INVITATION

Dear Reader,

We humans are splendidly sensuous creatures.[1] We delight in the beauty of touch, taste, sight, sound, and smell. And we are hungry creatures. We hunger to belong. We hunger for joy, pleasure, beauty, trustworthy companions. These are holy hungers. They lead us to relish the gifts of being alive as Earth creatures in an extravagantly beautiful world—magnificent beyond imaging.

With this book, I invite you into (or further into) a sacred journey. It is a journey of healing. If you are anything like me, you will not stick to something for the long haul unless it brings you joy, or beauty, or something else for which you hunger. Just doing the right thing might not be enough to hold our commitment over time. So, I implore you: As you enter (or continue) the quest for more equitable and ecologically sane ways of shaping our life together, ask, "How can this bring me joy? Where in this may I find beauty?" I invite you—throughout the journey—to cultivate joy, bathe in beauty, honor your body and its wisdom, and feed your soul. Brief sections at the end of each chapter point in those directions.

You are at risk in reading the first two chapters of this book. They could lead to a sense of overwhelmed hopelessness. Fear not. We will protect against that landing. As one protection, I offer in chapter 1 what has fortified companions on similar journeys for millennia. It is a love story. You have a place in it.

And I offer you companions. I stand in awe of our companions in this journey—people close at hand and around the world—whose courage, wisdom, creativity, and fierce tenacity are the lifeblood of the movement to build more equitable, ecological, and democratic economies. Perhaps you are one of them already.

Gratitude and awe fill my soul in the fleeting moments when the stunning beauty of life on Earth and of ordinary human beings appears to my often-dullened heart. "Beauty will save the world." So claims Fyodor Dostoevsky. Beauty will not directly mitigate climate change or stop extractive, exploitative fossil-fueled economies. Nor will awe and gratitude. But beauty, awe, and gratitude will feed us for the great calling before us at this pivotal time in human history—to build a world in which all people and Earth's life systems may flourish.

An ancient Chinese proverb notes, "If we continue in the direction we are going, we will get where we are headed." Our current direction is toward death by climate catastrophe—for humans and for much of the other life on our planetary home. Earth's life-support systems cannot bear us, living as we do.[2] But we can change direction.[3] Indeed, we—and with us Earth's capacity to sustain life—hang in the balance. Our "now" is a turning point.[4]

Our children, grandchildren, and other cherished youngsters will ask, "What did you do when the world and my future were in dire risk?" What will we say? My hope is that this book might give you grounds to say, "My child, I was one of those who turned things around. Together with the Spirit, we rescued this garden Earth and its people."

This book and the series to follow are for people who want to live in ways that build justice, joy, and life-giving relationships, and who have a hunch that economies are utterly central to that quest. We created this book series and the accompanying Web-based resources for students, educators, business leaders, faith groups, activists, governmental bodies, community members, and all who hunger for economic lives that reflect values of social justice, compassion, ecological resilience, and shared, accountable power.

In writing, I have tried to offer you an odd combination. I speak to you in my voice, person-to-person, often from my heart and experience. Yet, all that I say rests on the high standard of scholarly precision and theoretical grounding that I believe you deserve.

Before we begin, I share a few tips for reading, a preview of the chapters to come, and a word about the Web-based resources that accompany this volume.