



Presbyterians for Earth Care

2019 Lenten Devotional

<i>Introduction...</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>Joanna Hipp</i>
<i>Ash Wednesday...</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>Emily Brewer</i>
<i>First Sunday...</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>Paul Galbreath</i>
<i>Second Sunday...</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>Timothy Wotring</i>
<i>Third Sunday...</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>Daniel Tipton</i>
<i>Fourth Sunday...</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>Alissa Conner</i>
<i>Fifth Sunday...</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>Sue Rheem</i>
<i>Palm Sunday...</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>Alton Pollard</i>
<i>Maundy Thursday...</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>Amantha Barbee</i>
<i>Good Friday...</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>Bill Brown</i>
<i>Easter...</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>Kerri Allen</i>

Introduction

“The Stones Will Cry Out!” Luke 19: 28–40

On the road to Jerusalem there are many voices crying out “Make straight the way of the Lord” (John 1:23). As we join Jesus on his journey to the Cross we should pay particular attention to those voices often overlooked. From Elizabeth and Mary, to Magi and the mad king Herod there are many voices who bear witness to the astonishing life and work of Jesus. Often overlooked, however, are those less obvious voices that join the holy chorus proclaiming the day of the Lord. This Lent, as we follow Jesus on the road to Jerusalem, we pay special attention to these powerful testimonies.

These testimonies are voices that cannot be silenced. These are the voices crying out in the wilderness; creation itself proclaiming the Good News that Jesus has come to proclaim the peace of heaven. When those who are threatened by that peace demand the disciples cease their praise, Jesus declares that even if every faithful disciple should suddenly lose their ability (or freedom) to proclaim this good news, the very rocks hurled at them in hate will take up the cry of the hosannas of praise (Luke 19:40).

This Lent, in the busy-ness of our lives in an always on the go culture naturally opposed to peace, let us open our ears and our hearts and listen. As we embark on this 40-day journey let us turn our attention to the testimony of creation. By slowing down and walking in the wisdom of creation, we will open our hearts to hearing the good news of peace as we travel with Jesus to the city of Peace.

As we listen to the stones, the rivers, the trees and all the other voices of creation that bear witness to the Good News, we will hear the ways in which injustice and systems of oppression and unsustainable consumption threaten to silence the cries of hope and peace. This Lent we are called to join this choir of witnesses and work in opposition to ecological destruction, global warming, and policies of hurt and harm that threaten the voices of peace; the very rocks of the Earth that cry out in praise of the Holy One of creation.



Joanna Hipp is a North Carolina native, residing in Charlotte, North Carolina. She is a member of the presbytery's Ministry Resource Committee, president of the Alum Board of Louisville Seminary and serves on the executive board of Charlotte Clergy Coalition for Justice. Joanna loves colorful pants, crayons, and all sports.

Introduction, cont.

I give thanks to Jane Laping and Dennis Testerman for asking me to edit this devotional, and for their work throughout the process and assembling this for you all. My grateful thanks to each writer for their creative lens in which they took the prompt and produced what is before you. To graphic designer, Sarah Pragg, thank you for your design and layout of this work. Finally, to Jessica Jacks for the beautiful artwork. You inspire many.

Blessings and Peace, to you all this Lenten season.

Rev. Joanna Hipp

Ash Wednesday

Prayer-Walking

¹ Shout out, do not hold back!
Lift up your voice like a trumpet!
Announce to my people their rebellion,
to the house of Jacob their sins.

² Yet day after day they seek me
and delight to know my ways,
as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness
and did not forsake the ordinance of their God;
they ask of me righteous judgments,
they delight to draw near to God.

³ “Why do we fast, but you do not see?
Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?”
Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day,
and oppress all your workers.

⁴ 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.

⁵ Is such the fast that I choose,
a day to humble oneself?
Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush,

and to lie in sackcloth and ashes?
Will you call this a fast,
a day acceptable to the LORD?

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?

⁷ 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?

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

⁹ Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.

Isaiah 58: 1–9a

Ash Wednesday, cont.

Last year my Lenten discipline was prayer walking. I was preparing to walk 250 miles in June with the PCUSA Walk for a Fossil Free World, advocating for the Presbyterian Church (USA) to divest from fossil fuels. I had to get my body ready to walk 10–15 miles a day for two weeks, so each day in Lent I would walk and pray for a different community affected by climate change.

As I built up stamina and the muscles in my legs, I also built a kind of resiliency in thinking about climate change. For many of us, it's hard to wrap our minds and hearts around the reality of climate change: People will die. People are already dying.

Dying is natural, of course, as those familiar Ash Wednesday words remind us: “remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return.” What is not natural is that some people are dying sooner and more terribly because of the greed and actions of others. The words of judgement in Isaiah upon the nation that pretends to be righteous, that oppresses its workers, that does not share resources, are for us. It is because of actions like these that we are in this situation.

My prayer walking was a kind of repentance, and also a reminder of our belonging to each other and Creation: a reminder that climate change is real, and communities are experiencing it now, and those communities are also the ones with the most wisdom and creativity in mitigating climate change and fighting the greed that causes it.

Ash Wednesday calls us to remember and face that we are dust, we are finite, but *this is not a reason to despair*. Instead, this is a reason to work together. It will take all of us working together to mitigate climate change and bring justice to the parts of creation that are already suffering.

Prayer

God who moved across the waters of creation, move among us now. Help us to remember that we come from the Earth, and we will return to the Earth. We belong to the Earth and to each other. Help us remember. Help us change. Help us heal. Help us live the way you intend. Amen.

Rev. Emily Brewer is the Executive Director of the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, a 75-year-old organization committed to ending militarism, war, and violence through practices of active nonviolence. Emily is committed to working for climate justice as a way of preventing violence and being in solidarity with people and communities who experience climate change first and worst. She lives in Brooklyn, New York, but will always consider East Tennessee home.

Photo Credit: Emily Brewer, PCUSA Walk for a Fossil Free World



Photo Credit: AMB Photography



First Sunday

Making Room for Rocks

“The tempter came and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.’”

Matthew 4:3

Recently, I had the opportunity to hear a presentation by Dr. George “Tink” Tinker of the Osage Tribe. In his remarks, he noted that his daughter was taught in school that rocks are inert. In response to this characterization, he described the way in which he and others know and experience rocks as alive and an integral part of the entire eco-system in which we live.

It is interesting to note the way that following his baptism in the Jordan River, Jesus’ first temptation is to commodify rocks, to turn them into something else. “The tempter came and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.’” (Matthew 4:3).

This year the season of Lent invites us to look closely at our lives and at the world around us—to listen carefully so that we might hear the ways in which even the stones shout out to the glory of God. Seeing the rocks for what they are and not simply for the ways that we can use them, extract the minerals from them, or move them out of our way is an important step in finding a more balanced way to live in this world. I experience the gift of rocks especially in the beauty of the formations along the Oregon Coast where the giant boulders serve as a home for wildlife, navigational aids for fishing boats, and a photographic mecca for tourists and locals.

Prayer

O God, our rock and redeemer, by your Spirit open our eyes to see your presence in the world around us, through Christ we pray. Amen.



Paul Galbreath is Professor of Theology at Union Presbyterian Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina.

He lives in Asheville with his wife, Jan, and their two cats, Paco and Leo.

Second Sunday

Uncrowning the Bramble

The trees once went out
to anoint a king over themselves.
So they said to the olive tree,
‘Reign over us.’
The olive tree answered them,
‘Shall I stop producing my rich oil
by which gods and mortals are honored,
and go to sway over the trees?’

Then the trees said to the fig tree,
‘You come and reign over us.’
But the fig tree answered them,
‘Shall I stop producing my sweetness
and my delicious fruit,
and go to sway over the trees?’

Then the trees said to the vine,
‘You come and reign over us.’

But the vine said to them,
‘Shall I stop producing my wine
that cheers gods and mortals,
and go to sway over the trees?’

So all the trees said to the bramble,
‘You come and reign over us.’

And the bramble said to the trees,
‘If in good faith you are anointing me king over you,
then come and take refuge in my shade;
but if not, let fire come out of the bramble
and devour the cedars of Lebanon.’

Judges 9:8–15



One of the unluckiest lectionary-forgotten texts is the Parable of the Trees, found in Judges. This was the first parable in all of the Hebrew Bible. It has a strange and ecological edge to it. The trees are looking to be reigned over. The text does not share why the trees are looking for a ruler, but it is assumed that they are foolish in their pursuit. The trees speak to an olive tree, fig tree, and vine. They each respond that they are too busy providing vital nourishment and support for ‘the gods and mortals.’ When the trees eventually speak with the bramble, it seems to mock their aspirations, saying: “If in good faith you are anointing me king over you, then come and take refuge in my shade.” Trees, as we know, offer more shade than any bramble bush could. The next line though is even starker: “but if not, let fire come out of the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon.” The parable ends abruptly. I can imagine though that after the bramble bush said that, the trees gulped anxiously.

What might this parable mean for us during this Lenten Season? First, God is enough. The Book of Judges and the first chapters of First Samuel spell out to the Hebrew people that God is their king and they do not need human overlords. God speaks out of love and justice, not out of domination. Second, there’s a beautiful ecological meaning to it. The Earth is enough. It provides what we need when we need it. When we push the Earth to its limits, all suffer. Lastly, we are enough.



Second Sunday, cont.

We do not need to look for controlling and strong leaders. God has given us the abilities and the Scriptures to discern how to act justly and live out compassion. May we do so.

Prayer

O Loving God, through this Lent help us to trust you, knowing that you are enough. Direct us in treating the Earth as our sibling and not as something to be controlled. And guide us as we follow you, reading your Scriptures, and loving our neighbors. In Christ's name, Amen.



Timothy Wotring hails from Philadelphia, PA, and is a Candidate in the PC(USA). He enjoys consuming all things pop culture and going to the movies.

Third Sunday

“He entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way.”

Luke 19:1–4

I recently sat with a patient who told me how much he enjoys watching the deer walk through woods past his window. Often, these scenes are his only connection to the outside world. The woods provide a respite from loneliness and a connection to something bigger; God is there among the trees. Like Zacchaeus, my patient found a connection to his creator through creation.

Zacchaeus needed to connect to something bigger than himself. Zacchaeus wanted more than stories about Jesus; he wanted to see and experience Jesus for himself. Zacchaeus needed to connect with Jesus, but the crowd was too big and his wealth and social standing provided too little to make that connection. So, God planted a tree. God gave water to that tree and protected its roots and branches from wind and storm. In the due course of time, when Zacchaeus needed to make a connection with Jesus, this tree provided exactly what he needed to rise above the fray and meet the one in whom he would find his truth.

I often wonder what would happen to my patient if the trees were gone. Would he see God daily as he does now in the woods? Would his connection to world fade? Would his peace, his truth, and his life be the same if we cut down the one connection he has to his creator? What about the rest of us? Like Zacchaeus, we all need help connecting to the world in meaningful and life affirming ways. If we cut down the trees, if we destroy our connections to creation, will we miss out on the good news that Jesus wants to connect with us too?

Prayer

For the gifts of the trees, we give thanks, O God! May we trust the safety of the branch and vine to lift us up from the crowded fray. May we hear their gospel preached as their roots and limbs connect us to that which is greater than ourselves. Amen.



Daniel S Tipton is a hospice chaplain in Asheville, NC.

Fourth Sunday

“So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.”

Corinthians 5:17–19

Recently as a part of a community garden our church began composting. Composting is something that people have done for generations, but with our separation from our food source it has become easy to see our food scraps as nothing more than trash. In addition to our garden team and church members, members of the community have called to ask if they can bring their banana peels and vegetable scraps. People feel pulled to participate in a more ecologically friendly way of taking care of their trash. The leftovers, the organic trash, and even the leaves raked from our lawn are collected together. With time and tending the decomposing generates heat and these items break down. They become rich soil for new planting.

On this Lenten journey we embrace God’s desire to create in us a new creation. It is not an instant process. Instead it is perhaps more similar to composting. You take all of the hurts, mistakes, problems and bring them together. Talk them through with God and one another. There may be heat, but the continued result of forgiveness, reconciliation, and healthier relationships is worth it. We are indeed a new creation in Christ. As a new creation we are entrusted with the message of reconciliation for the world. This isn’t about pointing fingers, but as a part of the voice of reconciliation we join our voices to the stones that cry out for an honest appraisal and correction of behaviors that cause harm to God’s creation. We can carry the message of reconciliation by looking to new ways of being and by reinstating healthy old ways of being. We are a new creation. Being a new creation means a willingness to continue to change and to recognize that reconciliation can and does change the world.

Prayer

Dear God help us to be a new creation in you. Reconcile us to the world and to one another. Add our voices to the voices of the stones that cannot help but shout of your reconciling power. Amen.



Rev. Alissa Conner is the Associate Pastor at St. Philip Presbyterian church Hurst, Texas. She received degrees from Austin College and Louisville Presbyterian theological seminary. She is inspired by the work of growing and eco reconciliation going on in her community.

Fifth Sunday

Imagination: Lift Up Your Eyes

“Lift up your eyes on high and see: Who created these? He who brings out their host and numbers them, calling them all by name; because he is great in strength, mighty in power, not one is missing.”

Isaiah 40:26

We live in turbulent times. The news headlines about the dire warnings of climate change appearing almost daily are hard to ignore. Unknowingly, I have hunkered down to shield myself from the myriad of bad news, looking down at the gray sidewalk as I go about my day. But recently, I happened to look up as I waited for the traffic light to turn green and witnessed a spectacular cloud formation against a bright blue sky. The Psalmist's words came to mind, “The heavens are telling the glory of God—and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.” (Psalm 19:1)

In Isaiah's time, yet another turbulent time in the human story, he told the people of God to look up to the heavens so they may see God in all God's glory. He called on them to lift their eyes on high because they had lost their ability to see God beyond their imagining. Instead, they made false gods and relied on their own experiences to guide them through the difficult times. Isaiah's call is a good reminder for us to feed our own imagination for God that goes beyond our natural tendency to rely on our own understanding and false gods, whatever that may be for each of us. To seek a God great in strength and mighty in power, who knows all by name, and where all creation praise God—from sun, moon and the shining stars, the waters of the earth, the mountains and the hills, the trees and the animals—is to rely on the everlasting God to guide us through our difficult time of climate change.

When you go outside in these remaining days of Lent, take a moment to lift up your eyes on high and really see nature's inherent beauty that God has made, and let your imagination turn to God.

Prayer

Gracious God, you have loved your creation into being. Make us faithful and patient as we lift our eyes on high to draw from the beauty of your creation and to work for a new creation that it may be destined for the glory and service of Jesus Christ. Amen.



Sue Rheem is the Mission Specialist at the Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations, Presbyterian Mission Agency. She has a Master of Divinity degree from Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York. She serves on the Justice Ministries Committee of the New York City Presbytery and is a member of the Astoria Presbyterian Church.

Palm Sunday

If These Were Silent

- ¹ O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his steadfast love endures forever!
² Let Israel say,
“His steadfast love endures forever.”
¹⁹ Open to me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter through them
and give thanks to the Lord.
- ²⁰ This is the gate of the Lord;
the righteous shall enter through it.
²¹ I thank you that you have answered me
and have become my salvation.
²² The stone that the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone.
²³ This is the Lord’s doing;
it is marvelous in our eyes.
²⁴ This is the day that the Lord has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.
²⁵ Save us, we beseech you, O Lord!
O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!
²⁶ Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the
Lord.
We bless you from the house of the Lord.
²⁷ The Lord is God,
and he has given us light.
Bind the festal procession with branches,
up to the horns of the altar.
²⁸ You are my God, and I will give thanks to you;
you are my God, I will extol you.
²⁹ O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever.

After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, saying, “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it.’” So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” They said, “The Lord needs it.” Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!” Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

Luke 19: 28-40

**Psalm 118:
1-2, 19-29**

Palm Sunday, cont.

The most holy week in the life of our faith has begun. On this Sunday, we commemorate the life of Jesus, an all-inclusive ministry that led him back to Jerusalem and to this Passion moment. In a few short hours and days, a change will come over this city, the people, himself. Triumphal entry becomes martyrdom. Celebration gives way to condemnation. Coronation turns to crucifixion. It begins with the jubilant crowd, spreading their cloaks along the ground, taking palms from the trees, throwing flowers in front of his feet, singing praises to God with a loud voice, “hosanna,” “alleluia,” and “blessed is the king.” Jesus does not ride in a chariot, mount a war horse or wield the armaments of war but comes subversively, on a young donkey. Thirty-three years earlier, the infant Jesus had travelled by donkey too, under the dark cover of night with Mary and Joseph, out of Jerusalem, and into the safety of Egypt. Time and again, there have been many who find in the person and presence of the Nazarene, in his passion for justice and opposition to injustice, a profound threat and challenge to the status quo. Down throughout the ages principalities and powers—Herodians, rulers, empires, governments, corporations, industries, economies, militaries, militias, professionals, religious leaders and more—have been faint with praise while fiercely condemning Jesus. Now as then, many who would seek to know him are scattered, disinherited and at a loss. If we who profess to believe are silent, in our complicity, the very stones will cry out...

Prayer

We are grateful for this season of Love when life has the last word, all fear retreats and hope is realized within us yet again. Grace after grace, blessing after blessing, may the fragmentation of our days be made verdant, just and whole, and filled with the newness and goodness of life everywhere. You are the hunger of our hearts, O God. Amen.



The Rev. Dr. Alton B. Pollard III is Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary's tenth president. A scholar, author, consultant and speaker on the subject of African American and U.S. religion and culture, Pollard was previously dean of the School of Divinity and professor of religion and culture at Howard University in Washington, D.C.



Rev. Amantha Barbee is the senior pastor of Oakhurst Presbyterian Church (USA) in Decatur, GA. Her passion for social justice exudes from everything she does. She has recently moved from Charlotte, NC where she led a multifaith group of clergy to fight for justice in the streets, city hall, police stations and around the city.

Maundy Thursday

Which Stones are Crying Because of Our Silence?

“Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, ‘Teacher, order your disciples to stop.’ He answered, ‘I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.’”

Luke 19:39–40

“Order your disciples to stop.” We are called to be disciples of Jesus Christ yet, society has asked us to stop. Society has asked us not to love as Christ loves us. Society has asked us not to welcome the stranger. Society has asked us not to feed the hungry or clothe the naked. Society has asked us to be selfish and self-centered, especially when it comes to land and environment. What makes us money is what we will worship. We have been ordered to stop and unfortunately many of us who call ourselves Christians have adhered to the requests of the Pharisees.

We claim Jesus as Lord. We honor and worship him weekly. We jump with haste to the answer, “Christian” when we are asked our religion. Yet, we sit in silence when black and brown lives are mistreated at the bank, the store, while driving, or living in areas where leaky pipelines taint the water. The rocks are sobbing in a manner that to be sure, pleases not the God we serve but acts as an absolute albatross to truth. Our silence is so loud that perhaps we can’t even hear the rocks crying out.

As we journey through this Lenten season, will we once again allow Jesus to wash our feet as he did for the disciples in that upper room, humbling himself, for naught? Can we in good faith allow this innocent man to pull off his robe and wash our sinful, forgetful, ungrateful, silent feet? Listen to the rocks. They are crying. They are hurting. They have meaning and they matter. The rocks are the children, the oppressed, the poor, the uneducated, those drinking tainted water or living near nuclear waste. Listen!

Prayer

Holy Lord, we pray to you along our Lenten journey to free us from societal holds and worship you. Give us the courage to be disciples even when society tells us to stop. May we never stop. In Jesus’ name, Amen.



Good Friday

“When Jesus had received the wine, he said, ‘It is finished.’
Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”

John 19:30

Such were, according to John, the last words of Jesus on the cross. As I pondered these words for this reflection, I fully intended to recount the myriad disasters we are inflicting on our common home, the wounds of the world’s crucifixion. The list is all too familiar, and it can only elicit a bitter cry of despair. But in John’s Gospel, there was no such cry from the crucified Christ, no cry of abandonment as in Mark. Instead, Jesus’ last breath in John conveys a sense of completion. How so?

The clue comes from the fact that Jesus’ last words (one word in Greek) point back to the beginning of creation, specifically the pronouncement that the “heavens and the earth were finished” (Genesis 2:1). As John alluded to the beginning of creation in the very first verse of his Gospel (“In the beginning . . .”), so John now alludes to creation’s completion with Jesus’ last breath on the cross. Herein lies a mystery: Christ’s incarnation and death somehow encapsulate the story of creation, from the beginning to the Sabbath (Gen 1:1-2:3). Christ’s ministry, in other words, is for all creation (see John 3:16). The Word made flesh for the world made of flesh.

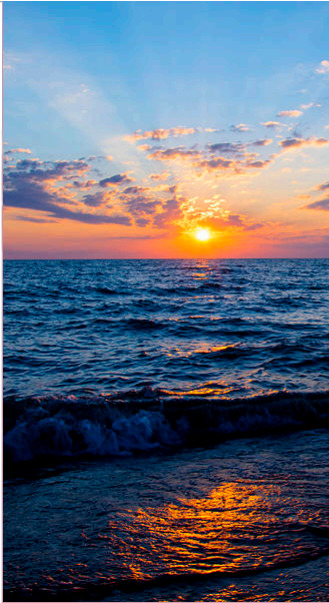
Yes, it is important to recognize the wounds of the world through the wounds of the crucified Christ. But John adds a new wrinkle: when all is “finished,” whether God’s creation in Genesis or Jesus’ ministry in John, what comes next is Sabbath. More than in any other Gospel, John’s Jesus is a “sabbath breaker,” the one who promotes life by upending convention. And so the church, as the sign of the new creation, must step up as resistant, sabbath-practicing people for the sake of creation’s liberation. I never expected to find hope, let alone a call to action, on the cross, but John has shown me the way. What we have been given by God in Christ is “finished,” that is, deemed sufficient for us to move forward as God’s sabbath-practicing, earth-honoring people.

Prayer

God of life, God in Christ, wake us up from our slumber of denial. Grant us the eyes to see more fully the wounds of the world that we have inflicted. But do not lead us into despair. Grant us the hope of redemption and healing for all the world, and in such hope may we act accordingly to break the cycle of exploitation and extraction, of greed and aggression. May we move forward in sabbath wonder, grounded in your vision of shalom for all the world. Amen.



William P. Brown is an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church USA, author, biblical theologian, and the William Marcellus McPheeters Professor of Old Testament at Columbia Theological Seminary.



Easter

“Very early in the morning on the first day of the week, the women went to the tomb, bringing the fragrant spices they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they didn’t find the body of the Lord Jesus. They didn’t know what to make of this. Suddenly, two men were standing beside them in gleaming bright clothing. The women were frightened and bowed their faces toward the ground, but the men said to them, ‘Why do you look for the living among the dead? He isn’t here, but has been raised. Remember what he told you while he was still in Galilee, that the Human One must be handed over to sinners, be crucified, and on the third day rise again.’ Then they remembered his words. When they returned from the tomb, they reported all these things to the eleven and all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles. Their words struck the apostles as nonsense, and they didn’t believe the women. But Peter ran to the tomb.

When he bent over to look inside, he saw only the linen cloth. Then he returned home, wondering what had happened.”

Luke 24: 1–12



Rev. Kerri N. Allen is a Reformed and womanist theologian, PhD student, and hospital chaplain in Chicago. Originally from St. Paul, MN when Kerri is not buried in a book or writing a paper, she enjoys hiking, travel, watching sports, cooking or spending time with one of her many nieces or nephews.

In this Easter Luke passage, women closest to Jesus proclaim Jesus’ resurrection. But before they go out to evangelize this good news, they experienced a lot of emotions. I imagine they were already experiencing grief, loss, and anger that Jesus was “handed over to the sinners” and crucified. They probably didn’t have much time to process these overwhelming emotions before going to the empty tomb. At first, they were frightened and then they couldn’t contain this good news.

I sense some parallels to the present day. This is not much different from contemporary conversations on environmental injustice, particularly on climate change. It is frightening, angering, and overwhelming. As I am writing this during the frigid winter of 2019, there have already been close to 30 deaths in the city of Chicago because of the record cold, with the elderly and children among those most vulnerable. According to the NAACP, race is the most significant indicator when it comes to the placement of toxic facilities. Even in the midst of lost lives and urgency to respond, there are too many who believe that environmental injustice is nonsense. If only they would bend over and look inside.

But we can’t control who is willing to look. Instead, we must be like the women on Easter morning. Like Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary we must remember Jesus words and proclaim them. Jesus warned that if his disciples remained quiet, the stones would cry out. And we see the earth crying out in extreme weather patterns throughout the world. Yet, Jesus proclaimed that sin does not have the last word.

Easter, cont.

As Easter people, we must proclaim the same and reject environmental injustice. We must declare that just as the sun rises over Lake Michigan, just as we arise on Easter morning to the hope that all of creation might be restored to God, we will rise and proclaim God's justice, environmental justice, will have the last word.

Prayer

*Eternal and ever present Holy One,
One of complexity and covenant,
God of hope and hospitality,
Source of love and life,
on this day that dawns fresh beginnings,
birth us anew.
Ignite in us a new passion,
one that dawns fresh beginnings,
one that emboldens us to resist the temptation complicity.
And when illusions and falsehoods become acceptable norms,
birth us with the audacity to speak truth in love for all that is right.
Amen.*

