



SHARED GRACIOUSLY BY
FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, RIVER FALLS
MODIFIED FOR THIS LECTIONARY YEAR

LENTEN DEVOTIONAL FOR CREATION

- 2023 -



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Image on Friday, April 7, 2023: Giovanni, di Paolo, approximately 1403-approximately 1482. Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, from Art in the Christian Tradition, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=57341> [retrieved January 5, 2023]. Original source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Christus_im_garten_Giovanni_di_Paolo.Vatican.jpg.

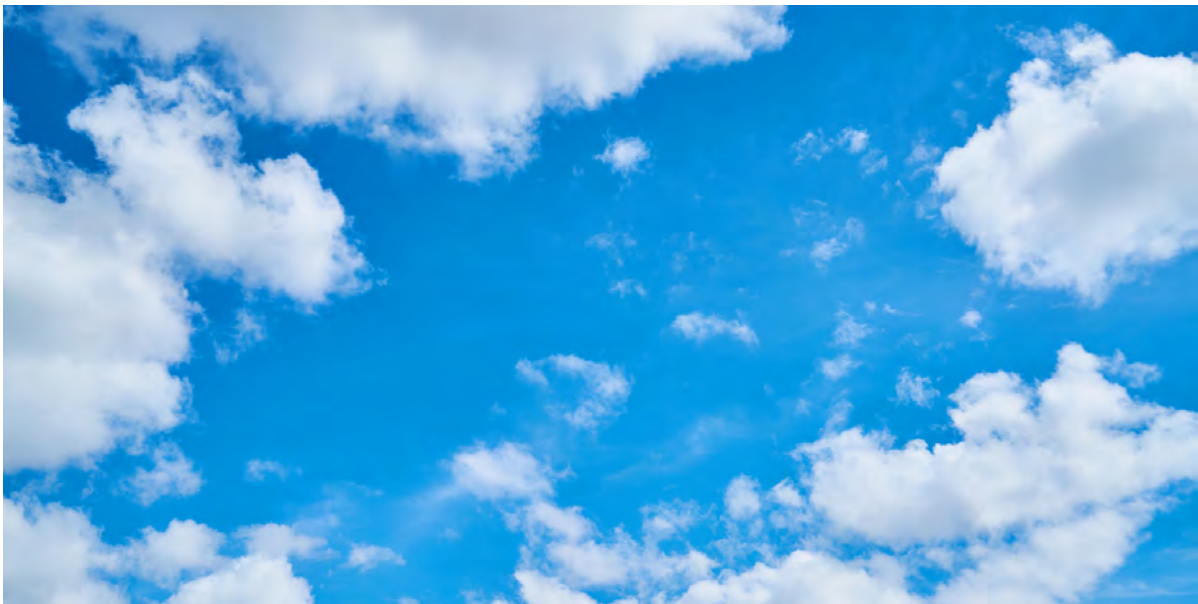
Image on Saturday, April 8, 2023: Hochhalter, Cara B.. When They Crucified Jesus, from Art in the Christian Tradition, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=59271> [retrieved January 5, 2023]. Original source: Cara B. Hochhalter.

Image on Sunday, April 9, 2023: Pittman, Lauren Wright. Jesus of the Bayou, from Art in the Christian Tradition, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=57089> [retrieved January 5, 2023]. Original source: Lauren Wright Pittman, <http://www.lewpstudio.com/>.



INTRODUCTION TO THIS DEVOTIONAL

We are grateful for the team at First Congregational in River Falls, who shared this resource with us and permitted us to adapt it to this lectionary year. The original First Congregational (River Falls) devotional grew out of the work and commitments not only of church members and leaders but also of the community-wide work of Hope for Creation, an ecumenical organization that has, since 2015, grown into a strong and influential community-wide initiative effectively addressing a wide range of environmental, sustainability, energy, and educational initiatives.



ASH WEDNESDAY

FEBRUARY 22, 2023

SCRIPTURE

MATTHEW 6:19-21

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

PRAYER

O God of the poor, help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth, so precious in your eyes. Bring healing to our lives, that we may protect the world and not prey on it, that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.

Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain at the expense of the poor and the earth. Teach us to discover the worth of each thing, to be filled with awe and contemplation, and to recognize that we are profoundly united with every creature as we journey toward your infinite light.

Amen.

ECUMENICAL WEDNESDAYS

Because tending to creation is not limited to one strand of Christianity, we will offer creation-centered messages on Wednesdays from Pope Francis' encyclical.



Laudato Si'

We are always capable of going out of ourselves towards the other. . . .“The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast.” For this reason, the ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior conversion. . . .What [some Christians] need is an “ecological conversion”, whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them. Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience.

Christian spirituality proposes an alternative understanding of the quality of life, and encourages a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle, one capable of deep enjoy-

ment free of the obsession with consumption. We need to take up an ancient lesson, found in different religious traditions and also in the Bible. It is the conviction that “less is more”. A constant flood of new consumer goods can baffle the heart and prevent us from cherishing each thing and each moment. To be serenely present to each reality, however small it may be, opens us to much greater horizons of understanding and personal fulfilment. Christian spirituality proposes a growth marked by moderation and the capacity to be happy with little. It is a return to that simplicity which allows us to stop and appreciate the small things, to be grateful for the opportunities which life affords us, to be spiritually detached from what we possess, and not to succumb to sadness for what we lack.

From Chapter Six, paragraphs 206 to 222.



THURSDAY

FEBRUARY 23, 2023

SCRIPTURE

GENESIS 1:1-5

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

PRAYER

God, who is our Rock, our Song, our Door, our Living Water, our Word, keep us always in your Presence, enable us to see You in everything, and help us to always share your Presence with the world.

Amen.

THURSDAYS WITH POETRY

Slow your mind & your speech on
Thursdays with the carefully chosen
words of poetry.



Many do not take literally that
Creation happened in seven days,
but we also don't dismiss this story
as mere fantasy. We know—we
believe—that the intensity and
rhythmic beauty of the Creation
story tells us another kind of truth
about God's care for us and for all of
Creation.

Writers turn to poetry when they
have opened themselves to that
which is beyond the ordinary, the
practical, and the realistic. And we
turn to poetry, whether in scripture
or from contemporary poets, when
we want to stop or to be stopped, to
stay in the present moment, to be in
the Presence of the Holy.

Listen how James Weldon Johnson
transforms the poetry of Genesis into
the language of our day. You can
enjoy the whole poem in his
collection, "God's Trombones."

The Creation By James Weldon Johnson

And God stepped out on space,
And he looked around and said:
I'm lonely-
I'll make me a world.

And far as the eye of God could see
Darkness covered everything,
Blacker than a hundred midnights
Down in a cypress swamp.

Then God smiled,
And the light broke,
And the darkness rolled up on one side,
And the light stood shining on the other,
And God said: That's good!



FRIDAY
FEBRUARY 24, 2023

SCRIPTURE

GENESIS 1:6-13

And God said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And it was so. The earth brought

forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

PRAYER

May the blessing of God, fountain of living water, flow within us as a river of life. May we drink deep of God's wisdom. May we never thirst again. May we go through life refreshing many, as a sign of healing for all; through the One who is Life eternal.

Amen

Prayer is by Miriam Therese Winter, as found in "The Orchard Ridge [Wisconsin] United Church of Christ Blessing Book," 2006.

MEAT-FREE FRIDAYS

BY REBECCA FERGUSON

On this third day of Lent, we remember the third day of creation, when God gave us not just plants, but the glorious notion of seeds. From the fullness, the fruit, of a living thing comes the tiny beginning for yet another growing creation.



Consider water, the second day's creation. While we have easy access to clean water, almost a billion people on the Earth can barely get any water, let alone clean water. If we pay a little more attention to the foods we eat and the water it takes to make them, we can grow a big, new habit of living more lightly on the earth with our sisters and brothers around the globe. There's a term to give a name to our hope of changing our earth-unfriendly habits: "reducetarianism."

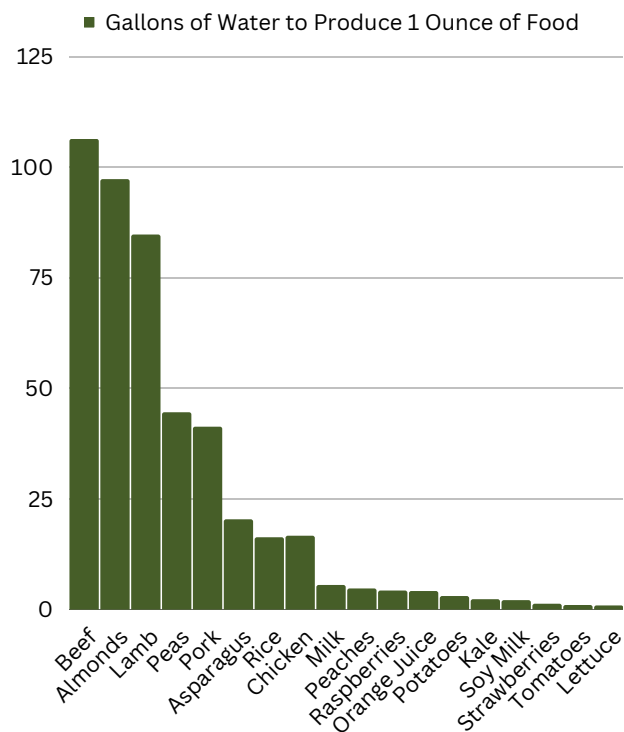
The term is meant to encourage us that we need not fear having to become vegetarians, but that we can simply eat less meat. We might try becoming "reducetarians." While some of us have had dramatic spiritual experiences when we were suddenly transformed by God's powerful intervention, most of us have known God's presence through the small seeds dropped every day into our lives. If you are moved to become vegan, hallelujah! And if you are blessed to make smaller changes, hallelujah for that, too!

Each Friday of Lent, you will find recipes and ideas to help you try out more fruitful (and veggie-full) living

and eating, to see how you might become a reducetarian.

According to the UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education, here's how much water it takes to produce different kinds of foods.

Any surprises for you?





SATURDAY
FEBRUARY 25, 2023

SCRIPTURE

GENESIS 1:14-19

And God said, “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.” And it was so.

God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that

it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

PRAYER

LORD God, we stand in awe of the interconnectedness of your creation. Every corner of the world shows your creativity and your intention for us to live in communion with each other and the land. We pray you give us the strength to spend our day today according to your will.

Amen.

CREATION

FROM *WISHFUL THINKING*
BY FREDERICK BUECHNER



To **make** suggests making something out of something else the way a man [or woman] makes wooden boxes out of wood. To **create** suggests making something out of nothing the way a [woman or] man makes paintings or poems. It is true that the artist, like the carpenter, has to use something else—paint, words—but the beauty or meaning [she or] he makes is different from the material he [or she] makes it out of. To create is to make something essentially new.

When God created the Creation he made something where before there had been nothing, and as the author of the Book of Job puts it, “The morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy” (Job 38:7) at the sheer and

shimmering novelty of the thing. “New every morning is the love / Our waking and uprising prove” says the hymn. Using the same old materials of earth, air, fire, and water, every twenty-four hours God creates something new out of them. If you think you’re seeing the same show all over again seven times a week, you’re crazy. Every morning you wake up to something that in all eternity never was before and never will be again. And the you that wakes up was never the same before and will never be the same again either.



FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

FEBRUARY 26, 2023

SCRIPTURE

MATTHEW 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus

said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the LORD your God to the test.'" Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the LORD your God, and serve only him.'" Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

PRAYER

Gracious God, Jesus' temptations seem so familiar to us. We, too, struggle to be steadfast in faithfulness. Remind us, pester us even, so that we are not tempted to forget our responsibility to the creation, the poor, the alienated, and those on the margins of society. Guard and protect us as we resist the power of the tempter.

Amen.

TEMPTATION

STACY JOHNSON MYERS

Immediately following Jesus' baptism, he was led by the Spirit into the wilderness where he was tempted for 40 days. First, the tempter challenges Jesus: "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." By this point, Jesus knew he was facing a daunting task and the tempter suggests escape: make your responsibilities fewer; don't try to meet everyone's needs, just the ones you feel are most important; don't pour out your life for others, take care of yourself first—end your own hunger. But Jesus resisted. The faithful don't live according to one need, one issue, one passion, one conviction. Faithful people don't just live for themselves. As Jesus said, "One does not live by bread alone."

In the second temptation, Jesus is confronted with false worship and the empty promise of "all the kingdoms of the world." As Jesus' story unfolds, we see that he does become the Lord of all the world, but not through grand use of power. Jesus' power comes from serving and then being nailed to a cross. The tempter tries to entice Jesus into achieving greatness without service or suffering, by relying on political

advantage, military strength, and economic opportunity. This kind of power gives you lots of people on your side, as well as a willingness to leave behind those who aren't on your side. But Jesus had none of it. He knew his ministry would not go around troubled places, but you take him right to the middle of them. He knew that his power came not in being a conqueror but in bring people together, offering healing and reconciliation.

In the last temptation, the tempter takes Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple and in effect says: "So, you say that you trust every word of God. Let's see. Jump! God's angels will protect you." Again, Jesus resisted. Why? Because this test comes not from trust but from a lack of trust. Testing God's promises is not a sign of faith, but a demonstration of doubt. Having doubt is not the problem (doubt is part of faith), but we need to live out of faith even when it seems futile. When we put God to the test, we dramatically reverse our relationship with God—we think we are in charge and treat God as our servant.



MONDAY
FEBRUARY 27, 2023

SCRIPTURE

GENESIS 1:20-23

And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures. And let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky." So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

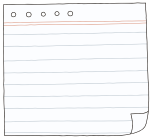
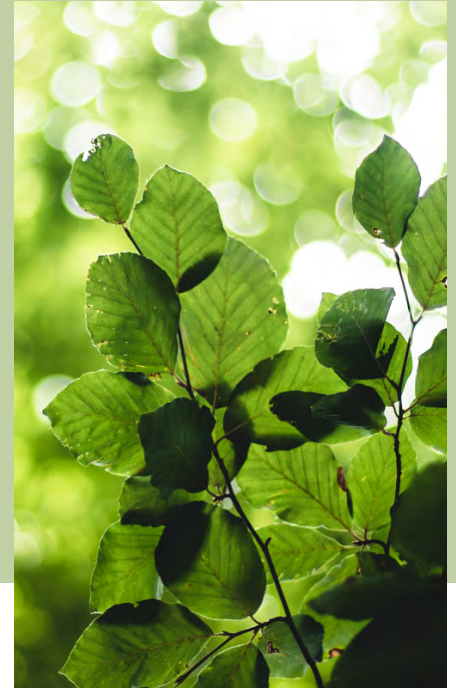
PRAYER

Creator God, you have given us a gift worth keeping, an earthly home that I want to share with my children and grandchildren. Guide me each day as I am reminded how to preserve this beautiful earth. Help me be conscious of my purchases and uses of the things I have in my home and my neighborhood.

Amen.

MONDAYS FOR PLANTING NOTIONS

Creation is our gift from God. Each Monday throughout Lent, we will “plant notions” about ways we can care for God’s gift of planet earth, our common home. “Going green” doesn’t have to be a daunting task that means sweeping life changes. Simple things can make a difference. The ideas we offer each Monday may not be new, but they bear repeating. Sometimes it takes a few reminders for things to take root.



USE BOTH SIDES OF PAPER

American businesses throw away 21 million tons of paper every year, equal to 175 pounds per office worker. For a quick and easy way to halve this, set your printer's default option to print double-sided (duplex printing). And when you're finished with your documents, don't forget to take them to the recycling bin.



DO NOT PREHEAT OVEN

Unless you are making bread or pastries of some sort, don't pre-heat the oven. Just turn it on when you put the dish in. Also, when checking on your food, look through the oven window instead of opening the door.



RETHINK BOTTLED WATER

Nearly 90% of plastic water bottles are not recycled, instead taking thousands of years to decompose. Buy a reusable container and fill it with tap water, a great choice for the environment, your wallet, and possibly your health. The EPA's standards for tap water are more stringent than the FDA's standards for bottled water. Wash your reusable containers by hand to prevent plastics from breaking down in the dishwasher.





TUESDAY
FEBRUARY 28, 2023

SCRIPTURE

GENESIS 1:24-25

And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind." And it was so. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

PRAYER

May God forgive us.

Amen.



INTERSECTION OF RACE & THE ENVIRONMENT

DAVE OSTENDORF

In 1975 economist William J. Kravant wrote that “Disadvantaged people are largely victims of middle- and upper-class pollution because they usually live closest to the sources of pollution...those with wealth and influence have political power to keep polluting facilities away from their homes. Living in poverty areas is bad enough. High pollution makes it worse.”

And in its groundbreaking 1987 report, “Toxic Wastes and Race,” the United Church of Christ (UCC) Commission for Racial Justice stunned the entire nation with its findings that a clear pattern existed in “the widespread presence of uncontrolled toxic waste sites in racial and ethnic communities throughout the United States.”

Forty years later, poor people and communities of color still bear the brunt of environmental degradation. Ironically, in the 1987 UCC report Flint, Michigan—today the site of one of the worst, contemporary toxic water disasters in the U.S.—was one of the communities cited as being vulnerable to environmental challenges due to its poverty and racial composition.



WEDNESDAY
MARCH 1, 2023

SCRIPTURE

GENESIS 1:27

So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

PRAYER

God of the beginning,
God of the end,
God of all creatures,
LORD of all generations . .

You are our God.
We give you thanks and
praise.

Prayer is from "The Orchard
Ridge [Wisconsin] United
Church of Christ Blessing Book,"
2006.

ECUMENICAL WEDNESDAYS

Because tending to creation is not limited to one strand of Christianity, we offer creation-centered messages on Wednesdays from Pope Francis' encyclical.



Laudato Si' **Dominion, Not Domination**

We are not God. The earth was here before us and it has been given to us. This allows us to respond to the charge that Judaeo-Christian thinking, on the basis of the Genesis account which grants man “dominion” over the earth (cf. Gen 1:28), has encouraged the unbridled exploitation of nature by painting him as domineering and destructive by nature. This is not a correct interpretation of the Bible as understood by the Church. Although it is true that we Christians have at times incorrectly interpreted the Scriptures, nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God’s image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures. . . . Each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty

to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations. “The earth is the Lord’s” (Ps 24:1); to him belongs “the earth with all that is within it” (Dt 10:14). Thus God rejects every claim to absolute ownership: “The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with me” (Lev 25:23).

This responsibility for God’s earth means that human beings, endowed with intelligence, must respect the laws of nature and the delicate equilibria existing between the creatures of this world The laws found in the Bible dwell on relationships, not only among individuals but also with other living beings. . . . Clearly, the Bible has no place for a tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures.

From Chapter Two, paragraphs 67 and 68.



THURSDAY
MARCH 2, 2023

SCRIPTURE

GENESIS 9:11-13

I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

PRAYER

Gracious God, may I sing praises to You and Your creation all day, and may I see in the eyes of all people and all creatures Your love.

Amen.

THURSDAYS WITH POETRY

Slow your mind & your speech on
Thursdays with the carefully chosen
words of poetry.



What a Wonderful World

**By George David Weiss and Bob Thiele, sung by
Louis Armstrong**

I see trees of green,
red roses too,
I see them bloom
for me and you,
and I think to myself,
"What a wonderful world!"

I see skies of blue
and clouds of white,
the bright blessed day,
and the dark sacred night,
and I think to myself,
"What a wonderful world!"

The colors of the rainbow,
so pretty in the sky,
are also the faces
of the people goin' by.

I see friends shakin' hands,
sayin', "How do you do?"
They're really sayin'
"I love you."

I hear babies cry,
I watch them grow,
they'll learn much more
than I'll ever know,
and I think to myself,
"What a wonderful world!"



FRIDAY
MARCH 3, 2023

SCRIPTURE

LEVITICUS 25:1-7

The LORD spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying: Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: When you enter the land that I am giving you, the land shall observe a sabbath for the LORD. Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather in their yield; but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of complete rest for the land, a sabbath for the LORD: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your unpruned vine: it shall be a year of

complete rest for the land. You may eat what the land yields during its sabbath—you, your male and female slaves, your hired and your bound laborers who live with you; for your livestock also, and for the wild animals in your land all its yield shall be for food.

PRAYER

Just to be is a blessing.
Just to live is holy.

Prayer by Rabbi Abraham Heschel, as found in "The Orchard Ridge [Wisconsin] United Church of Christ Blessing Book," 2006.

MEAT-FREE FRIDAYS SLOWING DOWN

REBECCA FERGUSON



Perhaps you have a hard time letting yourself actually practice a Sabbath of rest? We once lived among Orthodox Jewish neighbors who modeled keeping the Sabbath; they made enough time to visit with each other, to walk slowly together, to abandon cars and tools to be present to each other and Creation.

They used both old techniques and newer devices, including slow cookers. They started cooking on low before sundown on Friday in order to eat a Saturday mid-day meal. While the traditional stew, called “cholent,” might not necessarily have been vegetarian, the rich stew of beans you can create with your slow cooker might give you a bit of that experience of Sabbath-slowness we are called to share.

Here is a broad “recipe” for beans. Fill the slow cooker in the morning, and come home in the evening to a house full of good smells with time enough to put your feet up, visit with your loved ones, and give thanks for God’s bounty.

- Start with more familiar dry beans: pinto, small red, black beans, white beans. Try other kinds of beans as you become more familiar.

Here are some popular bean combinations:

- Pinto beans, tomatoes, green peppers, onions, and oregano
- Red beans really benefit from my favorite secret ingredient: ground ancho chili pepper (it’s not spicy, but deepens flavors), onions, green peppers, celery, thyme, and parsley

- White beans with a potato or two cut up to make a thick broth, spinach or kale, rosemary or thyme
- Black beans, lime & cilantro, as well as onions, garlic, and peppers; try bottled sofrito sauce.

Instructions:

- Soak the beans (2 or more cups) overnight, covered with at least 2 inches of water; drain off water in the morning. Some cooks say you can skip this soaking, and the beans will just need a little more cooking time. Lentils don’t need soaking. *Red kidney beans, however, need to be boiled for 10 minutes before being added to the slow cooker, due to an enzyme difficult to digest.
- Place beans in the slow cooker with enough liquid to cover 2-3 inches above. You can use water or try broth, stock, or tomato sauce.
- Add some flavorful vegetables, and some seasonings; you want to make a very richly-flavored broth. There’s a big difference of opinion about adding salt at this point. I don’t.
- Turn on the slow cooker and cook 6-8 hours on low. (If your slow cooker seems to let out some steam, cover it with aluminum foil before you put the lid on; it keeps all the juices in.) And if you are a little late getting home, no problem; dinner’s there, waiting.
- You may want to pour your beans over rice, or top them with some cheese, sour cream, yoghurt, or some chopped cilantro or parsley.
- Serve the beans with a salad or raw vegetables and some kind of bread, naan, or tortilla to scoop up the good stuff.



SATURDAY
MARCH 4, 2023

SCRIPTURE

DEUTERONOMY 10:14-15

Although heaven and the heaven of heavens belong to the LORD your God, the earth with all that is in it, yet the LORD set his heart in love on your ancestors alone and chose you, their descendants after them, out of all the peoples, as it is today.

PRAYER

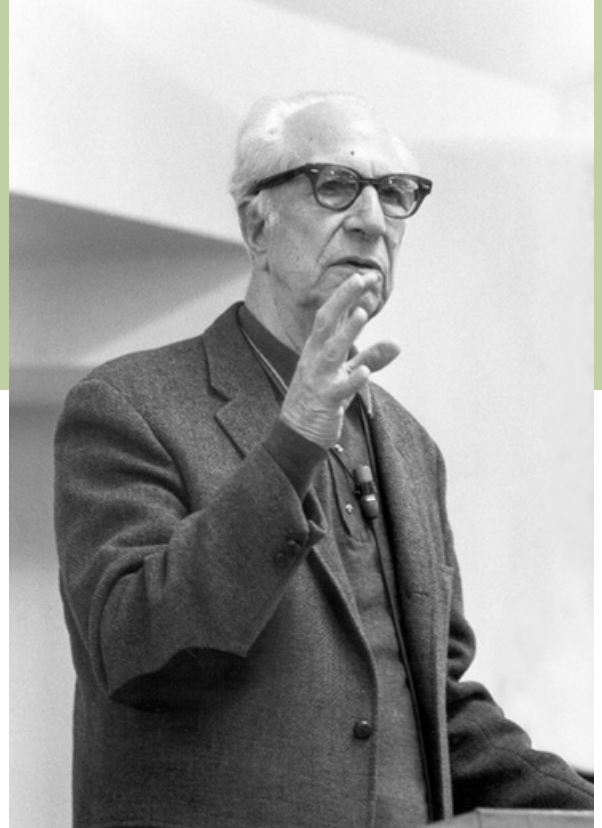
Remind us, O God, that we are people of purpose. You chose us to live in your beautiful creation according to your will. Help us commit to concrete ways of protecting your creation.

Amen.

I STILL PLANT TREES

FROM GRACE NOTES AND
OTHER FRAGMENTS
BY JOSEPH SITTLER

Joseph Sittler, a Lutheran theologian and ethicist who taught at the University of Chicago, was an early Christian theologian to think critically about environmentalism. In the 1960s Sittler wrote and spoke eloquently about creation, ethics, and the human responsibility to care for the earth. "Grace Notes and Other Fragments" is a collection of his essays. In this collection he wrote:



I do not think we are in a very good situation historically. For instance, I do not believe that our relationship to the earth is liable to change for the better until it gets catastrophically worse. Our record indicates that we can walk with our eyes wide open straight into sheer destruction if there is a profit on the way—and that seems to me to be what we are doing now. I have no great expectation that human cussedness will somehow be quickly modified and turned into generosity or that humanity's care of the earth will improve much.

But I do go around planting trees on the campus.

Consider

- Sittler wrote this passage 35 years ago. Was he and is he right?
- How can you “go around planting trees” literally and figuratively?



SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

MARCH 5, 2023

SCRIPTURE

There are two Gospel passages for this Sunday in the lectionary. You may also enjoy John 3.

MATTHEW 17:1-9

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This

is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

PRAYER

God of the covenant, in the glory of the cross your Son embraced the power of death and broke its hold over your people. In this time of repentance, draw all people to yourself, that we who confess Jesus as LORD may put aside the deeds of death and accept the life of your kingdom.

Amen.



MOUNTAIN ENCOUNTER WITH THE DIVINE

BY LAURA WRIGHT

The Gospel of Matthew is filled with echoes of the story of Moses. Jesus' refugee journey to Egypt sounds like Moses' time in Egypt (Matt 2). Jesus ascends a mountain with his students to encounter the Holy One like Moses when he received the law. Moses' face shines after seeing God (Exodus 34) like Jesus' face shines on the mountain of the transfiguration.

Moses and Jesus encounter God on the Mountain. Often theophanies happen on mountains for Israel and her neighbors whether it's Moses on Mount Sinai seeing God (Exodus 34), Elijah on the mountain listening for the Divine in a delicate silence (1 Kings 19:11-13), or the God, Baal, on Mount Zaphon. In this story, Jesus and his students go up the mountain and meet Moses and Elijah as God tells them that Jesus is God's child. **Have you, like Moses and Jesus' students, had your own encounters with the Divine One on a mountain or in nature?**

After the encounter was over, Jesus touched his students, but they no longer saw Moses or Elijah, only Jesus. **How can we keep that sense of sacredness near us after the moments of intense encounter with the Holy have passed?**

(If you want to hear the echoes of the Torah in this gospel more clearly, pick up Amy-Jill Levine's "The Jewish Annotated New Testament.")



OUT OF THE WHIRLWIND GOD SPEAKS

MONDAY
MARCH 6, 2023

SCRIPTURE

JOB 38:1-7

Then the LORD answered Job
out of the whirlwind:

"Who is this that darkens
counsel

by words without
knowledge?

Gird up your loins like a man,
I will question you, and you shall
declare to me.

"Where were you when I laid
the foundation of the
earth?

Tell me, if you have
understanding.

Who determined its
measurements—surely you
know!

Or who stretched the line
upon it?

On what were its bases sunk,
Or who laid its cornerstone
when the morning stars sang
together
And all the heavenly beings
shouted for joy?"

PRAYER

LORD, I pray that you will
lead me to be a good
steward of the earth's
resources. Help me be a
leader and a teacher of
environmental
consciousness.

Amen.

MONDAYS FOR PLANTING NOTIONS

Each Monday throughout Lent, we “plant notions” about ways we can care for God’s gift of planet earth, our common home. “Going green” doesn’t have to be a daunting task that means sweeping life changes. Simple things can make a difference.



SECOND-HAND DOESN'T MEAN SECOND-BEST

We accumulate a lot of stuff, and the stuff we buy requires raw materials, energy, packaging, transportation, and disposal—as well as our time and energy to maintain it. The next time you think of buying something, try borrowing it from a friend or buying it used. Consider buying items from a second-hand store. Toys, bicycles, roller blades, and other age and size-specific items are quickly outgrown. Second hand stores often sell these items in excellent condition since they are used for such a short period of time.



PLASTIC BAGS SUCK

Each year the U.S. uses 84 billion plastic bags, a significant portion of the 500 billion used worldwide. They are not biodegradable, and are making their way into our oceans, and subsequently, the food chain. Stronger, reusable bags are an inexpensive and readily available option. Every trip to the grocery store should include bringing a reusable bag. Second-hand stores will re-use your plastic bags when you can't escape having a few. Recycle too.



SHOWER WITH YOUR PARTNER

Sneak in a shower with your loved one to start the day with some zest that doesn't come in a bar. Not only have you made a wise choice for the environment, but you may notice some other added...um...benefits.



TUESDAY
MARCH 7, 2023

SCRIPTURE

JOB 38:25-27

"Who has cut a channel for the
 torrents of rain,
 and a way for the thunderbolt,
to bring rain on a land where no
 one lives,
 on the desert, which is empty
 of human life,
to satisfy the waste and desolate
 land,
 and to make the ground put
 forth grass?"

PRAYER

May God guide us.

Amen.

INTERSECTION OF POVERTY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

DAVE OSTENDORF



The president of the World Bank has stated unequivocally that “Poverty reduction and climate change are linked,” and that climate change impacts will “...likely be inherently unequal and tilted against many of the world’s poorest regions, which have the least economic, institutional, scientific, and technical capacity to cope and adapt.” The poor in coastal cities and on low-lying islands, according to the World Bank, are among the most vulnerable to climate change.

Fifty-two of the world’s small-island nations—home to 62 million people—are already facing such impacts, with sea-level rising up to four times the global average, according to the UN Environment Programme, with related development losses measured in trillions of dollars due to their increased vulnerability. The negative impact on fisheries alone will be enormous, challenging the capacity of these nations to meet “...the nutritional needs of growing populations, damaging livelihoods and hampering efforts to lift people out of poverty.”



WEDNESDAY
MARCH 8, 2023

SCRIPTURE

PSALM 19:1-4

The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims God's
handiwork.
Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.
There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;
yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.

PRAYER

All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures. You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty. Fill us with peace, that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

Amen.

From the conclusion of Chapter Six, "A Prayer for Our Earth"

ECUMENICAL WEDNESDAYS

Because tending to creation is not limited to one strand of Christianity, we offer creation-centered messages on Wednesdays from Pope Francis' encyclical.



Laudato Si' The Mystery of the Universe

In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, the word “creation” has a broader meaning than “nature,” for it has to do with God’s loving plan in which every creature has its own value and significance. Nature is usually seen as a system which can be studied, understood and controlled, whereas creation can only be understood as a gift from the outstretched hand of the Father of all, and as a reality illuminated by the love which calls us together into universal communion.

“By the word of the Lord the heavens were made” (Ps 33:6). This tells us that the world came about as the result of a decision, not from chaos

or chance, and this exalts it all the more. The creating word expresses a free choice. The universe did not emerge as the result of arbitrary omnipotence, a show of force or a desire for self-assertion. Creation is of the order of love. God’s love is the fundamental moving force in all created things: “For you love all things that exist, and detest none of the things that you have made; for you would not have made anything if you had hated it” (Wis 11:24).

From Chapter Three, paragraphs 77 and 78.



THURSDAY
MARCH 9, 2023

SCRIPTURE

PSALM 24:1-2

The earth is the LORD's and all
that is in it,
the world, and those who
live in it;
for he has founded it on the
seas,
and established it on the
rivers.

PRAYER

Be praised, my God, by butterfly
and dragonfly wings exercising
for their first flight.
Be praised by lightning and
thunder-causing, spring
showers.
Be praised by the silent voice of
grass growing and trees
building.
Be praised by all the colorful
flower-trumpets of spring.
Be praised by downy feathers,
freshly dried on newly hatched
ducklings and chicks.
Be praised by the songs of birds,
crickets, and frogs.
Be praised, my God, by all your
creation which tells of new life.

Prayer is by Mary Goergen, as found in "The Orchard Ridge [Wisconsin] United Church of Christ Blessing Book," 2006.

THURSDAYS WITH POETRY

Slow your mind & your speech on
Thursdays with carefully chosen words
of poetry.



Glory, Glory (from Psalm 19)

By Daniel Kerrigan

Many of the Psalms praise God and the Creation in glorious language and almost outrageous images; others simply state in quiet rhythms the fact that this world is not ours. As contemporary citizens of a noisy nation proud of its independence, we may find ourselves a little uneasy with all this, but as faithful ones, we are encouraged to try on these old truths in new words and deep silences.

The heavens bespeak the glory of God.
The firmament ablaze, a text of his works.
Dawn whispers to sunset
Dark to dark the word passes; glory glory.

All in a great silence,
no tongue's clamor-
yet the web of the world trembles
conscious, as of great winds passing.



FRIDAY
MARCH 10, 2023

SCRIPTURE

PSALM 65:9-13

You visit the earth and water it,
you greatly enrich it;
the river of God is full of water;
you provide the people with grain,
for so you have prepared it.

You water its furrows abundantly,
settling its ridges,
softening it with showers,
and blessing its growth.

You crown the year with your bounty;
your wagon tracks overflow with
richness.

The pastures of the wilderness overflow,
the hills gird themselves with joy,
the meadows clothe themselves with
flocks,
the valleys deck themselves with
grain,
they shout and sing together for joy.

PRAYER

Bountiful God, help us to
see the possibilities You
put before us. Keep us
from falling into old ruts
and the too-familiar, and
show us ways to create
fresh and healthy
sustenance from what we
have!

Amen.



MEAT-FREE FRIDAYS BUILD YOUR OWN GRAIN & BEAN SALADS

REBECCA FERGUSON

Mixing grains and beans gives us complete proteins, while also helping us find tasty ways to become “reducetarians.” Here is a scheme for creating healthy combinations that please both our individual preferences and those of our family members. (The idea of these salads comes from a 2011 USA Weekend article from a blog by “Three Many Cooks”.)

Mix together:

- 2 cups of canned beans, rinsed and drained. (Try kidney, pinto, black, white beans, black-eyed peas, lentils, or chickpeas, also called garbanzos.)
- 2 cups cooked grains (Try white, wild, or brown rice, barley, bite-size pasta, couscous, quinoa, or grains both new and ancient, such as amaranth and bulgur.)

- 3 cups bite-sized vegetables (If it's a cooked vegetable, okay to use just one, but try a mix of two or three raw vegetables.)
- ¼ medium red or white onion or 4/5 sliced green onions or scallions
- ¼ cup of soft fresh herbs (e.g., parsley, cilantro, basil, or mint) or a sprinkle of dried ones

When ready to serve, add:

- salt and pepper
- ½ cup extras (Toasted nuts? Dried Fruit? Cheese? Olives? Get creative!)
- ¼ to ½ cup dressing: (Try a simple dressing of olive oil and vinegar, or a seasoned oil, like sesame or walnut, with lemon or lime juice, or your favorite purchased salad dressing.)

Serves four as a main course, or six to eight as a side dish.



SATURDAY
MARCH 11, 2023

SCRIPTURE

PSALM 104:1-6

Bless the LORD, O my soul.

O LORD my God, you are very great.
You are clothed with honor and
majesty,
wrapped in light as with a garment.
You stretch out the heavens like a tent,
you set the beams of your chambers
on the waters,
You make clouds your chariot,
you ride on the wings of the wind,
you make the winds your messengers,
fire and flame your ministers.
You set the earth on its foundations,
so that it shall never be shaken.
You cover it with the deep as with a
garment;
the waters stood above the mountains.

PRAYER

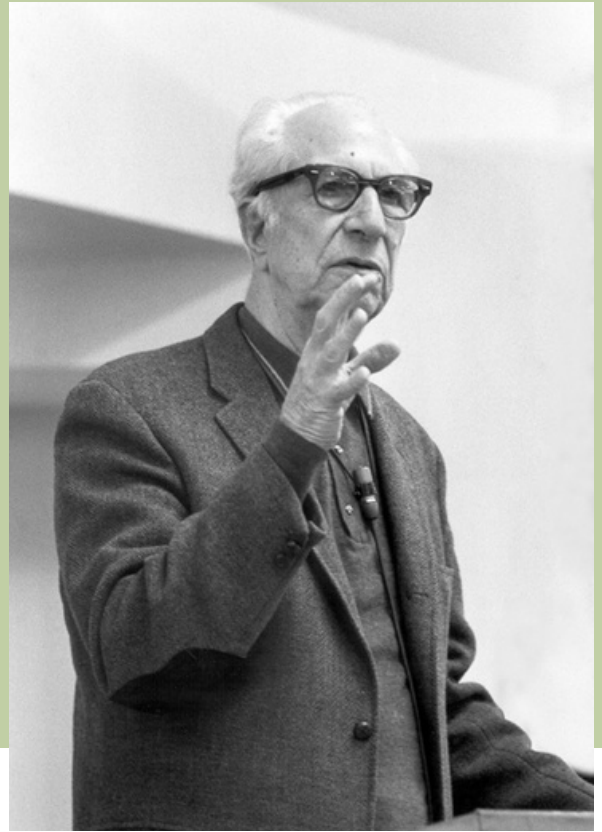
Gracious God, the beauty
of your creation is all
around us. Open our eyes
to see the wonders of
your hand.

Amen.

THE LAND

FROM *GRAVITY AND GRACE*

BY JOSEPH SITTLER



The land is against large-scale changes. Nature is what it is in its ecologically intricate structure because of the long time in which small modifications have occurred and were absorbed into the whole. Recently I was talking with an Iowa farmer about the way intensive land use has changed from what we knew in our youth. Farmers then had a grassy corner of the field where they turned their horses and their plows, and later their tractors, around. My farmer friend recalled that his father taught him to call these unplowed margins “God’s frame around the picture.”

Now farmers plow right up to the edges of the fence or the ditch. As a result, what we used to call hedgerows—bushes or wild growth around the fields—have been destroyed in large part. This means that the cover for birds is taken away. And birds eat insects; they have them for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

We have destroyed a situation of natural predation upon insects, and therefore we have to add more things to the land, the plants, and the air to control the insects. Nature is like a fine piece of cloth: you pull a thread there, and it vibrates through the whole fabric.”



THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

MARCH 12, 2023


SCRIPTURE

JOHN 4:5-21

So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?"

Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing



up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.

LIVING WATER

BY LAURA WRIGHT

When I lived on the Palestinian side of Jerusalem, a friend and I took weekly trips through the West Bank and Israel. When we entered a destination in google maps that would naturally take us through Palestinian territory, google maps would assume we were too fearful of entering Palestinian territory and would redirect us on an unnecessarily long journey circumventing the West Bank. As in Jesus' day, they assumed we feared Palestinians like ancient Israelites feared Samaritans.

Jesus, too, was on a journey from the southern hills to the north. Much like today, Jesus could journey around the hills of the Samaritans, but Jesus intentionally choose to live in peace with his neighbors. Jesus' teaching grants us a living water that satisfies our deepest human needs by instructing us to live at peace with one another.

How will you choose to live in peace with your neighbors today, whether human, plant, or animal neighbors? How will living in peace with them give you and them living water?





MONDAY
MARCH 13, 2023

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 104:14-21

You cause the grass to grow for the cattle,
and plants for people to use,
to bring forth food from the earth,
and wine to gladden the human heart,
oil to make the face shine,
and bread to strengthen the human
heart.

The trees of the LORD are watered
abundantly,
the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.
In them the birds build their nests;
the stork has its home in the fir trees.
The high mountains are for the wild goats;
the rocks are a refuge for the coney.
You have made the moon to mark the
seasons;
the sun knows its time for setting.

You make darkness, and it is night,
when all the animals of the forest
come creeping out.
The young lions roar for their prey,
seeking their food from God.

PRAYER

LORD, the cycle of seasons
continues to amaze us and
You planned it all! Help me
understand that every action
I take to reduce my footprint
on the environment is known
and welcomed by you.

Amen.

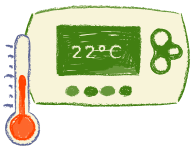
MONDAYS FOR PLANTING NOTIONS

Each Monday throughout Lent, we “plant notions” about ways we can care for God’s gift of planet earth, our common home.



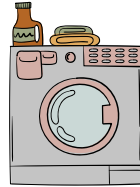
TURN OFF COMPUTERS AT NIGHT

By turning off your computer instead of leaving it in sleep mode, you can save 40 watt-hours per day. That adds up to 4 cents a day, or \$14 per year. If you don't want to wait for your computer to start up, set it to turn on automatically a few minutes before you get to work, or boot up while you're pouring your morning cup o' joe.



ADJUST YOUR THERMOSTAT

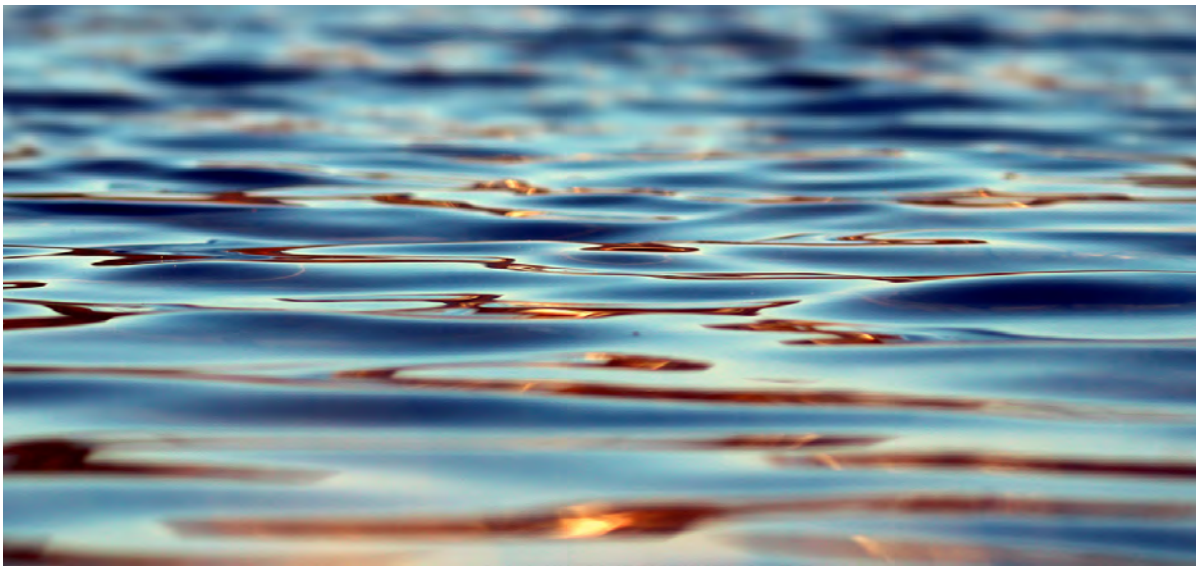
Adjust your thermostat one degree higher in the summer and one degree cooler in the winter. Each degree Fahrenheit less will save about 10% on your energy use! In addition, invest in a programmable thermostat which allows you to regulate temperature based on the times you are at home or away.



WASH YOUR CLOTHES IN THE COOLEST WATER POSSIBLE

About 80 percent of the cost to run your washer is used for heating the water. Except for all-white loads, there is little benefit to washing in hot water. Most conventional laundry detergents work just as well with cold water.

These are shared by Tom & Betsy Westerhaus.



TUESDAY
MARCH 14, 2023

SCRIPTURE

PSALM 104:24-30

O LORD, how manifold are your works!
In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.
Yonder is the sea, great and wide,
creeping things innumerable are there,
living things both small and great.
There go the ships,
and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.
These all look to you
to give them their food in due season;
when you give to them, they gather it up;
when you open your hand, they are filled with
good things.
When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
when you take away their breath, they die
and return to their dust.
When you send forth your spirit, they are created;
and you renew the face of the ground.

PRAYER

May God give the
people water,
and great
faithfulness.

Amen.



THE INTERSECTION OF POVERTY AND WATER

DAVE OSTENDORF

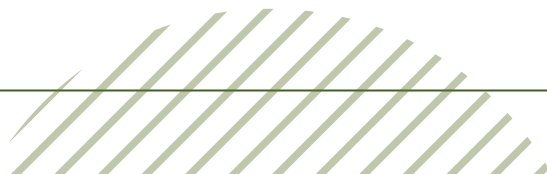
Flint, Michigan is the second most poverty-stricken city in the nation for its size, with over 40% of its almost 100,000 residents living in poverty, according to the U.S. Census. That level of poverty is 166.5% greater than the national average. The city is 57% African American. Since 2005 some 5,000 houses have been demolished in Flint.

Today Flint is a toxic water disaster site, facing one of the most critical environmental crises of our day—a crisis that has been unfolding for fifty years with no serious response or resolution. In the mid-1960s African American residents were raising concerns about the water, to no avail. At that time GM plants were dumping some 26 million gallons of industrial waste into the Flint River daily.

Now the water is undrinkable. Children are being tested for lead poisoning and a host of other potential contaminants. Filtration remedies and millions of gallons of bottled water are being provided to homes by FEMA. The state has been ordered to take immediate, emergency steps to address the contamination of the city's water.

Water. A basic of life. And a source of tragedy for many poor communities.

There is hope, however, and faith abides. As Flint's Mayor Karen Weaver said recently, "With the faith of a mustard seed saying to this mountain, and the water crisis is our mountain, get up and get out of our way...We will rise up and we will fly again... nothing will get in our way."





WEDNESDAY
MARCH 15, 2023

SCRIPTURE

ISAIAH 11:6-9

The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.
The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
The nursing child shall play over the hole of
the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on
the adder's den.
They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of
the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.

PRAYER

O God, help me to feel Your
presence everywhere I go
today.
To see You in everyone I meet
today. To sense You in all I
hear today.
To reflect You in all I do today.
To pray to and trust You in all I
experience today.
To struggle to be like You in all
I am today.
To speak of and for You in all I
say today.
To thank You for everything
every day.

Prayer is by Marian Wright Edelman,
from "The Orchard Ridge [Wisconsin]
United Church of Christ Blessing Book,"
2006.

ECUMENICAL WEDNESDAYS

Because tending to creation is not limited to one strand of Christianity, we offer creation-centered messages on Wednesdays from Pope Francis' encyclical.



Laudato Si' **The Trinity & Relations between Creations**

The divine Persons are subsistent relations, and the world, created according to the divine model, is a web of relationships. Creatures tend towards God, and in turn it is proper to every living being to tend towards other things, so that throughout the universe we can find any number of constant and secretly interwoven relationships. This leads us not only to marvel at the manifold connections existing among creatures, but also to discover a key to our own fulfilment. The human person grows more, matures more

and is sanctified more to the extent that he or she enters into relationships, going out from themselves to live in communion with God, with others and with all creatures. In this way, they make their own that trinitarian dynamism which God imprinted in them when they were created. Everything is interconnected, and this invites us to develop a spirituality of that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity.

From Chapter Three, paragraph 240.



THURSDAY
MARCH 16, 2023

SCRIPTURE

ISAIAH 35:1-2

The wilderness and the dry land shall
be glad,
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;
like the crocus it shall blossom
abundantly,
and rejoice with joy and singing.
The glory of Lebanon shall be given to
it,
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.
They shall see the glory of the LORD,
the majesty of our God.

PRAYER

God of Beauty, help me
to see anew today.

Amen.

THURSDAYS WITH POETRY

Slow your mind & your speech on
Thursdays with the carefully chosen
words of poetry.



God's Grandeur

By Gerald Manley Hopkins

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge & shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast & with ah! bright
wings.



FRIDAY
MARCH 17, 2023

SCRIPTURE

PSALM 65:5-8

By awesome deeds you answer us with
deliverance,

O God of our salvation;
you are the hope of all the ends of the
earth
and of the farthest seas.

By your strength you established the
mountains;
you are girded with might.

You silence the roaring of the seas,
the roaring of their waves,
the tumult of the peoples.

Those who live at earth's farthest
bounds are awed by your signs;
you make the gateways of the
morning and the evening shout for
joy.

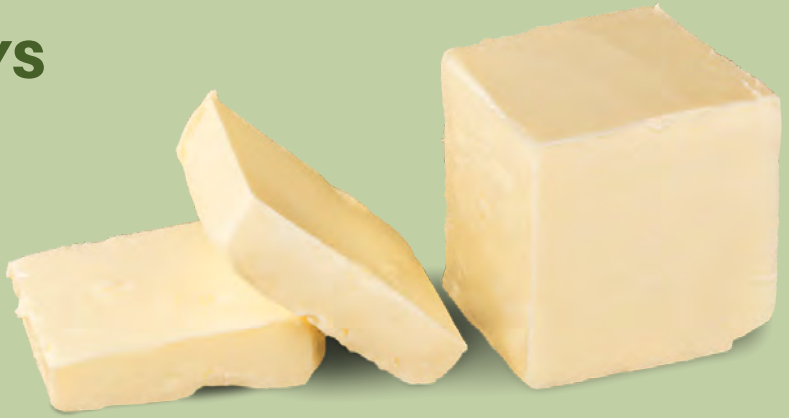
PRAYER

God of Comfort and
Challenge, you give us
what we need each day,
in wisdom and in
sustenance. Give us the
courage to act on the
challenges that confront
us, and help us to see and
accept the comfort you
offer.

Amen.

MEAT-FREE FRIDAYS BETTER BUTTER: SPREAD IT ABOUT

REBECCA FERGUSON



A few years ago, I just got fed up with all the plastic butter and margarine containers we were purchasing. Of course, I recycled them, but really, there were just too many to feel good about it. Then I got lucky and remembered a recipe called “Better Butter” from a few decades ago, in “Laurel’s Kitchen” by Laurel Robertson, Bronwen Godfrey, and Carol Flinders.

Now, all I do is blend up in my food processor one part butter with one part canola or olive oil. That’s it!

At first, I poured the blend back into a recycled plastic container, but then I haunted the second hand stores (more recycling!) until I found two small ceramic dishes with lids. (With two, the next one’s always ready.) Stored in the fridge, the better butter acts like margarine (easily spreadable), but is much healthier, which is another bonus.

Of course, you can now buy commercial products made the same way—but with some additional unpronounceable ingredients—and still in those obnoxious plastic containers.

This is just a small act, but it is one that encourages me to try for more. It reminds me of that slogan, “use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without,” and it reminds me to look around to see, “What else can I do to protect the earth—and my family?” What else can we all do?

And maybe we should modify that phrase to include the need to communicate with each other about the ways we have found to live more simply and more sanely: “Use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without—and spread it about!” Will you commit to sharing your small acts of reusing, reducing, and recycling with the rest of us, so we all learn?



SATURDAY
MARCH 18, 2023

SCRIPTURE

ISAIAH 26:1-6

On that day this song will be sung in
the land of Judah:

We have a strong city;
 he sets up victory like walls and
 bulwarks.
Open the gates,
 so that the righteous nation that
 keeps faith may enter in.
Those of steadfast mind you keep in
 peace—
 in peace because they trust in you.
Trust in the LORD forever,
 for in the LORD God
 you have an everlasting rock.
For he has brought low
 the inhabitants of the height;
 the lofty city he lays low.
He lays it low to the ground,
 casts it to the dust.
The foot tramples it,
 the feet of the poor,
 the steps of the needy.

PRAYER

Loving God, often we
don't know what to make
of you. We think we know
what you want us to do,
and then we are
challenged to think in a
new way and we are
confused. Remind us that
you are like a rock,
steady, strong and
immovable, calling us to
live in peace with you,
each other, and the
creation.

Amen.



GOD IS LIKE A ROCK

In a landscape where there are hardly any trees, a great boulder can be seen from a long distance away. It may provide the only shade for miles, and it seems strong and immovable. Rock serves as the foundation for building and for protection from enemies. Over and over again in the Bible, rocks stand for dependability and shelter. “Trust in the LORD forever,” says the prophet Isaiah [26:4], “for in the LORD God you have an everlasting rock.”

Many years later, when a discouraged people were in exile in Babylon, another prophet encouraged them to remember their history and God who was the source of their life:

Listen to me, you that pursue righteousness,
you that see the LORD.
Look to the rock from which you were hewn,
and to the quarry from which you were dug.
Look to Abraham your father
and to Sarah who bore you;
For he was but one when I called him,
but I blessed him and made him many.
For the LORD will comfort Zion;
he will comfort all her waste places,
And will make her wilderness like Eden,
her desert like the garden of the LORD;
Joy and gladness will be found in her,
thanksgiving and the voice of song.

(Isaiah 51:1-3)

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

MARCH 19, 2023

SCRIPTURE

JOHN 9:1-25



As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am he.” But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight.” They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, “He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.” Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath.” Others said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And they were divided. So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” He said, “He is a prophet.” The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” His parents answered, “We know

that this is our son and that he was born blind, but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see."

"THREE DAYS TO SEE"

By Hellen Keller

Published by The Atlantic Monthly (January 1933)

"I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see."

- John 9:25



In the afternoon of that first seeing day, I should take a long walk in the woods and intoxicate my eyes on the beauties of the world of Nature, trying desperately to absorb in a few hours the vast splendor which is constantly unfolding itself to those who can see. On the way home from my woodland jaunt my path would lie near a farm so that I might see the patient horses ploughing in the field (perhaps I should see only a tractor!) and the serene content of men living close to the soil. And I should pray for the glory of a colorful sunset.

<https://www.afb.org/about-afb/history/hellen-keller/books-essays-speeches/senses/three-days-see-published-atlantic>

PRAYER

Gracious God,
grant us the gift of
seeing with the
eyes of the heart
so that we may
perceive anew the
beauty and
splendor of this
world you created
and call us to love.

Amen.



MONDAY
MARCH 20, 2023

SCRIPTURE

ISAIAH 65:21-25

They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

They shall not build and another inhabit;
they shall not plant and another eat;
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my
people be,
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of
their hands.

They shall not labor in vain,
or bear children for calamity;
for they shall be offspring blessed by the LORD-
and their descendants as well.

Before they call I will answer,
while they are yet speaking I will hear.

The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,
the lion shall eat straw like the ox;
but the serpent-its food shall be dust.

They shall not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain,
says the LORD.

PRAYER

Gracious LORD, help
me find those little
ways today that I
can make life on
earth better for
those who will
come after me.
Knowing that you
are present for me
and that you care
about my entire
family, sustain me
and guide me. You
have favored us
with your kindness.
Help me pay it
forward to the next
generation.

Amen.

MONDAYS FOR PLANTING NOTIONS

Each Monday throughout Lent, we “plant notions” about ways we can care for God’s gift of planet earth, our common home. “Going green” doesn’t have to be a daunting task that means sweeping life changes. Simple things can make a difference.



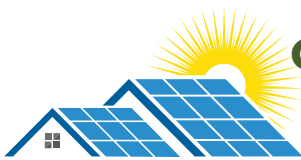
UNDERSTAND HOW YOUR HOME USES ENERGY

46% goes to heating and cooling. 12% goes to lighting. Clean or replace furnace air filters once a month. Not only will this improve your home’s efficiency in both the summer and winter, but it will also help allergy sufferers. Change habits to conserve energy in your home, like turning off the lights when you leave a room.



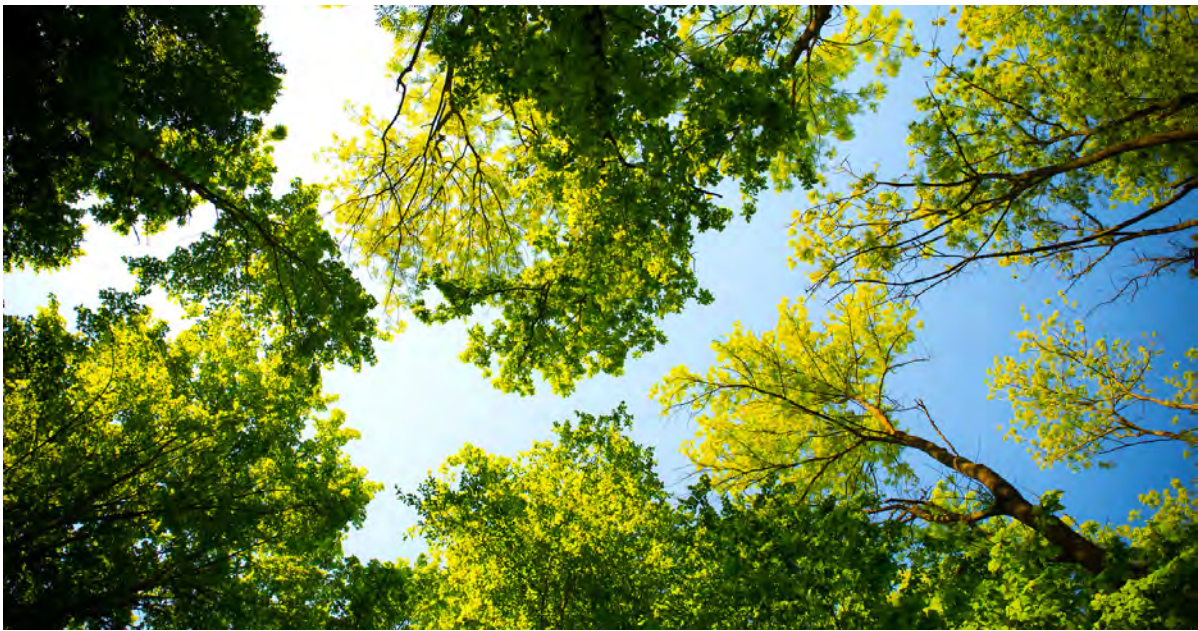
GET A HOME ENERGY ASSESSMENT

An energy assessment provides a clear road map of customized home recommendations, cash incentives to offset improvement costs, and expert guidance every step of the way. The energy assessment helps pinpoint where you can save money and enjoy greater home comfort. Your benefits? Lower energy bills, improved indoor air quality, financial incentives, technical support, greater home comfort, and quality assurance.



GET THE SKINNY ON SOLAR

If you’ve just started researching solar energy or are already participating and want to learn more, you can get the basics on how solar power works. Personnel at your local utilities company will be glad to talk to utility customers about installation costs and how you can put your home on the grid.



TUESDAY
MARCH 21, 2023

SCRIPTURE

HOSEA 4:1-3

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

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

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

Therefore the land mourns,
and all who live in it languish;
together with the wild animals
and the birds of the air,
even the fish of the sea are perishing.

PRAYER

Holy Tree of Life,
help us grow
fruit that will
nourish all
people.

Amen.

WHAT DO WE SEE?

REBECCA FERGUSON

It is always unnerving to read scripture thousands of years old and recognize our own realities right now. We would despair, but we have been given hope by God through the Christ and the continuing actions of the Spirit. So, we must sing as we go, even through desolate lands and corrupted cities.

A tune as beautiful as the one to "Be Thou My Vision" has been a fundamental part of worship for many. Dr. Abe Caceras of Milwaukee has written new words to help us bring old traditions and new concerns together. Try humming it with these new words as a prayerful way to connect with those around us in need. Click on this QR code to see the new lyrics and sing along.



Dr. Abe Caceras of Milwaukee has been creating new music, and new words for older tunes, for decades, always inspiring everyone around him. For more of his music, see his website: <http://worldhousemusic.org/about/>



WEDNESDAY
MARCH 22, 2023

SCRIPTURE

MATTHEW 6:26-29

Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.

PRAYER

O Great Spirit of Surprise, dazzle us with a day full of amazing embraces, capricious, uncalculated caring, great hearts, kind souls and doers of good deeds.

Amen.

Prayer is by Molly Fumia, from "The Orchard Ridge [Wisconsin] United Church of Christ Blessing Book," 2006.

ECUMENICAL WEDNESDAYS

Because tending to creation is not limited to one strand of Christianity, we offer creation-centered messages on Wednesdays from Pope Francis' encyclical.

Laudato Si'

...When media and the digital world become omnipresent, their influence can stop people from learning how to live wisely, to think deeply and to love generously. In this context, the great sages of the past run the risk of going unheard amid the noise and distractions of an information overload. Efforts need to be made to help these media become sources of new cultural progress for humanity and not a threat to our deepest riches. True wisdom, as the fruit of self-examination, dialogue and generous encounter between persons, is not acquired by a mere accumulation of data which eventually leads to overload and confusion, a sort of mental pollution. Real relationships with others, with all the challenges they entail, now tend to be replaced by a type of internet communication which enables us to choose or eliminate relationships at whim, thus

giving rise to a new type of contrived emotion which has more to do with devices and displays than with other people and with nature. Today's



media do enable us to communicate and to share our knowledge and affections. Yet at times they also shield us from direct contact with the pain, the fears and the joys of others and the complexity of their personal experiences. For this reason, we should be concerned that, alongside the exciting possibilities offered by these media, a deep and melancholic dissatisfaction with interpersonal relations, or a harmful sense of isolation, can also arise.

The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person's face. The ideal is not only to pass from the exterior to the interior to discover the action of God in the soul, but also to discover God in all things.

From Chapters One and Six, paragraphs 47 and 233



THURSDAY
MARCH 23, 2023

SCRIPTURE

MARK 4:3-8

“Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.”

PRAYER

God of Grace and Mercy, every day, every moment, you seed me. Forgive me for the times when I fail to grow toward You, and thanks be for the times when I bear fruit.

Amen.

THURSDAYS WITH POETRY

Slow your mind & your speech on
Thursdays with the carefully chosen
words of poetry.



Prayers: I

By Kaya Molodowsky,
translated by Kathryn Hellerstein

Don't let me fall
As a stone falls upon the hard ground.
And don't let my hands become dry
As the twigs of a tree
When the wind beats down the last leaves.
And when the storm raises dust from the earth
With anger and howling,
Don't let me become the last fly
Trembling terrified on a windowpane.
Don't let me fall.
I have asked for so much,
But as a blade of your grass in a distant wild field
Let's drop a seed in the lap of the earth
And dies away,
Sow in me your living breath,
As you sow a seed in the earth.



FRIDAY
MARCH 24, 2023

SCRIPTURE

MARK 4:30-32

He also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

PRAYER

The LORD is good to us
and so we thank the
LORD for giving us the
things we need:
the sun and the rain and
the apple seed.
The LORD is good to us.
Amen, amen,

Amen.

Words slightly modified from
the Disney song in the animated
short, Johnny Appleseed. Easy
to find on YouTube.

MEAT-FREE FRIDAYS CURRIED APPLE SQUASH SOUP

REBECCA FERGUSON



This recipe from "Yankee Magazine" online makes four to six servings.

Ingredients:

- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 4 cups peeled, chopped winter squash (or bake the squash in the oven til soft enough to cut into pieces; reduce the sautéing time a bit.)
- 2 cups peeled, chopped tart apples
- 1 cup chopped onion
- 1 teaspoon curry powder (We like a sweet curry mix, but you might like spicier food!)
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cardamom
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 cup apple cider or apple juice
- 1 quart vegetable stock
- 1/2 cup light cream (I have never used this; it just doesn't need it, it's so smooth.)
- salt and pepper to taste

Instructions:

Heat the oil in a large pot over medium heat and sauté the squash, apples, and onion, stirring gently, for 10 minutes. Add the curry powder, cardamom, and cinnamon; cook, stirring gently, for several minutes longer. Add the cider and stock, bring the mixture to a simmer, and cook, partially covered, for 20 minutes, or until the squash is soft.

Puree the mixture with an immersion blender or in a food processor. Cook over medium heat until mixture is reduced by about one-third, which takes maybe 20-40 minutes. (Add the cream, if using.) Season with salt and pepper. Keeps well, freezes well.



SATURDAY
MARCH 25, 2023

SCRIPTURE

MARK 4:26-29

He also said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come."

PRAYER

Loving God, often we don't know what to make of you. We think we know what you want us to do, and then we are challenged to think in a new way and we are confused. Remind us that you are like a rock, steady, strong and immovable, calling us to live in peace with you, each other, and the creation.

Amen.

REFLECTIONS ON POPE FRANCIS' ENCYCLICAL

EXCERPT OF THANKSGIVING SERMON (2015) BY STACY JOHNSON MYERS

A group of people from St. Bridget Catholic Church and First Congregational Church proved the point that Christians have long known: eating and talking bind people to each other. The focus of our discussion was Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si: Caring for our Common Home*.

There are many remarkable features of this encyclical. I will highlight only three: First of all, it is amazing that people are paying attention to it. Do a quick Google search and you will find not just the Catholic journals commenting on it, but the Washington Post, The Atlantic, The New York Review of Books, The New Yorker to name a few. This is a testament to the fact that Pope Francis' work is reasoned, reflective, and based in the Bible and the theological tradition.

Secondly, sometimes the most remarkable things are the simplest of things. Pope Francis' primary starting point is his concern for the poor. How perfectly fitting. In adopting this position, he echoes the Old Testament prophets who time and time again tell us that the most important measure of a society's strength is how it treats the poor. How do widows fare? How are orphans cared for? How are children treated and valued? How are strangers and refugees welcomed?

Typically in our world we use the measuring sticks of Gross National Product, interest rates, and the price of a barrel of crude oil to tell the story of our community, our nation, our world. But too often, way too often, the poor are notoriously forgotten by the markets, sacrificed by capitalism, and neglected by scientists and thinkers.

Pope Francis' encyclical calls us to whittle away all the incomplete ways of telling the world's story. The Pope reminds us to consider and uphold and protect those on the margins of life that we are often content to ignore. The encyclical calls us to speak and act for them and on behalf of them and their plight. Pope Francis starts with the poor. Remarkable, indeed.

The third remarkable feature of the encyclical is what I will call its sense of "urgent hope." Urgency runs throughout the document. This is a document that speaks to us right now, right here. The Pope is very clear in his call for human beings to establish new policies and practices to protect the whole of the creation, and he says there is no time to waste. Given all this, one might think that the document is depressing and hopeless, and that is very much not the case. Certainly it powerful and clearly outlines very significant challenges we must face in order to protect our Common Home. But it also holds out hope that we can all wake up, gather together, hold each other accountable, and figure out a way to work together as people of God. From this viewpoint the human family seems to stand at an important juncture—at a place where we will have to, as the Deuteronomist once said—choose between life and death.

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

MARCH 26, 2023

SCRIPTURE

JOHN 11:1-27

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather, it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was...he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him. Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."



PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH CLIMATE CHANGE

By Julia Terruso



"Lord, if you had been here, my brother
would not have died."

- Martha in John 11:32

Filmmaker, James Balog, made a documentary entitled "Chasing Ice" about the rapid deterioration of the polar ice sheets. Balog shares his motivation for making a film on climate change.

"Balog said he doesn't want his two daughters asking him in 20 years why no one did anything about climate change. 'I want to be able to say, 'Girls I did the best I could. I tried to show the world', he said."

https://www.syracuse.com/news/2011/03/photographer_james_balog_bring.html

PRAYER

Holy One, forgive us when we want to take a shortcut instead of face that which is painful, distressing, or scary. Grant us the courage to stay present to what is, and willing to use our gifts for the transformation of what can be.

Amen.



MONDAY
MARCH 27, 2023

SCRIPTURE

JOHN 4:13-14

Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.”

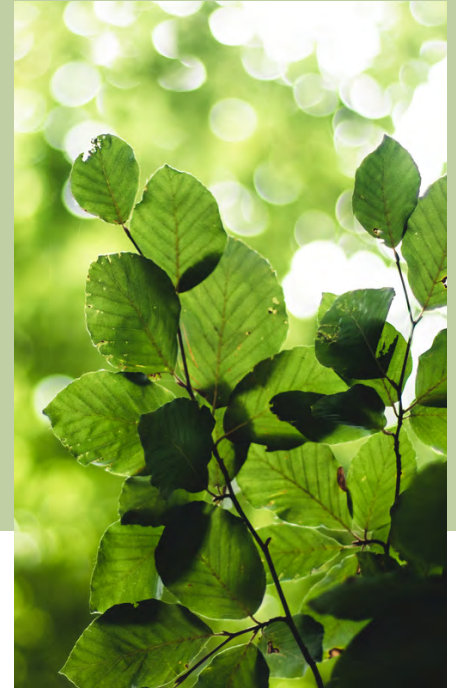
PRAYER

Dear LORD, as we watch the white snow melt away and spring return, may it help restore our precious reserve of water. We know that other parts of our country and around the world, clean water is becoming less available. Help us be good stewards in our efforts to take care of your creation. We pray this in the name of our Savior, Jesus the Christ.

Amen.

MONDAYS FOR PLANTING NOTIONS

Each Monday throughout Lent, we “plant notions” about ways we can care for God’s gift of planet earth, our common home. “Going green” doesn’t have to be a daunting task that means sweeping life changes. Simple things can make a difference.



BRUSH WITHOUT RUNNING

You've heard this one before, but maybe you still do it. You'll conserve up to five gallons per day if you stop. Daily savings in the U.S. alone could add up to 1.5 billion gallons-more water than folks use in the Big Apple. Turn off the water when you are shaving, too. Instead, run just enough to rinse your shaver or toothbrush.



BAN BATH TIME

Baths require almost twice as much water as showering. Not only will you reduce water consumption, but the energy costs associated with heating the water. Remember to take shorter showers too. Clean water is becoming a precious commodity. What you save today will be available tomorrow and into the future.



DON'T RINSE

Skip rinsing dishes before using your dishwasher and save up to 20 gallons of water each load. Plus, you're saving time and the energy used to heat the additional water.

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TUESDAY
MARCH 28, 2023

SCRIPTURE

ROMANS 8:22-23

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

PRAYER

We pray that we may at all times keep our minds open to new ideas and shun dogma; that we may become ever more filled with generosity of spirit and true compassion and love for all life. . . . We pray that we may learn the peace that comes with forgiving and the strength we gain in loving; . . . We pray because of our love for Creation, and because of our trust in the Great Spiritual Power.

"A Prayer for World Peace" by Jane Goodall.

FRIENDS WITH A JOINT PURPOSE ARE THE BEST KIND

REBECCA FERGUSON

I just discovered that wonderful sentence on a dot-org website called “Roots and Shoots,” a global, youth-led community organization started by Jane Goodall. The quotation fits with the serendipity that happens for us when we are fortunate enough to connect with friends who, in this case, share their first fruits of the Spirit.

I came home last week to an unexpected package, the present of a book a dear friend sent me just because. You may have known Jane Goodall because of her work with chimpanzees in Tanzania, but she is now also a United Nations Messenger of Peace.

Together with an amazing illustrator, an Iranian woman named Feeroozeh Golmohammadi, Goodall has created an utterly beautiful and moving book called “A Prayer for World Peace.” Find the book for yourself because the rich watercolors so deepen the words, and because you will want to share it with your friends, those loved ones who also care about peace and healing for our world; a part of her prayer is included on this day's devotional.

Use the QR code below to find an independent book store near you to acquire this book:





WEDNESDAY
MARCH 29, 2023

SCRIPTURE

I CORINTHIANS 5:17

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

PRAAYER

Alpha and Omega,
hear us singing as we
journey home to you.
Give us hope as we
care for all your
Creation.

Amen.

ECUMENICAL WEDNESDAYS

Because tending to creation is not limited to one strand of Christianity, we offer creation-centered messages on Wednesdays from Pope Francis' encyclical.



Laudato Si' **Beyond the Sun**

At the end, we will find ourselves face to face with the infinite beauty of God (cf. 1 Cor 13:12), and be able to read with admiration and happiness the mystery of the universe, which with us will share in unending plenitude. Even now we are journeying towards the sabbath of eternity, the new Jerusalem, towards our common home in heaven. Jesus says: “I make all things new” (Rev 21:5). Eternal life will be a shared experience of awe, in which each creature, resplendently transfigured, will take its rightful place and have something to give those poor men and women who will have been liberated once and for all.

In the meantime, we come together to take charge of this home which has been entrusted to us, knowing that all the good which exists here will be taken up into the heavenly feast. In union with all creatures, we journey through this land seeking God, for “if the world has a beginning and if it has been created, we must enquire who gave it this beginning, and who was its Creator”. Let us sing as we go. May our struggles and our concern for this planet never take away the joy of our hope.

From Chapter Six, paragraphs 243 and 244



THURSDAY
MARCH 30, 2023

SCRIPTURE

EPHESIANS 1:8b-10

With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

PRAYER

God of Mystery, we are so often distracted by the busyness of our lives. God of Mercy, You have given us silence, song and scripture, and the gathering of Your Church to help us stay centered in Your Love. For all this, we praise You and thank You.

Amen.

THURSDAYS WITH POETRY

Slow your mind & your speech on
Thursdays with the carefully chosen
words of poetry.



PRIMARY WONDER

By Denise Levertov

Days pass when I forget the mystery.
Problems insoluble and problems offering
their own ignored solutions
jostle for my attention, they crowd its antechamber
along with a host of diversions, my courtiers,
wearing their colored clothes: cap and bells.

And then

once more the quiet mystery
is present to me, the throng's clamor
recedes: the mystery
that there is anything, anything at all,
let alone cosmos, joy, memory, everything,
rather than void: and that, O Lord,
Creator, Hallowed One, You still,
hour by hour sustain it.



FRIDAY
MARCH 31, 2023

SCRIPTURE

PSALM 63:5-8

My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast,
and my mouth praises you with joyful lips
when I think of you on my bed,
and meditate on you in the watches of the
night;
for you have been my help,
and in the shadow of your wings I sing for
joy.
My soul clings to you;
your right hand upholds me.

PRAYER

God of Comfort, let us
find comfort in the grains
of your fields and the
milk of your creatures.

Let us see that we
depend on the gifts of
our siblings, the plants
that give seeds and
grains and our neighbors,
the cows, who grant us
cheeses and milks.

Let us be thankful for
their gifts.

Amen.

MEAT-FREE FRIDAYS

COMFORT

BETSY WESTERHAUS

Here are two recipes that add new flavors, & subtract meat, from favorite comfort foods. Your new way of eating also gives comfort and sustenance to the planet!

Quinoa Spinach Mac 'n Cheese

- 4 T. butter
- 4 T. flour
- 2 C. milk
- 2 dashes nutmeg
- ¼ tsp. salt
- 12 oz. sharp cheddar cheese
- 1 ½ cups quinoa
- 5-6 oz. fresh spinach
- Grated parmesan cheese for topping

Instructions:

Preheat oven to 350°F. Cook quinoa according to package. In a medium saucepan add 4 T of butter. Heat butter and flour in medium saucepan over medium heat. Whisk continuously until a paste forms. Whisk in milk. Increase heat to medium high and bring to a boil, whisking the whole time. Stir in nutmeg, salt and cheddar cheese. When cheese sauce is smooth, remove from heat. In a large bowl mix together the cooked quinoa, cheese sauce and spinach. Transfer the mixture into a casserole dish. Top with freshly grated Parmesan cheese. Bake 20 minutes or until golden brown. Makes six servings.



Black Bean Quinoa Burger

- ¼ cup cornmeal
- 2 T. flour or potato starch
- 2 tsp. cumin
- 2 tsp. coriander or chili powder 1 tsp. pepper
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 15 oz. can of black beans
- 1 large russet potato, baked
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- ¼ cup quinoa, steeped in boiling water for 5 minutes and drained
- 1-2 T. olive oil
- 4-6 slices provolone cheese

Instructions:

In a small bowl, stir together the cornmeal, potato starch, cumin, coriander or chili powder, pepper, and salt. Scoop potato out of skin. In a large bowl, mash potato and black beans. Add quinoa, garlic and cornmeal mixture. Combine well, though mixture should be slightly chunky. Form into 4-6 burgers.

In a heavy skillet, heat oil. Cook burgers over medium-high heat until they are nicely browned on one side, about 5 minutes. Turn carefully, and cook the other side until firm and brown. Place cheese slice on top during last minute or two to melt. Serve on bun, topped with guacamole (optional).



SATURDAY
APRIL 1, 2023

SCRIPTURE

COLOSSIANS 1:15-16

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.

PRAYER

Gracious God, we say that you are the creator of all that is. We confess that you are the sustainer of all life. And yet, I act as if I am the creator and the sustainer of my life. Remove from me the burden of needing to fashion meaning for myself. Prod me to remember that I, like all the created world, find my place in you.

Amen.

MONEY, WEALTH, & CREATION

EXCERPT FROM *WORDS FOR THE JOURNEY*
BY MARTIN B. COPENHAVER &
ANTHONY B. ROBINSON

There are a number of dangers associated with money. For one, there is the gap between the rich and poor, which raises questions of justice. Love of money can also result in danger to our environment. We consume so much, particularly in relation to people in other parts of the world, and in ways that cannot be sustained....Even if poverty were eliminated, and if the earth's environment were not threatened, our love of money can still be dangerous to our souls. Quite simply, it can distract us from those things that are most important. All of our focus on money, the harried and frantic getting and spending that so occupies us, can distract from those things that contribute to a truly rich and fulfilling life. I have in mind things like spending time with family or friends, developing a relationship with God, enjoying the gifts of nature, even pursuing some interest or hobby. The love of money can threaten all of those things, and often does. When we spend money we are called consumers, but often what is being consumed is our own lives.

Everything we have comes from God and in a very real way still belongs to God. We come into the world without possessions and we leave the same way. In between, we "have" possessions, including money, as if on loan. We are not owners, the masters of all we possess. Rather, we are God's caretakers of what has been entrusted to us for a time...If the natural world itself has been given to us as caretakers, we will tread more lightly on the earth, even as we treat carefully those things that are loaned to us, so that they will be in good shape when we pass them along to others.



PALM SUNDAY


APRIL 2, 2023

SCRIPTURE

MATTHEW 21:1-11

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, ‘The Lord needs them.’ And he will send them immediately.” This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet:

“Tell the daughter of Zion,
Look, your king is coming to you,
humble and mounted on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”



The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!”


When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?” The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

'LOOK, YOUR KING IS COMING'

BY LAURA WRIGHT

Jesus enters Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives as a king. The crowd calls him a son of David, one of the great kings of Israel's past. The narrator is also not subtle in presenting Jesus as a King; the narrator calls Jesus king by citing a passage from the prophet Zechariah: "Look, your king is coming." The crowd also laid their cloaks before him like earlier Israelites had done for their king (cf. 2 Kings 9:13). Yet there was a colonial power that ruled the region from Rome. And Jesus was not that king of the Roman kingdom.

Jesus' act is a fundamentally political act. He is tacitly critiquing the current ruling powers by declaring his counter-cultural kingship. What kind of kingdom and power does Jesus support? How might Jesus' kingship threaten ancient and current political powers? When you care for God's creation, you will threaten current political and economic powers. How does Jesus model for us a new way to care for creation?





MONDAY
APRIL 3, 2023

SCRIPTURE

COLOSSIANS 1:19-20

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.

PRAYER

Creator God, as we enter this Holy Week, help us to ponder our place in your infinite universe. While your creation is great, we may think our impact is small. Show us, please, that each thing we do to preserve our earthly home is welcomed by you. Our suffering is small, but your gift of eternal life is great. Help us honor your Son with our efforts. In the name of Jesus, we pray.

Amen.

MONDAYS FOR PLANTING NOTIONS

Each Monday throughout Lent, we “plant notions” about ways we can care for God’s gift of planet earth, our common home. “Going green” doesn’t have to be a daunting task that means sweeping life changes. Simple things can make a difference.



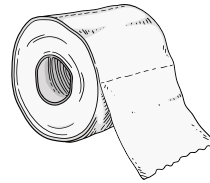
RECYCLE GLASS & CANS

Recycled glass reduces related air pollution by 20 percent and related water pollution by 50 percent. If it isn't recycled it can take a million years to decompose.



RECYCLE PAPER

There are 63 million newspapers printed each day in the U.S. Of these, 44 million, or about 69%, of them will be thrown away. Recycling just the Sunday papers would save more than half a million trees every week. You can also recycle nearly every piece of paper that comes into your home: mail, advertising, magazines and catalogs, food boxes (cereal for instance), cardboard, and paper bags. There are ways to cut back or eliminate most of these paper products, but it does take your time. You can find help on the internet or suggestions from friends. Help spread the word and make it a fun activity for your whole family. Remember you are helping God’s kingdom.



DON'T FORGET BATHROOM RECYCLING

Only 41% of Americans say they always recycle products from the bathroom. As a result common bathroom products like shampoo bottles, toothpaste boxes, and shaving-cream cans are more likely to end up in landfills. Spread the word to your family members about recycling personal care products including toothpaste boxes and tubes, shaving cream cans, shampoo bottles, toilet paper rolls, and body lotion bottles.



TUESDAY
APRIL 4, 2023

SCRIPTURE

MATTHEW 25:37-40

Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'

PRAYER

O God, use my hands.
Guide them so that they
will care for those who are
hungry, thirsty, lonely, or
sick. Make me not rest until
I walk in your paths, doing
your work.

Amen.

LORD, WHEN DID I?

BY STACY JOHNSON MYERS

Matthew's original audience wrestled powerfully with how to be faithful followers of Jesus. They knew the world was changing, complex, and filled with competing expectations. Much of Matthew's Gospel tries to help people figure out what it means to be a Christian in a complicated world. In *The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats*, Matthew focuses on what it means to be faithful disciples, not in theory, but in ways that attend to the needs of the world.

Our ancestors in faith needed no explanations about why a shepherd would separate sheep and goats—sheep were more valuable than goats. It would have been obvious that people, too, can be separated into groups. This time a distinction was made between those who helped others and those who turned a blind eye to the needs of others. Those who helped were given eternal blessing because their gifts of food, drink, hospitality, and clothing were given to Jesus, the Son of Man. Those who did not offer such gifts were cast into eternal punishment.

Initially the parable reflects the idea that those who do good deeds are rewarded and those who do not are punished. But the parable keeps going. The element of surprise enters when the sheep and the goats have no idea that they were either caring for Jesus or neglecting Jesus. They asked incredulous questions: “Lord when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink?” and “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?” The surprising and alarming answer is that whenever they cared or did not care for “the least of these who are members of my family” they did so to Jesus.

One key truth about being a disciple is that the responsibilities never end. People are never done being faithful. They are never finished helping the poor and hungry. Discipleship has never been glamorous or easy, in ancient days or today. Faithful Christians seek to care for those in need, and in doing so they care for the continuing body of Christ in the world.



WEDNESDAY
APRIL 5, 2023

SCRIPTURE

REVELATION 21:1-5

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.”

And the one who was seated
on the throne said, “See, I am
making all things new.” Also
he said, “Write this, for these
words are trustworthy and
true.”

PRAYER

"Laudato Si" concludes
with a prayer that can be
found on the next page.

ECUMENICAL WEDNESDAYS



Laudato Si'

A Christian Prayer in Union with Creation

Father, we praise you with all your creatures.
They came forth from your all-powerful hand;
they are yours, filled with your presence
and your tender love.
Praise be to you!

Son of God, Jesus,
through you all things were made.
You were formed in the womb of Mary our
Mother,
you became part of this earth,
and you gazed upon this world with human
eyes.
Today you are alive in every creature
in your risen glory.
Praise be to you!

Holy Spirit, by your light
you guide this world towards the Father's love
and accompany creation as it groans in travail.
You also dwell in our hearts
and you inspire us to do what is good.
Praise be to you!

Triune Lord, wondrous community of infinite
love,
teach us to contemplate you
in the beauty of the universe,
for all things speak of you.
Awaken our praise and thankfulness
for every being that you have made.
Give us the grace to feel profoundly joined
to everything that is.

God of love, show us our place
in this world
as channels of your love
for all the creatures of this earth,
for not one of them is forgotten in your
sight.
Enlighten those who possess power
and money
that they may avoid the sin of
indifference,
that they may love the common good,
advance the weak,
and care for this world in which we live.
The poor and the earth are crying out.
O Lord, seize us with your power and
light,
help us to protect all life,
to prepare for a better future,
for the coming of your Kingdom
of justice, peace, love and beauty.
Praise be to you!

Amen.



MAUNDY THURSDAY

APRIL 6, 2023

SCRIPTURE

JOHN 13:1-7

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

THURSDAYS WITH POETRY

Slow your mind & your speech on
Thursdays with the carefully chosen
words of poetry.



Who will wash my feet?

By Khosi Xaba

My tears dried before 1990.
My thirst is unknown.
My hunger is not for food.
My wounds are inside.
My womb weeps silence.
My nipples watch the soil
to safeguard those
who travelled through me.
My memories run in my veins.
My cracked and dry feet
have never touched a shoe
or a floor of any office.
But I also like the idea
of someone washing my feet.

Khosi Xaba, "No Serenity Here: An Anthology of African Poetry in Amharic, French, Arabic and Portuguese," edited by Philippa Yaa de Villiers et al (Beijing, 2010).



GOOD FRIDAY

APRIL 7, 2023


SCRIPTURE

JOHN 18:33-19:7

Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus answered, “Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?” Pilate replied, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?” Jesus answered, “My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom belonged to this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.” Pilate asked him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” Pilate asked him, “What is truth?”

After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, “I find no case against him. But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?” They shouted in reply, “Not this man but Barabbas!” Now Barabbas was a rebel.

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. They kept coming up to him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” and striking him on the face. Pilate went out again and said to them, “Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him.” So Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them,



"Behold the man!" When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him." The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God."

"What is truth?" - Pilate

NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) reports that each decade since 1980 the earth is warming at more than double the rate in earlier decades. Fossil fuel usage wraps our planet in a blanket and increasingly warms it. Do we dare support fossil fuel divestment? What is the truth of the matter? How do we testify to that truth?

As Harvard address climate devastation, they have asked what are they called to do & what is truth.

Some say: "[A]dministrators have long contended the school is best positioned to address climate change through its teaching, research, and campus sustainability efforts."

Others say: "Given the need to decarbonize the economy and our responsibility as fiduciaries to make long-term investment decisions that support our teaching and research mission, we do not believe such [fossil fuel] investments are prudent," [Harvard President Lawrence] Bacow wrote.

This has people's attention because Harvard's total endowment is \$41.9 billion – about 2% is believed to be directly in fossil fuels.

As Jesus awaits his own death and destruction, he says, "For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."

How do we, like Jesus, testify to the truth? How do we belong to the truth in an age of climate destruction?

See: <https://www.npr.org/2021/09/10/1035901596/harvard-university-end-investment-fossil-fuel-industry-climate-change-activism>

<https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2021/9/10/divest-declares-victory/>






HOLY SATURDAY

APRIL 8, 2023

SCRIPTURE

JOHN 19:38-42

After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let



him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews.

Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

MYRRH & ALOE FOR THE BODY

BY LAURA WRIGHT

On Holy Saturday, we mourn the death of God. We may not yet know with certainty that Resurrection is coming. Indeed, we may be looking at today's world devastated by pollution and harm. We may wonder if the Resurrection of creation is coming. We may hope for Easter morn, but we sit in the reality of the grief of Holy Saturday when God has died. Nicodemus did not know resurrection was coming, yet he tenderly cared for Jesus' body with a mixture of myrrh and aloes. As we wait for the Resurrection of creation, how will we still tenderly care for bodies?




EASTER SUNDAY

APRIL 9, 2023

SCRIPTURE

MATTHEW 28:1-10

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the



stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women,

"Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you."

So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them,

"Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

NEW LIFE IS COMING

On Easter, we see that the Resurrection of Jesus is certain. New Life has come. Jesus said "Do not be afraid; go and tell others to go to Galilee; there they will see me." If you were to know for certain that all of creation will be alive again and healed from all human harm, how would this change your labor on behalf of God's creation? How will you hope for new life to come?

