



“...for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come...” Song of Solomon 2:11-12

EARTH SUNDAY
Westminster Presbyterian Church
Eugene, Oregon
“At- Home” Worship
April 18, 2021

Gathering Around God’s Word

If you are worshipping with another family member or with children, you are invited to have different voices share and read the various parts of the service. You can also call/FaceTime someone to worship together. (If you have a prayer request you would like added to the At- Home Worship service, please email Brooke.office@wpceugene.org)

CALL TO WORSHIP

Oyai Mose (Come All You People)—Zimbabwe

#388

CALL TO CONFESSION

God calls us into a new covenant. “I will put my law within you, and I will write it upon your hearts. I will be your God and you will be my people. I will forgive your evil deeds and I will remember your sins no more.” In penitence and faith, let us confess our sins to God and to one another.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Creator God, we confess that we have sinned against you and against our neighbor, in thought, word, and deed, both by what we have done and by what we have left undone. For our own convenience and ease we have used more than our fair share of your gifts of creation. We have not worked to make sure all have sustenance for body, mind, and spirit, and we have ignored and neglected your most vulnerable ones. We have not considered how our habits and purchases affect the rest of your creation. Melt our hard hearts, we pray, and plant in us new courage so that we might grow and change and bring healing to your hurting world. Amen.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

God who redeems all Creation has come to us in Jesus Christ, to free us from sin and return us to the love and service of our Creator. Let us trust in God’s grace and turn to ways of justice, kindness, and make ours a humble walk with God. **Thanks be to God.**

HYMN

Faith Begins By Letting Go

#684

The Word

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

May we hear the voice of the Lord in the words of Scripture read here today. Amen.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Old Testament Reading: Psalm 104

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 the 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. At your rebuke they flee; at the sound of your thunder they take to flight. They rose up to the mountains, ran down to the valleys to the place that you appointed for them. You set a boundary that they may not pass, so that they might not again cover the earth. You make springs gush forth in the valleys; they flow between the hills, giving drink to every wild animal; the wild asses quench their thirst. By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation; they sing among the branches. From your lofty abode you water the mountains; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work. 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. When the sun rises, they withdraw and lie down in their dens. People go out to their work and to their labor until the evening. 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. May the glory of the Lord endure forever; may the Lord rejoice in his works— who looks on the earth and it trembles, who touches the mountains and they smoke. I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being. May my meditation be pleasing to him, for I rejoice in the Lord. Let sinners be consumed from the earth, and let the wicked be no more. Bless the Lord, O my soul. Praise the Lord!

New Testament Reading: John 3:1-7

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, ‘Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.’ Jesus answered him, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.’ Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?’ Jesus answered, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, “You must be born from above.”

ANTHEM

Purify My Heart

sung by: Elizabeth Dhungana

Can you believe this is only the third of seven Easter Sundays? We are just two weeks into the fifty days of Eastertide, that lovely time where we swing from Easter’s good news to Pentecost’s good news through days when the soil is warming, trees are blooming and leafing out, weeds are threatening to take over. At our house, we’re deciding that dandelions in the lawn are really okay, along with the little English daisies and a lot of moss in some areas. It’s good enough. We picked up a fabulous tool called the Grandpa Weeder, if you can believe it, that lifts the dandelions, root and all, out of the flower and veggie beds without me getting down on my knees to pray that I won’t leave some root behind to grow again.

Our Psalm today revels in the bounty of God’s creation: the beauty, the earth satisfied with God’s work and all creatures satisfied with their lot and place in it. People have food from the earth, wine and bread to both gladden and strengthen their hearts—much as communion does for us—and oil to make their faces shine. And the psalm reminds us that God’s creating doesn’t stop, either. Like all the rest of creation, like grain in the fields, we grow, do our part in making the earth a bountiful place, we die, and more are born. Even the very stones cry out creation as volcanoes erupt, and waves, snow, and rain erode, and so God renews the face of the earth. And so thankful are we to be part of that flow that we sing to the Lord and praise God while we have being.

I am deeply thankful for all the good things in creation that God has set in motion to provide for everyone and everything. I’m thankful for people who grapple with changing their shopping habits to reduce packaging and their need to recycle and throw away. That can be hard. I’m thankful for people who struggle to understand other viewpoints and passions and yet make room in the faithful community for everyone to bring their best ideas and to work side by side. I’m thankful for people who speak up to those in power on behalf of God’s most vulnerable and oppressed people, and for those who, like the Lorax, speak for the trees. I’m thankful for people of all ages—children, teens, young adults, busy mid-lifers, retirees, and our eldest who work at living simply so that others might simply live.

On Earth Sunday, we take special notice of the rich interplay between all the parts of God’s creation. We are tempted to see ourselves as set apart from the other creatures and from the volcanoes, and as merely users and appreciators of plants, but the current state of our changing climate and the health of our oceans, our wildlands, and our urban areas, lead me to ask if that temptation leads us into peace and wholeness.

We fulfill many roles in a faithful life. On any given day, we may be planting seeds of justice, kindness, and humility as we go along. On any given day, we may be the seed that God plants in in a world that needs what we will grow and become. On any given day, our life may be the fertile soil in which God seeds and waters so many helpful ideas and possibilities.

We all have seasons of our lives where we feel frozen, as if nothing will ever grow in us again. We need the warmth of faithful community to help us hold fast to what lies dormant in our heart. To remind us that God is faithful, even when we are not. To remind us that churches are places where broken people help each other hold together as well as places where joyful people laugh and give thanks, often at the same time. This year we have not let the deep freeze of pandemic kill all of our seeds. We have kept faith with God and each other as best we could, and we have managed to grow new ways to serve God together in our fearful and traumatized world.

I pray that the best of those lessons, learned in both our successes and our failures, will help us grow a more vibrant and passionate church that is unafraid to look at issues of social and environmental health and justice as Jesus would see them and to speak and work to those issues as Jesus would have us do. I pray that we will recognize ourselves as children of God and delight in pondering what we will grow to be in God’s good time.

As grown-ups, to know that we are children of God and to not know what we will be in time is to be like one of our own Westminster kids—to renew our sense of wonder that God is planting seeds of goodness and hope in us, and that it is for us to make ourselves fertile ground.

Children are like seeds we plant in the world. It really does take all of us, working together to create a healthy place for them to thrive so that each of them will grow and add their gifts to the world. But it's not a one-way street. Kids call us, in their way, to live more faithfully. It is part of their ministry, to remind their elders to examine our hearts and our beliefs and to, with God's help, renew our thanks and praise and our care for what God gives us.

When the Rev. Dr. David Gambrell spoke at the 2020 Presbyterian Youth Triennium last year, he said that every person, young or old, should understand that ministry with youth is not a one-way street. "They need to know they are valued — their gifts, wisdom, and experiences are important," Gambrell explains. "They need to know that we take them seriously and honor them as members of Christ's body and we want to learn from them even as they learn from us."

We all have something to learn. Or something to unlearn. Unlearning is harder. Whichever it is, God continually calls on us in Scripture and in life to thaw our hearts and plow up our self-interests, to listen to others and to understand with compassion where our learned biases and assumed privileges have harmed rather than healed.

I am currently taking a class called New Testament Survey. Immersion in the New Testament invariably draws you in and out of the Old Testament. The Bible is full of stories of people who all pass through seasons of learning and unlearning when they encounter God. When they meet Jesus. When the Holy Spirit blows in and through them. When they rub shoulders with others who have encountered the holy but in a different way. All through the Bible I see something resonating: God loves us just as God loves all of creation. God is faithful and responsive in and through everything God has created. John 3:16 says, "God so loved the world." The world.

All this is to say that even as I have watched the earth coming out of winter and into spring, I have been celebrating every sign of goodness I see. We are in the midst of holy times, although it is not always easy or pretty to watch.

We are living through the lightning and thunder of social change as oppressed people rage their pent-up frustration at long-frozen attitudes of superiority. Those of us with unrecognized frozen places in our hearts hardly know what to do in this righteous storm. Hear the words of our reading from 1 John. "See what love the Father has given us..." This doesn't say "see how much God loves us." It says, "what love the Father has given us." So much that we are called children of God. We have been given so much love that we need not protect it or hold it back. We are free to plant it everywhere and extravagantly, never worrying what other people think about our flagrant kindness and respect. Learning to love as evenhandedly as God does helps us thaw those frozen places in us and water the seeds of change and renewal.

Catholic priest David Tracy writes this about those who identify as religious people: "If there is one thing religions all agree on, it's that the ego is the problem, not the solution. I agree with Nietzsche: our souls are too small. The turn to religion . . . can either be a turn to the self or a turn to the other. In terms of the work of the spirit among genuine Christian groups, I would point to the fact that when you go into the really terrible neighborhoods, you'll find Christians serving there. And they've always been there. The hope for our culture as a whole—and not only the Christian church—is a recovery of that kind of spirituality."

In thinking about these things, I keep coming back to our kids. In young people I see hope for our tendencies to be set in our ways, adamant in our beliefs, polarized from our siblings in faith and society. Our young people come into life ready to be planted with God's love, to grow seeds of justice and compassion. Young people are taking to the streets, the media, and the courtrooms to call their elders' attention to serious problems with our climate and our earth. They care about the effects of overconsumption and pollution. Their ministry is agitating for our more faithful behavior. Could it be that they are pointing us the way to spiritual maturity?

I recently read something that Charles Loader of the Uniting Church of Australia said about Jesus's parable of the sower and the seeds in Mark 4: "[T]he kingdom grows ... in spiritual maturity as if, within a person, the seed of faith were sprouting, growing a stalk, then an ear, then the full grain in the ear. We can think first of hearing a parable as just a nice story, then of grasping what Jesus means by that story, then of applying his meaning to our own situations, then of realizing how he is calling us to change our ways to become more like him."

Spring is here, God is good, and the gardens are ready. What is ready in the fertile ground that is your life? What has the Holy Spirit seeded to grow there? What seeds will you go on to plant in the lives of others? You, dear and precious child of God, are uniquely and wonderfully gifted to sow peace and plenty for all, whatever your age, whatever your stage, wherever you are, and whenever you can. I pray that on Earth Day this coming Thursday you will join me in rereading Psalm 104. Let us together rejoice in the Lord and in God's manifold works for as long as we have being. Thanks be to God.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH – Canada

We are not alone; we live in God's world. We believe in God: who has created and is creating, who has come in Jesus, the Word made flesh, to reconcile and make new, who works in us and others by the Spirit. We trust in God. We are called to be the Church: to celebrate God's presence, to live with respect in Creation, to love and serve others, to seek justice and resist evil, to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, our judge and our hope. In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us. We are not alone.

HYMN

We Are One in the Spirit—South Side, Chicago, USA

#300

Pastoral Prayer

Creator God, we thank you for the abundance of your creation and the weaving together of our lives and livelihoods with everyone and everything else. You love your creation like a shower of rain that falls on all alike. You will good for all your creation alike. You are faithful, even when we are not, and your grace holds us gently when we fall.

You plant us in this fertile world and encourage us to grow.

We pray for this world and for the leaders who make decisions that affect all of creation: for humility and for strength to heal rather than oppress, to bring wholeness rather than neglect. To sustain and not waste what you have made for our children and the generations of children to come.

May they plant peace wherever they work.

We pray for those who suffer in body, mind, and spirit. Show us where to bless with the water of healing, to grow community with those we love and those you want us to love. In these days of pandemic and fires and violence we pray for those who grieve the loss of loved ones, for those who have lost homes and suffer trauma. Help us to seed healing and belovedness in their lives.

We thank you for young people who care about the wellbeing of the world, its climate, its water, and growing things. We thank you for our elders who never stops serving you in the ways you call them. We thank you for busy people who take time from their daily struggles to reach out to plant the seeds of your good news in friends and neighbors.

All these things and the joys and concerns in the depths of our hearts we lift up to you, Creator God. Amen.

The New Zealand Lord's Prayer, based on Matthew 6:9-15
Eternal Spirit, Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,
Source of all that is and that shall be,
Father and Mother of us all,
Loving God, in whom is heaven:
The hallowing of your name echo through the universe!
The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world!
Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!
Your commonwealth of peace and freedom sustain our hope and come on earth.
With the bread we need for today, feed us.
In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.
In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.
From trials too great to endure, spare us.
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.
For you reign in the glory of the power that is love, now and forever.
Amen.

- The New Zealand Book of Prayer | He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

Sending of God's Word

CLOSING HYMN

Soft Rains of Spring Flow- Korea

#680

BENEDICTION AND SENDING- Ireland

Deep peace of the running wave to you, of water flowing, rising, and falling, sometimes advancing, sometimes receding . . . May the stream of your life flow unimpeded!

Deep peace of the running wave to you!

Deep peace of the flowing air to you, which fans your face on a sultry day, the air which you breathe deeply rhythmically, which imparts to you energy, consciousness, life.

Deep peace of the flowing air to you!

Deep peace of the quiet earth to you, who, herself unmoving, harbours the movements and facilitates the life of the ten thousand creatures, while resting contented, stable, tranquil.

Deep peace of the quiet earth to you!

Deep peace of the shining stars to you, which stay invisible 'til darkness falls and discloses their pure and shining presence beaming down in compassion on our turning world.

Deep peace of the shining stars to you!

From the Carmina Gadelica - adapted from the Gaelic

And the love of God, the peace of Christ, and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit go with us all in the seasons to come. And all God's beloved children say, "**Thanks be to God.**"