

Feasting on God's Gifts; Fasting in Sorrow

A Lenten Devotional for 2012



(Photo from 2011 Faith and Environment Conference: "God's Earth: Too Big to Fail?")

This Devotional is brought to you by:

Presbyterians for Earth Care



PEC Lenten Reflection 2012, Moderator's comments

Diane Waddell



We enter into Lent in gratitude for God's graciousness. We are in awe of the beauty of this sacred space with which God has gifted us. At the same time, we come in grief; with deep sorrow for the losses which Creation has borne...loss of topsoil, clean water, habitats of species; loss of clean air and pristine wilderness, of opportunity for fuller health and healing; and much more.

With this Lenten Devotional, Presbyterians for Earth Care invites you to enter into Lent with us ... seeking... reflecting ...pondering... "Feasting and Fasting." Each devotional will contain Scripture, Prayer, and a Reflection. There is a reading for each holy day and one for each week of Lent.

The reflections are based on "Feasting and Fasting." A 2006 set of devotionals from (then) Presbyterians for Restoring Creation followed a similar theme. Members explained, "We are called both to attend to the sacredness of Creation *and* to respond to it by active participation in the protection of Creation".

You will receive this devotional electronically only. It will be shared a few days before the holy day or holy week it represents. It will also be available on the PEC website. Please share it with others.

Many thanks to those who helped develop these devotionals. Thanks also to PEC Coordinator Shantha Ready Alonso who prepared the layout and design and especially to the Rev. Holly Hallman, member of PEC's Steering Committee, who worked as co-lead in developing this offering.

Deep peace and strength to us all as we enter into this sacred holy season. May we together seek and find the connections and blessings of feasting and fasting as we encounter Christ in and through Creation.



Diane Waddell is a nurse practitioner, practicing integrative and holistic medicine. She is a moderator of Earthkeepers of Heartland Presbytery, which has been active in preparing eco-justice overtures for General Assembly.

Ash Wednesday – Holly Hallman

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Psalms 51:1-17

Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

Morning Prayer:

Creator of all, we stand at this in-between place, recalling the advent wonder yet standing on the road that leads to the passion and cross. The Book of Common Prayer tells us that we are ash, dust, earth. Let us pause and find afresh the meaning of those words—a meaning that links us, earth, ash and dust, to that all-that-was-and-is-and-ever-will-be. ...Words that place us neither over nor under all of your good works, simply pieces of your great whole.



Ah, the feasting is over. Mardi Gras has come and gone, the fat from Fat Tuesday has moved from lips to hips where it joins the Christmas cookies, New Year's salty treats and Twelfth Night's lovely crepes. It is Ash Wednesday with its solemn assembly and dusky cross on our foreheads. Our Lenten journey, this year will lead us to thoughts on how to feast from the table God sets before us in creation and how to fast from the things in our lives that tear at that lovely repast. But, for a moment let us consider the liminal space that comes between any two things. In Latin, liminal is the word for threshold. Ash Wednesday is that Day. It is the time/space between the feast and the fast but is neither. An image that explains liminality is that of a trapeze artist. Picture the person "flying" through the air and then letting go of the bar but still far from the bar that is coming from the other direction. That moment when one thing is gone and the next has not arrived. In the air. Not here and not there. Ash Wednesday is that day. There is the power and beauty of creation and there is our use/misuse of that. Between the two is liminal space and an invitation to pause and know, to hear the whisper of the still small voice, to let go of human "doing," to wait.

Evening Prayer:

Do we really have to do this? Can't we just buy daffodils and wait for the Easter Bunny? Advent is so nice. Now you are asking us to wear the soot of last year's palms on our faces, marking us as different—as fellow travelers with The Twelve. Keep us from spinning off into the activities that buffer us from feeling the pain of the journey. Hold us, each day in the liminal space that reminds us of timeless earth, dust and ash.

Rev. Holly Hallman is the Northwest Regional Representative for PEC. She is a native of Colorado and lives in Seattle. She is often found (and heard) where there opportunities for salmon advocacy.

First Week of Lent – Fred Milligan

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Scripture – Psalm 84:1-4

¹ How lovely is your dwelling place,
O LORD of hosts!

² My soul longs, indeed it faints
for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and my flesh sing for joy
to the living God.

³ Even the sparrow finds a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young,
at your altars, O LORD of hosts,
my King and my God.

⁴ Happy are those who live in your house,
ever singing your praise.



The most famous landmark in Rio De Janeiro is Christ the Redeemer statue that stands atop Corcovado Hill. The Hill itself is over 2310 feet high. This statue of Christ, recently named one of the Seven Wonders of the World, embraces the city with his outstretched arms rising 30 meters into the sky from the top of the hill. To the world the statue may have many meanings: The victory of Christianity over the pagan native inhabitants; the supremacy of Christ over all the lesser gods people worship in the valley below; the presence of the suffering Christ who watches over the suffering of the millions of poor Favella dwellers in this city of contrasts.

What I discovered on a recent visit to this “marvelous city” is that the immediate surroundings of this statue of our Lord is Tijuca Park, the largest urban forest in the world. Home to 30 waterfalls, hundreds of plants and trees and at least 100 different animal species, the park actually reduces the medium temperature of the city by approximately nine degrees.

This 8000 acre rainforest was once stripped bare of its native vegetation by coffee and sugar cane plantations. Replanted over ten painstaking years by engineer M.G. Archer, Tijuca National Park was the result of the project which began in 1861. Concerned that the erosion and deforestation caused by the sugar and coffee plantations combined with a dramatic decrease in rainfall in the area would severely reduce drinking water available to his subjects, the Portuguese King Don Pedro II began the reforestation of the area. A tribute to his ecological mind, Tijuca National Park is one of the last few remnants of the Atlantic Rainforest that at one time dominated the Southern coast of Brazil.

Prayer - Holy One, as we contemplate the outstretched arms of the Christ the Redeemer statue, we know that it represents the actual redemption of a very real piece of God's creation from the destruction wrought by the hands of humanity. We know that the living Christ is at work through our hearts and hands. Continue, as we fast in sorrow for what human hands have done and are doing to Your creation, to give us the feast of hope for, not only, the rain forests of Brazil but for the entire world.

Rev. Fred Milligan is an At-Large member of the PEC Steering Committee, where he chairs the Membership and Fundraising Committee. He also serves as a member of the Steering Committee of the Presbyterian Eco-Stewards program and its liaison with PEC. Fred currently serves as Interim Pastor, Head of Staff of The Presbyterian Church of Traverse City, Michigan.

Second Week of Lent – Ann Owen

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Genesis 9:12-13.

And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come:

I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth."



Morning Prayer:

***Creator God, you make all things
and weave them together in an intricate tapestry of life.
Teach us to respect the fragile balance of life and to care for all the gifts of your creation.
Guide by your wisdom those who have power and authority,
that, by the decisions they make, life may be cherished
and a good and fruitful Earth may continue to show your glory and sing your praises.***

***Almighty God,
you have called us to tend and keep the garden of your creation.
Give us wisdom and reverence for all your plants and animals who share this planet with us and
whose lives make possible our own.
Help us to remember that they too love the sweetness of life and join with us in giving you praise.***

(From the National Council of Churches Earth Day Sunday resource packet.)

Ellen F. Davis of Duke Divinity School has asserted that "eating is practical theology, or it should be: daily it gives us the opportunity to honor God with our bodies." I had the pleasure of hearing Davis at the 2009 Presbyterians for Earth Care conference at Montreat Conference Center in North Carolina when she presented a talk entitled, *Being a Creature Means You Eat: Reading Genesis One in the 21st Century*. She said that Genesis 1 is not only a theological statement about food; it is also an ecological one. Eating is practical *ecology* as well as practical *theology* -- indeed, the "most important ecological act we perform."

Davis was also an advisory board member and a contributor to *The Green Bible*, the green-letter edition of the *New Revised Standard Version*. An author of eight books, including *An Agrarian Reading of the Bible*, Davis says that every day, "taking our sustenance from the earth and from the bodies of other animals, we enter deeply into the mystery of creation. Our never-failing hunger is a steady reminder to acknowledge God as the Giver of every good gift."

Her message that getting food from field to table is the most important religious act we perform was one that really resonated with me. My husband Rick and I have been making a concerted effort to reduce the carbon footprint of this most religious act: we are eating much lower on the food chain; we choose not to use bottled water; we purchase from local growers; and we compost our table scraps.

The six-week Northwest Earth Institute discussion course *Menu for the Future* that we took in 2009 had a major impact on us, as it did a number of our classmates -- so much so that the *Hungry Scholars* group that we

subsequently formed has continued to meet monthly for almost three years around the topic of ethical and sustainable eating.

Evening Prayer:

Heavenly Father, Creator and Sustainer of Life, please help us to remember that with each meal, we enter deeply into the mystery of creation. Remind us too what it means to be a creature charged with exercising dominion -- that as you keep and sustain us, we must keep and sustain your creation. May we be joyfully aware each day, that as we consume the energy that keeps us alive for a time, we are eating until we ourselves become part of the fertile soil that yields more food for your creatures.

Ann Owen serves as the Southwest Regional Representative for Presbyterians for Earth Care. She is active at Second Presbyterian Church of Little Rock, one of the first churches to obtain the PC (USA) Earth Care Congregation certification. She founded the Environmental Stewardship group at Second and chaired it for three years. Ann is also active in environmental issues in her community, serving for three years on the Little Rock Sustainability Commission.

Third Week of Lent 2012
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Psalm 19, Exodus 20:1-17: v. 8-11

Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy.
For six days you shall labor and do all your work.
But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God;
you shall not do any work—
you, your son or your daughter,
your male or female slave,
your livestock,
or the alien resident in your towns.
For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and
all that is in them,
but rested the seventh day;
therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated
it.



Morning Prayer:

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord.

I recently heard American poet, Maurice Manning, speak about nostalgia. He deepened the definition of the word from a longing for things not present, especially a time or place that feels like home, to a longing for our first home, which we find in the natural world. He cited evidence from the natural sciences that creation generates and regenerates, drawing resources back to itself. Following this pattern, we too are drawn back to nature in our longing to find a true home.

Manning was not speaking theologically, but I believe the deep longing to relocate our place in nature comes from the Creator. God calls to us: come home, come home, come, be refreshed and renewed, abide in my creation, and call it good.

Exodus 20:8-11 confirms this call. In the surrounding verses, God offers the good gift of the law to guide God's people in their relationship with God, creation, and community as they wander in the wilderness and prepare to enter the land God promised their ancestors. Sabbath practice sits in the center of God's vision for the future of the faithful, calling God's people to rest in wonderment at God's awesome creative work.

You might say: these verses sound more like a prohibition of work on a day set aside for God, than a call to come home to creation; but, what are people who live on the land to do once their work has ceased, except feast their senses on God's good creation and wonder at their place in it?

In this command, we realize that feasting and fasting go hand in hand. God calls the people to fast from busyness and productivity, to fast from worrying about having enough, and to fast from the ideology that their work is greater than God's work. God calls the people to feast on the day, to luxuriate in the time and place that God creates, and to see the fruit of God's making and call it very good.

Evening Prayer:

Lord, call us again. Fill our hearts with a longing to find our true home in your majestic world. Clear the film from our eyes so we can see the idolatry of our earth endangering productivity and consumption. Turn us toward the righteous path established by your law. Revive our souls as we keep sabbath. Amen

Rev. Alice Schaap Freeman grew-up in southwestern Virginia as an outdoor enthusiast and studied environmental economics at Davidson College and The School for Field Studies. She has served the church as an associate pastor, youth director, and retreat leader.

Week Four of Lent - Katie Preston

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Psalm 107: 1, 19-20:

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever. Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress; he sent out his Word and healed them and delivered them from destruction.

John 3:17:

Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.



Many of you know that I am an ecoholic. I have to say, some of it definitely comes from my parents teaching us the importance of recycling and taking shorter showers. But a lot of it comes from my own personal conviction that being green is a call to be responsible stewards of the gifts of Creation that God has given to us. As I delve deeper into the Scriptures, I realize that God is calling us to be faithful followers of Christ by caring for all that God created – not just other people, but the entire Creation.

Working in the world of religious environmentalism for the past two years, I have definitely been living in what feels like a time of fasting from action, at least on the part of federal policy. No matter how much I try to conserve, to minimize my own footprint in the world, it feels worthless in comparison to the inaction and backward steps of Congress and even the international work through the United Nations. I sit, sometimes on the edge of my seat with bated breath and sometimes slumped over simply waiting for change to come. I hope that suddenly the light will go off for the decision makers the way it has for me and they will just “get it” – the need to take drastic and immediate action to combat our detrimental effect on the climate. But alas I wait in vain. At least it feels that way.

But the hope of the Gospel and the truth of Lent and Easter morning is that redemption is coming. Salvation is at hand. While we walk ever closer to the pain and loss of Good Friday in this season of Lent, we know that Easter Sunday is coming too. The hope and the joy of that first Easter morning are lived out every week that we gather together. And it is through this remembering of the cycle of life and death and resurrection that I gather my strength to continue to wait in hopeful expectation for the day when we will feast together at the celebration of God's redemptive work for ALL of Creation.

Prayer:

Artist of souls, you sculpted a people for yourself out of the rocks of wilderness and fasting. Help us as we take up your invitation to prayer and simplicity, that the discipline of these forty days may sharpen our hunger for the feast of your holy friendship, and whet our thirst for the living water you offer through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Katie Preston is an M.Div graduate from Columbia Theological Seminary and a candidate for ministry in the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta. For the last two and half years she has been working with Georgia Interfaith Power & Light to reach out to Presbyterian churches across the state, encouraging them to embrace efficiency and Care for Creation.

Fifth Week of Lent - John Pitney

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Enjoy Your Oatmeal!

John 3:17:

For God sent flesh and blood into the world not to condemn the world,
but that the world might be saved
through the just, kind and humble way of life the Child of God brings.

Something revolutionary happened at breakfast this morning. The Scottish oatmeal, the creamy milk, even the raspberries and almonds on top all came from our county. Just a small thing, I know, a tiny uprising in a world so proud of the absentee feast. The berries and nuts grew in our garden. And the oatmeal? Well, early this year, I was a guest of our farm friends Tom & Sue Hunton at the ribbon cutting ceremony for their newest venture, Camas Country Mill. 10 miles from our kitchen, they now grow the grains with a co-op of farm neighbors. It's milled to flour and our cereal right down the road. When I start my day with Tom and Sue's oats or toast made of the bread I yeasted, kneaded and baked of their flour, I feel strangely...well...I'm gonna say, strangely destined for good.



I have to say, as I feast and fast my way through Lent this time, I have to come to terms with John 3:17 again. It's been a hard scripture for me to like. More for how others have used it to condemn and divide than for its truth. And how, so often, it's used to say life is all about right belief and eternity is somewhere else after you die. I'm just saying eternity, for me, is in the oatmeal.

And it's not just about grain. Grass seed monoculture has been the convention here in the Willamette Valley for decades. Farmers used to get premiums raising grass seed for golf courses, lawns and grave yards. Soon very little food was grown on this sacred ground. As if that weren't condemnation enough of our way of life, once it became profitable the market became globalized and commoditized. Then the contracts growers were promised, vaporized along with their bottom line and their dignity. If you think about condemnation at all during this time of death and resurrection, think about golf courses and dignity.

The feast we partake is a new thing and new things take deep change. Tom, Sue and their neighbors are re-learning to grow varieties of bread and cereal grains our culture had long since forgotten how to grow. And, of course, grains can't be grown on the same fields year after year. It wearies the ground. A whole new occupation is mandatory. Pinto beans and black turtles, garbanzo beans and lentils, as it turns out, can be grown in rotation even in our climate. They rebuild the soil and create new wealth. Contracts with bakeries, schools, restaurants and tortilla makers ripple this earthy genius through the nearby economy. Wealth is shared, conscience embodied. In a world where 1% of us possess 50% of the stuff, where a few are chosen to live in paradise and the rest can go to hell, this kind of meal will literally be the New Covenant in our blood. My favorite prophet, Wendell Berry, interprets John 3:17 into language I can employ:

To live, we must daily break the body and shed the blood of Creation. When we do this knowingly, lovingly, skillfully, reverently, it is a sacrament. When we do it ignorantly, greedily, clumsily, destructively, it is a desecration. In such desecration we condemn ourselves to spiritual and moral loneliness, and others to want.

Wendell Berry, The Gift of Good Land (pg 304)

For a very long time now, I have suspected that living a Godly life has much to do with taste. Next week our church will host the 13th Annual "That's My Farmer" spring gala, inaugurating another year of connecting local CSA farms with members of 14 local congregations. Since the opening of the Camas Mill, a small band of local disciples is hosting a regular breakfast of local oats at our church on Sunday mornings while they discuss strategies for organizing buying clubs through our communities of faith. As we approach Holy Week we have begun to imagine the Maundy Thursday table. As we sit down to break the body and shed the blood of Creation, will it be desecration or sacrament we choose? What kind of meal does it take, shared around the feast table of the world, to finally cause the plagues of land and economy to passover till we are all truly free? In what kind of food should we feast

and from what might we fast? Our friends Tom and Sue are good business people and they choose good financial partners but, for them, it's not all business. Last time we talked, they were working out a deal with our regional food bank to sell them lentils and barley at far less than what they cost to produce. Lentils at 24% protein and barley at 14% will go into a soup mix providing to the most hungry of our people, many of whom are children, the protein they need without having to afford meat. Taste and see that the Lord is good.

Prayer –

Creator God, make us worthy of our food. Let us feast to the fullest on the faire of flock and field that most honors the integrity of soil, water, air, the sanctity of human labor and the sufficiency of community. Let us fast of tables that exploit, deplete, isolate and condemn. And may we welcome to the best seats, the most marginalized of humanity and the most endangered of plant and creaturekind. If by breakfast, lunch and dinner we can condemn, then by dinner, lunch and breakfast may we be saved. Amen.

John Pitney is Assoc. Minister at First United Methodist of Eugene, Oregon where wife, Debbie is the lead. "That's My Farmer," (13 faith communities supporting 14 CSA farms), a wetland restoration ministry called "Riparian Redeemers" and a 256-panel solar array (created with Oregon Interfaith Power & Light), highlight their Creation Care ministries. Since 1988, John has created 3 albums of Creation Care songs (johnpitney.org)

Palm Sunday

Feasting on God's Gifts; Fasting in Sorrow

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Matthew 26: 1-13

When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, "You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified."

Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and they conspired to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him.

But they said, "Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people."



Now while Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment, and she poured it on his head as he sat at the table.

But when the disciples saw it, they were angry and said, "Why this waste? For this ointment could have been sold for a large sum, and the money given to the poor."

But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you trouble the woman? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. By pouring this ointment on my body she has prepared me for burial. Truly I tell you, wherever this good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her."

Glenn Albrecht an Australian environmental philosopher coined the word "solastalgia" to describe the devastating physical, spiritual and psychological distress people experience due to the anticipated loss of a person or place. It is estimated in the next 50 years due to climate change there will be a billion people that will lose their God-loved home place. We are and will be a people in spiritual distress experiencing solastalgia, a longing for God's wholeness and renewal of creation – for the places we have shared with loved ones and with God.

We experience the spirit speaking to us in our placedness, the place of roots and family. For us, and the congregation we serve in Southeast Louisiana we feel the brokenness of an uncertain future. We live in a region of the country experiencing rapid land loss, amounting to a football field of home, of earth disappearing into the Gulf of Mexico every 30 minutes. Yes, we are watching our future disappear and missing a future we will not be able to share with our children.

The Gospel wants us to know that the woman with the expensive ointment was anticipating the events of the coming week, took what she had, and anointed Jesus. He told his disciples that it was in preparation for his death and we are to remember her. In our solastalgia stress, we feel the pain of the disintegration of beloved communities, the disappearance of the places of beauty and the end of historic livelihoods that have been home to Gospel people and places. But it not just our loss and our "solastalgia." It is a loss that will be felt around the world in that we are the

resting spot for tens of thousands of migratory birds of various species and the estuaries of life for the Atlantic Ocean. The region groans.

We as Christians called to be mindful of all God's creation feel the distress of loss and anticipate even greater loss before us, let us not forget the woman who poured out the nard, nor the man who received it for the final gift of resurrection. We enter this week humanly defeated, not optimistic but knowing, hoping and anticipating God's ultimate promise of a new heaven and earth.

Prayer -

O God of creation, teach us to listen before we pray and to listen while we pray, to listen to your children, to listen to both the glees and the groans of your creation, and at our core, to listen to your call. Having listened, guide our word-ways and our work-ways, now and always. Amen

Rev. Kristina Peterson is the pastor of Bayou Blue Presbyterian Church and researcher at CHART at the University of New Orleans. In 2010 she received the William Gibson Lifetime Achievement for her advocacy of the Louisiana wetlands.

The Rev. Richard Krajeski has served the Presbyterian church and the environmental community for over 45 years. He is instrumental in developing the Wetlands Theological Education Project in South Louisiana and serves with his wife Kristina at the Bayou Blue Presbyterian Church.

Maundy Thursday – Rebecca Barnes-Davies

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Exodus 12:1-14

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbor in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the Passover of the Lord. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord.



Photograph by Jane Laping

Morning Prayer:

God of grace, as the day begins we give thanks for each new breath and for the mystery of life. As we reflect on death and life this holy week, increase in us compassion and a willingness to travel the hard pathways to life and freedom.

In this passage, we are standing with a people on the verge of exodus. Here we have instructions given to Moses to prepare the people for freedom. This is quite a “to do” list. It emphasizes that preparations are needed. We can’t just walk into the freedom God intends for our life without doing any work.

The truth is: walking into freedom is hard; it takes deep courage. Preparing for freedom simultaneously means preparing for change, and change is never easy.

In this story, walking into freedom is a powerful blessing to an enslaved people. Yet walking into freedom also means hard, intentional work. It includes grief at saying goodbye to the familiar life. Freedom means really changing oneself, one’s family, and even one’s way of eating in order to walk through the door that God is opening. We know this is not easy, even if what lies behind is something we deeply desire.

The liberation event in this story is harried, stressful, and new: a new calendar, a new way to eat meat, and a new identity (they are called a congregation here, for the first time in scripture). This is our risk, too. If we want

liberation, we must accept the discomfort that comes with it, the newness and change. We cannot move forward into freedom if we just stand still, living the way we always have.

What liberation is God inviting you to pursue today? In what particular lifestyle change will your freedom emerge? Like God's people in times past, our personal freedom is connected to communal welfare. How might our fasting, our rituals, and our prayers this Holy Week mean liberation for the earth? When we are courageous enough to unbind ourselves, to prepare ourselves for freedom, we can also work for the unfettering of God's creation.

Perhaps like the ancient Israelites, God calls you into freedom through giving you a new intentionality and understanding of your food and ways of eating. Or maybe you are called to accept the discomfort that comes with fasting from consumerism and consumption, lightening your load for a walk to freedom. In whatever way you are called to change in order to follow Christ, may the pathway to freedom mean blessing for you, for the gathered people of God, and for all of Creation.

Terence E. Fretheim, "Exodus12:1-28" in *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching "Exodus"* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 81-82.

Evening Prayer:

God of liberating change, we know that you lead us into freedom even when we are scared of what this goodness might do to our current, comfortable lives. Walk beside us, O Christ, and guide us. Show us how to take this journey with you.

Rebecca Barnes-Davies is the Associate for Environmental Ministries (PCUSA) and is ministry organizer for Eco-Justice Worship Collective (in Louisville, KY).

Good Friday

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The Passion Narratives of the Gospels; Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.

The life of trees is one way of understanding the Good Friday story. Recently, while cross country skiing among tall trees in the Cascade Mountains of Washington state I saw in the faces of on-coming skiers and in the wind driven waving of the trees the joy of enjoying the out of-doors. But I didn't smile back, for I was pondering a book I had just read (i.e. Chris Hedges' *Empire of Illusion*), and if anything, I was frowning. But the smiles and waving trees made me think, "The trees have no worries." So I began to focus on the waving trees and the smiling skiers and before long I was simply enjoying and smiling back.

"The trees have no worries." Well, maybe they should. But, assuming they have no consciousness like our own, they simply live out their own genetic code and respond to the health of the soil, weather, animal life, and water that feed them. The most romantic picture is of trees that have a life course within a great forest that performs valuable ecological services, absorbing the carbon dioxide from human uses, and releasing fresh oxygen into the atmosphere. Trees, we are told, are the lungs of the earth.

Yet, there are other scenarios for trees. Land needs to be cleared for agriculture and trees are often sacrificed in this process. Trees are felled so that we might have fires around which to tell our stories, to keep us warm, and to cook our food. They may be sacrificed so that we have wood products to build our homes and offices, or to have paper. They may even be cut down to be weapons or in the case of Jesus cross, an instrument of repressive terror used by a great empire.

Jesus died on the beams of a tree that had been cut down and used by an empire to hold on to its power through violence and exploitation. He was non-violent. He challenged the distorted human mission that gave rise to empire. His death demonstrated human limit, and the limit of such empires.

In Lent the limits of creation are brought into stark relief. Especially on Good Friday we see the finiteness and vulnerability of life. And, we see how the quest for human power and glory often plays out in the exploitation of nature and people. That exploitation has ironically led to freedom of the most well off among us to enjoy



the out of doors, to celebrate, to enjoy our simple oneness with the earth. Good Friday is a time to fast and ponder.

So before we celebrate what is to come in hope, it is a time to fast and frown.

Meditation:

There is a time to frown, and a time to smile, a time for serious concern, and a time for simple enjoyment. May we know on this Easter weekend both a frown and a smile, beginning with our serious reflection on Good Friday.

John Preston is the author of Wrestling Until the Dawn: The fight for biblical justice in a postmodern world, and is currently active in organizing his township's effort to ban hydro-fracking in upstate New York. He has been the PEC's northeast representative to the steering committee for the past almost six years.

Easter Sunday – William Brown

The Ecology of Resurrection

John 20:1-18

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings



lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes. But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

The first proclamation on that early Easter morning was not “Christ is risen!” but “Jesus is stolen!” The empty tomb, Mary feared, bore all the signs of a body-snatching.

But fear turns to wonder when Mary encounters Jesus, whom she initially takes to be the gardener. The confusion surrounding Jesus’ identity is not a simple case of mistaken identity, however. Rather, it is a case of double entendre. Unbeknownst to her at that moment, Mary is well on her way toward acknowledging the one standing before her as divine. Mary’s first impression of the resurrected Christ is not a false one: it contains a seed of venerable truth about God’s redemptive work in the world. Gardeners are by definition

cultivators of life; they work with the soil to raise up new life. God, according to Genesis, was the first gardener.

Resurrection is hands down the most miraculous act of cultivation, a bringing forth of new life from out of the soil that is our flesh. "How are the dead raised?" Paul asks. The Apostle considers the seed, which must die before it bursts forth with new life (1 Corinthians 15:35-36). Perhaps that is the best way to understand the resurrection. Resurrection is organic, and the results are beyond measure. Without the seed there would be no mighty cedar, no majestic redwood, no mustard bush. New creation emerges out of the shell of a seed, out of the ground of refuse and decay. No wonder Paul describes Christ's resurrection as "the first fruits."

There is something boldly bodily about Christ's resurrection. And there is something quite cosmic about it as well. As our living bodies reflect the evolutionary legacy of life in all its interdependence and as the molecules of our bodies become dispersed in death and shared with future generations of life, then resurrection cannot be limited to the raising up of human life. Resurrection's scope includes all of life, for resurrection is the forerunner to the new creation, to the cosmic banquet by which all life will be sustained.

The empty tomb is not empty. It is fully charged with the renewing, transforming, healing power of God at work out in the world. The empty tomb points to the feast of grace.

Prayer:

O God, in whom we live and move and have our being, we give you thanks for the miraculous gift of resurrection, of the new creation that is already at work in Christ. May we be healing agents of your creation, which suffers and groans by our own hands. Make us practitioners of resurrection's wonder here and now in all that we do. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

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