

2019 Advent Devotional

Presbyterians for Earth Care

*²³ Sing, O heavens, for the Lord has done it;
shout, O depths of the earth;
break forth into singing, O mountains, O forest, and every tree in it!
For the Lord has redeemed Jacob, and will be glorified in Israel.
Isaiah 44:23*



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Introduction

I hate waiting. It seems like all we do these days is wait. Waiting in traffic. Waiting for people to call or text us back. Waiting in line at the grocery check-out. Waiting for our friends to get a clue and agree with us. And so we wait, in well-practiced squirmy, cranky and frustrated ways.

But is this the waiting of advent?

This advent we will be endeavoring to wait, not with a low-grade fever of irritation but with anticipation, like those who know their tickets to Disney have already been purchased, or the answers to their deepest need have been written and are about to be revealed. We will be waiting together in community, sharing strength with each other as we wait.



Tree roots growing over rock

Ecologist, Susanne Simard, is a professor of forest ecology and teaches at the University of British Columbia. She is a biologist and has tested theories about how trees communicate with other trees. She explained in her [TED Talk](#) that the trees communicate below ground via an infinite number of pathways sharing information, water, nutrients, carbon, nitrogen, minerals and warnings. The young trees are supported by more mature mother trees. Trees talk to each other. That talk makes it easier for other trees to survive, to thrive in community. But what happens when trees are damaged or even clear cut? Then those left behind are weakened, left without the full capacity of the community to heal and to thrive. But trees allowed to stand with even a small part of their community intact tend to thrive.

Just like the trees, we are meant to live in community, sharing information and resources for the good of the community. We are planted in community and called to share resources, called to share the wisdom and grace of Christ as we grow together. When one tree falls another arises to carry on the legacy, to learn the wisdom and to share in the connectedness of the community of grace.

So this advent we wait in community. We wait to soak up again the wisdom of the generations past, to tell again the stories of our faith in community. But we also wait with anticipation the renewal of those communities, the redemption of the land, the healing of scars and the emergence of the continuing work of our Savior in this time. Perhaps the wait will end with renewed commitments to wholeness, to preservation, to stewardship and to the sense of peace that comes from believing in a God who can, has and will transform us again and again.

It is worth the wait!

Barbara Chalfant, PEC Steering Committee

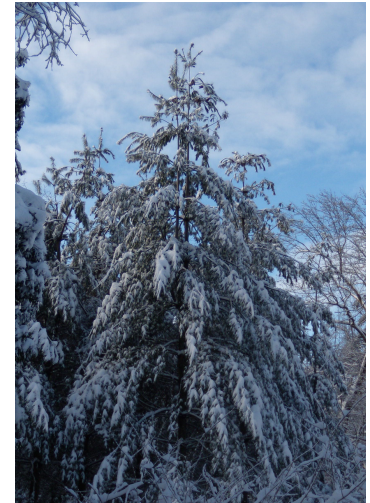
First Week of Advent

*Sing, O heavens, for the Lord has done it;
shout, O depths of the earth;
break forth into singing, O mountains, O forest, and every tree in it!
For the Lord has redeemed Jacob, and will be glorified in Israel. Isaiah 44:23*

Let's Bring Christmastime to Creation

My Advent journey always begins with a prayer for the Vision of 'What kind of Christmas I think I want to have'. That Vision focuses me in the framing of my approach to...preparing. As I reflect on my 2019 approach to the Manger, my focus is significantly seasoned by my experience this past summer as Music Worship Leader for the **Presbyterians for Earth Care** National Conference. Two days after the close of that Conference I was inspired to compose the song (*Let's Bring*) *Christmastime To Creation*.

As I reach to hear the Trees singing, they begin (even now) to sound like the Angels who serenaded the Shepherds...calling my attention into active participation as an instrument of God's Orchestrated Plan to Heal the Land. I share a portion of the verse and chorus of that song as my prayer for this Advent Season; that a gift I bring...to the newborn King...will be the gift of a renewed sense of personal responsibility for the health, welfare and vitality of our Planet Earth. Let us indeed...Bring Christmastime to Creation.



Snow on evergreens

*As we give the gift of presents and extol the manger birth
Let's repent of all the things that we have done to Mother Earth
We have pillaged, we have plundered, we have poisoned every plain
And we're having Christmas...We're Still having Christmas...*

*So as we celebrate let's participate in The Prayer 2 Heal The Land
As a mind can get true knowledge, then a heart can understand
That we're running out of time – so let's keep these things in mind
While we're having Christmas...just because it's Christmas...*

*Let's bring Christmastime to Creation
From a manger place to the sea and the sky above
We need to love The Earth from every nation
So that The Children will still have an Earth to love.*

Amen

Warren B. Cooper
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First Week of Advent, cont.

Prayer:

Creator God, we are reminded of your love as we look, see and hear the beauty in the creation you have given us. At the same time, we see the damage we have caused and repent of all that we have done. Give us Lord, a sense of renewed responsibility for the earth so that all nations, and especially children, will have an earth to love.



Warren B. Cooper is a Performance Artist, Producer and Music Minister who is dedicated to the creation of transformational art that is focused on redeeming humanity and healing the land. He is based in Philadelphia, PA where he serves as Executive Producer for **Music Media Ministry** (www.MusicMediaMinistry.com). His new release **CHRISTMASTIME 2 CREATION** is available on I-Tunes, Google Play, Spotify and all digital music platforms. Each download will result in a donation to resource efforts for protective environmental legislation.

Second Week of Advent

Read Isaiah 11:1-10

*A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.*

*² The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—
³ and he will delight in the fear of the Lord. Isaiah 11:1-3a*

The Stories of the Trees

There are many, many trees on the campus of Stony Point Center where I live as a member of the Community of Living Traditions, a multifaith community committed to the work of radical hospitality in the world and for all creation. Over the years I have learned the stories of several of the trees on the SPC grounds during community ‘tree walks.’ On these walks, we pause at a number of trees to share the stories and memories we have of the trees we encounter. We grieve by trees planted to mark the loss of good friends and children gone too soon. We note the beauty of those trees planted in grief, now firmly rooted like the memories of those they commemorate. We stop and celebrate by trees planted to mark the birth of babies; trees whose roots are nurtured by the placentas that sustained life in the womb. We offer gratitude at the base of some of the big, glorious maples on campus - gratitude for shade in spring and summer, for the blazing red-orange leaves of fall, for the sweet sap we collect in the cold of winter. The tree walks journey through all seasons of life and of creation. Together, we remember and are strengthened by the stories of Love’s presence in all seasons and of the new life that grows even from what we plant in our grief.



A tree at Stony Point Center in New York

Second Week of Advent, cont.

The trees we visit likely tell their own stories to one another. Through networks of support invisible to us, the larger trees send nutrients to smaller trees not yet prepared to weather the harsh winter winds. They signal one another when it is time to conserve energy and when it is time to put on the new green leaves of spring. They care for one another, carrying one another through the seasons.

The poem we read in Isaiah 11 is like the conversation between these trees and among the community that loves them. It is a message spoken on a tree walk, pausing at the stump of despair to let everyone know that new growth has been detected. All is not lost. In fact, a new inbreaking of justice for all creation is gaining strength to stand tall with deep, sturdy roots.

And it is growing even now. This Advent let us pause at the roots, trunks, and fruitful leaves of justice and peace we see growing all around us and supply them with all the nutrients needed for the seasons ahead.

Prayer:

Tree of Life, invite us under the canopy of your love in this Advent season. Gathered at your roots, may we remember the stories of your faithfulness in all seasons. Send us out to nurture the inbreaking of a new order in which the voices of the vulnerable are heard and all creation is restored. Amen.

Sarah Henkel is a Presbyterian pastor with roots in the Mennonite tradition. She is a resident of the Community of Living Traditions at Stony Point Center and currently serves as Parish Associate at White Plains Presbyterian Church (White Plains, NY). Sarah is a member of the Faith Working Group of the Alliance for Fair Food, a national network of people working in partnership with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers for farmworker justice, as well as a founding Support Team member for Proyecto Faro, a grassroots immigrant rights group growing in Rockland County. She is a birth doula and finds birth to be a powerful lens through which to expect and envision the new and just world always coming to life around us.

Sarah works in a variety of hospitality roles at Stony Point Center and enjoys developing art and graphics for use in the community.



Third Week of Advent

*Sing, O heavens, for the Lord has done it;
shout, O depths of the earth;
break forth into singing, O mountains, O forest, and every tree in it!
For the Lord has redeemed Jacob, and will be glorified in Israel. Isaiah 44:23*

Sing like the Trees



We think of language as a system of words and grammar to convey information but, fundamentally, it is a way to communicate with someone else. We exchange messages through body language, facial expressions, and actions. We communicate our identities through the clothing we wear and the way we spend our time. With all of these ways of “speaking,” should we be surprised to learn that nearly all living things do this in some form or another?

The trees in a forest are in constant communication with their neighbors, sending signals through the air and underground. Whether it’s releasing a warning message from a deer-browsed leaf or sending nutrients through complex root systems, trees benefit from the voices of those around them. A young plant limited by shade has the best chance of survival if it grows up near an older tree of the same species, which provides extra sugar through underground channels. The importance of community to a forest ecosystem is staggering, yet all too familiar.

During this Advent season, think of yourself as a tree in a vast forest and ask what your role would be. Are you a tall tree, bathed in light? If so, reflect on how to share the fruits of that blessing with those coming after you. If you are a young tree struggling to feel that warmth, what can you do to open yourself up to receive the gifts of others? Do you know how to ask? God wants us to use our voices to proclaim His glory, just as He commands the rest of the life He so lovingly created.

Third Week of Advent, cont.

Prayer:

Life-Giving God, may we learn how to praise you by following the examples of the plants that already nourish us in so many ways—plants that continue to perform the duties for which you created them, even as they face a rapidly changing world. May we be eager to share our blessings with others and be humble enough to receive your Word at all times. Amen.



Ryan Jiorle was born and raised in Phillipsburg, New Jersey. Through his schooling and career, he moved around various Southern states before returning home to northwest New Jersey. Along the way, Ryan has led Bible studies on the intersection of environmental stewardship and our call as Christians.

Fourth Week of Advent

The Lord loves seeing justice on the earth. Anywhere and everywhere you can find his faithful, unfailing love! Psalm 33:5 (The Passion Translation)

Mālama ‘Āina (Love Sustains Life)

Where I live, it's easy to be in love with nature. I often spend time on the mountains and in the ocean and think about how in love I am with Earth—how it looks, how it feels, how it sustains me and those I care about. But do I really love the earth?



Heart at Kaena Point Oahu, HI

Living in Hawai‘i, we learn the importance of mālama ‘āina, a traditional Hawaiian value meaning to care for the land so it can care for you. Like many native peoples, Native Hawaiians recognize the connection they have to their environment and live accordingly. Hawaiian spirituality experiences the divine in plants and animals, lava and ocean, in all of creation around us. In this sense, God is truly everywhere and in everything. By being in touch with nature, we are in touch with God.

I've always been fascinated by the lessons nature can teach us. Sunrises remind me that darkness does not last forever. Rainbows show me the beauty that can be reflected through the rain. Science has proven that trees support one another's growth by sharing resources when in need. Nature has wisdom to teach and valuable information to share with those paying attention. God is speaking through rising oceans, warming climates, burning forests, dying species, displaced people. How will we respond?

I'm amazed at how often 'love' is a valid solution to even the world's greatest problems. When we realize that we are a part of nature just as much as plants and animals, we understand that harmony with the earth includes harmony with one another. We were created with the ability to love because it is essential to sustaining life.

Fourth Week of Advent, cont.

Prayer:

God whose spirit is present in nature around us and whose essence is love, remind us of our connectedness to all living things and that our well-being rests in the condition of the environment we care for. Help us to birth love into the world for all of creation, now and long after the season of Advent and Christmas is over. Amen.



Kristen Young was born and raised on the island of O‘ahu, Hawai‘i where she currently works as the Youth Director at Central Union Church and the Social Media Coordinator for the Hawai‘i Conference United Church of Christ. She is a former PC(USA) Young Adult Volunteer and Eco-Stewards alumnus and has recently taken a stride in her “eco-faith journey” by joining the leadership team of The Eco-Stewards Program. Her favorite pastimes include hiking, spending time in the water, singing, and capturing moments through whatever camera’s on hand.

Christmas Eve

*Sing, O heavens, for the Lord has done it;
shout, O depths of the earth;
break forth into singing, O mountains, O forest, and every tree in it!
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Christmas Eve Ritual

Remember what you sang on Christmas Eve when you were a child?
Remember what it felt like to know that baby Jesus was going to be born on this very night?
Growing up in Morelia México, my favorite advent song from catholic school went like this:

*“Mi alma se llena de gozo,
porque el señor pronto vendrá,
preparare un persebre en mi corazón
despojandome de toda maldad,
señor yo quiero que nazcas
en mi en silencio estaré esperandote,
como viento que espera su descanso,
como fuego que arede sin fin...”*

"My soul is filled with joy
because the Lord will soon come,
I will prepare a manger in my heart
stripping it of all evil,
Lord, I want you to be born in me
in silence, I will be waiting for you,
like the wind that awaits its rest
as a fire that burns endlessly"



Beech trees in the fog

Thirty Christmas Eves have passed since I first learned it. Aiming for sanctity was a joyous game worth pursuing, knowing through confession we were all forgiven from our small setbacks. However, preparing this manger became a harder task with age. Especially through the years of my youth where I belonged to a catholic group called Regnum Christi. We performed meticulous conscience exams as part of our daily night prayers and meditation. I devoted most of one year to live with their “nuns” while seriously considering the vocation. It was then where the “stripping it of all evil” part became a daunting task filled with guilt and overthinking to a point where I started losing the capacity for deep sleep. Years passed by, and the toughest Christmas Eve of all came just a couple years after marriage. 2012 was the year I was singing Christmas Carols while pregnant for the very first time. Sobbing and wondering, why we don’t have advent reflections from Mary to console all soon to be mothers? The ones giving birth in the middle ages? The ones giving birth through persecution? During war times? I was disheartened while considering the disparity, climate, and justice challenges that children, including ours now, would have to cope in the 21st century and beyond.

Christmas Eve, cont.

Anxiety was crawling, when love reached and healed deep from the madness nourishing me as a loving mycorrhizae, helping me realize we are all complex amalgams of positive and negative personality traits that emerge or not depending on the circumstances. Most importantly, helping me understand that we are saved by grace and confirming all our actions to be motivated by tremendous gratitude, rather than fear. So now, since we moved to DC and found a loving community in Old Meeting Presbyterian House, I still mumble this advent song in my heart. Yet, with a few modifications:

*“Mi alma se llena de gozo,
porque Dios pronto vendrá,
Preparo un pesebre (de bondad) en mi corazón,
hogar y comunidad (glocal)*

*Señor yo quiero que nazcas en mí
activamente estoy esperandote,
como espíritu devoto a tu promesa,
como mycorrhizae esparzo tu eterno amor ...”*

"My soul is filled with joy,
because God will soon come,
I prepare a manger (of goodness) in my heart,
home and (glocal) community

Lord, I want you to be born in me
I'm actively waiting for you
as a spirit devoted to your promise,
as mycorrhizae spreading your endless love ...”

Prayer:

Lord, please be born in my soul again
I'm actively waiting for you
as a living spirit devoted to your promise,
like mycorrhizae spreading your endless love

Embracing chaos among our daily lives, proactively
We are trying to become useful puzzle pieces of your masterpiece
Gift us with the humility to accept the things we can't change
Awaken us to match our daily consumption and habits to our Christian values and also provide us the grit to transform our courage into action and advocate more efficiently, for the things we can. Today I ask you for enlightenment, to lead our way and discern the difference.



Daniela Ochoa Gonzalez is a deacon at the Old Presbyterian Meeting House in Alexandria, VA. She graduated from Cornell University with an MPA in Environmental Policy in 2009. She is a devoted mother of two little children and with her husband, Mitch aims to raise them as kind and spiritual glocals. She is the founder of “Regenerative Solutions” a translating and consulting company based in Washington DC that helps schools and houses of worship to align their values and transform their “waste” operations into zero waste and regenerative outputs that enhance their own local food system.

Christmas Day

*For I will pour water on the thirsty land,
and streams on the dry ground;
I will pour my spirit upon your descendants,
and my blessing on your offspring.
They shall spring up like a green tamarisk,
like willows by flowing streams. Isaiah 44:3-4*

Christmas Day... Sheltering in place

“Bloom where you are planted” is an old saying that sounds almost biblical, but it is not. It was coined by a saint of the church, Saint Francis de Sales. The intention was to say, happy or not with your place in the world, keep being a disciple of Christ and growing in faith. But it begs the question, “Am I planted in the right place?” and “Is it possible to be the right person in the wrong place?”



A tamarisk tree in Israel

Our scripture for the day leads us to the same question when we ask about the tamarisk plant. In the holy land the tamarisk shelters streams, provides shade and conserves water. They can survive in soils with high salt content and create a natural cooling effect by pulling water from the air at night and then releasing it in the day. In the holy land it is a useful native plant. But ask someone from the southwestern United States and they will tell you a different story. Someone thought the tamarisk would be a useful plant so it was transplanted and now it is spreading like a destructive wild fire, destroying water resources and pushing out native plants. It is an environmental disaster. Right plant in the wrong place.

So how do you know if you are a tamarisk in the holy land or in the southwest? Ask one of these questions:

1. When I grow in faith and step out in courage, do I make room for others or do I take up space that is better used by others?
2. When I dig in deep and spread my roots is there enough water, energy, space and time for growth to occur and for me to share with others in my community?
3. Am I creating life in others or am I pushing others out of community?

Christmas Day, cont.

This day we celebrate the expected one who was placed in what many considered to be the wrong place. Not a king born in a palace crib but a tiny child placed in a manger. What was so wrong turned out to be just right... he stepped out of that crib into the center of life, personal, social, political, spiritual. In all ways things making God's presence known in new and courageous ways.

This day, as we celebrate again the coming of "God with Us," the Christ, consider where you are planted and the effect you have on your environment and on your community. Are you planted in the right place to bloom or is it so wrong it is made right by the glory and compassion of God.

Prayer:

Loving Creator, you know us so well. Show me ways to be a better partner in community so that we all may bloom together and find ways daily to honor Emmanuel. Amen.



Barbara Chalfant is currently the Associate for Mission for the Presbytery of West Virginia. Her responsibilities include ministry to older adults, peacemaking, social justice, hunger action and disaster response. She is a graduate of Union Presbyterian Seminary, a certified educator and holds a certificate in older adult ministry from Columbia Seminary. She has served congregations in Virginia, Tennessee, and Pennsylvania. She is a curriculum writer, artist, singer, and is prone to bouts of laughter. Having seen the direct effects of bad environmental stewardship as she works in disaster ravaged communities, Barbara has become proactive concerning environmental issues, human caused disaster and damage, and working to reverse climate change.