

# 2016 Lenten Devotional

## Presbyterians for Earth Care

### Is Not This the Fast I Choose: Listening to a Diversity of Voices



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At the Presbyterians for Earth Care conference in September 2015, The Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson, Director of the Office of Public Witness, preached, "Presbyterians cannot solve the world's environmental issues alone. It will take a unified effort from the privileged, those living in poverty, people of different races and cultures." To that end, we invited a diversity of voices to provide devotions for this year's Lenten Devotional. We will hear from PC(USA) mission co-workers around the world, as well as voices here in the US, connecting environmental degradation/climate change to issues of social justice in their place.

Our inspiration comes from Isaiah 58: 6-9:

*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? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?*

*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. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am. (NRSV)*

We hope that you find these reflections helpful and hopeful in this Lenten time of journey to the cross.

*Sue Smith, Editor*

# Ash Wednesday

by Sue Smith

*Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice...(Isaiah 58:6-9)*

*Is not this the fast that I choose...to break every yoke?  
(Isaiah 58:6, NRSV)*

As we enter this season of Lent and our journey to the cross, a time of considering how we can make changes in our lives, those of us in the mainstream of the environmental movement might try to understand the efforts of the environmental justice movement, and how we can work together to promote that work. To help my understanding, I reached out to one of the leaders in the environmental justice (EJ) movement, Dr. Nicky Sheats. We talked about carbon trading, and how the mainstream environmental groups and the EJ movement look at the issue differently.

Let's take this opportunity to do some planning so that we make sure there are emissions reductions in communities overburdened with pollution.

What is carbon trading? Usually it is reducing overall carbon dioxide emissions by some defined amount coupled with the trading of emissions. Then it is called "cap and trade." All polluters must obtain an "allowance" before they can emit a certain amount of carbon dioxide. Overall reductions are achieved by setting the amount of available allowances, and therefore carbon dioxide emissions, at a lower level than previous emissions. Overall emissions may drop, but individual corporations can avoid or limit reductions by buying allowances. Mainstream response? Great, reduces greenhouse gas

emissions, positive impact on global warming and climate change. EJ response? If you emit carbon dioxide, you also emit other air pollutants that make people sick. So it matters to communities where these reductions occur. But it doesn't matter to the trading program.

EJ ask: Make sure that polluting facilities in EJ communities are required to decrease emissions. Mainstream response: we need the carbon trading deal, let's not complicate matters.

When discussions on carbon trading began, was the EJ movement consulted? No. As far as Dr. Sheats knows, no one reached out to the EJ movement. Did the EJ movement pitch a fit? Yes. Their perspective? Let's take this opportunity to do some planning so that we make sure there are emissions reductions in communities overburdened with pollution.



*The journey to the cross goes through  
Environmental Justice communities.*

## Ash Wednesday continued

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Let us remember that everyone's context is different. The EJ community wants to ensure emission reductions occur in neighborhoods most affected by pollution. The mainstream environmental movement wants an overall reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. These are very different goals. But they are not necessarily conflicting goals.

Have things changed over the years? Yes. Now that carbon trading is EPA policy, the mainstream seems more willing to listen to the needs of the EJ movement. As Christians, is this good enough? I don't think so.

God asks us to break every yoke. One of the yokes is that suffered by EJ communities. As we enter this season of Lent, and reflect on how we might change our lives and break yokes, let us consider how we can make sure that that we not only hear all voices in the environmental movement, but that we take every opportunity to ensure that the concerns of all voices are included in planning solutions.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, make our hearts open to the possibilities of the needs of all peoples in the care for your creation. Amen.*

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Sue Smith is the former Treasurer of Presbyterians for Earth Care, a recent M.Div. graduate of New Brunswick Theological Seminary, and a member of the First Presbyterian Church of Rumson, NJ.



*I want to thank Dr. Nicky Sheats for participating in this conversation. He is the director of the Center for the Urban Environment at the John S. Watson Institute for Public Policy of Thomas Edison State College, Trenton, NJ, which provides support for the environmental justice community both locally and nationally.*

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# First Sunday

by Jed Koball

*Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice...(Isaiah 58:6-9)*

*Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'" Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time. (Luke 4:1-13, NRSV)*



*Domesticated alpaca roam the mountaintops outside of Huancayo in the central Andes where mining and climate change are dramatically impacting the environment.*



## First Sunday continued

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Jesus had yet to preach a single word, perform a single miracle or even speak a single truth to power, and yet the devil calls him the "Son of God" - a tempting title reserved for Caesars, Kings and Emperors.

Former Peru President Garcia once screamed that no advancement will ever come as long as the "dogs of the orchard" block human progress. The "dogs" he spoke of were the indigenous peoples of the jungle who were protecting the lands from the invasion of the extractive industry whose billion dollar profits are the backbone of Peruvian progress today.

...seeking power to make positive change, generating profits to share with the less fortunate; it is an oh so tempting image – perhaps even of the devil himself.

He wanted to settle a debate about how to use those profits: some on the right argue for more investment in business, some on the left argue for more investment in health and education. But for those from the "orchard" - the "dogs" - they bark and growl, wondering what difference any

investment will make if it all hinges on the destruction of land, displacement of peoples, contamination of waters, imbalance and discord in Creation.

It is hard to imagine that there is greater distance between us than that between left and right. But in the end, we live between two worlds, not just two points on a line.

One world seeks harmony, a peaceable kingdom. The other seeks something better, a great city upon a hill.

One uses nature to move the human family forward. The other embraces nature as sister and brother.

One is fully human, delicate and vulnerable, trusting and innocent; it is knowledgeable and wise and so often misunderstood. So often dehumanized.

And the other? It is less than divine, seeking power to make positive change, generating profits to share with the less fortunate; it is an oh so tempting image – perhaps even of the devil himself.

You and I may never be emperors, but like Jesus we still have a choice to make: accept our humanity or hide from it. What world will you choose? What will be *your* kingdom come?

*Prayer: God of all Creation, may Your knowledge fill the earth as the waters cover the sea, and may we learn to neither hurt or destroy on all Your holy mountain. Amen.*



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Rev. Jed Koball is a PC(USA) mission co-worker who serves as the *Presbyterian Hunger Program's* Facilitator for Joining Hands in Peru. He serves with his wife, Jenny Koball, who is the site coordinator of the *Young Adult Volunteer Program* in Peru.

# Second Sunday

by Sarah Henken

*Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice...(Isaiah 58:6-9)*

*Is not this the fast that I choose? (Isaiah 58:6, NRSV)*

I lost a little weight in December. No, I wasn't planning to jump start any New Year's resolutions. I'd unexpectedly found myself joining the subsistence farmer's diet for a few weeks, as adapted for a vegetarian visitor. I ate soup of yuca and plantain, grown yards away from where we ate, gratefully harvested from land cultivated for a dozen years by my friends, the *campesinos* of El Tamarindo.



*Campesinos consult with their lawyers while riot police walk past in El Tamarindo.*

The communion of those midday meals gave us sustenance in the midst of spirit-draining tragedy. While crops and homes were being sinfully destroyed by machetes and bulldozers, I took a break from my prayers and advocacy efforts to sit at table and find refreshment with these friends. For a long series of days, the police, lawyers, and hired hands worked irrepressibly to complete the eviction of the *campesino* farmers, while the community kept vigil, stood guard, and did

everything possible to preserve the dignity and rights of its members.

A decade ago the *campesinos* sought title to the land but, before they could acquire it, an owner appeared: a corporation with commercial interests instead of plans to produce food for local neighbors or for the millions living in nearby Barranquilla. Since Colombia's free trade agreements came into effect, the land became much too valuable to be left in the hands of *campesinos*. After five years of community resistance, the company finally succeeded in ousting the farmers in December 2015.

The eviction of the *campesinos* from El Tamarindo was a defeat, but it's not the end of the story. Some of the *campesinos* have relocated to a different farm, while others have found shelter in the city; all await the verdict of the constitutional Court, which has agreed to consider their appeal. In the meantime, the Presbyterian Church of Colombia continues to stand in Christian solidarity with them, working and praying for God's justice.

Prayer: *Merciful God, forgive our complicity in a system that destroys life and livelihoods in the quest for "progress." Give us eyes to see and ears to hear your people bound by injustice. Give us hearts of flesh that stir us to act in true solidarity with them, that together we may see your light and experience your healing love. Amen.*



Sarah Henken lives in Barranquilla, Colombia, and serves with Presbyterian World Mission as Regional Liaison for the Andean countries of South America and as site coordinator for the Young Adult Volunteers (YAVs) in Colombia. She blogs sporadically at [andeanjourney.wordpress.com](http://andeanjourney.wordpress.com).

Presbyterians for Earth Care

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# Third Sunday

by Dave Winters

*Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice...(Isaiah 58:6-9)*

*Hear the word of the Lord, O people of Israel; for the Lord has an indictment against the inhabitants of the land.*

*There is no faithfulness or loyalty, and no knowledge of God in the land.*

*Swearing, lying, and murder, and stealing and adultery break out; bloodshed follows bloodshed.*

*Therefore the land mourns, and all who live in it languish; together with the wild animals and the birds of the air, even the fish of the sea are perishing. (Hosea 4:1-3, NRSV)*

Concern for the earth is nothing new.

Walter Brueggemann, writing in the January 2016 issue of *Sojourners* says, "The issue of climate change is a recent one, but the matter of revivifying the creation is a very old one in faith." He goes back to the eighth century B.C.E. prophets Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah. With rich imaginations and strong vision these prophets proclaimed a powerful word that rings even more true today.

Over and over again the prophets called Israel to recognize that choices have consequences. They saw that God expected "steadfast love" and "justice" and "knowledge of God." The absence of those always led to a "therefore."

Hosea says it clearly: "...the Lord has an indictment against the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or loyalty, and no knowledge of God in the land... Therefore the land mourns and all who live in it languish; together with the wild animals and the birds of the air, even the fish of the sea are perishing."

Indeed, there are consequences, and the land

mourns, as do all creatures who live on it. For lack of justice and knowledge of God and steadfast love, our land mourns. So, too, does the land of Guatemala. It is filthy. It is abused. It is polluted by long unregulated chemical use and newer poisonous mining practices. It is another sad example of so many third-world countries where both native elites and outside extractors fail to acknowledge that God's creation is made for all.

Some in Guatemala are awakening. Professor and poet, practicing Catholic, and Mayan spiritual guide Daniel Caño says "we need to ask Mother Earth's forgiveness for abusing her." He urges a return to the old Mayan understanding of the oneness of all of creation and of our reliance upon her provision. Some are protesting, at great personal risk, the mining practices that are sickening their children and ruining their villages. Others protest the deforestation occurring throughout the country.

Ponder Hosea's phrase: "Therefore the land mourns, and all who live in it languish...." In the U.S., in Guatemala, throughout the world, creation cries out for steadfast love and justice for all. Choices do have consequences.

## Third Sunday continued

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Prayer: *Oh God of all creation, we confess that we have not assured steadfast love and justice for all and our lands languish. As we are dragged mercilessly through this political season, may our choices be guided by your ancient prophets so that blessing may come for all of creation. In Jesus' name. Amen!*

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Dave Winters, along with his wife, Rachel Lausch, was a Mission Co-Worker in Guatemala and helps facilitate the more than 20-year partnership between Heartland and Maya Quiché Presbyteries.





# Fourth Sunday

by Dan Turk

*Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice...(Isaiah 58:6-9)*

*All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. (2 Cor 5:18-19, ESV)*



“Looking down on Madagascar, I have watched what little forest there was shrink to several tiny reserves.” —  
Astronaut John Grunsfeld, 5 x in space, August 2010

Christ calls us to a ministry of reconciliation that includes the ministry of reconciling people and creation. Madagascar is in great need of this reconciliation. It is home to over 100 species of lemurs, 30 species of tenrecs, 200 species of palms, and myriads of other plants and animals, most of which are found naturally only on Madagascar. Madagascar is also home to about 24 million people with the population doubling about every 25 years.

Madagascar is heading down a path toward environmental catastrophe with extensive human misery and mass extinctions. Over 80% of the people live in extreme poverty. Almost 50% of children are stunted from chronic malnutrition, one of the highest rates in the world. Deforestation is proceeding at a rapid pace, mainly due to slash-and-burn agriculture, fires, and cutting trees for forest products. Astronaut John Grunsfeld, who went to space five times, remarked in 2010, “Looking down on Madagascar, I have watched what little forest there was shrink to several tiny reserves.”

## Fourth Sunday continued

Taking its motivation from Genesis 2:15, “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it,” the Fiangonan’i Jesoa Kristy eto Madagasikara (FJKM), PC(USA)’s partner church in Madagascar, recognizes the responsibility humans have for preserving God’s creation. The FJKM is working to reconcile the great needs of the people for food security and the need to protect Madagascar’s biodiversity. PC(USA) is partnering with the FJKM in many of its efforts. The FJKM is teaching new pastors gardening and fruit growing skills. With help from PC(USA), native trees have been planted at churches and schools to promote environmental awareness. The FJKM also contributes to watchdog efforts to protect the country’s natural resources from unscrupulous exploitation. By working in partnership, PC(USA) is helping the FJKM have an even greater impact.



*FJKM youth planting a native tree on the grounds of the FJKM Ivato Seminary.*

*Prayer: O God, thank you for the FJKM’s commitment to preserve your creation. We pray for the FJKM’s efforts and other efforts to protect Madagascar’s endangered plants and animals. Please help the church and other organizations find ways for the people of Madagascar to get out of poverty and live more in harmony with your creation. Please help us to do what we can. Amen.*



Dan Turk is a PC(USA) mission co-worker serving in Madagascar since 1997. His work involves planting native trees and shrubs at churches and schools, as well as helping seminary students grow fruits and vegetables. Pictured here with a ‘Valencia Pride’ mango tree, one of many varieties PC(USA) helped bring to Madagascar. Dan and his wife received the Presbyterians for Earth Care William Gibson Lifetime Achievement Award in 2006.



# Fifth Sunday

## by Sook and Don Choi

*Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice...(Isaiah 58:6-9)*

*Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves. (Psalm 126:6, NRSV)*

“Why do you still want to study us? We have no more culture here,” responded the Manobos to Fr. Albert Alejo, S.J., an anthropologist wanting to study them. They lived in Mount Apo area in Mindanao, the southernmost part of the Philippines, where a 250 megawatt geothermal power plant was planned. Much conflict left the Manobos “apathetic and without a will to survive.” Without their ancestral land, they felt “inferior, embarrassed as hunters at not being able to catch their prey in the disturbed forest, awkward at having to borrow old gongs in order to dance, pain of being fired from jobs for lack of adequate skills, shame at being scolded by nurses in municipal clinics and in being accused of having sold their souls to the ‘development aggressor.’”

Similar struggles happen in Indonesia and elsewhere, too. Some argue that modernization and globalization are the way for everybody to prosper. Others want to preserve their way of life, together with a basic livelihood. Accommodating all has proven elusive, resulting in winners and losers.

Christ proclaimed God’s realm, with no losers – how strange! As strange as today’s passage. All those who go out shall come home! None will be missing! That they weep as they go out shows life is rife with risk and danger. That they shout with joy as they come home tells us that most grounding assurance: peace. That they go out with seeds and return carrying sheaves shows mankind finally in harmony with nature.

How is this possible? By the cross of Christ. It means different things to winners and losers. For all it is the way to God’s realm.

Indeed, the Manobos eventually “organized themselves to credibly prove their rights to” and reclaim their ancestral domain through recalling and celebrating their tribe’s spirit, reviving their cultural traditions and acting determinedly as one people.

Prayer: *God of life, your ways are perfect and life-giving to all, while our ways are imperfect and generate winners and losers. Help me see the other as you see me. Help us see your ways as real options for us – that our times of fasting may turn into celebrations of life together. Amen.*

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Sook and Don Choi have served as Mission Co-Workers in Indonesia since 2014. They are serving at the invitation of the Duta Wacana Christian University in the city of Yogyakarta, in partnership with the Communion of Churches of Indonesia (PGI). Sook teaches Art and English. As an adviser to the president, Don helps build international networks to strengthen the school’s growing graduate program.



# Palm Sunday

by Vickie Machado

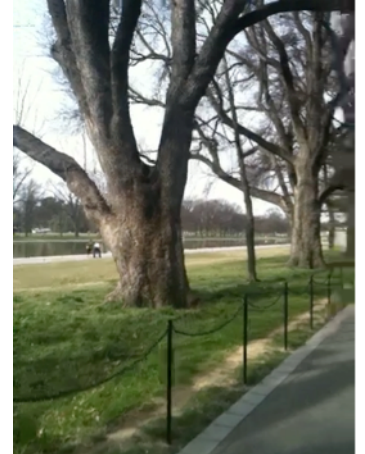
*Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice...(Isaiah 58:6-9)*

*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, NRSV)*

I love [biking around town](#). It's an easy, sustainable form of transportation. However, choosing to bike to work or school is a lot easier than having no other transportation options. When stormy weather moves in or if heavy loads appear, I reluctantly (yet thankfully) start up my car. Often times we forget that choice is a powerful gift. Choices provide a sense of control, autonomy, and privilege. We all have decisions in life, some more optimal than others. When situations are dire, our choices seem to dwindle. They become harder to make as the question becomes: feed the children or put gas in the car to go to work in an effort to create a sustainable source of income? It is choices like these that are difficult to make. A lack of options takes away decision-making abilities and reduces a person to a follower, a child, unable to decide their path in life.

As people of faith, we have the choice everyday to follow God. We choose how we live our lives. A

positive choice to follow our Creator does not always mean an easy choice. We decide the fast we take. To choose to *loosen the bonds of injustice* is a choice for justice. To choose to *undo the thongs of the yoke* is a choice for freedom. Injustice and oppression are a lack of opportunity. If we have the choice to fast, to follow Christ, and to undo the hurt in our world, then we are making the decision to expand that choice to others. A fast is much easier to make when you choose it. God is not demanding we stand for justice, listen to the voiceless or help our down-trodden brothers and sisters, out of spite but rather, is asking us to choose, with love in our hearts, to stand against oppression. Choosing justice is a decision to stand in solidarity with the poor, care for the earth, and promote sustainable, healthy futures for everyone. Choosing justice is choosing to stand for God, God's people, and all of Creation.



*Choosing Justice and Freedom*  
Click photo to start video

*Prayer: God, thank you for this day. Thank you for the choices you place in my life. Please help my actions to further your kingdom by breaking the bonds of injustice and providing healthy, sustainable choices to others and your creation.*

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Vickie Machado lives in Florida and is part of the Leadership Team for the EcoStewards program, a grassroots community that shapes young adult leaders (ages 20-30) through place-based experiences that connect faith and the environment. For more information see:  
<https://ecostewardsprogram.wordpress.com>





# Maundy Thursday

## Interview with Tiffany Immingan

*Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice...(Isaiah 58:6-9)*

*Oh, Lord, I am your servant; I am your servant, the child of your serving girl.  
You have loosed my bonds  
I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice and call on the name of the Lord.  
I will pay my vows to the Lord...in the courts of the house of the Lord...  
Praise the Lord! (Psalm 116: 16-17, 18a, 19, NRSV)*



*Tiffany connecting with the Gulf of Alaska.*

Let us connect.

Tiffany Immingan is an energetic young woman from Savoonga, Alaska. Savoonga is on the St. Lawrence Island in the Gulf of Alaska, south of the Arctic Ocean. As she notes proudly on her shirt, she is Siberian Yupik, an indigenous, (Eskimo) native. Yupik means "true people." Very important in their culture are whales and walrus, connecting them to Creation in a very intimate way.

She is a member of the Alaska Community Action on Toxins, and as such, is an advocate for the health of her wider community and for our beautiful Earth. She represented Yukon

Presbytery, coming to the 222 General Assembly in Detroit with Executive Presbyter, Rev. Dr. Curtis Karns, to serve as an overture advocate for the Precautionary Principle Overture. There she relayed the message that due to climate change and ocean warming, their village has suffered, in ways such as not being able to locate walrus, very important to their lifestyle. She came 4000 miles to help support Presbyterians, on behalf of Creation, as a plea for us all to care for our planet and each other.

I am grateful for Tiffany, for Curt, and for all who advocate in a sense of 'thanksgiving sacrifice'. Thanks be to God....

## Maundy Thursday continued

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Let us reflect.

On this night, our Lord Jesus gathered around table, preparing to sacrifice himself for us all, indeed all of Creation, so that we might be healed and whole.

Yet we as children of our Creator, turn away. We forsake Christ. We forsake Creation. We do not hold each other up...nor hold each other accountable.

We may not travel 4 miles, not to mention 4000 miles, to advocate for healing and restoration.

We ask for forgiveness, for strength, for guidance.



*Tiffany sharing time with a whale carcass.*

Let us pray.

*Lord,*

*Tonight we pray. We mourn. We hold vigil. We sit alongside our Lord in the Garden.*

*Help us Lord, to stay awake. Help us Lord, to know how to be sacrifice.*

*Grant us mercy. Grant us wisdom.*

*Grant us a depth of soul-seeking so that we may know you, hear you, and feel your presence in each other; in the walrus, in the whale, in the Ocean, in all of Creation.*

*In the name the One who came, comes, and will come again. Amen.*



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Tiffany Immingan was interviewed by Presbyterians for Earth Care moderator, Diane Waddell.

# Good Friday

## by Sung Yeon Choimorrow

*Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice...(Isaiah 58:6-9)*

*Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. The woman said to Peter, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing around it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself.*

*Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, "You are not also one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not." One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?" Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed. (John 18:15-18, 25-27, NRSV)*

Denial of Christ can come in so many ways in our contemporary age. For me the biggest form of denial of Christ is denying our fellow humans basic rights to a dignified life. If we remember back during Christ's ministry, Christ calls us to "love our neighbors as ourselves" (Mark 12:31). If we love ourselves by having basic needs met and even enjoying a few luxuries, how are we loving our neighbors when they are suffering disrespect, ill health and living in poverty?

Oftentimes we can get caught up in a just cause that's focused on an issue that we've been most impacted by or that we see impacts people dramatically. However, I want to encourage us to see the connections between issues to understand the true devastating impact of injustice on our neighbors, particularly those who have little to no means of living. More than half

of the world's population lives on less than \$2.50 a day. And these are the folks who are also most impacted by our environmental issues such as lack of water or constant flooding due to global climate change. These are the people who are most likely being trafficked into slavery and working under dangerous, even fatal working conditions.

When we think about our world and how vast the issues are, I encourage us to remember that we have friends in the social justice movement and that when we band together, we are stronger. At the end of the day, we are all working towards the same hope; that people can live in dignity in a sustainable earth. It is my prayer that we continue to work together across issues to lift up and fight for solutions that protect the more vulnerable.

## Good Friday continued

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*Prayer: Lord of grace and mercy, we are reminded of ways that we've denied you. Even as we work towards justice and hope, there are times we have failed to love our neighbors as ourselves. We pray for mercy and wisdom, that as we continue to journey with you towards justice and hope, that we may live our lives justly to treat all people with dignity and treat our earth with care. Amen.*

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Rev. Sung Yeon Choimorrow is the Director of Strategic Partnerships at Interfaith Worker Justice where she is committed to educating and organizing workers and the faith community across the United States for economic justice and safe and dignified working conditions for all workers. She is also a member of the Presbyterian Hunger Program's Advisory Committee. She lives in Chicago with her husband, Joseph and their daughter, Ella.

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# Easter Sunday

by J Herbert Nelson

*Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice...(Isaiah 58:6-9)*

*Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him. (Psalm 33:8, NRSV)*

The bible reminds us through the words of the Psalmist that we who inhabit the earth are to stand in awe of the Lord God. These words place a significant responsibility upon each one of us to be observant of God's creation, including people, plants, animals and every living creeping and crawling thing. (Genesis 1) This dominion over God's creation does not mean domination. We are given the authority to act on God's behalf as stewards or caretakers of the earth and all that dwells therein. This understanding makes domination of people, plant life, or animals a sin towards God. It is sinful, because we are led to believe that we are "gods" who control rather than acting on behalf of the one who gives us life, health and strength.

**Are we truly acting as  
stewards in our own  
communities on  
God's behalf?**

Dr. Benjamin Chavis, former Director of the United Church of Christ's Commission for Racial Justice and Executive Director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), coined the phrase "Environmental Racism" in 1982 while engaged in activist work in Warren County, North Carolina. He used it to describe the way the powerful profited from toxic waste dumping by intentionally



locating waste facilities in poor neighborhoods of color. The majority of those negatively affected by toxic waste sites in 1982 were African Americans.

In 2016, we witnessed a significant breach in our covenant with God when the headlines broke regarding the water crisis in Flint, Michigan. Children, adults, and people of various races (the majority African American) were adversely impacted by a deal made with the enemies of God's good graces who chose profits over people. As people in high places told documented lies regarding the cleanliness of the water in Flint, this community is still assessing the negative health toll. Flint represents one of the largest African American populations in the State of Michigan.

There are many faith questions that must be answered about this breach in care for the earth and its people. However, there is an accountability question that must be answered by those of us who claim to know the Lord, our God. Are we truly

## Easter Sunday continued

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acting as stewards in our own communities on God's behalf? Are we protecting our babies from toxic carbon emissions that prevent so many of them from attending school due to asthma and other respiratory problems? Are we relentless in our efforts to stop toxic waste dumping by private companies and government agencies that view such dumping as a means of revenue rather than a long-term health hazard? Are we building interracial coalitions to gain political traction to avoid the fallout we now see in Flint? Is your Church/Ministry engaged in preserving the planet and challenging climate change deniers with facts and the Gospel? It is our duty to be on God's side as stewards of the earth and its people, for "the earth and its fullness are the Lord's." (I Corinthians 10:26)

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*Prayer: Creator of life's beauty, majesty, and mystery, we thank you for the gift of life – ours and those of all your creation. Teach us what it means to be human and to treat one another with dignity and respect. Show us our role in the stewardship of Earth. Grant that we might embrace our role with both conviction and humility. Amen.*

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