On Dec. 30th the Deacons lead the worship service. The service was based upon the Interfaith Thanksgiving Service that Pastor Diane put together this past November, giving thanks to and recognizing the natural world. It was a beautiful service and the Deacons thought well worth the reprise. And I, well, the natural world IS my world and where my faith is imbedded. Below is my reflection delivered in the service leading into the Native American Haudenosaunee Address. And if any of you are wondering about my 300 hikes up Lion’s Head in 2018 - # 300 was completed on the 29th of December. Mission accomplished.

I have been reflecting on where my love of nature was kindled. I grew up in Ithaca, NY in the Finger Lakes region. You may not know that Ithaca is GORGES. A slogan riffing on the play between gorges and gorgeous. Anyway – the streams with waterfalls cutting through the rocky slate walls down to the lake to create these gorges, are truly beautiful and awe-inspiring. There are five State Parks right in the area, and my family took full advantage of them. Beyond that our family hiked and camped in the Adirondacks and the Green Mountains of Vermont. And even further beyond that, we spend several summers and then a year in the mountains of New Mexico. It was the 1960’s and we visited many, many of the National Parks in the west. My parents got us out there.

I think my fascination with Native Americans began but when we lived out west. I was 10 – an impressionable age. We visited many archeological Indian sites as well as visiting the Southwest Indian Reservations to observe their tribal celebrations. I became enthralled with their way of life and spent many hours playing at being an Indian. Lately I have been enjoying literature that shows the sacred connection that these indigenous people had with the earth. A most beautiful book, Braiding Sweetgrass by Robin Wall Kimmerer has a chapter called Allegiance to Gratitude. She speaks of a school on the Onondaga Nation in upstate New York where each day, in the place where our schools would have the kids reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, the Native students recite their version of the Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address. I will continue from the book in the beautiful words of explanation by the naturalist and poet, Robin Wall Kimmerer.

“The Address is sometimes mistakenly viewed as a prayer, but the children’s heads are not bowed. The elders at Onondaga teach otherwise, that the Address is far more than a pledge, a prayer, or a poem alone….

“I’m told that the Thanksgiving Address is at heart an invocation of gratitude, but it is also a material, scientific inventory of the natural world. Another name for the oration is Greetings and Thanks to the Natural World. As it goes forward, each element of the ecosystem is named in its turn, along with its function. Is is a lesson in Native science…..

“The Address is, by its very nature of greetings to all who sustain us, long. But it can be done in abbreviated form or in long and loving detail. At the school, it is tailored to the language skills of the children speaking it.
“Part of its power surely rests in the length of time it takes to send greetings and thanks to so many. The listeners reciprocate the gift of the speaker’s words with their attention, and by putting their minds into the place where gathered minds meet. You could be passive and just let the words and the time flow by, but each call asks for the response: “Now our minds are one.” You have to concentrate: you have to give yourself to the listening. It takes effort, especially in a time when we are accustomed to sound bites and immediate gratification.”

And now, please follow on the insert in your bulletin. And while we hear and say this together, imagine how differently each nation might address environmental challenges and ALL policies, environmental and otherwise. Imagine the impatience of lawyer and politicians if this was how each meeting and negotiation was begun.

In the service each piece was read by a different member of the congregation standing where they sat and the congregation responded: Now our minds are one.

**The Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address:**

1. **The People**
   Today we have gathered and we see that the cycles of life continue. We have been given the duty to live in balance and harmony with each other and all living things. So now, we bring our minds together as one as we give greetings and thanks to each other as people.
   *All: Now our minds are one.*

2. **The Earth Mother**
   We are all thankful to our Mother, the Earth, for she gives us all that we need for life. She supports our feet as we walk about upon her. It gives us joy that she continues to care for us as she has from the beginning of time. To our mother, we send greetings and thanks.
   *All: Now our minds are one.*

3. **The Waters**
   We give thanks to all the waters of the world for quenching our thirst and providing us with strength. Water is life. We know its power in many forms—waterfalls and rain, mists and streams, rivers and oceans. With one mind, we send greetings and thanks to the spirit of Water.
   *All: Now our minds are one.*

4. **The Fish**
   We turn our minds to all the Fish life in the water. They were instructed to cleanse and purify the water. They also give themselves to us as food. We are grateful that we can still find pure water. So, we turn now to the Fish and send our greetings and thanks.
   *All: Now our minds are one.*

5. **The Plants**
Now we turn toward the vast fields of Plant life. As far as the eye can see, the Plants grow, working many wonders. They sustain many life forms. With our minds gathered together, we give thanks and look forward to seeing Plant life for many generations to come.

All: Now our minds are one.

6. The Food Plants
With one mind, we turn to honor and thank all the Food Plants we harvest from the garden. Since the beginning of time, the grains, vegetables, beans and berries have helped the people survive. Many other living things draw strength from them too. We gather all the Plant Foods together as one and send them a greeting of thanks.

All: Now our minds are one.

7. The Medicine Herbs
Now we turn to all the Medicine herbs of the world. From the beginning they were instructed to take away sickness. They are always waiting and ready to heal us. We are happy there are still among us those special few who remember how to use these plants for healing. With one mind, we send greetings and thanks to the Medicines and to the keepers of the Medicines.

All: Now our minds are one.

8. The Animals
We gather our minds together to send greetings and thanks to all the Animal life in the world. They have many things to teach us as people. We are honored by them when they give up their lives so we may use their bodies as food for our people. We see them near our homes and in the deep forests. We are glad they are still here and we hope that it will always be so.

All: Now our minds are one.

9. The Trees
We now turn our thoughts to the Trees. The Earth has many families of Trees who have their own instructions and uses. Some provide us with shelter and shade, others with fruit, beauty and other useful things. Many people of the world use a Tree as a symbol of peace and strength. With one mind, we greet and thank the Tree life.

All: Now our minds are one.

10. The Birds
We put our minds together as one and thank all the Birds who move and fly about over our heads. The Creator gave them beautiful songs. Each day they remind us to enjoy and appreciate life. The Eagle was chosen to be their leader. To all the Birds—from the smallest to the largest—we send our joyful greetings and thanks.

All: Now our minds are one.

11. The Four Winds
We are all thankful to the powers we know as the Four Winds. We hear their voices in the moving air as they refresh us and purify the air we breathe. They help us to bring
the change of seasons. From the four directions they come, bringing us messages and
giving us strength. With one mind, we send our greetings and thanks to the Four Winds.
All: Now our minds are one.

12. The Thunderers
Now we turn to the west where our grandfathers, the Thunder Beings, live. With
lightning and thundering voices, they bring with them the water that renews life. We are
thankful that they keep those evil things made by Okwiseres underground. We bring our
minds together as one to send greetings and thanks to our Grandfathers, the
Thunderers.
All: Now our minds are one.

13. The Sun
We now send greetings and thanks to our eldest Brother, the Sun. Each day without fail
he travels the sky from east to west, bringing the light of a new day. He is the source of
all the fires of life. With one mind, we send greetings and thanks to our Brother, the Sun.
All: Now our minds are one.

14. Grandmother Moon
We put our minds together to give thanks to our oldest Grandmother, the Moon, who
lights the night-time sky. She is the leader of woman all over the world, and she governs
the movement of the ocean tides. By her changing face we measure time, and it is the
Moon who watches over the arrival of children here on Earth. With one mind, we send
greetings and thanks to our Grandmother, the Moon.
All: Now our minds are one.

15. The Stars
We give thanks to the Stars who are spread across the sky like jewelry. We see them in
the night, helping the Moon to light the darkness and bringing dew to the gardens and
growing things. When we travel at night, they guide us home. With our minds gathered
together as one, we send greetings and thanks to the Stars.
All: Now our minds are one.

16. The Enlightened Teachers
We gather our minds to greet and thank the enlightened Teachers who have come to
help throughout the ages. When we forget how to live in harmony, they remind us of the
way we were instructed to live as people. With one mind, we send greetings and thanks
to these caring teachers.
All: Now our minds are one.

17. The Creator
Now we turn our thoughts to the creator, or Great Spirit, and send greetings and thanks
for all the gifts of Creation. Everything we need to live a good life is here on this Mother
Earth. For all the love that is still around us, we gather our minds together as one and
send our choicest words of greetings and thanks to the Creator.
All: Now our minds are one.
18. **Closing Words**
We have now arrived at the place where we end our words. Of all the things we have named, it was not our intention to leave anything out. If something was forgotten, we leave it to each individual to send such greetings and thanks in their own way.  
*All: Now our minds are one.*