

**For April 6, 2006**  
**“What is Hope in Times of Crisis and Loss?”**  
**Joan Brown, osf, discussion leader**

Last month I read a news article featuring James Lovelock’s new book, *The Revenge of Gaia*. The British scientist and originator of the Gaia theory (earth as a living organism) gives a very grim scenario for the future of humans and others on our planet in view of the increasing impacts of global warming.

I began to ponder, once again, the meaning of hope and our lived response as we breathe, relate, and work each day. How do we live real and hopeful lives of meaning for ourselves and the future in the light of the manifold ecological and human tragedies brought about by global warming? Can hope, expressed through creative acts of love, prayer, and compassionate action, inspire us to walk into the future by living in integrity in the moment? Can our lives be a witness to the children and young people with whom we walk now and for those yet to be born?

As I awake each morning I look out the lace curtains of my window in expectation of the dawn. I light a candle as I begin prayer and meditation and ask that I might have the wisdom to act with a realistic hope in the day ahead. After meditation and prayer I cup the candle light in my hands and I pray in gratitude for the great love of God of the universe and then blow the light of compassion and love to all peoples and creatures throughout the earth.

For me, this ritual speaks of my belief that I am here on earth at this moment for a particular reason: to celebrate the wonders of each day and the many gifts that are given. We can choose to live with a grim “scarcity mentality,” or with a hope that knows there are hidden treasures we do not yet perceive, waiting to be offered to us who live in these difficult and challenging times. Such a deeply alive spiritual discipline is vital in our moment on Earth. The celebration of the beauty of each day and the opening of oneself to creativity are essential in order to live with hope.

I love this poem by Wendell Berry, a farmer, writer, and teacher who brings the anxious feelings and questions we all experience in the night into an earthy prayer.

When despair for the world grows in me  
and I wake in the night at the least sound  
in fear of what my life and my children’s lives may be.  
I go and lie down where the wood drake  
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.  
I come into the peace of wild things  
who do not tax their lives with forethought  
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.  
And I feel above me the day-blind stars  
waiting with their light. For a time  
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

It is important to face what we humans have done to the earth, to ponder the large questions for which we have no clear answers and then in our own unique ways to live hope-filled lives.

Thus, our April Earth Seminar will focus upon what this means to each of us individually and what it might mean to live together in hope in times of crisis and loss. In preparation, I invite you to read an article by James Lovelock ([click here](#)) drawn from his book, and then to ponder these questions:

1. Is it realistic to have hope in our day? What do I do with all of the news of global warming and extinction of species?
2. From what place or source within you or outside of you do you gather hope or energy to live each day and to act responsibly in our world? Don't stop with surface answers. Please bring to the seminar any creative expressions you use in your own life—aphorisms, ways of thinking, particular poems, stories, rituals--that help lead you to inspiration and energy in times of adversity.
3. Finally, how might we live—conduct our lives—for the future, and for the future of our children?