

Presbyterians for Earth Care

Lenten Reflections 2014

Advocating for Environmental and Social Justice

*Isaiah 58:1 Shout out, do not hold back! Lift up
your voice like a trumpet!*



Grace and hope abound! Yet now particularly, there is a need for Advocacy for eco-justice! During this Lenten season and through Earth Day Sunday (the first Sunday after Easter), PEC invites you to join us in sharing a series of Lenten reflections. We invite you to engage in discernment, then re-engage in action- oriented measures toward caring for Creation. Isaiah 58 is our scriptural base, taken from a lectionary reading for Ash Wednesday. Thanks to all who partake in this Lenten series and know that "the lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail." (Isaiah 58:11)

Diane Waddell, Moderator, PEC

Ash Wednesday

Fasting For Justice

On this Ash Wednesday, we receive an odd word for Lent from the prophet Isaiah. As we begin our own season of fasting, we confront a text that implies our spiritual discipline may be without meaning (or worse, concealing a greater injustice). Not exactly the encouragement we could use right about now!

We in the environmental movement, much like Isaiah's own people, often think that if we just fast enough—or, in our case, eat enough local, organic food, recycle and compost, walk or use a bike, use alternative energy, and drink only from reusable water bottles—we can be holy and no longer complicit in destructive systems. But Ash Wednesday and Isaiah remind us that the path to holiness is marked not by the ways we extract ourselves from the world but by the ways we thrust ourselves into that world.

God's complaint is not with fasting; it's not with biking or growing your own food—these are noble acts. It's that there is a world suffering—and it has far more use for troublemakers unafraid to walk through grime and sin to link arms with the rest of creation than for righteous churchgoers who perform their feel-good acts of piety from behind privileged walls.

So let's not be discouraged in our own efforts to adopt spiritual disciplines that enable us to hear God's voice more clearly or practices that align our lifestyle with our principles. Let's rather hear a cry this Lent to do more. If we want to get closer to God, we must seek out the worker, the person who bears the brunt of environmental waste, the farmer imprisoned by GMOs, the uncle who vehemently disagrees with us, the person who has no access to fresh food or cannot afford to buy organic, and all of God's children, human and not.

O Creator God,

You saved us by taking on flesh and walking this long, muddy road to Calvary with us. Inspire us to walk a little longer and not forsake the road for more pleasant pieties. But turn not also from our fasting; rather make of our fasting a more complete offering, as we find you yet again in our earthly midst.

Amen

*Patrick David Heery is an ordained teaching elder in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the editor of *Presbyterians Today* magazine. An avid nature-lover, he helped found the Environmentally Conscious Organization of Seminarians at Princeton Theological Seminary and is currently involved with his local chapter of the Sierra Club.*



First Sunday in Lent

Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high. (Isaiah 58:4)

“Briefly put, Lent is like an ellipse: It is a single entity with a double focus. The Forty Days are (a) a time for a probing consideration of our human condition, including sin and its deadly consequences for both individuals and society, and (b) a time for an equally intense consideration of the new possibilities offered to us in Jesus Christ and their implications for practical living.” [1]

In this Lenten season, we are called to reflect on the quarrels that are having consequences for our society, for they have the potential to harm our relationship with God. We are living in a culture that does not worship the common good. We worship the gods of economic growth and individual self-interest. In our political sphere there is little agreement on anything. If anyone wins from our political arguments, it is big business and not the individuals who need the circle of protection that government can provide.

In the pursuit of economic growth, God’s creation seems to be suffering. But the quarrels are very complicated. Fracking can cause harm to the earth and to God’s people. Yet there are quarrels that say fracking is making us energy independent, which makes our society safer. And if you Google ‘Presbyterian churches gas and oil lease’ you will find that churches who own land in areas of gas and oil drilling are leasing their land for drilling, you will find that Presbyteries have policies for churches who plan to lease their land, and you will find camps that negotiate to have pipelines built on their property. Some may quarrel that gas and oil drilling harms God’s creation. They quarrel that we need to find different sources of energy. However, those that lease their property are using the revenues to further the mission of God’s church and to enhance the Christian camping experience. In some ways this is a quarrel between our responsibility to tend and serve God’s creation and our desire to grow God’s church deep and wide. Some churches allow cell phone companies to lease their steeples, a resource that they have, to fund ministries that their membership is not able to fund. The churches that are leasing their property to oil and gas companies are doing the same thing. Should they be able to use their resources to further God’s church?

These are not easy quarrels. May we use this Lenten season to consider together new possibilities that will allow churches to tend and serve God’s creation and to grow God’s church.

Dear Lord, we are quarreling over how to tend and serve your creation and your church. Help us in this Lenten season to listen to each other. Give us the gift of seeing all of the possibilities and the gift of wisdom to make good decisions. In the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen



Sue Smith is the Treasurer of Presbyterians for Earth Care. She is a member of the First Presbyterian Church of Rumson (NJ). Sue is a GreenFaith Fellow and a

[1] Laurence Hull Stookey, *Calendar: Christ’s Time for the Church*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 80.

Second Sunday in Lent

This Lenten season, we focus on a call to advocate for God's planet and God's people. As followers of Christ, when we see injustices, we are called to make them right. In today's world of ever-mounting injustices and inequity, it is more important than ever to have faithful voices working to make change. In the words of the prophet Isaiah, *"Shout out, do not hold back! Lift up your voice like a trumpet!"* People of faith have been lifting up their voices on behalf of clean water and the preservation of native culture in Alaska.

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Isaiah 58:6

Bristol Bay, Alaska embodies the magnificent beauty and intricacy of God's creation. This rugged area is also incredibly delicate, but has managed to support and sustain the well-being of God's people for generations. A proposed open-pit mine at the headwaters of the Bay threatens this balance and the livelihood of many that rely on it. Bristol Bay has supported Alaskan native subsistence fishermen with salmon, commercial fishermen with a vibrant industry, and thousands of individuals with a healthy and diverse home. The mine would destroy streams, spawning areas for salmon, and contaminate this pristine watershed.

It is very difficult to deny the importance of clean water in our lives, as well as its importance to the health of the planet, fish, and wildlife. When a threat to this resource arises, stewards of God's creation must spring into action.

The Environmental Protection Agency released their Watershed Assessment of the Bay on the heels of a letter sent from faith leaders to the Administrator asking for the assessment to be completed. This scientific assessment of Bristol Bay asserted that the mine would be harmful to the salmon runs and that "salmon decline would lead to decline in Alaska Native culture, and spiritual life." We have recently received wonderful news that the EPA has decided to implement the Clean Water Act to stop the mine from going in. There is still a process to go through, but we are very joyful about getting justice for Native Alaskans.

God's gift of clean water should not be taken for granted, and we are called to be advocates for this resource and those that depend on it. Read more about the spiritual importance of water with Creation Justice

Tricia Bruckbauer is an Eco-Justice Fellow at Creation Justice Ministries (CJM), formerly the National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Program. CJM represents 37 Christian denominations and their policies relating to Creation care. To learn more visit www.creationjustice.org. Tricia also coordinates the efforts of Presbyterians for Earth Care.



Third Sunday in Lent

Turning Around the Pointing Finger

Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am. If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil (Isaiah 58:9)

We need to be calling out to the Lord to help us defend Creation from the multiple assaults that are occurring daily. You have undoubtedly heard of GMO foods, but do you know about genetically engineered (GE) trees? Like GMO foods, GE trees have been genetically modified to possess certain desirable traits, such as making them more economical to grow. For example, ArborGen is seeking fast track approval from the USDA to sell their cold-tolerant GE eucalyptus seedlings for vast plantations in the Southeast to be used as fuel. Eucalyptus has many drawbacks including that it is flammable and could result in devastating wildfires, it is water depleting and diminishes supplies for communities, forests and other ecosystems, and it is highly invasive.

Unlike GMO foods, GE trees are not annuals like corn and soybeans. They continue to grow for decades, spreading their seeds and pollen vast distances and increasing the chance of contamination from plantation to forest. GE eucalyptus is only the beginning and if it is approved, GE poplar and GE pine won't be far behind. What if native trees become contaminated with GE pine pollen to produce hybrid trees, for example, and our forests now contain copyrighted genes that ArborGen claims are theirs? Will ArborGen own trees in our national forests, like Monsanto has claimed that their GMO corn is in fields where it was never planted?

When we call out, the Lord will answer and say here I am, assuring us in this time of trouble. In a situation like this, Isaiah tells us to examine our own conscience and not point our finger directly at ArborGen or speak evil of GE trees. How does our desire for abundant and affordable energy drive this frantic search for quick sources of fuel? Are we guilty of holding back our voices about various abuses to God's creation?



Creator God, we call out to you and ask for your help in protecting the wondrous world you have given us to call home. You answer us and say, "Here I am." May your presence give us the strength and courage to lift up our voices like a trumpet and speak out about the injustices to your creation that we witness each day.

Jane Laping is the Vice Moderator of Presbyterians for Earth Care, is on the steering committee of Western North Carolina Green Congregations, and heads up the Creation Care Team at First Presbyterian Church in Asheville.

Fourth Sunday in Lent

Isaiah 58:6 *Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free and to break every yoke?*

On November 8, 2013 Super Typhoon Haiyan struck the Philippines with 200 mile per hour winds and a storm surge that reached 19 feet. The destruction was immense and over 6,000 people lost their lives, 1.9 million people were rendered homeless and 6 million people were displaced. This was a major tragedy, with it's greatest impact on the poor.

As I surveyed the destruction in Tacloban during the weeks after the typhoon, I reflected on the inequity of being materially poor. The vast majority of those remaining in Tacloban were the poor. Besides the physical and emotional injuries from the typhoon, the diseases of poverty were readily apparent in the survivors due to poor access to health care, poor nutrition and toxin exposure. These are conditions which we have imposed on our brothers and sisters, either through commission or neglect. I could understand (but not condone) that. What seemed exceedingly unfair to me was that the poor were treated badly, even by nature. We can break the bonds of injustice of man through prayer, advocacy and example, but how do we change the inequity of nature?

I could see that even here, the fault does lie with humankind. We cannot change the force of the wind or reduce the storm surge of a storm of a 200 mph typhoon. However we can build up the resilience of the people to better withstand the forces of nature. We can improve the health of the poor to allow them to better survive and recover from disaster. We can improve the living standards so the people can have more substantial homes. We can reduce income inequality so the poor don't have to live in the most vulnerable margins of the land. We can reduce the CO2 production to reduce the odds of developing of even bigger and more devastating storms.

More storms will come, more earthquakes will occur and more droughts will afflict the land. It is never a question of whether another disaster will occur, but when and where it will occur. The poor will always be with us. However, we are called to care for them as our neighbors and family and to alleviate their suffering and to care for the land which sustains them. We should make this care a priority in our lives. We should do what we can to build them up and to petition our leaders to care for those who Jesus called 'the least of these'.

Lord, help me to push past the constraints of my fears to confront those forces that oppress God's people; to lift up those who have little, to comfort those who suffer and help heal all of God's creation.

Rick Randolph is a family physician in Lenexa Kansas who has worked extensively in the developing world. He has provided primary care, public health and disaster response in the US, the Caribbean, sub-Saharan Africa and the Philippines. Rick is a member of Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church in Heartland Presbytery.

Fifth Sunday in Lent

“If you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness …” Isaiah 58:10

I suspect most of us have come face to face with hunger. Perhaps you’ve volunteered at a soup kitchen or seen someone standing at an intersection asking for a handout. Maybe you have been in the checkout line at the grocery while someone purchased their next meal with food stamps. Yes, we’ve seen hunger and addressed it. We’ve supported food drives conducted by the church and sent checks to charities whose mission is hunger relief.

But Isaiah asks more of us when he tells us that in addition to offering food to the hungry we are to “satisfy the needs of the afflicted.” That’s a huge undertaking.

Seldom does a day pass when I don’t receive a letter asking me to help the afflicted; the hungry, the sick, those suffering because of some natural disaster, the orphaned. The list of those in need, like the letters written on their behalf, is endless and overwhelming. It encourages paralysis or indifference. How do I choose a worthy cause? What difference could my offering possibly make?

Many of the reflections you have been reading have focused our attention on saints. That’s a bit of a stretch when we think about ourselves, isn’t it? Me, a saint! Who are you kidding?

Yet scripture is filled with references to saints who are rather ordinary men and women who do what they can to bring us closer to the Kingdom of God. I think about the boy with the five loaves and two fish. He was just an ordinary kid who gave his lunch away and who, in doing so, became an instrument of God’s goodness. God says all of us are quite capable of doing something equally significant. Take the next step and see where it leads you. Several dozen members of the church I serve will be participating in the SNAP Challenge, living for a week on the same amount of grocery expenditures (\$4.47 per day) as do our sisters and brothers who are dependent on government assistance. Are these folks saints? I would suggest their commitment to experiencing the challenges of poverty so as to better understand those in need is a step in the direction of sainthood. Theirs is an “atonement” … a “being with” moment that is like unto Christ.

Gracious God, you made me in your image. Help me live up to that reality. Give me opportunities to feed the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted so that your light - not mine - shall rise in the darkness.

Jay McKell is a husband, father, and grandfather. He gardens in the spring, prays for rain in August, celebrates October and plays in winter’s snow. His current ministry focuses on pastoral care with some attention paid to social justice issues.

Palm Sunday

Isaiah 58:8: Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.

I have always loved the dawn. Growing up within a few minutes of the ocean in New Jersey was like having a constant and open invitation from God to experience the glory of the first bright light streaming across the horizon. I went often to enjoy the sunrise, regardless of time of year. I loved sitting in the quiet morning, watching the darkness transition to light, watching the myriad colors move across the sky, and finally, suddenly, watching the bright orange sun peek over the edge of the ocean.

This scripture makes me think of Matthew 5:14: "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid." God created light, and created it beautiful. God also created humans, to be a light and shine as brightly and beautifully as the first streams of dawn at the beach. I know humans are a part of creation, formed reflecting God's image, but I really enjoy when we are compared to other glorious aspects of creation. It really drives the point home for me that we are connected to earth and should be caring for it. It's a good reminder to let my light, which is a reflection of God's own light, shine forth, with God behind me in all I do.

Will you pray with me?

Loving God, help us to remember to shine Your light in this world, as new and beautiful as the first light of every morning. Amen.



Colleen Earp is currently serving as a Young Adult Volunteer in South Louisiana, focusing on wetlands conservation and advocacy. Her bias towards sunrises over sunsets comes from growing up on the east coast in New Jersey.

Maundy Thursday/Good Friday

"if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday." Isaiah 58: 10

We in South Louisiana will come to the table this Maundy Thursday and to Good Friday's deadline. We will come as people on the edge of Exile. We will come as people who dwell in the dark shadows of a quickening disastrous future. We will come as residents of a sacrificial zone. We will come as a people who see God's good life giving earth disappearing under our feet. We will come as people who see a cornucopia of good things to share and eat endangered. We will come as people who know every day the consequences of sin. We will come with a growing sense of urgency and foreboding. We will come as the fishers for a nation. We will come afraid to eat the bounty of our place. We will come as a people desperate for hope. We will come as poets and prophets, as fishers, dwellers-in-place, and providers of food. We will come because in the last analysis we have no other place to go. We will come to the table. We will come to face Good Friday. We will come full of fear and seeking hope. We come in darkness and gloom. We will come praying for light and noonday. WE WILL COME TO THE TABLE WHERE THE BREAD OF LIFE IS SHARED.

I See the
Hammer
Strike the crucifying Nails
And I see the Ghost tree
remains of the once mighty
Cypress.
I see water
where Communities once thrived.
And the Ringing of the Nails
fills the Earth.

I See the
Hammer
Strike the crucifying Nails
and I see the City
a Flood.
Death floating.
And the Ringing of the Nails
fills the Earth.

I See the
Hammer
Strike the crucifying Nails
and I See the Brown Sludge
Cover the Earth
Stopping the Reflection
Of God's Smile.
And the Ringing of the Nails
Covers the Sea.

I See the
Hammer
Strike the crucifying Nails
I See
the Black Death
Covering the Birthplace,
the Nursery place,
the Resting place,
Of God's Creatures
And the Places of God's People.
And the Ringing of the Nails
fills the Earth.
The Hammer Stops.
The Nails are Driven.
The Ringing Ends in
Silence.
Dead Silence.
And the Silence is Louder
Than All the Other Sounds.
It is the Sound of the Death of God.
ONLY THE SILENCE OF
RESURRECTION IS LOUDER.

From "Nails" by Richard Krajewski

Richard Krajewski has been a Presbyterian pastor for almost 50 years and an environmental advocate even longer. Dick now spends his time working to develop the Wetlands Theological Education Project of the South Louisiana Presbytery and serving the people of south Louisiana with his wife the Rev. Dr. Kristina Peterson and the people of the First Presbyterian Church of Bayou Blue. Rev. Dr. Kristina Peterson currently facilitates The Lowlander Center, a nonprofit organization that helps create solutions through education, research, and advocacy, beginning at the community level, for Lowland people and places in the bayous of Louisiana. She received the PEC William Gibson Environmental Award in 2010.

Easter Sunday

Isaiah 58:1-12 – What a beautiful and inspiring passage – one that seems eerily written for us in our time and place. I was asked to reflect specifically on verse 11, and the six lines contain beautiful imagery of guidance, fulfillment, strength, life, energy, and eternity. All that we yearn for. Sign me up!

But wait, this is the promise at the end of the If/Then clauses of previous verses... To reach the vision, I, as an individual, and we, as a community, must intentionally remove the yoke from among us, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil and we are to offer food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted.

When I read these words, I think of Yolanda who lives in LaOroyo, Peru and came down to Lima to meet with us about her children. She told us there was a U.S. smelter in the town that was poisoning the air, the water, the people and the animals. Indeed the town is one of the ugliest towns I have ever visited. It could be the set for a sci-fi movie as the mountains look dead, the river leaves odd colors on its banks, and ash drifted down from the sky. God's creation was being destroyed. The facts compelled Presbyterians from St. Louis, Columbus, and Washington, D.C. to connect the community to those in the U.S. who could do impartial health and environmental studies, journalists, and even testify before Peruvian Congress about the documented behavior of this company in Missouri. Presbyterians hosted inter-faith prayer vigils and brought Peruvians to our own government officials. It became an outpouring of support that has spanned over twelve years.

And, yes, the company was closed down until it agreed to add scrubbers and other infrastructure it had promised to do years earlier. And, yes, now the company is suing the Peruvian state for lost profits under a free trade agreement that values a company's right to risk-free investment more than its responsibilities to a nation's children and the land they live on, the waters they drink, and the air they breathe.

I think of Yolanda because it wasn't until months later when I asked about her children that I realized that she was single and had no children. Her children were all 11,000 kids who lived in La Oroya.

Creator God,

May we love and care for all of earth as we do our own backyards and may we love and care for all children as we do our own. Then, you, oh God, will guide us continually, satisfy our needs in parched places, make our bones strong and we shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water whose waters never fail. In the name of our Creator's son, Amen.



Ruth Farrell has the joy and privilege of coordinating the Presbyterian Hunger Program. Prior to that she and her husband Hunter served as mission co-workers in economic and community development in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Peru.