A photograph of a vast field of yellow dandelions stretching to the horizon under a clear, bright blue sky. The flowers are in full bloom, and the perspective is from a low angle, looking across the field.

A Matter of Stewardship

Eco-justice in Biblical Perspective

Rev. Cassandra Carkuff Williams, Ed.D.

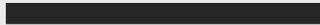
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*This study is dedicated to the memory of my
mother, Bobeeta Davies Carkuff, in gratitude for
the hours we spent together in nature where she
taught me to gather mushrooms, clean elderberries,
and celebrate a good thunderstorm.*



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About this Study

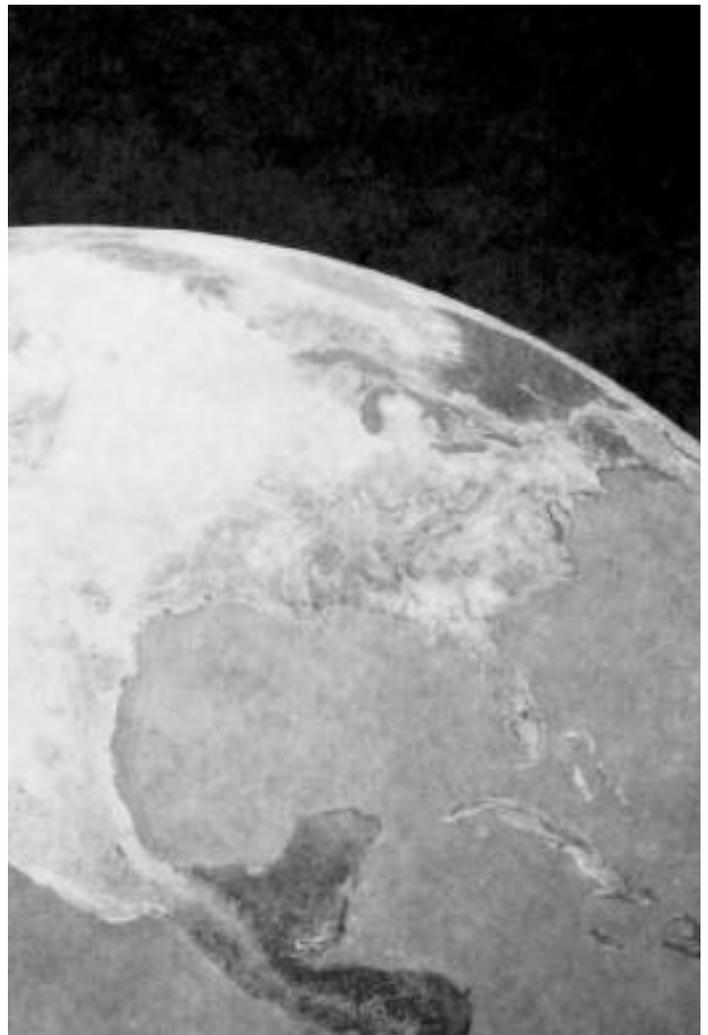
This study is designed for individual or group use. If you use it for personal study, you may want to have a journal handy for the reflection activities. A hymn suggestion and prayers are offered to make your study time a time of personal devotion. If you are planning to use the study in a small group, please read “Notes for Group Leaders” below for information on conducting the study. A PowerPoint presentation for use in teaching is available at www.abhms.org/discipleship/resources.cfm.

The purpose of this study is *not* to attach Scripture verses to a preconceived environmental agenda but rather to bring general questions about creation and our role within creation to the Bible and let it speak to us. Nor is the purpose to rehearse dire predictions or impose “guilt-trips” on users. The study explores the call to stewardship as it was first given to us—what does it mean that God created the world and invited human beings to “have dominion” (Gen 1:26) or “till and keep the garden” (Gen 2:15)? Therefore, this study is not just for—or even primarily for—those who have a commitment to environmentalism. It is for all Christians who seek to understand and be faithful in our role as the “crowned ones” (Ps 8) within creation.

Christians hold a variety of perspectives on multiple topics, but we share a love for Jesus and the responsibility to seek guidance in our Scriptures in order to grow in our faithfulness. So, for example, whether you believe that global warming is a serious pressing issue or that it is an alarmist invention, this study is for you. Because as a Christian, what you believe about individual issues does not alleviate your responsibility to explore God’s Word and seek greater faithfulness to that Word. And in this study, our goal is to seek out God’s Word on creation and what it means to live responsively and responsibly within it.

Those who reject environmentalism will be challenged during this study, but so too will those who hold a commitment to ecology. We all have room to grow and for too long the debate over environmentalism has been vague, politicized, and polarizing. We do not need to adopt a secular view of the environment in order to justify care for the planet. Our mandate to care for creation was given long before Earth Day was assigned to April. Nor can we get away with rejecting care for creation as a misguided liberal infiltration of the church. For all believers who are willing to set

aside preconceptions for a while and look to Scripture for guidance, we will walk together through a process that will help us move beyond inflammatory language, reclaim fellowship with one another, and bear witness to a distinctly biblical view of creation and our role within it. Eco-justice—a term that was developed by American Baptists—was adopted as a way of expressing the unique calling upon Christians to live out a relationship to the rest of creation that is in keeping with the will of the Creator. Recognizing that the word *zedek* (צדק) is translated into English both as righteousness and as justice can remind us that living a righteous life includes acting justly (Mic 6:8). When we speak of eco-justice, what we are talking about is righteousness that answers the call to stewardship that was given to us “in the beginning.”



Notes for Group Leaders

Conducting the Study

Each session in this study includes the following items:

- An opening reading and hymn suggestion that helps to place care for creation within the context of the historic Christian tradition
- A reflection activity designed to open up pathways to growth by inviting participants to explore their existing—and sometimes unconsciously held—beliefs and assumptions through journal writing, discussion, or quiet reflection
- Content/information drawn from Scripture and other sources, which can be shared using a variety of information-processing strategies, such as lecture, group reading, or learning stations
- Engagement exercises designed to help participants interact with and to respond to the content; to move beyond cognition to emotion, volition, and connection with their daily lives
- A closing prayer

An appendix with additional readings and prayers can be used as you see fit.

Some Assumptions at Work in the Study

A foundational assumption of this study is that beliefs are often based on preconceptions and assumptions that were formed through key relationships and experiences and are held in place by emotions attached to those relationships and experiences. By raising to consciousness such beliefs and opening them up to reflection, we can move toward greater authenticity and integrity, whether or not those beliefs change. Among the tools of transformational education is the disorienting dilemma. In this study, unfamiliar Scripture texts, alternative readings of given texts, and views from a variety of cultures are offered as potential disorienting dilemmas. The response to disorienting dilemmas can be openness and change, resistance to and/or attempts to discredit the idea, retreat into previous assumptions, or even anger. All responses are valid and sometimes the most vehement response can be indicative

of transformation taking place. It is crucial, therefore, that leaders resist any temptation to show favoritism to an amenable participant or be dismissive of a “disagreeable” one. The goal is for each participant to move toward greater authenticity in belief and integrity in lifestyle, and we can presume to dictate neither the path nor the end result.

Aside from transformational educational principles, there are several assumptions peculiar to the topic of eco-justice that are at work in this study. Each is a product of a disorienting dilemma that challenged an assumption of mine and helped to shape my approach to eco-justice and teaching about eco-justice.

Disorienting Dilemma 1:

I was shocked when, as I expressed concern about the condition of the beautiful Genesee River in Western New York State, a leader and noted “spiritual giant” in the church I was serving shouted, “I *hate* environmentalists.” Beyond my shock that a Christian would hold such vehement hatred toward any entire group of people, especially

a group that included some of his brothers and sisters in Christ, I was stunned by the depth of his anger. His was clearly a position held in place by profound emotion born out of some potent experience. I later learned that he worked for a company in the area that was both a well-known polluter and a major employer. The community had recently evaluated this company’s role as an employer versus the environmental damage it did and decided that the good done outweighed the bad. A small group of local environmentalists, which included members of area churches and a





beloved long-term local pastor, voiced opposition to this decision. This environmentalist-hating man had experienced environmentalism as a threat to both his livelihood and his community's survival. His decision—and that of the majority of the community—that the destruction of the environment was less important than the risks to business and jobs flowed from an expressed theological understanding that human need supersedes other concerns and an unarticulated yet functional belief that care for creation necessarily means risk to people; that the two sets of needs are in conflict with one another.

This encounter confirmed for me that beliefs are held in place much more strongly by the threads of emotion and experience than by cognition and, therefore, any teaching about beliefs must take seriously four truths:

1. People's emotions and experiences are valid for them and must be treated with respect.
2. To teach, we must learn to listen beneath the words and commit ourselves to not judging either the thought or the way the thought is expressed.
3. To give learners opportunities for transformation, we must include time for exploring experiences and the emotional impact of those experiences.
4. To give learners opportunities for transformation, we must encourage critical reflection on unconsciously held beliefs and unexamined assumptions.

Disorienting Dilemma 2:

One summer evening I led a study on animal theology for a local congregation. I had taught and led worship at this church a number of times and was aware of an older gentleman in the gathering who was a self-professed fundamentalist Christian and open opponent of women in the pastorate. Throughout my presentation, I was aware of this man's presence and wondered if he'd be able to hear me in spite of his opposition to women in ministry. Afterwards he came up to me and shared on a deeply personal level the sadness he felt for how animals are treated in factory farming. He had been raised on a family farm where he learned respect for animals. He was supportive and appreciative of my presentation. Among those who were resistant to my message were some who could be classified as progressive, socially conscious Christians. This experience reminded me that we cannot presume how a given person will respond to any issue based on beliefs they hold in other areas; therefore it is essential to set aside our own preconceptions when we teach.

Disorienting Dilemma 3:

I have frequently encountered tension between environmentalists and animal welfare activists. As a person who cares about creation, including the needs of individual creatures with whom we share this planet, I continue to find it perplexing that these two groups could be at odds with each other. The friction between environmentalists and animal activists is complex and relates to some fundamental philosophical differences as well as differences of opinion about the role of humans within the created order. I've learned from this tension that sometimes those whose thinking seems closest to one another can have the more difficult time hearing each other on specific issues. I have made a commitment to intentionally address animals when I speak about eco-justice, not only because animals are sometimes neglected in discussions on the environment, but, even more importantly, because Scripture has much to say on the topic.

Certainly and admittedly, my hope is that people who use this study will adopt creation-friendly beliefs and move toward increasingly eco-just lifestyles. My greater hope is that in our shared journey, we can talk with one another and explore together what it means to live faithfully as Christians in all aspects of our lives, and always show respect for one another as we work to build up the body of Christ "until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:12-13).

Session One

About Us

I. Opening

A. Readings

*When I open my eyes,
My God, on all that you have created
I have heaven already in my hands*

*Serenely I gather in my lap
Roses and lilies and all green things
While I praise your works.*

*My own works I ascribe entirely to you.
Gladness springs forth from sorrow,
And joy brings happiness.*

—Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179)

There is within the human heart a tough fibrous root of fallen life whose nature is to possess, always to possess. It covets “things” with a deep and fierce passion. The pronouns ‘my’ and ‘mine’ look innocent enough in print, but their constant and universal use is significant. They express the real nature of the old Adamic man better than a thousand volumes of theology could do. The roots of our hearts have grown down into things, and we dare not pull up one rootlet lest we die. Things have become necessary to us, a development never originally intended. God’s gifts now take the place of God, and the whole course of nature is upset by the monstrous substitution.

—A. W. Tozer (1897–1963)

B. Hymn: “All Things Bright and Beautiful”

C. Reflection Activity

Take a few moments to consider the following:

1. What is your understanding of people as part of God’s creation? If you use terms such as “God’s image” or “dominion” be sure to explain concretely what that means to you. When do you first remember thinking of people in this way? Who or what experiences taught you this understanding?
2. Note times when you have heard people say, “God gave us dominion.” What was the context? What behaviors were they defending or what were they responding to? What impulse was beneath that statement?

II. The Uniqueness of Human Beings

A. Crowned with Glory

Genesis 1:26a tells us that God created people on the final day of creation and in the divine image, a view echoed in Genesis 5:1. This understanding is reflected in later Old Testament writings, such as Psalm 8:

You made us a little lower than yourself [or “the angels”] and have crowned us with glory and honor (vs. 5).



The question for us is: “What does it mean to be created in God’s own image?” Both Genesis 1 and Psalm 8 suggest that our uniqueness has to do with the power we have been given within the created order:

We will let them rule the fish, the birds, and all other living creatures (Gen 1:26b).

You let us rule everything your hands have made and you put all of it under our power (Ps 8:6).

A simple look around confirms that humans have power within creation and most people of faith would concur that power was given to us as part of the divine plan. However, when people proclaim, “We have dominion!” they often forget two crucial and related details:

1. “Our” power was given by God and the purpose was for us to be God’s agents—not our own agents—within creation.
2. We must, therefore, look to God to understand how we are to use that power.

B. Our Role within the Created Order

Genesis 1 tells us that after creating human beings, God blessed them with the call to populate the earth (a command God also gave to animals after creating them) and then instructs:

See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of 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 (vs. 29-30).

Immediately after empowering humans, God sets limits on our use of power. Since our role within creation was bestowed by the Creator, the Creator gets to define how we live it out. Not only are there limits on what humans are to take for themselves for food, God makes it clear that humans do not get to use everything. Some of the bounty of the earth is given for the other creatures with whom we share this habitat. Human dominion, then, is *relative* dominion. The exercise of our power within the created order is qualified by God’s sovereignty over us. We are God’s envoys, earthly representatives of the Creator, and when we live out dominion *in ways that reflect the character*



and intent of God, we bear witness to God’s ultimate authority as Creator. Other texts in Scripture shed light on this divine design:

- The creation story as told in Genesis 2:4b–3:24 tells of God placing the man (Hebrew, *Adam*) in the Garden of Eden to “till and to keep” it (2:15) and again placing limits on the use of creation (“you may eat of every tree except . . .”). The language of tilling and keeping suggests care and preservation of creation.
- While Genesis says we are given dominion, Scripture repeatedly reminds us that “the earth is the LORD’s and its fullness thereof” (Ps 24:1); this is God’s creation entrusted to us, not our creation to use as we see fit.
- The legal material found in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy sets parameters and gives guidelines for how people are to relate with the rest of creation. For example, the institution of the sabbatical year (Lev 25:2-7, also Ex 23:10), which we will look at more closely in Session Two, calls for one year out of every seven to be a period of rest for the land.
- The prophets see God’s authority over people resting in God’s rights as the creator of the world, for example,

Isaiah 42:5, which reads: “This is what God the LORD says—he who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it.”

- The first Christians saw Jesus as the full likeness (image) of God and applied Psalm 8:6 to him (1 Cor 15:27; Eph 1:22; Heb 2:8), so the ultimate model for us as we seek to live out dominion is Jesus, who lovingly and sacrificially used his power on behalf of the entire created order.

To claim dominion as the right to do what we please with creation or even to use creation solely for the welfare of human beings is a violation of our God-given role within the created order. It is also a violation of the model of our savior who demonstrates that the proper use of power is in service beyond our own needs. On the other hand, and to state things more positively, as Christians we have a unique responsibility to both reclaim God’s intent ourselves and to bear witness to that original divine plan in which humans are entrusted with the care of creation to sustain it, not only for ourselves, but for future generations and other living beings.

III. Engagement Exercises

A. Respond to the following questions:

1. Are you surprised, concerned, resistant, excited, or perplexed by any of the material covered so far?
2. What influential persons or experiences came to mind as you reviewed this material?
3. What information might your reactions and/or thoughts offer about your assumptions, fears, or expectations?

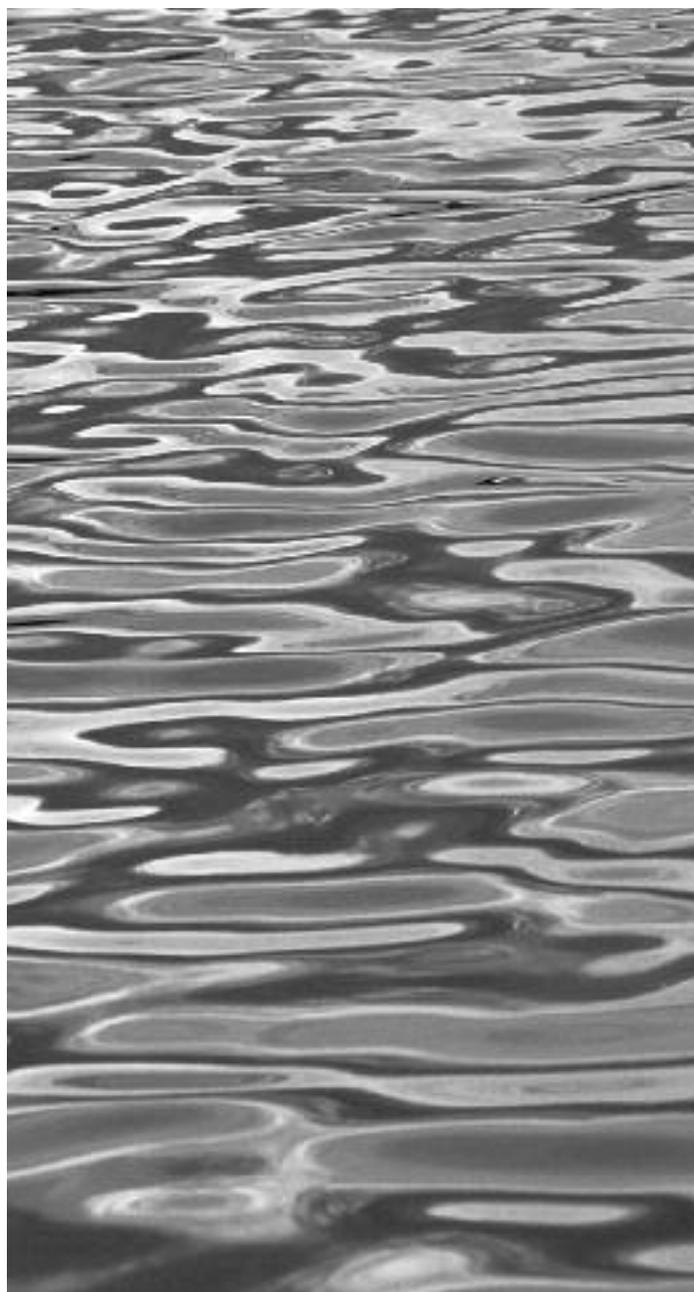
B. A Day in My Life

Think about your day, from the morning when you wake up until the night when you lie down to sleep. Consider the places your life intersects with creation—where you live, what you eat, how you get around, how you heat or cool your home, what you wear, and so on. In what ways does your approach to creation reflect a belief that the earth is God’s and that we were given a divine mandate to care for and preserve creation? In what ways does your approach to creation suggest that it is yours to do with as you please? How might you adjust your daily lifestyle to come more closely into harmony with God’s purposes?

IV. Closing Prayer

O God, we thank you for this earth, our home; for the wide sky and the blessed sun, for the salt sea and the running water, for the everlasting hills and the never-resting winds, for trees and the common grass underfoot. We thank you for our senses by which we hear the songs of birds and see the splendour of the summer fields, and taste the autumn fruits, and rejoice in the feel of the snow, and smell of the breath of spring. Grant us a heart wide open to all this beauty; and save our souls from being so blind that we pass unseeing when even the common thornbush is aflame with your glory, O God, our creator, who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

—Walter Rauschenbusch (1861–1918)



Session Two

About Stewardship

I. Opening

A. Readings

Let him who possesses a field, so partake of its yearly fruits, that he may not suffer the ground to be injured by his negligence; but let him endeavor to hand it down to posterity as he received it, or even better cultivated. Let him so feed on its fruits that he neither dissipates it by luxury, nor permits it to be marred by neglect. Moreover, let everyone regard himself as the steward of God in all things which he possesses. Then he will neither conduct himself dissolutely, nor corrupt by abuse those things which God requires to be preserved. . . . The creation is quite like a spacious and splendid house, provided and filled with the most exquisite and the most abundant furnishings. Everything in it tells us of God.

—John Calvin (1509–1564)

*Love all God's creation,
The whole and every grain of sand in it.
Love every leaf,
Every ray of God's light.
Love the animals,
Love the plants,
Love everything
If you love everything,
You will perceive
The divine mystery in things.
Once you perceive it,
You will begin to comprehend it better every day.
And you will come at last to love the whole world with
an all-embracing love.*

—Fyodor Dostoyevski (1821–1881)

B. Hymn: "The Common Doxology"

C. Reflection Activity

1. There is a fierce debate taking place in our county about gas drilling. The debate is highly emotional and further complicated by the economic challenges in the area. One farmer recently summarized the problem as: "The environmentalists don't want anyone to make any



money." On the other hand, some who oppose the drilling consider proponents to be simple and short-sighted. The search for truth and effective options is not helped by extreme rhetoric or negative characterizations of people with opposing views.

Think of a time when you held a strong opinion about a subject and could not productively engage in discussion. How did you frame the issue? Was your description accurate and fair? How did you assess your opponents? What assumptions, fears, or prejudices were reflected in your language? How might you have reframed the issue or changed your assessment of those who held a different view in order to open up communication and leave room for the Spirit of truth to work?

2. Read "Behold the Dandelion" (Appendix, Reading 1) and consider the following questions:
 - How did you form your ideas of what constitutes a good yard?

- Who decides what a weed is and on what basis?
- How would you feel if your yard was not as groomed as your neighbors’?

II. Practical Impracticality

A. Stewardship Defined

While we often think of stewardship as giving of our financial resources, stewardship actually means managing the property of another on his or her behalf. Faithful stewardship requires managing the property of another according to that person’s will and pleasure. Since God entrusted creation to our care, how we relate to creation is a matter of stewardship. Faithful stewards care for creation according to God’s wishes.



B. The Impracticality of Biblical Stewardship

1. Scripture records guidelines given to ancient Israel for the care of the land. These guidelines, which include the call for a sabbatical year and leaving part of the harvest, don’t maximize return and in that sense may seem impractical to contemporary thinkers.
 - The sabbatical year: *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 nor 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 the yield shall be for food’”* (Lev 25:1-7 also Ex 23:10).
 - Leaving part of the harvest: *When you harvest your olives, don’t try to get them all for yourself, but leave some for the poor. And when you pick your grapes, go over the vines only once then let the poor have what is left* (Deut 24:19-2, CEV). *When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the foreigner. I am the LORD your God* (Lev 19:9-10).
2. These laws diverge dramatically from the commonly held perspectives that: 1) the land I own and work is *mine* and I am entitled to all it produces; and 2) It is proper to do whatever it takes to maximize production and return. Instead they remind us that:
 - While land may be held in trust by people, it is ultimately God’s land and God has the right to determine both how it is treated and how its yield is handled.
 - Respect for the land is essential and requires an eye toward long-term viability for future generations.
 - Creation is designed to support all people and other creatures.
 - Creation can support human need, but cannot abide our greed.

III. Engagement Exercises

1) Abraham Heschel speaks of the Sabbath itself, rather than humanity, as the pinnacle of creation:

To the philosopher the idea of the good is the most exalted idea. But to the Bible the idea of the good is penultimate; it cannot exist without the holy. The good is the base, the holy is the summit. Things created in six days He considered good, the seventh day He made holy. [The Sabbath (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975)]

Such a view challenges both the human sense of being of primary importance and also our focus on doing, accomplishing, achieving as the measure of goodness. How might our lives, our relationships with one another and with creation change if we embraced Sabbath as holy?

2) Dieter T. Hessel writes:

The Torah (or covenant law) conveys an ethic of environmental care with social justice—not over against or instead of, but together. Key passages such as Exodus 23, Leviticus 19 and 25, and Deuteronomy 15 express the covenant obligation to respond to the poor, to give animals Sabbath rest, to let the land lie fallow, and to cancel debts periodically, if not to redistribute land. Theology with this sensitivity poses no either/or choice between caring for people and caring for the earth. The way people treat land and animals is as important a sign of faithfulness as the way people treat each other. Modern anthropocentric Christianity forgot this, bowing to ideologies of economic growth that sacrifice both ecology and equity. (Eco-justice Ethics, 2007)

Consider the following questions:

1. In what ways do you see human beings functioning with an understanding that we have to choose either to care for ourselves or for creation; that the two concerns are in conflict with one another?
2. Do you trust that we would be okay if we followed stewardship of creation, as outlined in the Bible, and limited production while sharing proceeds with the poor, the foreigner, and animals? If not, what experiences make you think otherwise? How do you reconcile your beliefs with these directives from Scripture?
3. If, according to Scripture, the either/or perspective is a false one, how might you go about experimenting on a small scale with a lifestyle that reflects these biblical mandates?

IV. Closing Prayer

*Every creature, every plant
every rock and grain of sand
proclaims the glory of its Creator
worships through colour,
Shape, scent and form.
A multi-sensory song of praise.
Creator God, may we join
with the whole of your creation
in praising you, our Creator
through the fragrance
and melody of our lives.*

—Celtic Prayer of Creation



Session Three

About Creation

I. Opening

A. Readings

If your heart be right, then every created thing will become for you a mirror of life and a book of holy teaching. For there is nothing created so small and mean that it does not reflect the goodness of God.

—Thomas à Kempis (1379–1471)

*All you big things, bless the Lord.
Mount Kilimanjaro and Lake Victoria,
The Rift Valley and the Serengeti Plain,
Fat baobabs and shady mango trees,
All eucalyptus and tamarind trees,
Bless the Lord.
Praise and extol Him for ever and ever.*

*All you tiny things, bless the Lord.
Busy black ants and hopping fleas,
Wriggling tadpoles and mosquito larvae,
Flying locusts and water drops,
Pollen dust and tsetse flies,
Millet seeds and dried dagaa,
Bless the Lord.
Praise and extol Him for ever and ever.*
—Traditional African Canticle



B. Hymn: “This is My Father’s World”

C. Reflection Activity

Spend some time thinking about your relationship with creation. The following questions may help stimulate your thinking:

1. What do you feel when you see a sunset?
2. Do you like or dislike rain?
3. Can you imagine the smell of a pine forest?
4. Have you experienced a natural disaster, such as a tornado or flood?
5. Is nature kind or cruel? Beautiful or ugly?
6. What experiences stand out when you think about being in nature?

II. Blessed, Fallen, and Included in the Plan of Redemption

A. Creation is blessed with goodness, in its relationship with God, and as a divine witness.

1. Throughout the creation story in Genesis 1, God pronounces each day “good.” Instances of the Hebrew word *tov* and its Greek equivalent *agathon* are translated variously as good, beautiful, pleasant, joyful, useful, precious, proper, and righteous. In the Gospels, Jesus responds to the man who calls him “good teacher” by asking, “Who is but God alone?” (Mk 10:18). To say that creation is good is to say that it reflects the nature of God; that in the creation process, the divine self was invested in what was being made.
2. Creation’s relationship with God is celebrated in the Psalms.
 - *For dominion belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations* (Ps 22: 28).
 - *The earth is the LORD’s and all that is in it* (Ps 24:10).



- How many are your works, O LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures (Ps 104: 24).
- Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars. Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies. Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he commanded and they were created. He set them in place for ever and ever; he gave a decree that will never pass away. Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths, lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding, you mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, wild animals and all cattle (Ps 148:3-10).

3. God's relationship with creation is independent of human beings, as clearly stated in the speech to Job from the storm wind, which reads in part:

Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand.

Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know!

Who stretched a measuring line across it?

On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone—while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?

Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb, when I made the clouds its garment and wrapped it in thick darkness, when I fixed limits for it and set its doors and bars in place, when I said, "This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt?"

Have you ever given orders to the morning, or shown the dawn its place, that it might take the earth by the edges and shake the wicked out of it?

Have you entered the storehouses of the snow or seen the storehouses of the hail, which I reserve for times of trouble, for days of war and battle?

What is the way to the place where the lightning is dispersed, or the place where the east winds are scattered over the earth? Who cuts a channel for the torrents of rain, and a path for the thunderstorm, to water a land where no man lives, a desert with no one in it, to satisfy a desolate wasteland and make it sprout with grass?

Does the rain have a father? Who fathers the drops of dew? From whose womb comes the ice? Who gives birth to the frost from the heavens when the waters become hard as stone, when the surface of the deep is frozen?

Can you bind the beautiful Pleiades? Can you loose the cords of Orion?

Can you bring forth the constellations in their seasons or lead out the Bear with its cubs?

Do you know the laws of the heavens? Can you set up God's dominion over the earth? (Job 38:4-13, 22-33)

4. Creation gives witness to the existence and nature of the Creator.

- The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands (Ps 19:1).

- Let the sea resound, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. Let the rivers clap their hands, Let the mountains sing together for joy; let them sing before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth (Ps 98: 7-9).

- Jesus affirmed that God created all things (Mk 10:6; 13:19; Mt 19:4) and that nature reflects the activity of God, who sustains and cares for it (Mt 5:45; 6:26-30; Lk 12:6). He looked to nature for ethical lessons (Mt 5:44-45) and used nature to teach spiritual truths (Mk 4:1-8, 13-20; Mt 13; Lk 13:6-9; 21:29-30).

- Romans explicitly states that nature's witness is sufficient for faith: "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse" (1:20).

B. While creation reflects and bears witness to the goodness of God, it was also negatively affected by the choices of human beings—creation is fallen.

1. Genesis 3:17-19 explains that all of the relationships of creation are negatively affected by the fall. The peaceful garden is replaced by a world of danger, violence and struggle: "Cursed is the ground because of you; through

painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground . . .”

2. The prophet Jeremiah notes how creation and creatures suffer the consequences of human disobedience: “How long will the land lie parched and the grass in every field be withered? Because those who live in it are wicked, the animals and birds have perished. . . . The ground is cracked because there is no rain in the land; the farmers are dismayed and cover their heads. Even the doe in the field deserts her newborn fawn because there is no grass. Wild donkeys stand on the barren heights and pant like jackals; their eyesight fails for lack of pasture” (12:4; 14:4-6).

C. Just as all of creation is affected by the fall, so too is it affected by the promised redemption:

1. The prophetic visions of the Kingdom include a redeemed creation, for example:

- *The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them.* (Is 11:6)
- *The wolf and the lamb will graze together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox; and dust will be the serpent’s food. They will do no evil or harm in all my holy mountain.* (Is 65:25)
- *In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the creatures that move along the ground. Bow and sword and battle I will abolish from the land, so that all may lie down in safety.* (Hos 2:18)

2. The New Testament suggests that the message of Jesus and the awaited fulfillment of his redemptive work include all of creation; and that human beings play a crucial role in that plan:

- *Jesus said to them “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.”* (Mk 16:15)
- *For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.* (Col 1:19-20)

- *The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.* (Rom 8:19-22)

III. Engagement Exercises

A. Fyodor Dostoyevski referred to the human species as “the ungrateful biped.” What do you think of that assessment? How might gratitude to God for life and new life in Jesus manifest itself in regard to our relationship with the rest of creation? What phrase would you suggest for the kind of “bipeds” God calls us to be?

B. Spend some time thinking about the natural world in light of the following questions:

1. Where do you see the goodness of creation?
2. Where do you see its fallenness?
3. The frequently heard phrase, “That’s just nature’s way” suggests that things are as they should be in the natural world. How does the notion that creation is destined for redemption challenge such an understanding?

VI. Closing Prayer

Lord, you love life; we owe our existence to you. Give us reverence for life and love for every creature. Sharpen our senses so that we shall recognize the beauty and also the longing of your creation, and, as befits your children, treat our fellow creatures of the animal and plant kingdoms with love as our brothers and sisters, in readiness for your great day, when you will make all things new. Amen.

—The Evangelical Reformed Churches in German-speaking Switzerland

Session Four

About Animals

I. Opening

A. Readings

*And to teach, by his own example,
Love and reverence
To all things that God made and loveth.
Farewell, farewell! but this I tell
To thee, thou Wedding-Guest!
He prayeth well, who loveth well
Both man and bird and beast.
He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all*

—Samuel Taylor Coleridge,
Rime of the Ancient Mariner (1798)

*O Thou, who bearest the pain of the weakest and lowliest of
creatures, touch our hearts to hear their pain, to hear the voice of
these voiceless ones, to hear them and heed them . . .*

*God, give us the strength to find in our hearts the ways we can
best help those humble creatures who have only us to rely on,
and who cannot speak for themselves. Give us the courage to
move undaunted, despite criticism and indifference, to relieve
their suffering . . .*

*We entreat for them all Thy mercy and pity, and for those who
deal with them we ask a heart of compassion and
gentle hands and kindly words. Make us be true friends to ani-
mals and so to share the blessing of the merciful.*

—Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965)

Cruelty to animals is as if humans did not love God.

—Cardinal John Henry Newman (1801–1890)

B. Hymn: "All Creatures of our God and King"

C. Reflection Activity

1. Spend some time thinking about your experiences with animals. What did/do those experiences teach you about other-than-human creatures?
2. Next consider what you were explicitly taught about animals. Are there any places where your experiences and what you have been taught don't align?

II. We're not Alone

While human beings are unique within the created order, we are not the only living beings who inhabit God's world. In fact animals have much in common with human beings.

A. Similarities in the creation story:

1. Land animals and people were created on the same day of creation (Gen 1:24) and were fashioned out of the soil of earth (Gen 2:7, 19); all animals were commanded, as were humans to be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1:22).
2. Both humans and animals have the "breath of life" and are "living beings" or "living souls" (*nephesh hayah*) (Gen 1:30).
3. Humans and animals are both blessed by God and referred to as "good" (Gen 1:21, 25, 31).



B. God has a multifaceted and direct relationship with both humans and animals.

1. God enters into covenant with animals.

- *Then God said to Noah “I now establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—with every living creature on earth” (Gen 9:8-10; also vs. 11-13, 14-15, 16, and 17).*
- *In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the creatures that move along the ground. Bow and sword and battle I will abolish from the land, so that all may lie down in safety (Hos 2:18).*

2. God cares about animals.

- *The angel of the LORD asked Balaam, “Why have you beaten your donkey these three times? I have come here to oppose you because your path is a reckless one before me. The donkey saw me and turned away from me these three times. If she had not turned away, I would certainly have killed you by now, but I would have spared her” (Num 22:32-33).*
- *But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city? (Jn 4:11).*
- *Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the great deep. O LORD, you preserve both man and beast. (Ps 36:6)*

3. God provides for animals.

- *Who among all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this? In His hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind (Job 12:9-10).*
- *Who provides food for the raven when its young cry out to God and wander about for lack of food? Do you know when the mountain goats give birth? Do you watch when the doe bears her fawn? . . . Who let the wild donkey go free? Who untied his ropes? I gave him the wasteland as his home, the salt flats as his habitat. . . . Will the wild ox consent to serve you? Will he stay by your manger at night? (Job 38:41-39:1, 5-6, 9).*

- *He makes springs pour water into the ravines; it flows between the mountains. They give water to all the beasts of the field; the wild donkeys quench their thirst. The birds of the air nest by the waters; they sing among the branches. . . These all look to you to give them their food at the proper time. When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things (Ps 104: 10-12; 27-28).*

C. Animals play important roles.

1. As images for God’s nature:

- *He shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of his eye, like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions (Deut 32:11-12).*
- *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing (Mt 23:37; Lk 13:34).*

2. As teachers, ministers, and examples:

- *But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish of the sea inform you (Job 12:7-8).*
- *Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah: “Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. You will drink from the brook, and I have ordered the ravens to feed you there” (1 Kgs 17:2-4).*
- *The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner’s manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand (Is 1:3).*

- *Even the stork in the sky knows her appointed seasons, and the dove, the swift and the thrush observe the time of their migration. But my people do not know the requirements of the LORD (Jer 8:7).*

D. God cares about how animals are treated.

1. The Sabbatical year requires that some of yield of the land go to domesticated and wild animals. (Ex 23:11 and Lev 25:6-7)
2. The command to keep the Sabbath specifically includes allowing the animals to rest. (Ex 23:12; Deut 5:14)

3. The people of Israel were required to help with an injured donkey of both a friend and an enemy. (Ex 23:5; Deut 22:4)
4. Many cruel practices are prohibited:
 - plowing with animals of different strength together (Deut 22:10)
 - cooking a young goat in its mother's milk (Ex 34:26; Deut 14:21)
 - taking a mother bird and her young from a nest (Deut 22:6)
 - muzzling an ox to keep it from eating while it is treading out grain (Deut 25:4)
 - eating meat with blood in it (in contrast to the local practice of cutting flesh off of living animals to ensure fresh meat) (Deut 12:23)
 - sexual assault (Lev 18:23; Deut 14:3-21)
5. Proverbs 12:10 identifies righteousness with caring for animals.

III. Engagement Exercises

1. Identify all the ways your life is connected with animals—companion animals/pets, working or service animals, wildlife, animals that provide milk, eggs, meat, wool or leather, or animals that are used in laboratories and experimentation.
2. Consider how you categorize different animals and how you feel they should be treated. What are those distinctions based on?
3. Did any of the biblical teachings surprise you or conflict with what you thought about animals before this study? How do you feel about those differences?

VI. Closing

*Holy Father,
help us
to discern the mystery
of the cross
of your son
Jesus Christ;*

*to grasp the truth
that you identify
with the weak,
the vulnerable
and the innocent;*

*that your face
is seen
in all the faces
of suffering
in our world;*

*that no life of any creature
is futile
or without hope;*

*that all pain
shall be
transfigured
by your love;*

*and to see the
Cross as the living
sign of your presence
with all creatures
who suffer and die.
Amen.*

—Andrew Linzey
(Prayer from *Animal Rites: Liturgies of Animal Care* (SCM Press/Pilgrim Press, 1999).
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Session Five

About Justice

I. Opening

A. Readings

We the youth, envision a world where sustainable practices are the norm; where the environment is treated with respect and cared for because we understand ourselves to be part of it; where all work is valued and meaningful; where everyone has freedom of expression and organisation. We yearn for a lifestyle that is peaceful, safe and prosperous. We envisage an earth where economies are driven by human need, and not human greed. We conceive of a world where wealth is measured by happiness, contentment and an abundant community life. We dream of a future in which young people have the freedom to choose their own paths and develop full human potential. We desire a world that is just and sweet.

—From the *Youth Declaration* by delegates from Bangladesh, Cambodia, Hong Kong, India, Korea, Philippines, Pakistan, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Tonga, Australia, Kenya, South Africa, and the United States to the AGAPE Consultation on Poverty, Wealth, and Ecology, 2009.

With the phrase “Justice, peace and the integrity of creation” the World Council of Churches found a metaphor that brought together the great ideals of the world. The three dimensions cannot be separated. Without justice life together is not possible. Peace means having good and just relations with other people, other cultures, with nature and with God. And integrity of creation is



the foundation. If we destroy creation then all other projects are impossible. For me this triple affirmation is like a short summary of the good news of the gospel. And even if it is in the nature of utopia to never quite be achievable it nevertheless shows us the way forward like a compass and motivates us to not give up.

—Leonardo Boff

B. Hymn: “I Sing the Mighty Power of God”

C. Reflection Activity

1. The Hebrew word *tzedik* is translated into English as both righteousness and justice. In our culture, we often separate that single idea into two distinct concepts: personal morality and social justice. How might it change your approach to the faith if you understood personal morality and public justice as inseparable aspects of righteousness?
2. Ezekiel 16:49-50 records the sin of Sodom as arrogance and failure to care for those in need and equates disregard for the poor with abomination: “Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. They were haughty and did detestable things before me. Therefore I did away with them as you have seen.” Does this teaching about Sodom surprise you? If so, how do you feel about the idea that the sin of Sodom was related to public justice rather than personal morality?

II. God’s Concern for People at Risk

A. God’s concern for people on the margins of society is evident throughout Scripture.

1. God identifies with the poor and needy.

Then the king will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my father; take your inheritance, the kingdom pre-



pared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.” Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?” The king will reply, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.” (Mt 25:34-40)

2. God cares for those who are oppressed.

- But you, O God, do see trouble and grief; you consider it to take it in hand. The victim commits himself to you; you are the helper of the fatherless. (Ps 10:14)
- I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and justice for the poor. (Ps 140:12)
- The LORD sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and he exalts. He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honor. (1 Sam. 2:7-8)
- For you have been a defense for the helpless, a defense for the needy in his distress (Is 25:4). The afflicted and needy are seeking water, but there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst. I, the LORD, will answer them myself, as the God of Israel I will not forsake them. (Is 41:17)

3. Jesus came to bring a kingdom of justice.

- And Mary sang . . . “He has brought down rulers from their thrones, and has exalted those who were hungry. He has filled the hungry with good things; and sent away the rich empty-handed.” (Lk 1:52-53)
- He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: “The Spirit of the LORD is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor.” Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” (Lk 4:16-21)
- Did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he promised to those who love him? (Jas 2:5)

B. God calls us to care for those at risk in society.

1. Protections were built into the laws that governed Israel.

- Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; each one of you is to return to his family property and each to his own clan. In this Year of Jubilee everyone is to return to his own property. If you sell land to one of your countrymen or buy any from him, do not take advantage of each other. . . . Do not take advantage of each other, but fear your God. I am the LORD your God. (Lv 25: 10, 13-4, 17)
- If there is a poor man among you, one of your brothers, in any of the towns of the land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand to your poor brother; but you shall freely open your hand to him, and generously lending him sufficient for his need in whatever he lacks. (Deut 15:7)
- Do not take a pair of millstones—not even the upper one—as security for a debt, because that would be taking a man’s livelihood as security. (Deut 24:6)



- *When you make a loan of any kind to your neighbor, do not go into his house to get what he is offering as a pledge. Stay outside and let the man to whom you are making the loan bring the pledge out to you. If the man is poor, do not go to sleep with his pledge in your possession. Return his cloak to him by sunset so that he may sleep in it. Then he will thank you, and it will be regarded as a righteous act in the sight of the LORD your God. (Deut 24:10-13)*
- *Do not take advantage of a hired man who is poor and needy, whether he is a brother Israelite or an alien living in one of your towns. Pay him his wages each day before sunset, because he is poor and is counting on it. Otherwise he may cry to the LORD against you, and you will be guilty of sin. (Deut 24:14-15)*
- *Do not deprive the alien or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge. (Deut 24:17)*
- *When you have finished paying the complete tithe of your increase in the third year, the year of tithing, then you shall give it to the Levite, to the stranger, to the orphan and the widow, that they may eat in your towns, and be satisfied. (Deut 26:12)*

2. Protecting those in need is an essential aspect of righteous living.

- *The righteous is concerned for the rights of the poor; the wicked does not understand such concern. (Prov 29:7)*
- *Open your mouth for the dumb, for the rights of all the unfortunate. Open your mouth, judge righteously, and defend the rights of the afflicted and needy. (Prov 31:8-9)*

- *Is this not the fast which I choose, to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free, and break every yoke? Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into the house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? (Is 58:66)*
- *Do justice and righteousness, and deliver the one who has been robbed from the power of his oppressor. Also do not mistreat or do violence to the stranger, the orphan, or the widow; and do not shed innocent blood in this place. (Jer 22:3)*

3. The early church strove to live out communal justice.

- *All those who had believed were together, and had all things in common; and they began to sell their property and possessions, and share them with all, as anyone might have need. (Acts 2:44)*
- *And with great power the apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles' feet; and they would be distributed to each, as any had need. (Acts 4:33-35)*
- *But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? (1 Jn 3:17)*

C. There is accountability for how we treat those on the margins of society.

- *Woe to those who enact evil statutes, and to those who continually record unjust decisions, so as to deprive the needy of justice, and rob the poor of my people of their rights . . . Now what will you do in the day of punishment, and in the devastation which will come from afar? (Is 10:1-3).*
- *"The people of the land have practiced oppression and committed robbery, and they have wronged the poor and needy and have oppressed the sojourner without justice . . . Thus I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; their way I have brought upon their heads," declares the LORD God (Ezek 22:29, 31).*
- *"[The wicked] do not plead the cause, the cause of the orphan, that they may prosper; and they do not defend the rights of*

the poor. Shall I not punish these people?" declares the LORD. "On such a nation as this, shall I not avenge myself?"
(Jer 5:28-29)

- *Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me." They also will answer, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?" He will reply, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me." Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."*
(Mt 25:41-46)
- *Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. ...Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and with you have withheld, cries out against you; and the outcry of the harvesters has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabbath. You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.* (Jas 5:1-6)

III. Engagement Exercises

A. Read "Poverty, Race, Age-level, and Environmental Degradation," (Appendix, Reading 2) and consider the following questions:

1. Sociologists tell us that people begin to hoard and compete for resources when they believe that there isn't enough to go around. By working to change structures that lead to and maintain unfair distribution of creation's abundance, we proclaim the fundamental Christian belief that God created the world "good," fully stocked and able to sustain us. Is it helpful to view working for economic justice as a proclamation of God, our Creator and Sustainer?
2. The statistics simply confirm what we know from Scripture—we are part of an intricately designed web of life and when we injure one part of that web, it has affects well beyond the point of injury. Did any of the statistics challenge you? Anger you? Annoy you?

B. Read "Our Legacy to Our Children" (Appendix, Reading 3) and spend some time envisioning the world you would like to leave for the next generations.

IV. Closing

An Ojibwa Prayer

*Oh, Great Spirit,
whose voice I hear in the winds,
and whose breath gives life
to all the world, hear me!*

*I come to you as one of your many
children; I am weak . . .
I am small. . . I need your wisdom
and your strength.*

*Let me walk in beauty,
and make my eyes ever behold
the red and purple sunsets.*

*Make my hands respect
the things you have made,
and make my ears sharp
so I may hear your voice.*

*Make me wise
so I may understand
the things you have taught my people.*

*Let me learn
the lessons you have hidden
in every leaf and rock.*

*I ask for wisdom and strength
not to be greater than my brothers
and sisters, but to fight my greatest
enemy—myself.*

*Make me always ready
to come before you with clean hands
and a straight eye,*

*So as life fades away, as a fading sunset,
my spirit may come to you
without shame.*

—George Walters, White Earth Chippewa

Session Six

About Faithfulness

I. Opening

A. Readings

*Consider the Lilies of the Field
Flowers preach to us if we will hear:
The rose saith in the dewy morn:
I am most fair;
Yet all my loveliness is born
Upon a thorn.
The poppy saith amid the corn:
Let but my scarlet head appear
And I am held in scorn;
Yet juice of subtle virtue lies
Within my cup of curious dyes.
The lilies say: Behold how we
Preach without words of purity.
The violets whisper from the shade
Which their own leaves have made:
Men scent our fragrance on the air,
Yet take no heed
Of humble lessons we would read.
But not alone the fairest flowers:
The merest grass
Along the roadside where we pass,
Lichen and moss and sturdy weed,
Tell of His love who sends the dew,
The rain and sunshine too,
To nourish one small seed.*

—Christina Rossetti (1830–1894)



Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.

—Howard Thurman (1899–1981)

B. Hymn: Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee

C. Reflection Activity

1. Take a deep breath or two and ask yourself, “What am I feeling after participating in this study?” and “What information can I glean from these feelings?”
2. Think of changes you have tried to make in your life. When have you been successful in those changes? When have you failed? Consider the possibility that trying to force change from the outside is often a losing battle, but allowing yourself to rest in God and trusting in that relationship to transform you has a better chance of success.

II. Finding Your Calling

It can seem overwhelming when we look at the world's problems. Sometimes just our own individual difficulties feel like too much to handle. Allow the following words of hope, promise, and possibility from Scripture wash over you.

- *God guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way. (Ps 25:9)*

- *I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you. (Ps 32:8)*
- *For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk in integrity, guarding the paths of justice, and he preserves the way of his godly ones Then you will discern righteousness and justice and equity and every good course. (Prov 2:6-9)*
- *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge God and he shall direct your paths. (Prov 3:5-6)*
- *Seek first God's kingdom and righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. (Mt 6:33)*
- *Jesus replied, "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." (Mt 17:20)*
- *So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. (Lk 11:9-10)*
- *The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. (Jn.14:26)*
- *And I am sure that he who began a good work in you will complete it. (Phil 1:6)*
- *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach. (Jas 1:5)*

III. Engagement Exercises

Read "The Star Thrower." (Appendix, Reading 4).

If you feel ready to take a particular step, make a note of that step and commit it to God through prayer. It is quite possible that you need some time to live in an attitude of

openness to discover what God is calling you to. As you consider possible activities or changes, keep in mind the following guidelines:

1. Eschew guilt. Jesus came to free us from guilt and feelings of guilt are poor motivators that come between us and God's grace.
2. Expect to differ from others. Christians have a unique understanding and approach to environmental issues and you will have a unique calling.
3. Accept differences in others. Christians live according to principles, so one person's fulfillment of stewardship of creation may look different than another's.
4. Anticipate opportunities to share the faith. By being faithful to God's call to care for creation, you will witness to God, the Creator.
5. Avoid easy answers. For, example, while recycling can be helpful it doesn't let us off the hook. "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle" is in an intentional order. Reducing consumption and reusing materials greatly lessens our impact on creation.
6. Have a healthy suspicion of eco-friendly claims. Environmental concern has produced new marketing jargon for manufacturers. Some who claim to produce eco-friendly lines, do tremendous damage to the environment in other areas. And many use cruel and unnecessary animal testing in their development of their products.

IV. Closing Prayer

*Almighty God and Father of all,
You have chosen humankind for a position of special responsibility; we have failed to respond in awe at your wonders; we have misinterpreted our role of Dominion too often as one of ruthless exploitation rather than one of loving care; we have treated the animal kingdom with an inhumanity incompatible with that which Jesus came to teach us; forgive us, LORD, as we seek anew the vision which you set before us, and as we strive to respond to your call; grant us forgiveness, and the strength and grace to respond in spreading your love to all your creation through the same Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen.*

—Adapted from *An Animal Blessing Service*, The Anglican Society for the Welfare of Animals



Appendix

Reading 1: Behold the Dandelion

Reading 2: Poverty, Race, Age-level, and Environmental Degradation

Reading 3: Our Legacy to Our Children

Reading 4: The Star Thrower

Additional Quotes, Prayers and Resources

Reading 1

Behold the Dandelion

I love dandelions. I love the way their soft yellow faces smile at the world. I love blowing their gentle seeds into the air as I make child-like wishes. As a child, I savored the boiled greens on my dinner plate in early spring.

My neighbors hate dandelions. They crawl around on their hands and knees digging them out of their groomed lawns and when that fails, they pour on toxic chemicals that promise to kill the plants at their roots. But dandelions are survivors and my neighbors are regularly tormented by those sunny smiles that defy poison and knife, and pop up after the mower passes over to resume their posts as lawn sentries.

When was it decided that dandelions are bad, and by whom? By what logic was it resolved that pouring poison into the earth was better than having dandelions or plantain, which is equally edible and medicinal, in the yard? Perhaps Ralph Waldo Emerson was correct when he described a weed as “a plant whose virtues have not yet been discovered”—or in the case of dandelions, rediscovered.

When the early colonists came to the Americas, they brought with them dandelions, which they used as a food and medicine. Its botanical name, *Taraxacum Officinale*, means “the official remedy for disorders” and it is actually used in many patent medicines. The whole plant is edible. A close relative of chicory, the dandelion’s root is used as a coffee substitute. The greens and flowers are harvested for salads, and the greens can be steamed, boiled or sautéed. The flowers are often batter fried for fritters or made into jelly or wine. The tiny young buds, found deep within the base of the leaves are considered a delicacy by some and the root can also be eaten as a cooked vegetable.

Dandelion greens are a rich source of potassium and a cup of raw greens has the same calcium as half a glass of milk. It also has 14,000 i.u. of Vitamin A, plus 19 milligrams of thiamin, 26 mg. of riboflavin and 35 mg. of ascorbic acid, which your body changes into Vitamin C. In folk medicine, the milky substance from the dandelion stem has been used to treat warts and corns. The plant has antibacterial action, so in herbal medicine, the fresh juice of a dandelion is applied externally to help heal wounds. Dandelion tea has long been used as a tonic, and in Chinese medicine, tea made from the root is a treatment for tonsillitis. The root contains inulin and levulin, substances that herbalists say may help balance blood sugar, as well as bitter taraxacin, which stimulates digestion. The root is also a source of natural red dye. The flowers and leaves release ethylene gas, which helps ripen fruit when placed in a bag together. And some folks make a skin lotion from the appendages at the base of the leaf blades to clear the skin and fade freckles.

What a remarkable gift from our Creator! And instead of celebrating its riches, we’d rather destroy it, and at the same time, poison our land, ourselves, and our children. If we want to be faithful, we must behold the lesson of the dandelion: the human view of creation far misses the mark of God’s perspective. It is time to open ourselves up to the good gifts that God has to offer through creation and to protect those gifts for generations to come.

Note: This discussion is not intended to provide medical or culinary advice. Do not proceed with home remedies without first checking with a knowledgeable practitioner. Copyright 2004, Cassandra Carkuff Williams. Used by Permission.



Reading 2

Poverty, Race, Age-level, and Environmental Degradation

Poverty Statistics

From the U.S. Census Bureau's 2009 report "Income, Poverty and Health Insurance in the United States" (www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/data/in-cpovhlth/2009/index.html)

- The nation's official poverty rate (defined as under \$21,954 a year for a family of four) in 2009 was 14.3%, with poverty rates among specific groups as follows:

• White non-Hispanic	9.4%
• Black	25.8%
• Asian	12.5%
• Hispanic	25.3%
• Children under 18 years old	20.7% (15.5 million)
• People 18 to 64	12.9 % (24.7 million)
• People 65 and older	8.9 % (3.4 million)
• Married-couple families	5.8%
• Female-householder-with-no-husband-present families	29.9%
• Male-householder-no-wife-present families	16.9%

- The earnings of women working full time, year-round were 77% of that for corresponding men.

- 50.7 million people were without health insurance coverage as follows:

• White non-Hispanic	12%
• Black	21%
• Asian	17%
• Hispanic	32.4%
• Children under 18 years of age	10% (7.5 million)
• Children in poverty	15.1%
• Households earning less than \$25,000	26.6 %
• Households earning \$75,000 or more	9.1%

- According to the 2008 census report: Ziebach County, South Dakota, which is entirely within Native American reservations, had the nation's highest poverty rate (54.4%); 21% of children under age 6 lived in poor families; and 39% of American Indian/Alaska Native children under the age of 5 lived in poverty.

Environmental Degradation and People on the Margins

- An estimated 50% of African-Americans and 60% of Hispanics live in counties with levels of two or more air pollutants exceeding government standards.
- 50 % of all Asian/Pacific Islanders and Native American/First Nations people live in communities with uncontrolled toxic waste sites.
- While 70% of African-Americans live in counties that violate federal air pollution standards, African-American households emit fewer greenhouse gases (e.g. 20% less carbon dioxide) than do primarily Caucasian households; and per capita, blacks use 30% less gasoline than do whites.
- According to the Mississippi River Basin Alliance, the catastrophe of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans was a "decades long culmination of human decisions that unnaturally moved water into tighter and increasingly fragile man-made spaces and concentrated people where they would be most vulnerable to flooding" (www.mrba.org). As of 2003, the wetlands off the Louisiana and Mississippi coasts, which have for centuries served as natural protection from storm surges, lost nineteen hundred square miles of coastal land, primarily marshes, during the twentieth century due to drainage and development (www.nwrc.usgs.gov/releases/pr03-oo4.html), leaving residents of these coastal areas severely exposed.
- The three states where communities were damaged or flooded by Hurricane Katrina rank among the poorest in the nation. Congressional Research Service estimates that about one-fifth of the population most directly impacted by the storm was poor (www.gnocdc.org/reports/crsrept.pdf).

- Analysis of FEMA storm damage data shows that the storm’s impact was disproportionately borne by the region’s African-American community, by people who rented their homes, and by the poor and unemployed:

	Damaged Areas	Undamaged Areas
African-American	45.5%	26.4%
Renters	45.7%	30.9%
Below the poverty line	20.9%	15.3%
Unemployed (before the flood)	7.6%	6.0%

- *The Journal of Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness* reports:

- Children who experienced Katrina are 4.5 times more likely to have serious emotional disturbances.
- 60% of children (20,000) displaced by Katrina have serious emotional disorders, behavioral issues and/or are experiencing significant housing instability.
- Another third of the children have been diagnosed with at least one mental health problem.
- Fewer than 50 percent of parents were able to access required professional services.



Reading 3

Our Legacy to Our Children

*Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
You may house their bodies but not their souls,
for their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,
which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.*

—Kahlil Gilbran, *The Prophet*

*Treat the earth well: it was not given to you by your parents;
it was loaned to you by your children.
We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors;
we borrow it from our children.*

—Ancient First Nations Proverb

While classic infectious diseases are no longer the leading causes of illness and death in children, and infant mortality has been lowered among many groups in the U.S., developmental disorders and certain cancers have increased significantly over recent decades. For example:

- The incidence of childhood brain and nervous system cancers jumped 40% from 1973 to 1994.
- Autism spectrum disorder is estimated to affect 450,000 children under the age of 18 (10 times more prevalent today than it was in the 1980s).
- 1.4 million children under the age of 18, and an estimated 12 million children suffer from one or more learning, developmental, or behavioral disability

Suspensions are growing that environmental exposures are likely a significant reason we are seeing this increase in neurological problems. Senator Frank Lautenberg who introduced legislation to overhaul the “Toxic Substances Control Act of 1976” (TSCA) in April 2010, reported that under existing law, the Environmental Protection Agency has required safety testing of only 200 of the 80,000 registered chemicals in the U.S., turning our children into test subjects for chemical exposure. (Under current law, the EPA can only call for safety testing after evidence surfaces demonstrating a chemical is dangerous.) Dr. Philip J.

Landrigan, professor of pediatrics at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York, cites “historically important, proof-of-concept studies that specifically link autism to environmental exposures experienced prenatally.”

One peer-reviewed study published in 2010 in *Environmental Health Perspectives* reported an increased rate of disruptive behavior among children of women who had higher



levels of certain phthalates (found in fragrances, shampoos, cosmetics, and nail polishes) in their urine during pregnancy. “There are diseases that are increasing in the population that we have no known cause for,” said Alan M. Goldberg, a professor of toxicology at the Bloomberg School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins University. “Breast cancer, prostate cancer, autism are three examples. The potential is for these diseases to be on the rise because of chemicals in the environment.” Research into the effects of an environment laden with chemicals is in its infancy; however, the research clearly and consistently shows that lead, mercury, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), alcohol, toluene, tobacco smoke, some pesticides, solvents, and other heavy metals are capable of disrupting human brain development, which negatively impacts intelligence, learning, attention, memory, comprehension, language acquisition, written and verbal communication, and behavior.

The consequences of neurological disabilities are experienced not only by the affected children, but also by their families and communities. The affects are long-term and wide-ranging, and can mean, as Elise Miller, executive director of the Institute for Children’s Environmental Health warns, an increase in unemployment, school dropout, teen parenting, substance abuse, welfare dependency, and criminal behavior—all of which take a huge toll on the families and on society at large. The issue of costs was addressed by Dr. Landrigan and five colleagues in a 2002 report:

Today the most serious diseases confronting children in the United States and in other industrially developed nations are a group of chronic conditions of multifactorial origin that have been termed the “new pediatric morbidity.” Examples include asthma, for which incidence has more than doubled, childhood cancer, for which reported incidence of certain types has increased significantly, neurodevelopmental and behavioral disorders, and certain congenital defects. An important unresolved question is the extent to which chemical pollutants in the environment may be contributing to these changing patterns of pediatric disease.

The group’s report goes on to say that more than 80,000 new synthetic chemical compounds have been developed over the past 50 years with 2,000 to 3,000 new chemicals being brought to the E.P.A. each year for review. Fifteen thousand of those chemicals are produced in quantities greater than 10,000 pounds per year and 2,800 are produced in quantities greater than 1 million pounds per year to be dispersed in air, water, food crops, communities, and homes. Only 43% of those high-volume chemicals have been tested for potential human toxicity, and only 7% have been studied for their possible effects on development. Based on the Landrigan team’s research, which was limited to lead poisoning, asthma, cancer, and neurobehavioral disorders, they estimate the total annual costs of environmentally attributable diseases in American children to be \$54.9 billion or 2.8% of total U.S. health care costs. The researchers focused on lead poisoning, asthma, cancer, and neurobehavioral disorders because those common and serious conditions are potentially preventable through public health efforts and pollution prevention. Their figures do not take into consideration the pain and suffering and therefore, numbers represent low estimates yet still provide a chilling picture of the financial costs that accompany the emotional and physical price of environmental pollution.

Sources

“Cancer Incidence and Survival among Children and Adolescents,” Gurney, Smith, and Bunin, National Cancer Institute, 1999

“Do Toxins Cause Autism?” Nicholas D. Kristof, *New York Times*, February 25, 2010

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Journal of Pediatrics, 93(3); 1994

“Pollution, Toxic Chemicals, and Mental Retardation: A National Summit on Potential Environmental Contributors to Developmental Disabilities,” AAMR 4

“Potential Environmental Contributors to Developmental Disabilities: Why We Should Care” by Elise Miller, AAMR 4

Reading 4

The Star Thrower

He was a scientist on vacation roaming the beach of Costabel, seeing what the ocean had offered up onto its sandy shore during the night. Loren Eiseley was his name, and he looked with a scientist's cold eye at natural selection at work. "In the end," he mused darkly to himself, "the sea rejects its offspring." He saw shells with their tiny animals inside, he saw a small octopus dying on the sand, and he saw hundreds of starfish the stormy waters had washed ashore. He had awakened an hour before dawn to go to the shore. Walking along, he saw another kind of death at work: the flashlights of professional shellers as they greedily gathered the starfish, from the sand and stuffed them into their bags. Bags full of dying starfish. He walked on around a bluff. The rising sun behind had projected its rim of light onto the stormy sky ahead, and there before him "a gigantic rainbow . . . had sprung shimmering into existence." Then he looked and saw in the distance near the foot of the rainbow, just within its circle of color a human figure. He could hardly make it out. The figure was looking down. It stooped and flung some object beyond the breaking surf. As Eiseley drew close, he saw the man reach down again and pick up . . . a starfish.

"It's still alive," Eiseley offered.

"Yes," said the man, and he took the star and spun it far into the sea. "It may live if the offshore pull is strong enough," he said gently.

"Do you collect?" Eiseley asked.

"Only for the living," he said, and he stooped and threw another star. "The stars," he said, "throw well. One can help them."

Eiseley walked on. As he reached a bend in the shore he turned, looked back, and saw the man toss another star. "For a moment," Eiseley wrote later in his famous essay, "The Star Thrower," "in the changing light, the sower appeared magnified, as though casting larger stars upon some greater sea. He had . . . the posture of a god." But then Eiseley's eyes refocused and his scientist's mind startled back into motion, and he reconsidered. "No, he is a man . . . the star thrower is a man, and death is running more fleet than he along every sea beach in the world." As Eiseley walked along the beach, he pondered Darwin and nature's law of tooth and claw, where death is some sad rule of progress. He pondered Freud and the inner struggle between darkness and light in the human soul. He pondered the twisters that roared across the plains in his boyhood, wreaking destruction, and he saw again in his mind's eye the old photo-



graph of his mother as a child clinging to her sister, her eyes already troubled. He remembered the biblical injunction, “Love not the world . . . neither things that are in the world.” And he thought to himself, “But I do love the world. I love its small ones, the things beaten in the strangling surf, the bird, singing, which flies and falls and is not seen again . . . I love the lost ones, the failures of the world.” And he said to himself, “I must go back and find the star thrower.” As he returned down the beach, far ahead in the “rain-swept morning” he saw the star thrower still flinging stars beneath the rainbow. Eiseley reached the man, picked up a still-living star and spun it himself far out into the waves. “Call me another thrower” was all he said to the man. And he picked up another and flung it into the sea, and another. “Perhaps,” he thought, “far out on the rim of space a genuine star was similarly being seized and flung.” He could feel the movement of his body in the repetition of throwing. It felt good. “It was like sowing—the sowing of life.” He walked on, then looked back and saw the star thrower once more, “small and dark against the receding rainbow.” He saw the man stoop and fling once more. And Eiseley picked up a star and flung and flung again, sowing life against all the death in the world. A sower sowing life. Flinging life like a fool in love with the world. And as he flung, he felt as though he and the man were casting stars on some infinite beach “beside an unknown hurler of suns.”

There the famous essay ends.

So the God of the universe spins worlds into existence. And so this same God sent into our history of tooth and

claw and endless human struggle, a star thrower. His name was Jesus from Nazareth, a tiny town in a tiny occupied country. And we, at first, thought him a fool, flinging stars into the sea, sowing life in the face of so much death. Jesus, the Star Thrower came and said, “I *do* love the world. I love every small one, every bird that sings and flies and falls. I love every creature great and small, and every human child, star of God, washed on life’s shore.”

Who is this man spinning stars back to life? This single, solitary man on one small beach, who came to one tiny country and for three short years taught and healed and forgave and lived a kindness that brought people life. Was he a fool, sowing life against so much death? Was his mercy a fool’s gesture in the face of nature’s chaos and “man’s inhumanity to man?” Was his an ineffectual, mutant love standing on the shore of evolution’s faceless sea? Or was it God’s *new thing* redeeming our laws and ways? A sign, like the rainbow, of the sureness of God’s love and of its final triumph? Yes, I think that’s it. God’s new thing. A sign. The future we now see. . . . And he comes to you and hands you a star and says, “You are a thrower too.”

Note

1. All quotations are from Loren Eiseley’s essay “The Star Thrower,” in *The Star Thrower* (New York: Harvest Books, 1978), pp. 169-185.

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Additional Prayers and Quotes

We remember with shame that in the past we have exercised the high dominion of man with ruthless cruelty so that the voice of the earth, which should have gone up to thee in song, has been a groan of pain. May we realize that they live, not for us alone, but for themselves and for Thee and that they love the sweetness of life.

—St. Basil the Great (329–379)

Let a man fear, above all, me, his God, and so much the gentler will he become toward my creatures and animals, on whom, on account of me, their Creator, he ought to have compassion.

—St. Birgitta (1303–1373)

Now if I believe in God's Son and remember that He became man, all creatures will appear a hundred times more beautiful to me than before. Then I will properly appreciate the sun, the moon, the stars, trees, apples, as I reflect that he is Lord over all things. ...God writes the Gospel, not in the Bible alone, but also on trees, and in the flowers and clouds and stars.

—Martin Luther (1483–1546)

Chrysostom, I remember, mentions a twofold book of God: the book of the creatures, and the book of the scriptures. God, having taught us first of all by his works, did it afterwards, by his Words. We will now for a while read the former of these books; 'twill help us in reading the latter. They will admirably assist one another.

—Cotton Mather (1663–1728)

They [Creatures] encourage us to imitate Him whose mercy is over all His works. It may enlarge our hearts toward these poor creatures to reflect that not one of them is forgotten in the sight of our Father which is in heaven.

—John Wesley (1701–1791)

The squirrel that you kill in jest, dies in earnest.

—Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862)

God loved the birds and invented trees. Man loved the birds and invented cages.

—Jacques Deval (1895–1972)

The Canticle of Creation

O Most High, all-powerful, good LORD God,
to you belong praise, glory,
honour and all blessing.

Be praised, my Lord, for all your creation
and especially for our Brother Sun,
who brings us the day and the light;
he is strong and shines magnificently.

O Lord, we think of you when we look at him.

Be praised, my Lord, for Sister Moon,
and for the stars
which you have set shining and lovely
in the heavens.

Be praised, my Lord,
for our Brothers Wind and Air
and every kind of weather
by which you, Lord,
uphold life in all your creatures.

Be praised, my Lord, for Sister Water,
who is very useful to us,
and humble and precious and pure.

Be praised, my Lord, for Brother Fire,

through whom you give us light in the darkness:
he is bright and lively and strong.

Be praised, my Lord,
for Sister Earth, our Mother,
who nourishes us and sustains us,
bringing forth

fruits and vegetables of many kinds
and flowers of many colours.

Be praised, my Lord,
for those who forgive for love of you;
and for those

who bear sickness and weakness
in peace and patience
—you will grant them a crown.

Be praised, my Lord, for our Sister Death,
whom we must all face.

I praise and bless you, Lord,
and I give thanks to you,
and I will serve you in all humility.

—St. Francis of Assisi (1182–1228)

My heart is transformed by the smile of trust given by some people who are terribly fragile and weak. They call forth new energies from me. They seem to break down barriers and bring me a new freedom. It is the same with the smile of a child: even the hardest heart can't resist. Contact with people who are weak and who are crying out . . . is one of the most important nourishments in our lives. When we let ourselves be really touched by the gift of their presence, they leave something precious in our hearts. As long as we remain at the level of "doing" things for people, we tend to stay behind our barriers of superiority. We ought to welcome the gift of the poor with open hands. Jesus says, "What you do for the least of my brothers, you do for me."
—Jean Vanier (contemporary)

For believers, concern for the environment is a religious obligation, especially because the material world is potentially transfigurable, and is the locus of theophany, through which the divine manifests itself because God in the Incarnation became a human being of flesh and blood. We need the material because God communicates the very life of God through material, mundane things in the sacraments: bread, water, oil, wine. So we stand before creation, the environment, with reverence, for it will not be annihilated. It, too, will be redeemed, has been redeemed, for there will be a new heaven and a new earth. So we must handle the environment with care, with reverence, tenderly. Or we are doomed.
—Bishop Desmond Tutu (contemporary)

Resources

"Ecojustice: American Baptists' Heritage and Hope for Creation," *Christian Citizen*, Vol. 1, 2009
(www.abhms.org/resources/christian_citizen/cc2009_1.cfm)

Earth Gospel: A Guide to Prayer for God's Creation by Sam Hamilton-Poore
(Upper Room Books, 2008)

Evangelical Environmental Network
(creationcare.org/)

New Evangelical Partnership for the Common Good—Creation Care
(www.newevangelicalpartnership.org/?q=node/10)

National Council of Churches of Christ Eco-Justice Programs
(nccecojustice.org/)

The "Safe Chemicals Act of 2010" requires safety testing of all industrial chemicals, and puts the burden on industry to prove that chemicals are safe in order to stay on the market. For a summary of the proposed legislation, visit lautenberg.senate.gov/assets/SCA2010Summary.pdf.

Tending to Eden: Environmental Stewardship for God's People by Scott C. Sabin
(Judson Press, 2010)



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