

Week Three

March 11

REDISCOVERY: Rediscovering our place (and God) in creation

Texts: Ps 8:1, 3-9; Eph 4:1-6; Romans 8:38-39; John 1:1-5, 14a

Introduction – God’s presence fills all creation; where do we fit in?

(may be read aloud or printed in bulletin or displayed on a screen)

[There is] *one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.* [Eph 4:6]

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers ... what are human beings that you are [even] mindful of them (?) ... [and yet] ... You have given them dominion over the works of your hands... [Psalm 8:3a,4a,6a]

Our God is both awesomely immense and transcendent (above all) and yet powerfully near and immanent (through all and in all). How and where do we recognize God in creation? What is the proper and faith-guided “place” for us humans, puny though we may be, who have yet caused such huge impacts to creation in our too-oft misguided exercise of “dominion”?

We seem to have totally lost the awe and humility inherent in the words of Psalm 8.

We may sense God’s presence in our natural world, but somehow feel it’s “not religious” to do so. What can we rediscover about how we fit into (or should fit into) the grand tapestry of creation and how might we be more attuned to our God who fills all creation?

Could fresh perspectives on these questions help call forth and guide our earthkeeping?

Greeting

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom all things hold together;

The love of God our Creator; and

The enlivening breath and communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all!

(Response) **And also with you.**

Opening Litany of Prayer

(Read responsively)

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Let us pray:

Lord of all creation, you are a God of amazing and awesome wonders;
and your presence reaches to the heights and depths of all creation.

Forgive us, Lord, for our lack of wonder and awe, and for our arrogant ways of relating to your creation and to others.

Gracious Lord, help us to know our role in the ongoing unfolding of creation's story; speak to our hearts and urge us to gentleness, love, and peace in our relationships with others.

Help us to tend and mend our connection to others and with all of creation.

Ever-present God, we give thanks for the many ways you continue to reach out to us – through your Word, through others, and through your creation.

Teach us, shape us, and lead us, now and into your future.

May we be guided by your light and your love, and share that light which no darkness can overcome, with all of the dark and broken corners of our world.
All praise and glory are yours, now and forever.
Amen.

Gathering Song*

Hearing God's Word

Ps 8:1, 3-9
Eph 4:1-6
Romans 8:38-39
John 1:1-5, 14a

Sermon (see text notes below)

Hymn*

Prayers of Intercession

(Examples)

Let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need...
We pray for this congregation and for the wider church, that as God's people, we will come to more faithfully tend God's good and precious creation. Lord, in your mercy (Hear our prayer).
We pray for those places in the world, where creatures and landscapes are suffering: [\[name\]](#).
Lord, in your mercy (Hear our prayer).
Lord, we ask for wisdom, to address these problems; courage, to make the changes that may be needed; prophetic persistence, to

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Speak truth to power and to keep striving toward healing for all of your creation. Lord, in your mercy (Hear our prayer).

We pray for all those human populations who may be suffering due to ecological degradations: those who lack clean water; those in the path of extreme weather, losing their lives, homes, or livelihoods; those suffering from increased pollution, disease, or famine; and any others we name at this time [name]. Lord, in your mercy (Hear our prayer).

- By Kim Winchell, in *Awakening to God's Call to Earthkeeping* (ELCA, 2006), page 37

Peace

(Offering)

Prayer

(sample)

Let us pray...

Loving God,
We thank you for the wonderful gift of life.
We know that all we are, and all we have, are your loving gifts.
We thank you for the gift of your son, Jesus Christ,
who shows us the way to love, and
who calls us to work together to build
a community of peace, justice and care for the Earth.
We desire to be good stewards of all your gifts, nurturing them
with reverence and care.
It is our fervent hope and prayer that you who have begun this
good work in us,
will bring it to fulfillment in Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God for ever and ever. Amen.

- By Sr. Ellen C. Rinke, IHM (2008);
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Blessing

(sample)

May the blessing of God, Creator of heaven and Earth,
rest upon you and upon all that God has made;

May the Risen Christ Jesus transform your life and your vision,
so that you may live in reconciliation with all things; and

May the power of God's Holy Spirit move over this whole Earth,
like the breath of Spring,

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to renew the Earth and all its people, so that all creation may join together in praise to God's holy name!

Almighty God, + Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you now and forever. Amen.

Sending Song*

Dismissal

Go in peace! Take the love of Christ to all creation!

Thanks be to God!

*Hymn suggestions

Creating God, Your Fingers Trace [ELW 684; WOV 757]

Many and Great, O God, Are Your Works [ELW 837; WOV 794]

How Great Thou Art [ELW 856; LBW 532]

Worship theme notes

There are several approaches that can be used with this week's worship theme. The two main concepts to get across are that (1) if we were to better understand our "place" as humans – cosmologically, theologically, and bioregionally – we might be better informed about our "role" as earthkeepers; and (2) it can deepen our spirituality to connect with God in creation.

There is a long tradition, from the earliest times of the church, of saints and Christian mystics (and even Luther) writing of God being known through the testimony of creation (see also Romans 1:20). Whether it is called "creation spirituality" or "eco-spirituality," there is a place for it and it can help to empower and sustain our earthkeeping efforts.

The power of God is present at all places, even in the tiniest tree leaf.

God is in all creatures, even in the smallest flowers! – Martin Luther (1483-1546)

For when one considers the universe, can anyone be so simple-minded as not to believe that the Divine is present in everything, pervading, embracing, and penetrating it?

– St. Gregory of Nyssa (335-395)

The day of my spiritual awakening was the day I saw – and knew –

all things in God and God in all things. – Mechtild of Magdeberg (1210 -1279)

The modern "story of the universe" – the approximately 14 billion year timeline of the development of the universe, provided by astrophysics – can offer us, as people of faith, another way to ponder our God with deeper awe and humility. Worship leaders may find it helpful, interesting, or perhaps even challenging, to include photos from the Hubble Telescope in some way, during this Wednesday worship. The photos might be projected, if such a system is in place, or a few printed and posted in a display area. Set against our texts from Psalm 8 and Ephesians, such photos are particularly powerful images to help us feel the awe and the mystery of the God who is "above all and through all and in all."

<http://hubblesite.org> – see the Gallery link for photos

<http://www.thegreatstory.org/timeline.html> - a universe timeline

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It is worth understanding our place and our time in the history of the universe, for the simple fact that it might jar us out of our oft near-sighted complacency about how we relate to our Earth home. Humans – and our modern civilization – have been around for a mere blink of the eye, compared to the long unfolding of the universe. Larry Rasmussen, in his important book *Earth Community, Earth Ethics* (Orbis, 1996), makes a sobering point on this very topic:

It is astonishing that an organic world aeons in the making could be so easily jeopardized by the species [humankind] that claims to master its secrets and care for it as a watchful steward. ... Alongside our miniscule tenure the thing most astonishing is our gargantuan imprint. (p. 28)

... If we truly and humbly knew our place, and in reverence before God more faithfully fulfilled our role as stewards of God's Earth, would that be the case?

See, also, the booklet *Nature Stations: A Meditative Walk* (IHM Sisters of Monroe, MI, listed in the [Additional Resource Suggestions](#), below); it is offered as an integration of the Universe story and Earth story with Christian reflections, for a meditative walk with nine "stations."

Text Notes

Ps 8:1, 3-9

With quite beautiful language, the psalmist expresses wonder, awe, and humility before God and before God's magnificent works. It is striking to think of how we modern people – even with the amazing views of the universe we now have – seem often numb to that kind of awe or humility. As people of faith, this is one of those texts that really ought to help us understand the *attitude* we should have, in our "dominion" of God's Earth, especially given the wonders we now can know.

Eph 4:1-6

This text speaks to our calling, as followers of Christ – that we are to live with (v 2-3) "all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." And we, and our calling, are set (v 6) within the "context" of the one God who is "above all and through all and in all." There is, then, in this text an angle to lift up our place/calling in terms of *relationship* with one another, as well as a perspective of reverence for God who fills all creation. If we are to treat one another with gentleness, love, and peace, then we are called to eco-justice. Our experiences of God's presence in creation and the reverence we hold for our Lord also ought to help spur our love and care for the Earth.

Romans 8:38-39

In soaring rhetoric, Paul assures believers that *nothing* – not death, not life in the present or future, nor height or depth, or anything in all of creation – can "separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (v 38-39). Again here, God's power and presence more than fills all of creation and surrounds us before, behind, and all around.

John 1:1-5 [14a]

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." All things come into being in and through this holy Word, and this Word brings light and life to all people.

There is a very "cosmic" feel to the opening lines of John, an immense and all encompassing sense of God/Christ/the Word woven throughout all things from the beginning.

And yet this Word also draws so very near – *And the Word became flesh and lived among us*. Both God's transcendence and immanence shine in these verses. The element of the "light" coming into the world, through Christ/the Word, is a rich one for those studied in Celtic spirituality. The light - God's power and presence - is woven throughout creation. We can attune ourselves to recognize that light within one another and shining forth through God's world.

The whole earth is a living icon of the face of God. – John of Damascus (675-749)

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ACTION IDEAS

Spring is likely unfolding; spend time outdoors and make a point to learn the names of some of the birds, plants, trees, or peeping spring frogs that live near you. How is creation responding to the increasing light of spring? Where are you seeing and responding to the light of God?

It might be getting warm enough to start hanging your laundry out on a clothesline (washing clothes in cold water saves energy, too). Why did we ever lose that clothesline tradition?

Check out the (NRSV) Green Bible, not only for your devotions, but also read the essays and other helpful materials in this special “green letter” bible edition by HarperCollins (2008).

See www.greenletterbible.com