

BUTTERFLY THOUGHTS ON THE LAND WE HOLD IN TRUST

Fair warning — this reflection is going to jump around a lot. It's the sort of thing that drives my young, properly-educated, editorial assistants crazy. But this is what's happening inside my head at the moment.

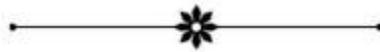
I woke up a few days ago and the sky was clear! For the first time in over a week, smoke had not drifted 150 miles down to Starcross from the worst California wildfire in history. Flocks of birds were flying everywhere. They were finally able to breathe, eat and drink. People were able to work outside. Kids could go to school. Our neighbors to the north were not so fortunate. Thousands of homes were destroyed. People's lives were irreparably changed. A friend up there emailed me that he hadn't met anyone in the area that was not seriously traumatized. The death toll is now over 90 and it will go up to a much higher



number. There are over 900 people unaccounted for as I write.

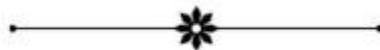
A few weeks ago I, at least, thought climate change deniers were just naive people or entrepreneurs more interested in profit than the common welfare. Now I wonder if it too late to correct our mistakes? Scientists seem to be gently trying to tell us it is. But I have a kind of blind faith that the cosmos has a way of healing itself that sometimes comes as a complete surprise. Will that happen? I hope it does. I don't know. And then there is always the fact that when the times are bad, people can do incredible things. I will never forget the picture of an elderly woman in her wheelchair coming down a road surrounded by fire. She had her dog on her lap. A stranger driving by picked them up. They were the last beings to make it out on that road.

This is the world we live in.



Let us take a little jump back to the 4th Century B.C.E. Remember the butterfly dream of Chuang Tzu? He put it like this, *Am I a person dreaming that I am a butterfly or am I a butterfly dreaming that I am a person?* I think many people have had butterfly dreams and thoughts. Mine happened when I was about 10 years old at a school picnic. Our family didn't have a car so getting out to the country was a big deal for me. We had to ford what looked like a little river to get to the picnic grounds. I

couldn't swim (still can't) but it looked like everyone was just walking across. It got crowded so I moved to one side and stepped down into a deep hole. The water was well over my head. I think what happened was I just kept walking and came out. But every once in a while I wonder. Did I actually drown? Am I now dreaming about what my life would have been like had I lived? That probably sounds like pretty crazy stuff UNLESS you have had a similar experience.



In a few weeks I will be 88 years old. In reality or in my dream, am I watching the destruction of this beautiful planet? Some of the people in my circle of friends, especially the young ones, think that Earth is probably on its way out. But what I find remarkable is that they are still working hard to reverse the trend! Give it whatever name you want to — but the divine spark, the Holy Spirit is still working. As long as that's the case, and I believe it is, there is hope.

Of course we have to do something about the people who aren't that interested in anything but themselves. What Thomas Frank (1965-) called "*The Wrecking Crew*" — people especially in Washington D.C. who, as he put it, *ruined government, enriched themselves, and beggared the nation* are still very much at work. But I feel the tide of history turning. These may be just the wild wishes of an old guy — but maybe not!



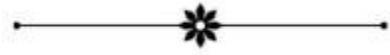
Strange things are happening all over the world. But they are different strange things. Our olives ripened early and had to be picked and pressed when they were ready. Normally our rainy season starts in late September but now in late November, we have yet to have a decent rainfall. Our 24-year-old friend Clara Arcarons manages her father's olive grove in Catalonia. They have had torrential rains which keep them from getting out in the field to harvest. Weird contrasts like these are happening every place.

I think the only thing we can do, other than protest the actions of those wreckers who are only concerned about their own greed, is to protect the spot of ground that we are occupying — wherever that may be and whatever may be needed. The "land we were give in trust" as Wendell Berry (1934 -) and others keep telling us.



Our entire property at Starcross has been certified as organic. It used to be just the olives, now it is everything. We are in the process of finalizing a permanent conservation easement plan with the Sonoma Land Trust, a very trusted organization and partner. Another partner of ours is the local fire district. They have given us very clear directions on how be on the defensive against fire without harming the environment. We store a lot of extra water for their benefit and the aid of our neighbors. Our Sister Julie, who was just elected to the local School Board, hosted grade school children on a field trip here to increase their awareness, appreciation and mindfulness of the land we all share together.

I would not be a bit surprised to hear even more suggestions coming up regularly on how we can care for the land, as well as the people, animals, trees and other things on it. That's what we are called to do. It's everyone's task.



Well, those are the thoughts of an old guy who sometimes thinks he's a young butterfly. Or, of a young butterfly who sometimes thinks he is an old guy.

Blessings to all!

Brother Toby