



Presbyterians for Earth Care

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Lenten Devotional 2022

*all photography courtesy
Roy Howard*

Ash Wednesday - March 2, 2022

The inspiration for the following hymn comes from the scripture that is often used during Ash Wednesday worship services: "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19).

We do not ponder enough that we are created by God. This hymn was commissioned by *Presbyterian Outlook* magazine four years ago.

Sing Out! We're Made of Common Dust

CANONBURY 8.8.8.8 ("Lord, Speak to Me, That I May Speak")

Sing out! We're made of common dust; one day, to dust we shall return!
Yet, God, you've placed your mark on us and so for you our spirits yearn.

This gift of ashes we receive reminds us we belong to you.
You call us to repent, believe, and seek your Way in all we do.

The dust and dirt of children's play, of youthful times, of working years
Are part of life — and life's decay; we wash the dust with sorrow's tears.

We sing, O God, of what you give: this ash reminds us we are yours.
In life we're claimed, in death we live! In Christ our life, your love endures.

Biblical Reference: Genesis 3:19

Tune: Robert Schumann, 1839 ("Lord, Speak to Me, That I May Speak")

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Here is the prayer before the marking of the ashes: "Almighty God, you have created us out of the dust of the earth. May these ashes be for us a sign of our mortality and penitence, and a reminder that only by your gracious gift are we given everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen." (*Presbyterian Book of Common Worship*).

As we start the season of Lent, it is good to be reminded that life is a wonderful, awe-inspiring gift from God and that we are made of matter (we are more than spiritual beings). God uses the most common, tiny material to give us life. "A grain of house dust is roughly halfway in size between a subatomic particle and the planet earth" (Jeffery Burton Russell in *Dust: A History of the Small and the Invisible* by Joseph A. Amato, page xi). A visit to the hospital can be a reminder of how fragile and mortal life is. As we are reminded of the gift that we have been given, we respond in gratitude by loving God, loving our neighbors, and loving creation. These acts of thankfulness give purpose and meaning to our lives. In the limited time we have in this mortal life, we need to ponder how we can better love all that God has given us. We are called to be stewards of God's creation, caring for it when far too much is being destroyed and the whole planet is suffering.

Prayer: Loving God, thank you creating us out of so little and blessing us with life. Help us to treasure each day as a gift from you. Guide us as we seek to care for all that you have created. We pray in the name of Jesus, who lived, died and lives again, offering us life in all of its fullness now and forever. Amen.

Carolyn Winfrey Gillette



First Sunday in Lent – March 6, 2022

Our Time in the Wilderness

A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord." Isaiah 40:3a

Walking in Montana wilderness means breathing pine-coned forests and hearing waterfalls but one is always aware of meeting a bear, falling from a rocky crag, or in winter suffocating under an avalanche. A prairie walk brings desert flowers but also rattlesnakes.

During the past few years many of us have wandered in a darkened wilderness with too many loved ones ill or dying in a culture gone mad with fear, distrust, anger, and violence. We are often heart-broken, tired, and lonely. We have lost connections with our work, with nature, our values, and with each other.

In Lent, our church calendar of 40 days, we are asked to take time to meditate on past confusions, to turn to focus on God, and to "prepare the way of the Lord" and the resurrection of Life with us and within us.

To turn from darkness to Light, Luke's (4:1-13) description of Jesus being led by the Spirit for 40 days in the wilderness is instructive. The devil tempts Jesus three times and Jesus teaches us that

* living is more than daily survival---there is a spiritual as well as a material world ("One does not live by bread alone.")

* even though we humans think we can solve everything, we cannot ("Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.")

* but we need to do the right thing when we can and not just throw up our hands and say it's in God's hands ("Do not put your Lord God to the test.")

As we pray for the entire eco-system of plants, animals, and us to flourish, it is time to stop our willful wandering in a drought-filled desert and center on rich spiritual renewal. If we listen closely, we'll hear what God is calling us to do, individually and as a community of the faithful.

Prayer

"Hymn of Promise": In the bulb there is a flower; in the seed, an apple tree; in cocoons, a hidden promise, butterflies will soon be free! In the cold and snow of winter there's a spring that waits to be, unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.

Betty Whiting



(Capitol Reef National Park, Dec. 2021 - Photo © Trent Hidenfelter)

Second Sunday in Lent – March 13, 2022

Genesis 15:17-18

Psalm 27

The Creator made a covenant with Abraham and said, "I give this land...." How have we cared for that gift?

While the religious establishment has been late to the environmental justice movement, people of faith since the beginning have recognized a moral obligation to protect fragile ecosystems that sustain life. If we have failed in that obligation, we can join the movement now with a commitment to change what we can where we can.

We are called to understand that climate change is a moral challenge... We are called to honor our duties of justice, to prevent the enormities of climate change, as the price of the lifestyles of the privileged is paid by millions of poor people, in the loss of their livelihoods and their lives. We are called to honor our duties of compassion, to prevent the suffering of millions of innocent people, especially the hungry children... In matters of climate change, as in all our lives, our obligation is clear: we must do unto others as we would wish them to do unto us.

- Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, 2010 in Foreword to "Moral Ground: Ethical Action for a Planet in Peril," Kathleen Dean Moore and Michael P. Nelson, Editors
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"Doing unto others" is similar to "loving thy neighbor." Is our choice of entertainment systems, cars, fuels, travel, appliances, and recycling habits simply a lifestyle or a spiritual consideration?

And who is my neighbor? Consider the Good Samaritan. We are called to actions that consider the plight of our neighbors, including those who suffer the consequences of our wasteful choices. By shopping local, carpooling, hanging clothes to dry, changing light bulbs, keeping phones a while longer, refusing plastic straws, refusing Styrofoam, taking our coffee cups to church, eating less meat, using cloth napkins, and choosing reusable shopping bags, we impact the lives of people around the world we will never meet – our neighbors.

Prayer: Creator God, as the Psalmist writes "Teach me thy way, O Lord; and lead me on a level path..." We are people on a path toward you. Forgive us for our wasteful neglect along the way. Remind us to care for your precious gift – a home created with perfectly balanced ecosystems. Open our eyes to the wonders around us. Amen.

Scharmél Roussel



Third Sunday in Lent – March 20, 2022

Isaiah 55:1

All of you who are thirsty,
come to the water!
Whoever has no money,
come, buy food and eat!
Without money, at no cost,
buy wine and milk!

This invitation to come and feast may seem counter-intuitive to those of us in the middle of the Lenten wilderness. The invitation to feast may seem ill-timed to those of us in the struggle to heal God's creation. It's time to work, not party! It's time to engage—write letters, attend webinars, study, teach, and join demonstrations (and indeed it is). The invitation to feast may seem a bit pollyannaish to many of us who are tired, broke, and bereft of hopefulness. This invitation comes to us when we are smack dab in the middle of our wilderness journey. We have gone too far to turn back, and our destination is still too far away to see. We are vulnerable, tired, and we're not sure if we have anything left to spend.

And yet, to those of us who are tired, thirsty, and despairing, the invitation comes nonetheless.

It's in the wilderness where we need the invitation the most. It's in the middle, when we are running on empty, that the invitation can have its greatest power to keep us going forward.

Did you notice that the word doesn't say everything is free? It still costs! But the funds are not ours. We may be broke, but God's Spirit tucks enough grace, hope, and love into our hands so that everyone, anyone, all of us can get what need to taste the abundant feast that is the beloved community of God's kin-dom.

More often than I like to admit, though I do my best to hide it, I worry that we won't have enough to make it all the way to where we need to be. That can wear me out. But then we fellow travelers gather together as siblings and we hear the invitation from our God who promises resurrection after death. The audacious invitation proclaims that our faith is not one cowed by scarcity. We celebrate abundance.

Seeing each other's faces, holding each other's hands, carrying each other's loads when they get too heavy, and sharing hope, grace, and love when one runs out, we move forward-trusting and tasting, together.
Come, join the feast.

Paul Heins



Fourth Sunday in Lent – March 27, 2022

"So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!"

2 Corinthians 5:17 New Revised Standard Version c. 1989

There is a new creation—every day. God is doing a new thing, day after day, moment to moment. And God is inviting us to be part of it, to participate in the ongoing evolution, ongoing creation of the universe. The newer translations of 2 Corinthians 5:17 remind us that we are connected to the rest of creation: our renewal is connected to the renewal of all creation.

The Gospel reading for today, the familiar story of the Good Samaritan, reminds us that part of the newness God calls us to embody is new relationships. We are called to love. Who is our neighbor? Not only the people we love, and feel connected to, Jesus says, but people we've thought of as different, or enemies. Franciscan sister and scientist Ilia Delio reminds us that the French Jesuit paleontologist, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin wrote "[Love-energy] is the most universal, the most tremendous, and the most mysterious of the cosmic forces. . . . The *physical* structure of the universe is love." Delio comments: "Teilhard's insights on love-energy as the core energy of evolution provide a new basis to understand cosmic nature. If being is intrinsically relational, then nothing exists independently or autonomously. Rather, "to be" is "to be with." [Teilhard de Chardin, *Human Energy*, 72, quoted in Ilia Delio, *The Unbearable Wholeness of Being*, Orbis Books, 2013, 44-45]

We are *with* creation—the trees, the birds, the insects, the animals, the fungi are also our neighbors. When we love them as we are called to love our neighbors, we understand that we are part of a creation community in which all creation is part of our neighborhood. And as we embody the love-energy of God in our relationships with other humans, and all creation, we participate in God's making all things new, including us.

We're Part of the Blessing by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette
ASH GROVE ("Let All Things Now Living")

We're part of the blessing of God's new creation;
The world may not see it, but we know it's true.
For God in Christ Jesus has given salvation;
The old life is gone! God makes everything new!

Rev. Dr. Susan Gilbert Zencka



Fifth Sunday in Lent – April 3, 2022

John 12:1-8

The scene where Mary anoints Jesus' feet with nard and wipes them with her hair has always struck me as uncomfortably intimate. It seems an odd thing to do at a dinner party! I feel the others in attendance must have felt the same way I do as we don't hear much from them. They are all seemingly dumbstruck. Except for Judas, who feels he must express a self-righteous outrage at Mary's actions, criticizing her and acting as if he suddenly cares about the poor.

Jesus' response to him is more than just an off the cuff remark. I feel it is a call to action. He says, "You will always have the poor with you, but you won't always have me."

In this scene, Mary is showing love to one who meant the world to her. But how do we show love to the world today? If we are to be Jesus's hands and feet in this world, we must listen for the weeping around us whether it be the oceans filling with plastic waste or endangered species slowly disappearing or people living in poverty and oppression, victims of inequality and violence. We must find ways to help the poor and all those in need who are still with us every day.

Mary's action, while strangely intimate, filled the house with the scent of perfume. That was probably an improvement over sweaty bodies and dirty feet! What can we do today to improve conditions and lessen the suffering of God's creation? How are we called to change the world for the better?

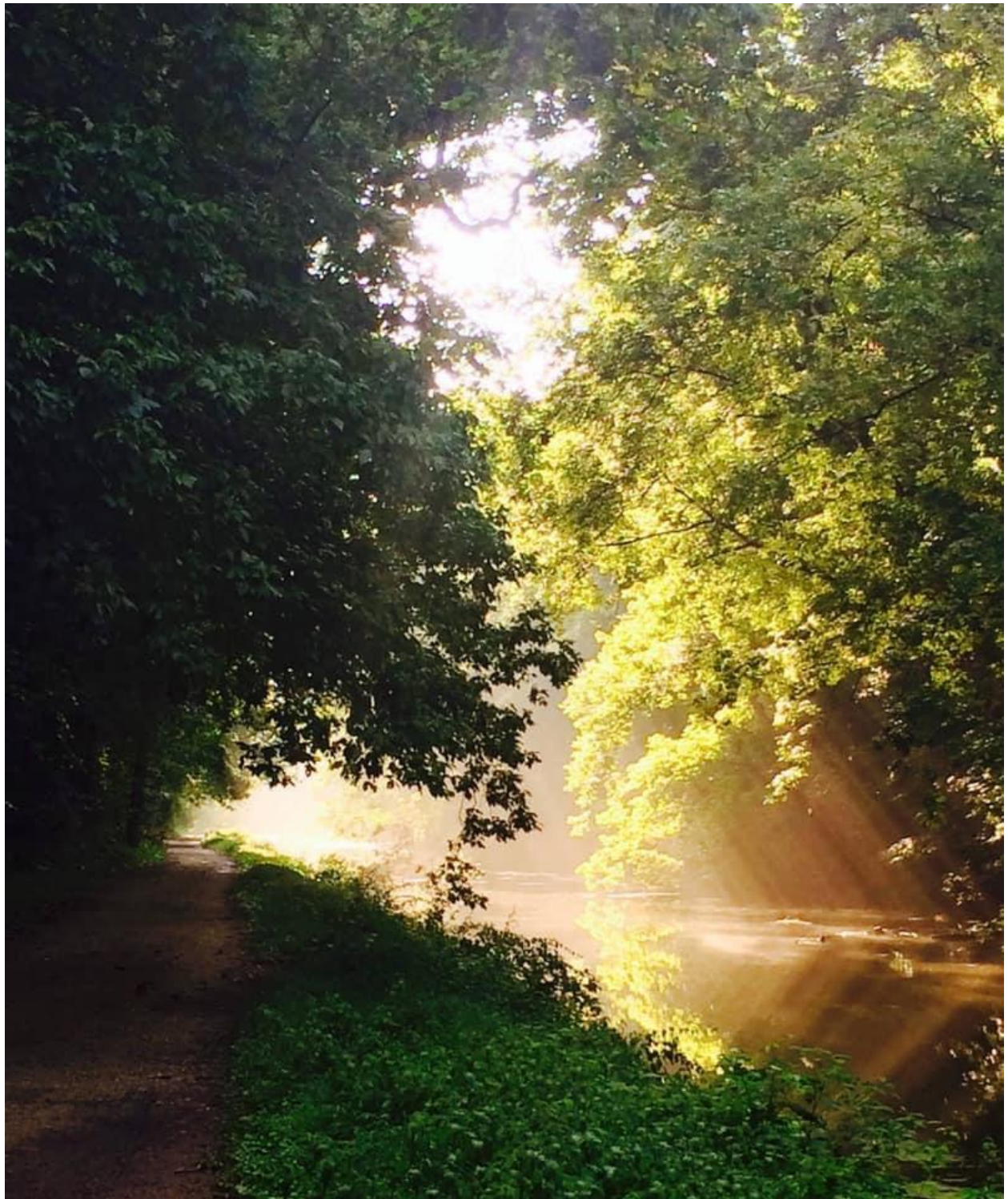
Showing love is always an intimate act. But it doesn't have to be uncomfortable or awkward. Showing love is what we are called to do for all of God's creation. How will you show your love today?

Prayer

Loving God,

Help us to hear your call. Help us to step up and, like Mary, proudly and unashamedly show our love for your creation. Help us to find ways to make your world a better place for all your creatures as we act as your hands and feet in the world.

Nancy Jones



Palm Sunday – April 10, 2022

John 12: 12-19

I can imagine how excited Jesus' followers must have been that first Palm Sunday...Celebration is a simple statement of spiritual truth. I don't believe any of the disciples had fully allowed the euphoria of that first Palm Sunday parade to blind them to the harsh reality that they faced on a daily basis.

Sometimes – especially right in the middle of struggle, uncertainty, tension, and stress – it's a good thing simply to celebrate, regardless of the circumstances...There's no denying how difficult it is to maintain optimism and hope in the face of tough times. But Jesus is our anticipation and our expectation, and so we're not exhibiting a simplistic, pie-in-the-sky hope for the future when we celebrate. The Christian celebration, as exemplified by our Palm Sunday worship services, expresses a statement of a spiritual truth.

(Derek Maul, *Reaching Toward Easter*, Upper Room Books, 2011, 112-113 – reprinted with permission)

A recent survey of 10,000 people between the ages of 16 and 25 across 10 countries, led by Bath University in collaboration with five universities, found that young people are experiencing deep anxiety over the current trajectory of climate change. Nearly 60% of those surveyed said they felt worried or extremely worried for the future of the planet, and over half of respondents think humanity is doomed as a result. (Roger Harrabin for BBC, *Climate change: Young people very worried – survey*, Sept. 14, 2021) This is a terrible burden for our young people to bear and yet, they seem to be the ones who truly acknowledge the long-term future impacts of the decisions we adults make today and every day.

We do not want our children to live in distress for the future of the earth, as they watch destruction of our resources unfold. Let us not leave them to feel abandoned and betrayed by global decision-makers. We need to listen and give the world's youth a seat at the table to have a role in making necessary changes to the way we carry on with our daily lives. Yes, this is a time of global distress. But Palm Sunday and the triumphant entrance of Jesus reminds us that optimism and hope are important in difficult times. And the face of this optimism and hope may well be that of our collective youthful world citizens.

Prayer

Dear Lord, Jesus' triumphant entrance into Jerusalem reminds us of hope in the midst of trying times. Be with our youth as they grow in a world of environmental distress and allow them to be guided as the hope for the planet. Amen.

Mindy Hidenfelter



Maundy Thursday – April 14, 2022

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Many of us celebrate special occasions by eating lavish meals and enjoying premium entertainment. We may mark birthdays or anniversaries with an expensive dinner and the concert of a favorite musician. We may even shape the day around what we most want to do, giving ourselves permission to be self-centered for a time. Imagine, then, how we would want to spend our last hours. Jesus, however, spends his Last Supper, not focusing on indulgence, but rather in loving service to others. After explaining that it is his body and blood that sustain us, he takes a basin of water and a towel and washes his disciples' feet. He tells them he has set an example for them to follow and that "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." On his last free night, Jesus feeds, cleanses, and teaches. He lifts up others. He serves with love.

How do we follow Jesus' example? How do we mark this special, holy day of Maundy Thursday? How do we spend our ordinary days? To follow Jesus' example means putting others before our own interests. It means caring first for others' needs and well being - not just those close to us, but for people around the world. It means serving with love.

And we can't serve and care for others if we are not also tending to the environment around them. A person's welfare is linked to the quality of water they have to drink, the safety of the food they have to eat, the freshness of the air they have to breathe. If we want to show Christ's love for others, we have to love the world they inhabit.

How do our actions - what we purchase, what we consume, how we live - affect the lives of others? Do our actions prevent or ensure others will have their needs met? How might we, as the old hymn says, "guard human dignity and save human pride" so that "they'll know we are Christians by our love?"

Prayer

Loving God, thank you for your example of service rendered in love. Help us to consider the needs and welfare of other people in all that we do. May your love be so visible in us that we will be known as your disciples. Amen.

Courtney Bowen



Good Friday – April 15, 2022

Luke 23: 26-56

In my childhood, Lent was a time of intentional austerity. We always "gave up" favorite foods, treats and activities, and, in keeping with parochial school custom, had no meat on Friday. But the tide began to turn, not on Easter Sunday, but Good Friday afternoon. After the noon until 3:00 pm worship vigil (which walks the congregation through the agony and sorrow of the Crucifixion), it was time to make Hot Cross Buns. This delicious bread, in the form of spiced and fruit-filled dough baked into individual portions, marked on top with a cross formed of sugar, is a church tradition in England that dates back to the Middle Ages. As the dough is crafted, each ingredient is symbolic of one part of the Gospel narrative: water, for baptism, leaven and flour for Jesus' parable of his Kingdom, bitter orange peel for the gall raised to his lips as he hung on the cross, spices for the rich aromatic oils with which Jesus' mother and companions anointed his body, crosses shaped of sugar to emphasize the joy of redemption, and more. My grandmother, alongside whom I made this bread, had survived the Great Depression as a homeless single mother of a young son. She was grateful for any tiny blessing in life, and never wasted anything ever (as in, never. ever.) We rolled all miniscule dough scraps that remained on the countertop into small spheres and fed them to the backyard birds and squirrels, singing 'one-a-penny, two-a-penny, Hot Cross Buns!.. (Sis, we got to remember it's Holy Week for the creatures, too, not just the people'...).

To this day, Hot Cross Buns on Good Friday remind me of the Gospel promise of a world redeemed, even when hope seems lost, and the knowledge that even in dark times, Light prevails.

Prayer

God of all Creation, Give us courage to walk through this day and persist on the journey, knowing the best is yet to come...

Allison Davidson



The Resurrection of the Lord, Easter - April 17, 2022

¹⁹ If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. ²⁰ But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. ²¹ For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; ²² for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. ²⁴ Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”
1 Corinthians 15:19-26

We usually hear a gospel story about the risen Jesus on Easter, but the creators of the lectionary include a reading from Paul’s first letter to the Corinthian Christians because its fifteen chapter says more about what the resurrection means to us today than any other place in the Bible. Diana Butler Bass, author of *Grounded: Finding God in the World - A Spiritual Revolution*, wrote in her February 17, 2022 *Sunday Musings at the Cottage* e-newsletter about Paul’s world-changing chapter:

“Paul challenged the hierarchical status of bodies held by the upper class by insisting on a resurrection. He challenged the narrow conception of fleshly bodies held by lower status Christians by insisting on something called a *pneuma-soma*, a “spirit-body” (again: this is a *real body* — neither mere flesh nor a disembodied entity). By correcting both factions, and by crafting new theological ground, Paul established the possibility of a unified Christian community — one *not* roiled by divisive arguments derived largely from conflicts of social status. This **new** body — the Body of Christ — was the alternative to the *Imperial Body* of Rome. In this way, resurrection makes possible the Kingdom of God.”

The promise we have of embodied life after death has implications for our lives here and now. The Church values everyone equally because all are made in the image of God, saved in Jesus and guided by the Holy Spirit. Together we are the Body of Christ, called to love and serve in this world, furthering the Kingdom of God here (we pray and try to live “Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”). David Hay comments on I Corinthians 15:23-28: “Christians live in a world of conflict, widespread opposition to God, and death. They have the assurance, however, that the risen Christ already reigns invisibly as Lord to overcome all the opposing forces, including death. In the end all persons and powers will submit to the sovereignty of God” (*The Discipleship Study Bible*, p. 1963).

One can easily be discouraged trying to counter the deadly impact of climate change throughout the world. In the end, our hope does not come from what we are doing, but from what God has done in Jesus and what God continues to do in our lives and our world. Easter tells us that God wins in the end, so there will be no end. We seek to further God’s will out of gratitude, including as we care for all of creation now.

Prayer: Eternal God, make us instruments of your love-- caring for your creation-- and messengers of hope, knowing that Easter brings new life now and forever. Amen.

Bruce Gillette