jabrila Via, Mitzie and Bill Dew, Barb and Jim Griffiths, Jim Pitney and Betty Lou

Pipes. Finally, I thank my father Jim Pitney, who, with my mother, worked overtime and by their wits to make our farm a successful business. Dad's gracious sharing of the returns has helped to make this production possible.

The Loves of My Life are those within whose enduring presence I find who I am and from whose greater scores my little tunes spring. Debbie is my wife, lover and co-adventurer. She is the lead pastor of the church we serve. For 25 years she has been the primary breadwinner who makes the time for my creativity and activism possible. It was an honor to have her in the chorus with us. She believes in me even when I don't. Our children Joel and Erin are my favorite heroes. Joel just married Christiana and, with her, is learning to farm. Erin is a mathematician and an artist and soon will be the kind of teacher I'd endure adolescence again just to be in her class! Finally I recognize my good friends Charles Foster and Trudy Wischemann who have encouraged my vocation as a writer. Both were very helpful proofreaders and editors of this work.