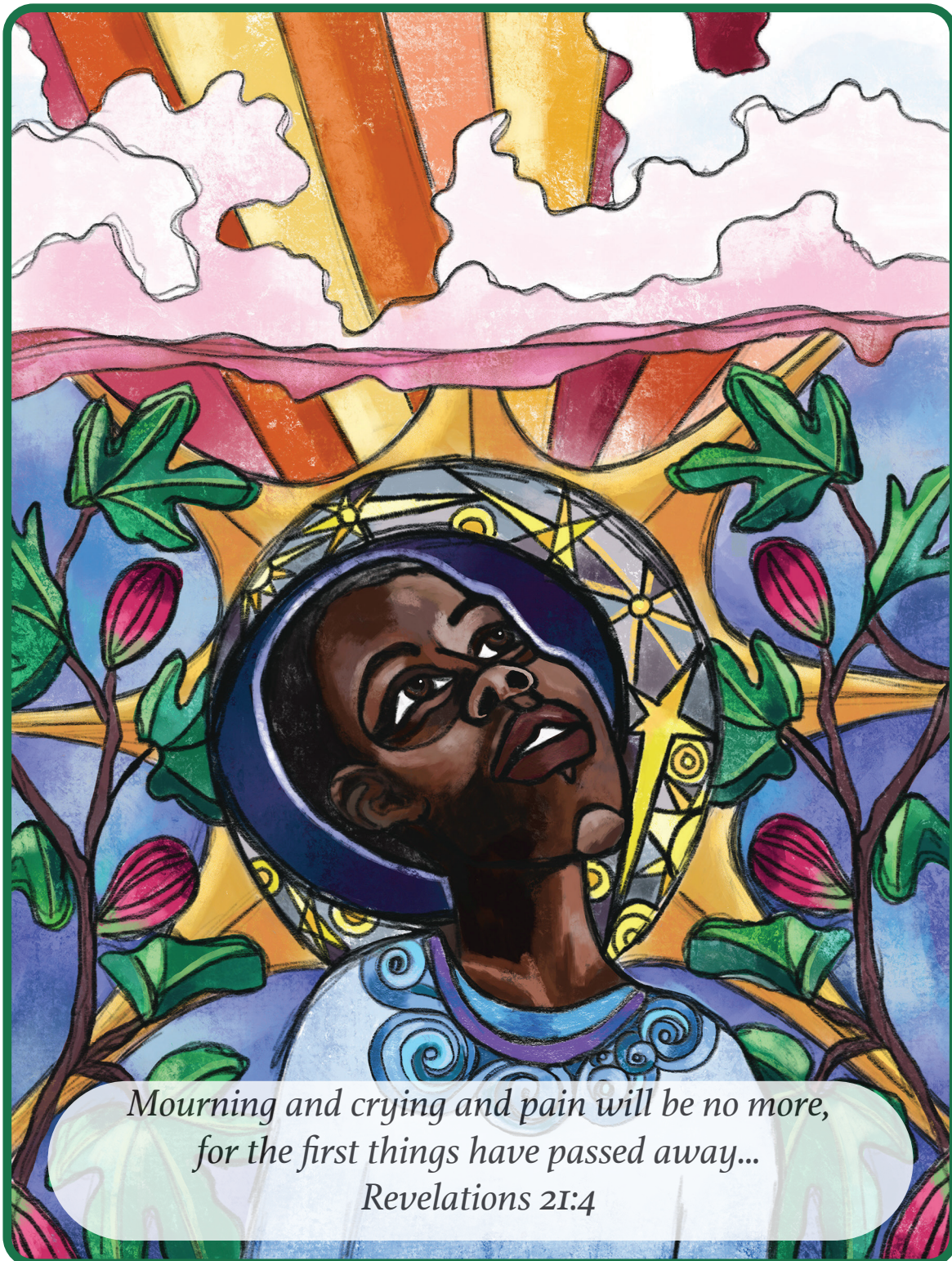


Presbyterians for Earth Care

2021 Lenten Devotional



Cover art: "Raise Your Head" by Lauren Wright Pittman

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying:

“See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away...”

Revelations 21:1-4 (NRSV)

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Introduction

I remember the beginning of the 2020 Lenten season quite clearly. It was my first Lent as a seminary student, and the school was abuzz with anticipation. Students were discussing amongst themselves about how they might channel this period of abstinence into impactful action. The chapel worship team excitedly invited all to join together for the Ash Wednesday service. Some students even hosted Mardi Gras parties (yes, more than one) complete with colorful beads and a plethora of sweets. I was excited to be in this space where Lent and Easter wouldn't just be Sunday morning references, but events to be reminded of and look forward to daily. Little did I expect, however, that we all would soon be giving up much more than we had bargained for.



Photo Credit: taken at Washington National Cathedral

Over the past several months, we've watched as the world collectively entered into something from the *Twilight Zone*. Elbow bumps and quick waves are the new handshakes and hugs, "Zoom rooms" have replaced classrooms and church sanctuaries, and masks are essential accessories. What's more, violence against our Black siblings has finally opened the eyes of many to the deep injustices rooted in our nation, and the events of January 6th have given us a brand new definition of political turmoil. Whether we like it or not, the world is a different place, and it has touched all of us.

In Revelations 21:1-4, John sees a vision of the arrival of a new heaven and new earth to replace the old. This is a hallowed place marked as the home of God, free from all suffering, pain, and death. While ours is not this paradise, we also see a new world around us filled with expectations and demands once largely unseen and unheard. We now have an opportunity to join in with the voices crying out for justice, mercy, and love, to join in the reimagining that is needed to build the new Jerusalem of our dreams.

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This reimagining is already taking place around us; in the face of isolation and violence, we have found new ways of building community, new networks of resiliency, and new understandings of how to better love one another and ourselves.

Our work as stewards of God's creation also requires us to imagine a new earth, to take back the land, water, and air away from polluting, extractive, and imperialist ways of viewing our home and neighbors and to create something sustainable, equitable, and compassionate in its place. The task ahead of us is colossal, but do not forget about the stories of environmental renewal that sprung up in the midst of the pandemic: fauna of all shapes and sizes returned to their old homes, cities recorded record-low levels of pollution, and people rediscovered the joy of gardening and cultivating the earth.



Photo Credit: taken at Washington National Cathedral

Whatever your Lenten practice might be this year, I pray that you will look to God for comfort and assurance in this ever-precarious world we find ourselves in. I pray that you let the voices in this devotional move your heart, and to accept their invitation of joining in communion with all creation as we go forward.

To the Glory of God

P.S. For those that did not know, 2020 was PEC's 25th Anniversary! In commemoration of this momentous achievement, several of the writers in this devotional are past and present leaders of *Presbyterians for Earth Care* ministries. Thank you so much to everyone who has supported PEC's work. May God continue to bless us for another 25 years!



Jonathan Lee is a second year Master of Divinity student at Yale Divinity School. Born and raised North Carolina, Jonathan's faith and love for God's Creation were simultaneously cultivated during a time in the Maine woods. In addition to considering ordained ministry, Jonathan is interested in environmental and Asian American theologies. He is currently serving as Presbyterians for Earth Care's Programming and Learning Fellow.

Ash Wednesday

Today we bear a mark, the smudge of ashes, on our foreheads or hands.

Many of us grew up with an unappealing notion of “dirt.” Visible dirt smudged on our skin might be unfavorable. As a slang word for soil, dirt has a lot of negative connotations. Someone might be called “dirt” as a hurtful term about their essential worth. Being “dirty” means one must clean one’s self before being admitted into proper company. Or, alternatively, being “dirty” could be used to convey a spiritual or moral uncleanness. Dirt is associated with impropriety at best and shame at worst.

Shame is different than guilt. Guilt is related to having enacted a particular harmful behavior. Shame meanwhile is more about one’s essence, worth or deeper value. Being ashamed is different than being humble. Shame can impact one’s ability to keep and maintain relationships, work, and purpose. Shame can create great harm in a person’s life and in our world. Ashes should not be a mark of shame, but rather a mark of humility.

Humility is about knowing one’s right proportion in comparison to other things. Humility is not a rejection of self but a sense of the larger universe and of God’s presence. We are a part of something, even if only a small part. We are claiming we are earthy, dirty, and connected to creation—which is actually a beautiful thing rather than a terrible thing.



Ash Wednesday, cont.

Humility can be a relief, if we let it be. Being made from ash and returned to ash at the end of our earthly existence, we have an empowering and invigorating connection with God and God's creation. It's a reminder that the world's problems aren't all up to us, even if they depend on each of our contributions to make things better. God is in our midst.

In Revelation we look to a new heaven and a new earth, but not because we are shameful dirt that needs redemption. We look to a new heaven and new earth because being part of creation, we affirm that this world isn't yet what God desires it to be. With humility, we mark ourselves with ash and commit ourselves to humble action. And even if we are unable to receive the imposition of ashes this year because of the continuing pandemic, we can always mark our hearts in its place. No matter how we choose to mark ourselves this year, by doing so we draw closer to the creation and to our Creator.

Prayer

Creator, this Lenten season, open our eyes to the injustices around us. May we begin to build the foundation for a world that is honoring and pleasing to you.—one that removes fear and values everyone.

Amen.



Rev. Rebecca Barnes is the Coordinator for the Presbyterian Hunger Program.

First Sunday

*By the sweat of your face
You will eat bread,
Till you return to the ground,
Because from it you were taken;
For you are dust,
And to dust you shall return.*
Genesis 3:19

We have been reminded this year that we are dust. Our frailty, our mortality, has felt so visceral and clear over the past 12 months. We have lived in the uncertainty of the unknown, suffered the pain of loss, and struggled with our own lack of answers. We have felt fragile, and the world has felt beyond our control.

And yet, I remind myself: COVID-19 is organic, it is evolution, and it is creation. The same breath that transmits this virus is the breath I have learned to think of as Spirit: *ruach*, *pneuma*, the same breath that moved over the waters in Genesis. The Spirit moves, even as we cover our mouths and noses to protect ourselves from a virus we struggle to understand.



Photo Credit: courtesy of Luke Rembold

First Sunday, cont.



Scripture tells us that we are dust, and to dust we shall return. The dust that greets my face on the wind during one of our gusty New Mexican spring days is the same dust to which I am intrinsically connected. Our relationship with creation cannot be separated, even as we struggle to understand how to be in relationship with a virus that seems to have no conscience.

I'm not sure how we begin to live in this creation in a new way. We have become accustomed to controlling--perhaps even conquering--nature, and this recent loss of control is scary and has resulted in so much pain and loss. Yet, when the book of Revelation talks about a "new heaven, and a new earth," I wonder if this is our invitation into a new relationship with creation around us. Creation is a part of us, and we are a part of it. We cannot continue to live as if we are separate.

Prayer

Almighty God, Spirit moving around us, draw us into right relationship with creation. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear you calling us into the dust.

Amen.



Originally from the Pacific Northwest, Luke Rembold is an avid hiker and explorer who seeks the beauty in God's creation. Luke credits a year as a PC(USA) Young Adult Volunteer (YAV) in Tucson, AZ, for molding his call to ministry. He currently serves as the Youth and Young Adult Ministry Coordinator for the Presbytery of Santa Fe, guiding the Albuquerque site of the YAV program and supporting youth leaders in the vital work of youth ministry.

Second Sunday

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

Colossians 1:15-20

High on the mountainside about 10,000 feet above sea-level, we climbed steadily upward. The top of Mt. Wheeler loomed above, a sheer face dropping down toward a glacier and the talus slope of a glacier moraine. Before long, occasional gnarled trees appeared, bleached white or gray because of the wind. We had reached a forest of bristlecone pine, the oldest living things on earth dating back 4,500 years. The oldest grow in the harshest of conditions, forced by wind and water to grow slowly with a density of wood that resists invading disease. Tenacious trees.



Photo Credit: courtesy of Rick Goldwaser; Wikimedia Commons

Second Sunday, cont.

We stopped near a tree. A fellow hiker paused as well, staring at the tree. Before long he reached out to touch the weathered wood, and exclaimed, “This tree was living when Jesus lived. Can you imagine that?” I thought about those trees. How old were they before the first human ever touched them? How long were they here converting carbon dioxide back into oxygen before the first human breathed in that oxygen? Here was a living tree whose life spanned centuries. I felt in the presence of something holy, enduring, and precious to God.

Modern science teaches us that each time we breathe, we inhale billions of oxygen molecules. In fact, these molecules have entered the lungs of every one of the 150 billion human beings and billions of animals who have ever lived. And the molecules we breathe in now will find their way into all the humans and other animals yet to come. Same air, same molecules. This natural, physical act reminds us that we exist in a miraculous, interdependent web of life created by God connecting us to God, to each other, to all of creation, now and over time.

This Lent as we reflect, discern, and reset our spiritual and moral compasses, take time to become mindful of your breathing. It will lead you to honor what God has done, and embrace God’s promise of what is to come.

Prayer

*Creator, this Lenten season, open our eyes to the injustices around us.
May we begin to build the foundation for a world that is honoring and pleasing to you. — one that removes fear and values everyone.*

Amen.



For more than three decades, Rev. Bill Somplatsky-Jarman served the church in social witness ministries and as the first national staff for environmental issues. He represented the PCUSA at the Rio Earth Summit, and has attended all but one of the UN climate negotiations since 1995. Now retired in the red rock canyon country of southern Utah, he continues to serve on the World Council of Churches Climate Change Steering Committee.

Third Sunday

Now the company of prophets said to Elisha, “As you see, the place where we live under your charge is too small for us. Let us go to the Jordan, and let us collect logs there, one for each of us, and build a place there for us to live.” He answered, “Do so.” Then one of them said, “Please come with your servants.” And he answered, “I will.” So he went with them. When they came to the Jordan, they cut down trees. But as one was felling a log, his ax head fell into the water; he cried out, “Alas, master! It was borrowed.” Then the man of God said, “Where did it fall?” When he showed him the place, he cut off a stick, and threw it in there, and made the iron float. He said, “Pick it up.” So, he reached out his hand and took it.

2 Kings 6:1-7



Photo Credit: courtesy of Crosby Palmer

On July 4th, 2019, I supervised residential campers on a special trip to watch fireworks from the field of a nearby ski slope. As the show ended and the darkness of the night sky settled once more, a camper announced he lost his retainer. There was a brief moment of panic before a voice bellowed, “let’s line up like the search and rescue teams do in the movies and scan the area!” Shoulder to shoulder campers and staff moved in sync searching for a clear retainer lost in an expansive field in the cover of night. It felt hopeless. Miraculously, however, the retainer was found.

Third Sunday, cont.

Miracles take our collective participation. Elisha didn't retrieve the sunken axe head on his own - he invited his companion to assist in the miracle of a floating piece of iron. The companion responded to the invitation and reached out to retrieve the borrowed tool. I wonder what could happen if we had hoped an axe head could float or a retainer could be found. In a period where we increasingly long for the good news of Easter, what would it look like to practice hope by living in Christ's footprints? What if we truly believed Earth can be as it is in Heaven - not as a truth in the distant future, but as a reality in the here and now? What if we responded to the invitation to collectively participate in miracles of care for creation?

When I walk the trails of North Carolina's high country, I witness the snapping of Beech trees. I mourn this species that will soon be extinct from an unstoppable, deadly fungus and bug combination. Yet, I hold faith in the open canopy, and I hope in the invitation for new foliage to grow. I spread new seeds, and I know the fallen trees, the lost retainer, and the sunken axe head are not the last words.

Prayer

God,

Earth.

Loss.

Suffering.

Longing.

Chaos.

Mystery.

Hope.

Change.

Miracles.

As it is in Heaven.

Amen.



Crosby is an Austin College and Vanderbilt Divinity School alum who now works as Program Director at Holston Presbytery Camp and Retreat Center. Located in Banner Elk, NC, Crosby and their dog Turtle enjoy camping, hiking, rock-climbing, gardening, and playing capture the flag in the beautiful southern-Appalachian Mountains.

Fourth Sunday

*The LORD created me at the beginning of his work,
the first of his acts of long ago.
Ages ago I was set up, at the first,
before the beginning of the earth.*

*And now, my children, listen to me:
happy are those who keep my ways.
Hear instruction and be wise,
and do not neglect it.
Happy is the one who listens to me,
watching daily at my gates,
waiting beside my doors.
For whoever finds me finds life
and obtains favor from the LORD;
but those who miss me injure
themselves; all who hate me love death.*

Proverbs 8:22-23, 32-36

One of my favorite Bible stories related to God and Creation is God's creation of Sophia, the feminine presence of Wisdom. In Proverbs 8, Sophia instructs us to keep her ways of wisdom in order to find life. She also warns us, however, that we will injure ourselves if we miss her. Over the centuries, the dominant culture in the United States has assumed that the more advanced our scientific knowledge and technology, the better off we will be in the future. While technology and scientific advancements certainly have improved the quality of life for many people, humanity is now at a moment where our actions and human advancements are creating ecological and human destruction alongside human-induced climate change.



Fourth Sunday, cont.

Many of us have traded our ancestors' culture of wisdom and community for the pursuit of knowledge and wealth to the detriment of both the Earth and ourselves. Western Christianity has neglected Sophia for too long, and has even assisted in destroying cultures and communities that keep her wisdom through the evils of colonization, slavery and white supremacy. The good news is that despite these evils, many indigenous peoples and cultures have resisted against this imperial culture to pass down the wisdom of their ancestors. We still have a chance to listen, learn and practice with our indigenous siblings to balance scientific knowledge and technology with indigenous wisdom of and from the Earth. Books such as *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer, who uses indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and the teachings of plants to awaken our relationship to a living Earth, have taught me to find wisdom in the Earth just as it is in Scripture.

We must consider the wisdom of Sophia to let ourselves and the Earth rest on this Sabbath. We must also consider the cross of Christ that has made us children of God where we receive and give in community. God has given us a mother in the Earth, and we must seek wisdom that enhances our relationship to Earth so that she may continue giving life to all humans, animals, and plants. Our churches should not just be marked by the resources and presence of Christ we gain to build churches, but what gifts, time and resources with Christ we give back to the living world.

Prayer

God of life help us to remember your wisdom in Sophia.

Forgive us of the ways we have neglected her wisdom.

Remind us of our dependent relationship to all people, animals, plants and Earth.

Help us to give back the life we have received from your creation.

Amen.



James Martin is a Master of Divinity student at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary. He spent four years prior as a middle school science teacher in Douglas, AZ., and enjoys spending lots of free time in the mountains either camping, hiking, biking, or rock climbing. James hopes to continue working, living, learning and being in community with his siblings in the U.S./Mexico borderlands.

Fifth Sunday



The lack of physical description for the ‘new heaven and new earth’ makes it hard to envision exactly what this Holy City might look like. One thing is for sure, the new heaven and earth is God’s dwelling place, a space where the Lord brings comfort to the people removing death, mourning, crying, and pain. In this sense, there appears to be a change in consciousness as God removes fears that lead to such hurt.

This re-envisioning is precisely what ecofeminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether presents in her book *New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation* (1975). After providing an introduction to Christian theology, ecology, and feminism by recognizing the interrelation between ideology and systemic oppression, Ruether encourages a change in consciousness by calling out patriarchy, hierarchy, inequity, and inferiorization. Such widespread oppressions like racism, sexism, and classism only get in the way when it comes to ushering in a new heaven and a new earth.

Given the heightened turmoil of the past few years, a brand new city is deeply needed, but when viewed within the lens of Ruether another question remains: What oppressions must we abolish in order to achieve this new heaven and new earth? In other words, what might the world look like if we were co-creators in this narrative? I would imagine this new world would be one that is free from fear, a place that strives to care for those who have been hurt, and most of all, a world in which oppression is obsolete. It’s a lot to tackle, but it is worth striving for.

As people of faith, we are our siblings’ keepers. Justice for others is justice for all. As we anticipate the resurrection of Easter Sunday, I hope we hold onto cultivating a world that is pleasing to God and free from fear— where the Lord can comfortably inhabit our society and dwell among all people.

Fifth Sunday, cont.

Prayer

Creator, this Lenten season, open our eyes to the injustices around us. May we begin to build the foundation for a world that is honoring and pleasing to you.—one that removes fear and values everyone.

Amen.



Vickie Machado is a leader with the Eco-Stewards Program, a grassroots community that shapes young adult leaders through place-based experiences that connect faith and the environment. She is also a PhD candidate studying Religion & Nature at the University of Florida where her research focuses on the role of religion and spirituality in water-based environmental movements.



Palm Sunday

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 ... 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.’” ... 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!”*

Luke 19:29-39



As a child there was one treat that I always wanted, but I never needed: a **McDonald's Happy Meal complete with the featured toy of the season**. I was an all-out McDonald's enthusiast, with a rather impressive collection of Happy Meal toys considering the response I would get most often when asking for McDonalds was, “Do you have McDonald's money?” Often followed by the offhand comment, “You don't need it anyway, there's food at home.” It was during these tense negotiations with my mother where I learned the difference between needing and wanting, and where I got a glimpse of the economic system that undergirded my mother's ability to secure our needs and occasionally to satisfy our wants.

Palm Sunday, cont.

It is in recalling these memories that Jesus' instructions to his disciples come into focus. "If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'" Luke's recounting of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem is rich and textured. But it's Luke's decision to depart from Matthew and Mark's account, and to designate Christ as king that opens this story to the wider implications it poses for us, the land, and the systems of production we've created that break bodies and abuse Creation.

Perhaps Luke's retelling of the story casts Christ as king because of the disruptive role Jesus plays in this scene. Jesus has need of a young donkey, disrupting its ability to labor in the fields of an occupied Israel. Jesus is disruptive, causing workers to abandon their posts. It's interesting that Luke's account has no mention of Palm branches, but rather it centers cloaks. Jesus is disruptive, causing people to rethink their needs and their wants, displacing the capitalistic focus on materialism and production with another more powerful force, relationship.

This disruptive divine presence will not be easily displaced; in fact it will bring about a reordering of nature that causes the Earth to cry out. A reordering that clarifies what is truly needed. A new relationship not only between life and death but between bodies and consumption and between animals and production. A new relationship that helps us to listen to Creation, for it is speaking. A relationship that brings us closer to the new Heaven and new Earth that is stored up for us in eternity. And that is what we need, and for each Believer, that must be what we want.

Prayer

Everlasting God, we confess that we have often given in to our desire to have and do more. We confess that we've loved what our eyes have seen and what our hands have accomplished more than we have loved you. May you grant us the spirit of disruption, that it may come into our lives and reorder us toward what we most need and what you require. Disrupt us with a holy disruption, and help us to be drawn into you and closer to one another.

In Jesus name, Amen.



A graduate of Howard University and Yale Divinity School, Joshua Narcisse serves as the inaugural Faith & Health Pastoral Resident at the Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church and Church Health in Memphis, TN, where he leads digital and young adult ministries and develops spiritual care programming for medical professionals. He is an ordained ruling elder and candidate for ordination under care of New York City Presbytery.

Maundy Thursday



Photo Credit: courtesy of Samantha Corwin

Oftentimes our earthly eyes get clouded with visions of the present time. We work for our own comfort, for productivity and worldly abundance. We value goods and seek quantity over quality. Our temporal short-sightedness sets our paths toward what is quick and pleasurable. Our end goals of eternity get lost in the busyness of life. Revelation 21:1-4 gives us a vision of our true spiritual desire.

We are gifted with this image of the new heaven and new earth. A new home without pain. A place to live in communion with our Creator where God himself dwells among us! This picture of a new heaven and earth can help guide our time now on this earth. When earthly things pass away as in Revelation 21:1 and the new heaven and earth are formed, how will our interactions with one another and with God change? Without the need to strive for comfort, productivity, and material abundance, how will our relationship and interactions with earth change?

Let us use this vision of new heaven and new earth to guide our earthly interactions now. We can see a reflection of our home to come when we partake in communion together. Gratefully giving thanks for the gift of salvation, we remember Christ's death and resurrection. We look to the promise of a new heaven and earth when we are able to partake in communion with Christ again in this new home where God dwells with us. In our new home, we will treat earth less selfishly, not looking for what we can get out of the earth for our own comfort or productivity, but for what we can pour back into it and into this new creation that God has given us.

Prayer

*Sustainer of the Universe,
Empty us of our own desires so that we may receive your vision as fresh and fertile soil
prepared to sprout seeds of new beginning. May your heavenly will be done on earth and by
your graciousness, may we create places of renewal while we await the return of our Savior
Jesus Christ.*

Amen

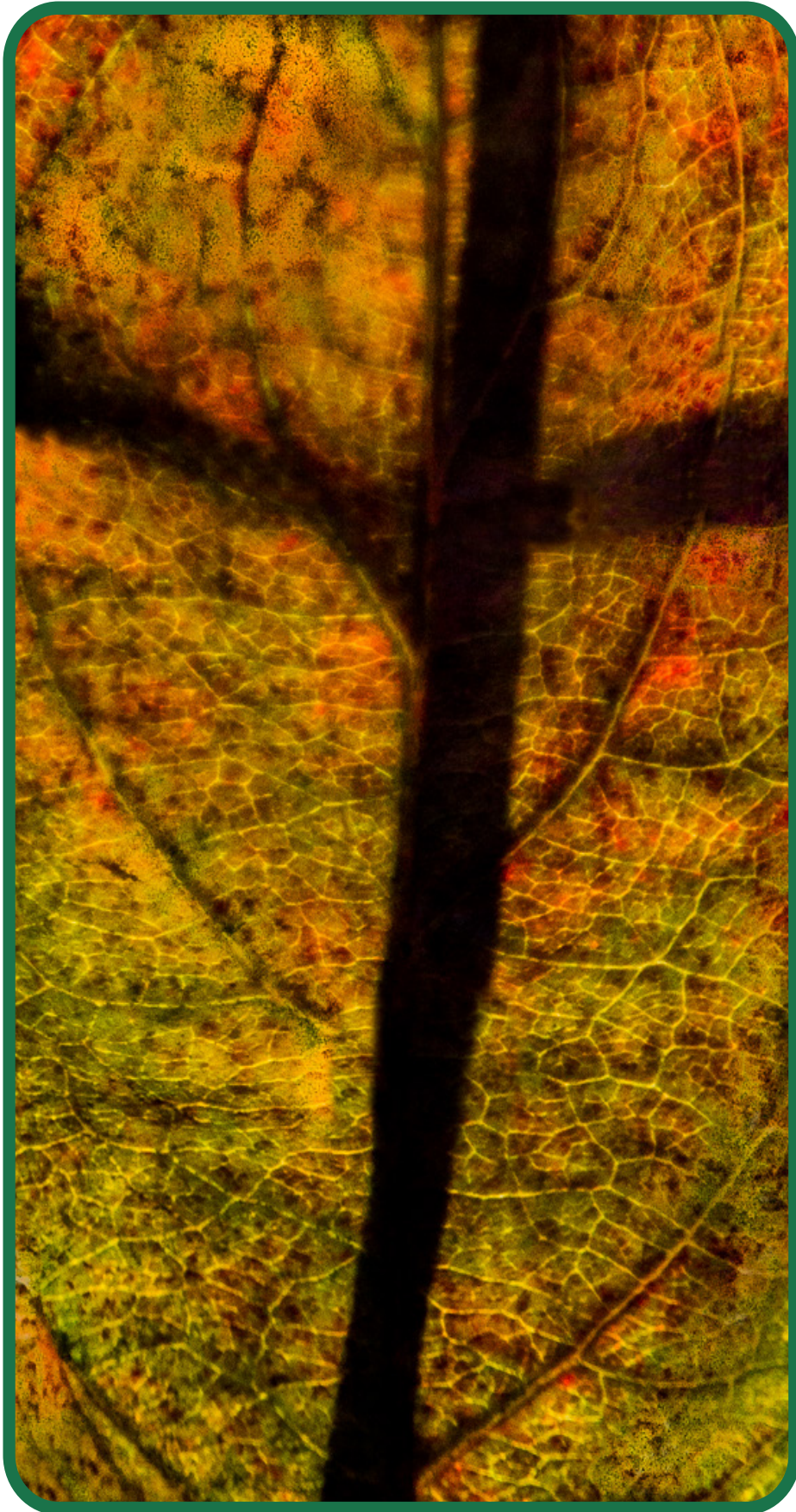
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Maundy Thursday, cont.



Samantha Corwin is a Master of Divinity student at Fuller Theological Seminary. She has started the process of becoming an inquirer with the encouragement and support of United Presbyterian Church. Samantha is thankful for the love and support of her husband, Ryan and daughters, Bravely and Adventure. As a proud member of the Chickasaw Nation Samantha feels a great call to earth care and conservation.





Good Friday

A google search for why we call Good Friday “good” reveals a lot of speculation. However, it is easy to imagine that Pontius Pilate and Herod patted themselves on the back and declared the day good. The young up-start from Nazareth was dead and done. The score was Empire: 1 and Nazareth: 0. Admittedly it was strange about the earthquake happening around that time, but not to worry, empires have lots of stone masons. They didn’t know then that Empire was the loser and the crumbling walls would give way to the message of love being carried globally.

Last year, on this holy day, we couldn’t know that our empire was shaking, and that the scales would fall from our eyes. A virus and a murder exposed our institutional inequities, our history of genocide, and slavery un-resolved. Very few guessed that some folks would enter the heart of our democracy on January 6th while the president spent his time pardoning prisoners, leasing public lands, and approving pesticides. This Good Friday we are definitely standing on the shaking ground of empire—with our eyes open to what we have ignored for hundreds of years.

And that really is Good Friday news. We are standing in the rubble of our colonialism, our consumerism, and our escapism. We also stand on our tortured, beautiful Earth, hand in hand, heads down. We see. We weep. We wait “for the old order of things has passed away” (Rev. 21:4) as the writer of Revelations knew. Empires don’t hold, but the love that is God came and is coming. Eat and sleep well this night. Now that we can see what we haven’t been seeing, we have work to do—together, with the Love of this coming Sunday to guide our efforts.

Prayer

Now that we see, lead us, holy Jesus, with your love to do the repairs earth and all that dwell in and upon it requires of us.



Rev. Holly Hallman (left) and husband Fred Dunlap (right) live on traditional lands belonging to the Port Gamble S’Kallam tribe in the Puget Sound of Washington state. Holly is a retired hospice chaplain who hopes that the earth is not her next patient.

Easter Sunday

When he was at the table with them, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?”

Luke 13:30-32



I am often curious as to how much the Christian capacity to generously share is related to the trust in a recognition that God is the provider of all things. God is, after all, the source of supply. As people of Grace, we must come close to God and neighbor in love to encounter the power of collective compassion in order to counter the ever-present temptation to the broken systems of domination and fear.

We find ourselves Lent after Lent straining towards the beauty and joy of Easter knowing that spiritually we must first sojourn through the emotional and psychological rocky road of Holy Week. If we are to truly appreciate the glory of the New Life of The Risen Jesus, we must open our hearts and our imaginations to practice living in the now and the not yet.

Easter Sunday, cont.

Both literally and figuratively, we must trust the seed-planting processing. The work to rid the world of food deserts and the work to hold powers and principalities systemically accountable for the immoral dumping of toxic waste or poisoning water drinking water requires the kind of faith that with open eyes and hearts to burn with the truth is shared. It is the kind of imperfect faith that Cleopas and another follower of Jesus had that was willing to invite the stranger on the road in and share a conversation, a meal, a hope, or a dream.

Indeed, to care for this gift of the Earth faithfully, we will have to expand our conversation partners and be open to new insights when we are most dejected. We will need to make more time in our actual lives to share our food, our shelter, or our resources of all sorts with those we discover on the road, even when we are heartbroken or worried that things have been destroyed past the point of no return.

As people on a faith journey to love God and tend tenderly to God's beautiful creation, we will undoubtedly find ourselves dismayed and disoriented. While we normally think of this scripture in the Post-Lent and Post-Easter Season, may the story of Cleopas and the unknown follower of Jesus on their way to Emmaus be an invitation on this Easter Sunday to wonder and wander, to rest and refresh, to break open scripture and break bread with our fellow sojourners in a sharing of wisdom and resources.

Who might God be calling you to connect with today? Will you make that time? Christ Jesus just might show up in unexpected and unimaginable ways.

Prayer

Gracious God, we give you praise for who you are. We thank you for your presence which set our hearts ablaze and never leaves us alone. Empower us to be the Body of Christ together while we are yet full of questions and curiosities about the care of your world.

In the name of the Our Creator, Liberator, and Sustainer, we pray. Amen.



Rev. Shavon Starling-Louis graduated from Columbia Theological Seminary and serves as the pastor of Meadowlake Presbyterian Church in the Presbytery of Charlotte. As an enneagram 2, she is a generous and gifted encourager, teacher, and preacher, and she is passionate about equity and anti-oppression work in the Church and beyond.

Credits

Cover Art

The cover art was provided by Lauren Wright Pittman (she/her), Founding Creative Partner and Director of Branding for Sanctified Art, a ministry that develops creative, multimedia resources for church leaders and spiritual seekers.

Lauren is an artist, graphic designer, and visual exegete. She uses paint, metallic inks, and Apple pencil to image the layered complexity she experiences in scripture texts. She also helps faith communities share their vibrant stories through branding & design services.

You can find more of her work at sanctifiedart.org and lewpstudio.com.



Raise Your Head | Inspired by: Luke 21:25-36

“Jesus says to respond to apocalyptic signs with staggering hope and confidence. When it feels like the very foundations of the heavens are crumbling, we are to stand up. When the roaring sea and the waves confuse us, when the sun, moon and stars come tumbling out of the sky, we are to raise our heads... Just as the trees signal the changing of the seasons, these signs will prepare us for the coming of Christ. Instead of getting lost in the worries of this life, stand up, raise your head, and get lost in the fact that this expansive, infinite God is drawing near to you. Choose to get lost in wonder.”

Photos

Unless otherwise noted, all the photos used in this devotional were provided by David Kepley. You can view more of David's photography at: davidkepleyphotography.smugmug.com

Layout and Coordinator

This year's Lenten Devotional was the work of Jonathan Lee as a part of his internship experience with Presbyterians for Earth Care.

Thank you so much to all of the contributors, editors, and people who helped me along this undertaking.

May you go out and welcome the world that awaits us.