

COMOX VALLEY CLIMATE CHANGE CHRONICLES (12)

“Tell Them the Story—The New Story”

Ninety-seven percent of all scientists believe in climate change and they have been telling us about it for forty years. So why are so many of us not getting it? It's because scientists don't have a good story.

A good story has three essential elements: context, relationship and motivation.

Language is a context. If someone is speaking to you in German, but you don't speak German, you won't get the message. The scientific facts are imbedded in a context—the scientific method that serves as a framework for interpreting their findings. But most of us don't speak science.

For a story to be effective it must relate to peoples' personal experiences and values—like family, jobs and lifestyles. But in many ways scientists do not succeed in tapping into our personal relationships and experiences. Many of them feel this is outside their area of expertise.

Finally, a good story motivates. But motivation depends upon context and relationship. If there is no context and relationship there is very little motivation.

But there is a bigger problem. According to Thomas Berry our whole society is in between stories and a new story is just beginning to emerge.

Thomas Berry was a cultural historian, monk and Roman Catholic priest. Assisted by Brian Swimme, a mathematical cosmologist, he became the Father of the New Cosmology. It links Earth and the human to the traditional cosmology—the galaxies and planets. The universe, Earth and the human are all tied together in one story. But most of us do not realize this. Berry explained the problem this way.

“It's all a question of story. We are in trouble just now because we do not have a good story. We are in between stories. The old story, the account of how the world came to be and how we fit into it, is no longer effective. Yet we have not learned the new story.

Our traditional story of the universe sustained us for a long period of time. It shaped our emotional attitudes, provided us with life purposes and energized action. It consecrated suffering and integrated knowledge. We awoke in the morning and we knew where we were. We could answer the questions of our children. We could identify crime, punish transgressors. Everything was taken care of because the story was there.

A radical reassessment of the human situation is needed, especially concerning those basic values that give life some satisfactory meaning. If we are to achieve this purpose, we must begin where everything begins in human affairs—with the basic story, our narrative of how things came to be, how they came to be as they are, and how the future can be given some satisfying direction. We need a story that will educate us, a story that will heal, guide, and discipline us.”

The emerging New Story provides us with a new context for understanding ourselves and the world around us. As quantum physics points out we live in, and are part of, a conscious universe. It has been a physical and a psychic/spiritual reality from the very beginning. We have come from the universe through Earth’s evolution. Human consciousness is the universe reflecting upon itself.

The New Story gives us a very different understanding of our relationship with Earth. It is not something “out there.” It is part of us. We are earthlings and Earth is our Greater Self. As we reflect upon this we realize that we are related to all other species. In a sense they are our kin. We also become aware of our responsibilities for Earth.

The New Story motivates us. We see the great destruction that the climate changing world we have created is causing. It is affecting all species and is affecting or will affect our children, grandchildren and future generations. At the community level we become aware that we have responsibilities beyond our own community, for we are first and foremost Earth Citizens.

So the emerging New Story provides a new context, describes a new relationship with Earth and the Universe, and motivates us to work with Earth so it can heal itself.

When I was a kid just after World War 2 and the soldiers were returning, kids would sometimes ask their fathers, “Dad, what did you do in the war.” I can imagine that our children, grandchildren and their grandchildren may one day ask “Mom and Dad, what did you do about the struggle with climate change?”

Perhaps they will say what Thomas Berry would say after he gave a talk. Some one would get up and ask, “Father Berry, what should we do about this.” And he would always say, “Tell them the story—the New Story.”

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