**Devin**

Forty-five years ago NASA astronauts took the first ever high definition picture of earth. It was called the blue marble and when people saw it, they came to this realization…this realization that our world is pretty small. Just a tiny blue dot in a sea of black. It isn't some immeasurable place with infinite resources, it is a very limited, very vulnerable place where we live. This realization is what helped spark the green movement of the 70’s. People began to come together in hopes of protecting the world from the dangers of industrialization. This, to me, is the meaning of Earth Day. Finding how we as a species can find harmony with the world.

I’m going to tell you a story about Paul Bunyan, the protagonist in many American folktales. To spare you the details of his whole life, he was said to be a giant man who worked as a lumberjack. With him was his trusty blue ox who was said to be 50 feet tall. Now Paul ran a lumber camp in northern Minnesota, and the river used to move logs was called the whistling river. The river didn't just whistle twice a day, however.  It was known to be deep and fast, often breaking apart logs or flipping people off rafts. It never really bothered Paul until one day he was combing his beard with a large pine tree. Suddenly, the river reared up out if it’s bed and spat four hundred and nineteen gallons of muddy water onto Paul’s freshly groomed beard! This surprised him, but being as big as we was, and being a lumberjack he didn't mind a little bit of mud on his face. Now this river was really ornery, and I only use that word because that is how it was described to me, but this ornery river reared up once more and shot out 5 thousand and nineteen gallons of muddy water, adding a batch of mud turtles, several large fish, as well as a single muskrat. Now this made Paul really mad and he jumped up and proclaimed he was going to tame the river! (Sounds crazy, but we try to tame nature everyday.)

I’ll spare you the ensuing shenanigans of excessive popcorn eating, pot-pie making, and confused wild animals, but Paul decided he would use his ox to pull the river straight. He couldn't hook the water with a chin how it was in the river, so he headed north. Just a short walk for him to the north pole where he set a box trap and baited it with icicles. After playing fetch with the blue ox, he checked the trap and found six young blizzards and an old north-wester. He put two of the blizzards in his travel sack, released the rest and then walked back down to the whistling river. He put the two blizzards down, one on each side of the river and by morning it was frozen for seventeen miles in each direction. He wrapped his log chain around the frozen river and both he and his ox pulled with all their strength and straightened out the river. Anyways, after the river was straightened, it never flowed with the same strength as it had before, meaning it took a lot longer for the lumberjacks to move their logs downstream, and it had lost it’s ornery spirit, no longer whistling.

I know it is a silly story, but what I get out of it is that there are often unintended consequences when we mess with nature. Many rivers in America flow slower because of their use in irrigation. This sort of a thing is necessary when we try to feed everyone in our country. We burn fossil fuels not because there is no other option, but because they are easier to distribute to people en-mass. Everything we do is a balancing act of good and bad effects.

During Earth Week at Priory, we aim to do more good than bad.  Humans will always have an effect on the world. Even totally organic farms that produce only vegan goods take land away from natural ecosystems. By driving an electric car, you contribute to the mining of rare earth metals for it’s battery. Water power which is said to be clean energy disrupts aquatic ecosystems and wind turbines affect migratory birds.

I’m not trying to be really depressing, and I’m sorry if I am coming off that way. The whole point of me talking about this is to explain that our jobs as humans is not to go and live in a mud hut in the woods, wearing homemade hemp tunics and eating wild berries and roots. No, but we have been put into this position of *stewards* to find ways in which we can harmonize with the world. We could choose to eat only local and seasonal crops, minimizing the energy used to transport them to our homes. We can wear sweaters instead of turning up the heat. We can recycle our metals and plastics so that we no longer need to mine ore.

Something closer to home that we have been doing as a community is working towards the removal of starthistle on our campus. Though not completely solved as a problem, it’s just a small example of how we can cultivate a better earth. This was done however not by sitting back and hoping things would solve themselves, but by coordinated effort having serious and tangible impacts on a problem we face. Only through unified action can we overcome the ecological issue we face today.

Our next few generations as humans have the potential to start fixing our planet, and cultivating a greater symbiotic relationship. I am hopeful. The hole in the ozone is closing because we came together as a species to stop producing the chemicals that created the hole. Human population growth, which I would argue, is the root cause of nearly every single ecological problem we are face today, is becoming a less pressing problem. Though our species are still growing, our rate is slowing down. This, above all else, makes me hopeful. As human populations eventually decline through gradual cultural changes, our world can potentially recover from the degradation. The only way this can happen however is by conserving our resources and energy until then.

Theodore Roosevelt encompasses this mindset. “Conservation means development as much as it does protection. I recognize the right and duty of this generation to develop and use the natural resources of our land; but I do not recognize the right to waste them, or to rob, by wasteful use, the generations that come after us.”

He said that more than 100 years ago, however it is still the responsibility of everyone to work towards a sustainable world. Try to remember that, not just this week but for your entire lives. Teach it to your children, and their children. And if we can work together, we might just be able to fix the problems our world faces today. And unlike Paul Bunyan, anticipate the effects of our actions on our environment.

**Noah**

      Just three years ago this summer my family and I were enjoying time at our ranch on the northern California coast. On the afternoon of July 26th we were spending time down at the creek cooling off as we usually did. However on the way back up to the house I had an encounter that changed my life. It was for sure the scariest thing that has happened to me thus far and hopefully will be the scariest thing that ever happens to me. I ended up six feet away from a mountain lion that was almost twice my size, cornered against a shed and ready to pounce. For a solid 30 seconds that felt more like an hour I legitimately thought I was going to die right then and there. I obviously did not, the predator found a way to back away from me and crawl under the shed instead of pouncing. I realized that my fate rested in the hands of that mountain lion for those 30 seconds.

        The reason why I am telling this story on earth day is not the usual, to extol the virtues of being in and appreciating the beauty nature, but rather as a larger metaphor. You see, most of the world still lives off the land hunting and growing most of their food and consume very energy and resources however, most of us in this room are isolated from nature, padded by the conveniences of modern life. You likely live in a house that is heated in the winter and you are able to go to the store when you are hungry and buy food. You probably do not think about what makes these great things possible. We do not realize that what ultimately provides all the abundance and comfort that we enjoy is nature. All the food we eat and resources we consume are all dependent on Earth’s natural systems.

        When you think of Earth day you may think that it's a bunch of hippy dippy nonsense. You may not care that the Bumblebee Bat or the Polar Bear is going extinct. You may think well, sucks to be a Bumblebee Bat or a Polar Bear, why should I care. You may also think that the cost of curtailing our polluting and consuming ways is to high and after all, I’m not a Polar Bear so who cares. So what if a few species go extinct, a little coal slurry is dumped in a river, or Earth’s temperature rises just a little? We’ll be ok. It’s just a little deforestation or habitat degradation. Whatever.

The problem is that we are just animals like the polar bear or bumblebee bat. And if our habitat, the earth, is degraded and depleted enough we too, will start to suffer. In fact we are starting to see the negative impacts of human activity already. For example, the population of bees in China has been diminished so much that farmers have to pay workers to pollinate their crops with paint brushes, driving up food prices. Perhaps more alarmingly there has been over a 600% increase of reported natural disasters since 1960 worldwide. These trends will soon start to have consequences for all humans. As resources like food and water become scarce or sea levels rise people will continue to be displaced and causing deadly conflict. In fact, a Benedictine school on a Micronesian island is considering moving to join Australian Benedictine schools to escape rising seas.  Their tiny island is disappearing! And we should remember that we, living in the United States, are not going to be forever immune from these forces. Nature does not discriminate.

        My message to you is that protecting the earth should not be seen as protecting polar bears or bumblebee bats, environmental issues will have political social, economic, and demographic effects . Ultimately as I learned from the mountain lion we are all still at the mercy of nature. So when environmentalists talk about reducing or conserving don’t think of these actions as a nuisance just to protect polar bears but rather as a way to ultimately make sure that our generation enjoys the same quality of life that past generations have.

Ultimately we are just animals and are at the mercy of the same forces as any other animal. We cannot continue to try and make nature conform to our every desire, we cannot change the earth to suit our every want and expect to continue to live happily on this planet. As I learned from the mountain lion, we are all at the mercy of nature. As Abbot John Klassen put it “If you ask me for one word equivalent to humility, it is the word truth: the truth of our human situation, the truth of our strengths and weaknesses, the truth of our multiple motivations for any action, the truth of our relationships, to each other and to the earth.”