

Believing into Christ

Eastertide 2025 worship series

Second Sunday of Easter, Year C

April 27, 2025

Embodied Believing

PLANNING NOTES

The first week of the series involves coming to the awareness that our beliefs are not just intellectual assent to abstract ideas. Our beliefs are embodied. They shape who we are, what we wear, how we eat, and where we show up for action. Our beliefs connect us to Christ, in whom we believe and into whom we grow, by embodying the assents we make. See if worship this week can be an embodied, participatory experience.

If you are creating a terrarium or other visual display throughout the series, you may wish to start with a terrarium globe available on the altar or prominently displayed in worship. During worship, invite congregational members to remember that our bodies are made of the same elements and compounds as the rest of the Earth. Adding soil and/or rocks during worship to the terrarium this week reminds us of how we live embodied lives that are not separate from the rest of the planet. Give thanks for the soil, the rocks, and the Earth.

Consider inviting someone from the disability community in your church or your area to talk about their experiences working for justice in the community or ways they envision allies helping to work for justice. This could include advocating for longer walk signals at busy intersections so everyone can cross safely or being treated with respect and dignity, especially when asking for or offering help.

PREACHING NOTES

Reading this passage, I often wonder whether Thomas' entire identity as a disciple is unfairly boiled down to the name "doubting Thomas." Thomas is largely a background character throughout the Gospel of John, but he does a fair amount to drive the narrative forward. Take the story of Lazarus, for example, when Jesus says, "Let us go to Jerusalem." Thomas says, "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (John 11:16). What this brings to my mind as a theologian with a disability is how often disabled people feel the pressure and weight of being "othered" concerning things we consider important in the areas of faith and social justice. In activist and church spaces focused on righting the wrongs of the world, we often hear a long list of issues such as racial justice, environmental justice, and queer justice, followed by the phrase "and persons with disabilities." People with disabilities have been central to faith and justice throughout history.

Looking at Thomas in John 11, biblical scholars point out that the phrase or verb used to indicate “let us go” in this text indicates leadership.¹ Thomas is driving the story forward from the background. In many ways, this phrase, “Let us also go, that we may die with him,” triggers everything that follows in the Gospel of John. Further, Thomas’ doubt is echoed by the majority of the other disciples! Why aren’t any of the folks who doubted Mary’s Resurrection encounter called “doubting” disciples? Because history has labeled Thomas, we have continued to call him “doubting Thomas.”

When I reflect on this, bringing my disabled experience to bear, I wonder how often we dismiss disabled folks in our churches or community groups who bring a different perspective. I am reminded of an anecdote told by Black disability activist Imani Barbarin, who says— regarding people with disabilities participating in justice movements: “It is really hard to care about the environment on a daily basis when you are broke and tired all the time.”² She talks about being in a restaurant and being criticized by an activist acquaintance for not using paper straws. She explained that people with disabilities often find paper straws challenging to use. I hear echoes of Thomas bearing disproportionate weight for his choices, questions, and experience. This can be turned into a constructive invitation by celebrating different perspectives, lived experiences, and even doubts within our faith communities. After all, as the Revelation reading indicates, *all* types of people, all abilities, all bodies, and all beings will come together to “see” and “mourn for” Christ when he returns to bring liberation and resurrection to Creation (Rev. 1:7).

Examining Thomas’s encounter with the risen Christ brings us to one of the most compelling embodiment and disability angles in the Gospel of John—Thomas’s request to touch Jesus’ wounds (John 20:25).³ Scholars note this is not a subtle request to put his fingers in Jesus’ wounds gently. Thomas’s language indicates that he is talking about a sharp poke. This is interesting because people with disabilities often do not come from the perspective of having full control over how their bodies are viewed and used within the larger society. We are often kept at a distance from “normal bodies” because we force society to witness the potential for vulnerability through our bodies. Or our bodies are fields for medical and clinical discourse, which is often dehumanizing. Contrast this with what Thomas asked. Thomas positions Jesus’ bodily vulnerability—his literal wounds—as a pathway for Thomas to understand his faith. Not only is he doing this, but he is also making the request in language that indicates extreme intimacy. He invites readers to examine their relationships with their bodies and the world they inhabit.

¹ Johnson Thomaskutty, “Characterization of Thomas in the Fourth Gospel,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 76(1), a5632, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i1.5632>.

² “What is Ableism? A Conversation with Imani Barbarin, Dr. Kara Ayers, and Mia Ives-Rublee,” YouTube, <https://youtu.be/GU0qGZaLQml?feature=shared>

³ Johnson Thomaskutty, “Characterization of Thomas in the Fourth Gospel,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 76(1), a5632, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i1.5632>.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Call to Worship

In the rising of the morning sun, the Holy speaks:

You are my children. Shine!

In the greening of the Earth and blooming of creation, the Holy speaks:

You are my children. Grow!

In the mountains reaching toward the sky, the Holy speaks:

You are my children. Stand with strength!

In the darkness of the winter days, the Holy speaks:

You are my children. Trust!

In the presence of the skies that float above us and the assurance of the Earth beneath us

And with the calm of the Spirit within us, the Holy speaks:

You are my children. Live!

Written by Sally Johnson, United Methodist Creation Justice Movement

Opening Prayer

Creator God, you call us to take on the holiness you have planted within us. In our worship this day, open our eyes and hearts to your movement that longs to make a home in us. So be it. Amen.

Written by Sally Johnson, United Methodist Creation Justice Movement

Pastoral Prayer

Maker, Healer, Gatherer God,

You formed our bodies from the dust and called them good.

You made all creation to be in fellowship with one another.

Just as the fungi and the trees have connections so deep that we cannot see them on the surface,

So, too, do we have connections to you and one another.

Remind us of our calling to maintain this world;

Guide us in our pursuit of justice for every body that calls this place home;

Enliven us and energize us with the glow of your love.

May we show that love to every being that comes near to us.

Ever near God, draw us in to see the wounds of the world.

Give us the strength to bear witness.

Grant us the courage to proclaim what we have seen.

Open the ears of all that are there to hear.

God, gather us together in your love;

Strengthen our resolve to collaborate;

Open our hearts to your possibilities.

May it be so.

Written by Rev. Chad Hornsby, United Methodist Creation Justice Movement

Benediction

May we go from this place to embody God's love of all creation.

May we rise like those with wings.

May we know the lightness of those that swim.

May we have the courage of the four-leggeds.

And may the Holy be embodied in all our comings and goings, this day and every day.

Go in peace to love and serve our God.

Written by Sally Johnson, United Methodist Creation Justice Movement

Third Sunday of Easter, Year C

May 4, 2025

Circling Toward Food Justice

PLANNING NOTES

Food justice is a recognition that not everyone has access to the same kinds of nutritious foods that are available in some places, depending on geography, infrastructure, and economics. Unjust systems are in place. Part of our call as Christians is to interrupt those unjust systems and provide for all. Try to make worship this week a rehearsal of the justice-oriented practices that will bring about a world where God's abundance is available to all.

If your congregation receives Communion this week, consider doing so in a way that allows people to serve one another. Form circles of ten to twelve people who share bread and juice with their neighbors. Alternatively, each person in a line may serve the person next to them before receiving it from the person on the other side. Using our hands and feet as Christ did to serve others is a kinesthetic reminder of how belief moves us to action.

If you are creating a terrarium or other visual display together throughout the season, add the first plant(s) this week. Plants do more for us than grow food. Without plants, we couldn't breathe, and much of the fertile soil would erode from areas where we rely on it. Give thanks for the plants and the Earth. Make sure your plant has access to sun and water between worship services!

Consider inviting a farmer or gardener from your congregation or community to share a testimony about working for justice for the land or those who rely on it for their food. They might talk about how they use (or don't use) pesticides or what part of the harvest they till back into the soil or give to those who are hungry. The speakers might want to invite congregation members to join them in some action related to food availability in your area.

PREACHING NOTES

We find a powerful story of community and care in John 21:1-19. After a night of unsuccessful fishing, the disciples, guided by Jesus' suggestion, cast their nets on the other side of their boats and bring in a bountiful catch. This abundant harvest is not merely a gift; it comes with a call to action. It is a call to recognize the potential for plenty when we collaborate and share resources. Following this moment of provision, Jesus charges Peter with the responsibility to "feed my sheep," emphasizing the importance of caring for others — to tend to their tangible needs for food, safety, and community support. What a bold invitation to recognize the Risen Christ among us and make his presence real to one another through food.

In Revelation 5:11-14, there is a vision of a world where all of Creation—every creature on land, in the sea, and in the heavens—joins in a harmonious chorus of praise. This passage beautifully illustrates the interconnectedness of all life. A literal chorus is not complete without each voice part, nor is the chorus

of Creation's praise complete without each creature. Our well-being is tied to the well-being of the entire ecosystem. Every creature plays a role in the larger tapestry of life, and our actions impact our communities and our ecosystems.

This call to connection and action is remarkable in an age of increased food and environmental injustice and when planetary survival seems shaky at best. Especially now, it is helpful to learn from those who have called this land home for thousands of years. Indigenous communities have long understood the importance of living in harmony with the land and recognizing the interconnectedness of life. Traditional Indigenous food systems are grounded in reciprocity, respect, and sustainability. Harvesting and caring for food crops is seen as a spiritual practice that requires gratitude and an understanding that all beings are part of a larger web of life.

The Haudenosaunee, whose traditional homelands encompass much of what is now the State of New York and cross over the modern boundary between the United States and Canada, begin and end their shared time together with words of gratitude. In the languages of the Six Nations, the land and all its beings are acknowledged and thanked for their roles. Indigenous traditions teach us to take only what we need and share what we have - not just with our human siblings. Indigenous teachings expand the call of Jesus to feed and nurture all creation.

Thus, as Associate Professor in Indigenous Environmental Justice Deborah McGregor, who is also Anishinaabe from Whitefish River First Nation, writes, "[We seek] justice for all beings of Creation, not only because threats to their existence threaten ours, but because from an Aboriginal perspective, justice among beings of creation is life-affirming." She further states that "all beings of creation have spirit, with duties and responsibilities to each other to ensure the continuation of creation." Finally, she notes that we are called to act upon "responsibilities [that are] beyond those of people [that] also must be fulfilled to ensure the processes of creation will continue."⁴

This line of thinking is similar to the call to action in today's verses. We must become deeply concerned with our responsibility to other beings on the planet because we have responsibilities to all our relations. In turn, they have responsibilities to us. As beings-in-relation, our responsibilities are reciprocal. The decreasing frequency of bug splatters on your windshield (see sermon illustrations below!) matters because you have a responsibility to help avoid mass insect extinction; insects, in turn, have a role in keeping our food and ecosystems intact. Indigenous ways of knowing provide a roadmap for this, transforming our thoughts and our tangible actions. By embracing reciprocity, respect, and sustainability principles, we can create food systems that honor the earth and ensure that all people have what they need to live with dignity.

This means addressing the inequalities that leave some people with too much while others go without. It calls us to reimagine our food systems, not as a marketplace driven by profit but as a communal table where everyone has a place and enough to eat. The insects remind us that we must care for the beings

⁴ Deborah McGregor, "Honouring Our Relations: an Anishinaabe Perspective on Environmental Justice," in *Speaking for Ourselves: Environmental Justice in Canada*, ed. Julian Agyeman (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009), 27.

of this earth at the smallest scales and that our choices to act, even when it seems insignificant, can have immense impact.

The calls to action in John and Revelation can feel daunting, but even the smallest actions can have massive impacts. We see people choosing to act in small and big ways all around us. The question then is: “How can you act to justly feed your human and other-than-human neighbors?”

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Call to Worship

God, you call us from the corners of the Earth.

From the cities and the prairies, from the ghettos and the tables of the wealthy.

God, you sing to us from the corners of the universe.

In the gentle ocean breeze, in the colors that burst forth from our landscapes, in the faces of children ravaged by war.

God, you speak to us from the corners of the Earth.

To the east, to the west, to the north and to the south, above us, below us, and within us, your voice rings clear.

Send your voice to sing in us, we pray, as we worship this day.

Written by Sally Johnson, United Methodist Creation Justice Movement

Opening Prayer

God of love, we bring our very selves to worship. Our triumphs. Our failures. Our vulnerabilities. Our greatest joys and our deepest sorrows. In this time set apart, may we hear the voice of Jesus urging us to feed and be fed, to love and be loved. Amen.

Written by Sally Johnson, United Methodist Creation Justice Movement

A Litany for Survival

Leader:

For the times we have cast our nets in familiar waters, yet found no sustenance,

People:

We remember the call to cast our nets on the other side, trusting in abundance.

Leader:

For the times we have consumed without thought, taking more than we need,

People:

We seek forgiveness and commit to living in harmony with the Earth and all its creatures.

Leader:

For the times we have forgotten the wisdom of our ancestors who taught us to honor the land,

People:

We ask for the strength to learn from Indigenous ways of knowing so that we might walk gently on this earth.

Leader:

For the times when we have neglected the call to “feed my sheep,” focusing only on our own needs,

People:

We commit to nurturing all beings, recognizing our interconnectedness with the entire web of life.

Leader:

For the moments when we have seen the Earth as a resource to exploit rather than a gift to cherish,

People:

We pledge to protect and restore the lands, waters, and skies.

Leader:

For the times when our actions have harmed the Earth, the waters, and all living beings,

People:

We repent and turn toward sustainable and just practices that honor the sacredness of creation.

Leader:

For the times when we have silenced the voices of Indigenous communities,

People:

We vow to listen, learn, and stand in solidarity with those who protect Earth and its sacred ways.

Leader:

In the face of systems that perpetuate inequality and injustice,

People:

We commit to building new systems of care, reciprocity, and justice, guided by the wisdom of those who have come before us.

Leader:

As we envision a future where all of creation is united in praise,

People:

We dedicate ourselves to the work of food justice, ensuring that all beings have access to the nourishment they need to thrive.

Leader:

For the times when we feel overwhelmed by the magnitude of the task before us,

People:

We draw strength from Earth and trust its beings to help us.

Leader:

Together, let us move forward with courage,

People:

Committed to the flourishing of all life.

Leader:

In the name of justice, abundance, and peace,

People:

Amen.

Written by Dr. Geran Lorraine, United Methodist Creation Justice Movement

Benediction

Let us go from this place, casting the net of God's love wide.

May we live our lives with the compassion and care of the one who includes all, the one who breathed the creation into being and looked around and declared it good.

Very, very good. Go in peace to do likewise.

Written by Sally Johnson, United Methodist Creation Justice Movement

Confession

Creator God: Your Eden flowed with mountain-fed rivers into lush valleys with orchards of pomegranates, grapes, and honeybees. The rain fell at the right time in the right amount. Even just a few decades ago, summertime was the season of shared community celebrations, weddings, parades, picnics, and growing crops. That has changed. This is not the Earth that Eden would recognize. Creator

God, forgive us for our carelessness. Comfort those who suffer. We repent of this destructive path. Turn the hearts of those who would continue to do harm to this planet. Let us believe as you have taught us, that all things can be made new. Amen.

Written by Rev. Richenda Fairhurst, United Methodist Creation Justice Movement

Communion Liturgy

In the beginning, Breath poured forth,
and goodness was born,
bringing light from darkness,
life from chaos,
birth from the Womb of Creation.

Circling round the fire,
from the beginning of humanity,
people gathered to tell their story and to give thanks,
for the gifts of the Creator:
promise of seed,
hope of new life,
wholeness of heart,
sacredness of all that lives and breathes.
And all the creatures, in their own language, spoke their gratitude:

The whole world is full of your goodness and mercy.

We give thanks today, tomorrow, and always.

In the fullness of time,
goodness was once again born,
and the world came to know our brother Jesus,

born of woman, whole in heart and Spirit,
dedicated to the way of God
who invited all to the table of grace and continues to invite us now
to this circle of healing and hope.

As he gathered his disciples in his time,
we come now to remember and seek to become
the body of Christ in our own time.

This bread, gift of earth, promise of seed, is prepared for all to share.
Eat with thankful hearts and hope of life renewed.

This wine, gift of the Vine that connects us all,
is offered with joy and celebration.
Seed and fruit to feed our hunger and quench our thirst.
These offerings bind us together in this eternal life-giving act.

Creator, Christ, Sacred Spirit,
fill this meal and this circle with the gifts of life
so we may be seed and fruit for one another and all creation,
for the nourishment of all.

With all creation, we continue to say:

The whole world is full of your goodness and mercy.

We give thanks today, tomorrow, and always.

As Jesus remained true to the goodness and mercy planted within him,

even till death,
may we live lives that help to feed the hunger
and quench the thirst of the world.

May we also offer ourselves, as Jesus did,
as gifts of healing through our words of love and acts of praise.

O God, may we continue to welcome to the circle all who are in need
and share in our awe and thanksgiving, saying:

**The world is full of your goodness and mercy.
We give thanks today, tomorrow, and always.**

Let us pray together:

**Our Creator,
who dwells in heaven and earth,
sacred are all your names.**

**May your circle of mercy and care be present this day and
your will for all creation bring us into your light,
even as we are held by your great love throughout time.**

**Feed us today with the gifts of your goodness
and bathe us in your mercy,
as we offer acts of justice and love to all we meet.**

Help us to turn from all that leads us from your way

and save us from all that destroys life.

For this creation is yours,

full of awe and beauty and mystery,

today, tomorrow, and always,

may it be so, Amen

Serving the meal:

Cup bearer blessing: The cup of life and new creation.

Bread bearer blessing: The body of Christ, eat, live, and believe.

Written by Sally Johnson, United Methodist Creation Justice Movement

Prayer following Communion

(The following prayers were updated and adapted

by Rev. Richenda Fairhurst from #557 *Book of Worship* by Fritz Pawelzik.

Choose one to celebrate Africa, Asia, the Americas, Europe, the Middle East

or Australia/New Zealand.

Extend the season and read the other variations next Sunday for Pentecost.)

Africa

Almighty God, Creator of all things, God of sun and Earth, you created us with your breath. You are here with us. As we tilled the soil, you opened the seed. Your rain watered the ground; your sun drew mango and sorghum out of the clay. Your mercy showered blessing after blessing over the land, its humans, and living things. Creeks flowed into rivers; wetlands fed turtles and butter fish. Healthy and fat buffalo, crested guineafowl, red goats, and Sanga cows graze on the green sea of the savanna. The yam is fat; the cassava melts on the tongue; guavas burst bright pink inside their peels. Creator, Provider, we will care for this good Earth. In the name of Jesus who is the Christ, Amen.

Asia

Almighty God, Creator of all things, God of sun and Earth, you created us with your breath. You are here with us. As we tilled the soil, you opened the seed. Your rain watered the ground; your sun drew tugi root and mung beans out of the rich soil. Your mercy showered blessing after blessing over the land, its humans, and living things. Creeks flowed into rivers; wetlands fed turtles and catfish. Healthy and fat bison, junglefowl, and black goats graze near green oceans of rice. The fuzzy melon grows fat; the banana melts on the tongue; coconuts crack juicy and sweet out of their shells. Creator, Provider, we will care for this good Earth. In the name of Jesus who is the Christ, Amen.

The Americas

Almighty God, Creator of all things, God of sun and Earth, you created us with your breath. You are here with us. As we tilled the soil, you opened the seed. Your rain watered the ground; your sun drew jeweled corn and red tomatoes out of the rich soil. Your mercy showered blessing after blessing over the land, its humans, and living things. Creeks flowed into rivers; wetlands fed turtles and the water wolf. Healthy and fat bison, turkeys, elk, and alpaca graze under green and gold mountains. The potato grows fat; the cassava melts on the tongue; berries burst sweet juice in their clusters, Creator, Provider, we will care for this good Earth. In the name of Jesus who is the Christ, Amen.

Europe

Almighty God, Creator of all things, God of sun and Earth, you created us with your breath. You are here with us. As we tilled the soil, you opened the seed. Your rain watered the ground; your sun drew apples and wild oats out of the rich soil. Your mercy showered blessing after blessing over the land, its humans, and living things. Creeks flowed into rivers; wetlands fed turtles and weed eels. Healthy and fat bison, graylag geese, mouflon sheep, and wild rabbits graze in the heather valleys. The turnips grow fat; roasted hazelnuts melt on the tongue; and round black currants leak red-purple juice over green leaves. Creator, Provider, we will care for this good Earth. In the name of Jesus who is the Christ, Amen.

Middle East

Almighty God, Creator of all things, God of sun and Earth, you created us with your breath. You are here with us. As we tilled the soil, you opened the seed. Your rain watered the ground; your sun drew chickpeas and wheat out of the rich soil. Your mercy showered blessing after blessing over the land, its humans, and living things. Creeks flowed into rivers; wetlands fed turtles and tilapia. Healthy and fat Arabian oryx, sparrows, shami goats, and honeybees live and graze in the high plains and deserts. The figs grow sweet alongside olives and almonds; soft, syrupy dates cluster under green palms. Creator, Provider, we will care for this good Earth. In the name of Jesus who is the Christ, Amen.

Australia/New Zealand

Almighty God, Creator of all things, God of sun and Earth, you created us with your breath. You are here with us. As we planted, you opened the seed. Your rain watered the ground; your sun drew youlk potato and button grass out of the warm soil. Your mercy showered blessing after blessing over the land, its humans, and living things. Creeks flowed into rivers; wetlands fed turtles and ray-finned fishes. Healthy and fat kangaroo, brush-turkeys, bellbirds, and kiwis forage through the bush. The wild, peachy quandong grows plump; the macadamias melt in a soft crunch, and the ribberries bring a showcase of red, purple, and bright pink clusters, Creator, Provider, we will care for this good Earth. In the name of Jesus who is the Christ, Amen.

Fourth Sunday of Easter, Year C

May 11, 2025

Springs of Living Water

PLANNING NOTES

An old song, “Spring, up O Well!” reminds us that the river of life flows in us and out of us into the world. This week, we celebrate the living water that nourishes us and the world when we share it with those around us.

Add water to the plants in your terrarium this week or visual display in your worship center. Depending on the size and shape of your terrarium and your plants, you may need to water more often than every Sunday, but bring the water during worship at least this week.

Consider inviting someone who fishes or explores waterways by boat to share a story this week. That person could talk about how the fish populations have changed over time or how water that once was clean for swimming is no longer clean. That person could invite congregation members to participate with a local organization that documents fish spawning events or protects local waterways as habitats.

PREACHING NOTES

Since 2012, I have been deeply involved with communities in Manicaland, Zimbabwe, that are grappling with severe climate impacts, mostly working on reforestation, food security, climate-smart agriculture, and climate change adaptation. Residents of Marange have faced relentless droughts since the 1980s, even before climate change was widely recognized. In Chipinge and Chimanimani, devastating cyclones strike annually, causing destruction valued at up to \$700 million each year. Despite their minimal contribution to climate change—living modestly with low carbon emissions—these communities bear the brunt of its effects, including food insecurity, poverty, and displacement.

These conditions force families into dire situations: children drop out of school due to financial strain, and families marry off young daughters to survive. Migration, often involving men and youths, leaves women—who are primary caregivers—struggling with harsh conditions as they cannot leave their dependents behind.

A year ago, marking the fifth anniversary of Cyclone Idai, the most devastating cyclone in the region, we heard from women who recounted their traumatic experiences. They spoke of homes destroyed, children lost to floodwaters, and the anguish of mass graves for cyclone victims. They described the heartache of finding loved ones' bodies washed ashore in Mozambique, unable to bury them and find closure.

In this context, Revelation 7:9-17 offers a powerful vision of hope and redemption, directly connected to the quest for ecological justice. The passage envisions a diverse multitude before God's throne, liberated from suffering, hunger, and harsh environmental conditions. This vision aligns with the promise of relief and protection from adversity, emphasizing the need to address environmental degradation and climate change responsibly.

Revelation 7:16-17 (NIV⁵) promises that "never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them, nor any scorching heat." This assurance of relief resonates with the struggles faced by these African communities, highlighting the ethical imperative for those in wealthier, high-carbon-emission societies to mitigate their environmental impact. The vision underscores our collective responsibility to work toward ecological justice, ensuring that all communities can experience the promise of restoration described in Revelation.

The passage also depicts a diverse "comm'nity of every nation, tribe, people, and language standing before God, symbolizing inclusivity and unity. The "white robes" signify purity and victory over adversity (Revelation 7:14), tying in to the pursuit of racial and ecological justice. This imagery invites us to confront disparities where affluent nations contribute significantly to climate change while impoverished communities suffer disproportionately. Addressing these inequalities involves recognizing the interconnectedness of racial and ecological justice with striving to rectify the injustices faced by vulnerable communities.

Revelation's depiction of hymns challenging imperial claims calls for resistance against oppressive systems and advocacy for justice. In the climate context, this means opposing practices that contribute to environmental harm and promoting sustainable living. It invites congregations to challenge excessive carbon emissions and unsustainable resource exploitation, advocating for systemic changes that support environmental sustainability. We are all connected in the body of Christ, a body of beings Jesus calls to himself for relationships of deep and authentic love, true to the core (John 10:27-28). We cannot believe *in* Christ without believing and living *into* the interconnectedness that Christ reveals to us. Our actions—*and inactions*—affect more than ourselves alone. As Jesus points out to his friends that he and his Abba

⁵ Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by [Biblica, Inc.](https://www.biblica.com/)® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

“are one” (10:30), when we live into Christ, we too become one within the heart of their imperishable relation.

The Revelation passage’s use of palm branches evokes the Feast of Tabernacles, commemorating the Israelites’ wilderness journey (Leviticus 23:40-43). This imagery of a new Exodus suggests not just physical liberation but ecological liberation. Applying this vision today means advocating for an ecological redemption that addresses the suffering caused by environmental neglect and ensures communities are not left in hardship. Revelation 7:17 offers hope amid adversity, assuring that God’s judgment is tempered with mercy and protection. This promise can inspire perseverance in the pursuit of environmental justice. Despite the severe impacts of climate change on communities in Africa, this vision provides hope for eventual relief and restoration.

Revelation 7:9-17 provides a vision of hope and redemption that can guide efforts toward ecological and racial justice. By reflecting on this passage in the context of climate change, we understand the importance of global solidarity in addressing environmental issues and supporting affected communities. Major contributors to climate change have a responsibility to alter their lifestyles and advocate for systemic changes that align with the promise of restoration and justice described in Revelation.

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Call to Worship

The God of day and darkness moves among us...

We are the people of Living Water.

The God of hope and promise lives among us...

We are the people of Living Water.

The God of the lost and lonely calls us by name...

We are the people bathed in the Living Water of Creation, God’s kin, traveling toward home and a love that will not let us go.

Written by Sally Johnson, United Methodist Creation Justice Movement

Opening Prayer

Holy One of the morning, we come together to remember who we are and whose we are. Open our hearts to the nudging of your Spirit that moves among us, empowering us to listen, to nurture, and to care for all creation. Give us eyes to see when you break into our lives through all you have made and wash us once again in your life-giving waters. Amen

Written by Sally Johnson, United Methodist Creation Justice Movement

Pastoral Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We gather in awe before you, inspired by the vision from Revelation 7:9-17, where a multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language stands before your throne, delivered from hunger, thirst, and scorching heat. We thank you for this promise of restoration and hope amid our current trials.

Lord, we recognize the deep and profound ecological injustices that mar our world today. We see the suffering of communities, particularly in vulnerable regions, who endure the harshest impacts of climate change despite contributing the least to its causes. We pray for your mercy and intervention in these times of hardship.

Help us to embody the vision of inclusivity and justice seen in Revelation. Guide us to advocate for policies that uplift and protect those most affected by ecological degradation. Inspire us to work toward a world where every voice is heard and every need is addressed, aligning our actions with your promise of relief and renewal.

Teach us to live sustainably, reducing our impact on the environment and embracing practices that honor your creation. Let our lives reflect the purity and victory symbolized by the white robes of the multitude in your heavenly vision. May we be diligent in our efforts to support and uplift those who are suffering from environmental injustices, through both direct relief and systemic change.

Empower us to foster a culture of compassion and justice. Instill in our hearts a deep commitment to care for the Earth and one another, knowing that our actions echo your love and justice. Strengthen our resolve to advocate for meaningful change and to build networks of support that enhance resilience and hope in every community.

As we strive toward ecological justice, let us remain mindful of your promises, trusting that you are with us in our efforts and that a future free from suffering and hardship is within our reach.

In your holy name, we pray, Amen.

Written by Shamiso Winnet Mupara, United Methodist Creation Justice Movement

Benediction

God's hand holds us fast and will never let us go.

Let us leave this place in sure and certain faith that we swim in the love of our Creator, to the east, the west, above us, below us, and within us.

Written by Sally Johnson, United Methodist Creation Justice Movement

Fifth Sunday of Easter, Year C

May 18, 2025

A New World

PLANNING NOTES

God is creating a new world out of this one. God is making all things possible, starting here and now. God is renewing life, love, and connection for the benefit of what is and will be. This week, worship centers around the creative process God has modeled for us, starting with what is and building what will be.

For the terrarium or other display this week, add some nutrients to the soil so that it will support life more fully. To do this, start with a few leaves. If they are small, add them, but shred or rip most of the leaves into smaller pieces. Water the leaves with the rest of the soil, so that the leaves can release nutrients into the soil. Make sure the plants are getting enough (and not too much) water.

This week, invite someone new to your community to talk about what it's like to be new. If the individual is learning the language or the dialect spoken in your community, they may have stories about what it's like to not fully be understood. That person can explain how to walk alongside those who enter your community, learning and helping with systems that may be confusing to newcomers, such as filling out forms for school registration or driver's licenses.

PREACHING NOTES

There's a resting place along the sidewalk over the Lake Street Bridge where people can pause and look out toward downtown Minneapolis. From that point, they can see the urban skyline of buildings with the Mississippi River flowing through the middle. Trees edge both sides of the river. As the seasons change, so do the vibrant colors of leaves. Sometimes, people write words like "peace" along the railing or leave a short prayer. These "revelations" from people's hearts were especially true in 2020 after the protests and unrest following George Floyd's murder.

From this bird's-eye view, we can contemplate the fullness of life in the city. We can wonder, "Will the city become a place where all can thrive?" Perhaps you have a place in your local community that invites similar reflections.

Scripture tells us Jesus paused at the Mount of Olives (Luke 19:41-42) and looked mournfully out over his city, whose name literally means "City of Peace"—*Jerusalem*. From this resting place, Jesus saw the whole city, and with a prophet's heavy heart, he wept among the ancient olive trees. Before him was the city named for peace, but inhabited by those who did not know the things that made for peace!

No wonder, decades later, another visionary named John imagined the same City of Peace, while he lived on the Greek island of Patmos. John was a Christ-follower, exiled under the fearsome reign of Roman Emperor Domitian. In what seemed at first like a terrifying nightmare, John then envisioned a renewed city, a bright, shining city. In contrast to "Babylon," the deathly city of trauma and suffering, John's "New

Jerusalem” emerged as God’s own dwelling place.⁶ In John’s dream, the Holy One had relocated, moving down to Earth, taking up residence throughout the whole city. In announcing God’s hope for Creation, John heard a sublime voice: “See, the home of God is among mortals!” (Rev. 21:3).

Eco-theologian Catherine Keller offers her interpretation of John’s theological pivot: “The divine...gets revealed as immanent to the world. It is no longer found dwelling *above* as most of the tradition before and after presumes, but ‘dwelling with them’—*cohabiting*.”⁷ What John envisioned countermands a ‘rapture’ out of God’s Creation for another universe. Keller claims that “collective transformation takes place with the dramatic shift away from the picture of God ruling, Caesar-like, from above...[T]his making-new takes place not as a *replacement* but as a *renewal*...not a supernatural substitution.”⁸ Thus, “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1) signifies Christian hope for all things new, not God making *all new things*.⁹

In preaching as United Methodists, we can find support for regenerative hope as we align the Revelation text with the gospel lesson from John (13:31-35). The bridge can be built by connecting Jesus’ love for his friends with God’s love for the renewed Creation, as identified in the “Preamble” of our revised *Social Principles* (2024):

From the beginning, God called us into covenant, bound with God, with one another, and with God’s wonderfully diverse Creation. God called us, further, to live lovingly in those relationships...According to Jesus’ commandment, we are to love one another: ‘Just as I have loved you, so you also must love each other. This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples, when you love each other’ (John 13:34–35).¹⁰

Curiously, both John’s Gospel and John of Patmos’ prophecy draw on a wedding feast to imagine the profoundness of God’s love. Recall that Jesus’ first public act was unveiled at a wedding feast in Cana (John 2:1-11), and Revelation portrays the relationship between the bride-city and the Lamb-groom (Rev. 21:2) as a cosmic celebration of love.

In our time, 2025, we can continue believing into Christ and the expansiveness of divine love by inviting congregations to reflect on recent decisions of our General Conference—removing the exclusive language of the *Discipline* regarding ordination and LGBTQ people, as well as affirming the words of the revised Social Principles that marriage is “a sacred, lifelong covenant that brings two people of faith...into union with one another.”¹¹ The lectionary texts invite us to discern “what the Spirit is saying to the churches” (Rev. 2:7) as we love one another into beloved community within God’s whole Creation.

⁶ William Stringfellow, *An Ethic for Christians and Other Aliens in a Strange Land* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 1973), 49.

⁷ Catherine Keller, *Facing Apocalypse: Climate, Democracy and Other Last Chances* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2021), 168.

⁸ Keller, *Facing Apocalypse*, 169.

⁹ Keller, *Facing Apocalypse*, 170.

¹⁰ “Preamble,” *Social Principles* (2024), page 6, <https://www.umcjustice.org/documents/124>.

¹¹ *Social Principles* (2024), <https://www.umc.org/en/content/social-principles-the-social-community#marriage>

But then, how strange that in the prophet's vision, "the sea was no more" (21:1)? The signifier of chaos and fearsome storms (remember, John had been shipwrecked!), the sea transported Roman military and policing power throughout the empire. No wonder then, John's vision of New Creation included an absent sea. In our time, we can ask ourselves what dangerous entities we hope become "no more" in our own futuring of New Creation—drone warfare, drought and floods, school shootings, toxic waste incinerators, gender- and sexuality-based violence? As an imaginative exercise, consider Doug Gay's liturgical poem based on Revelation 21, but written through prophetic eyes for his city, "The New Glasgow":

I saw a vision – it was last Thursday at eleven o'clock in the morning:

*I was standing on the Necropolis, looking down over the city;
and the cold blue winter sky broke open above my head
and the Spirit of God breathed on my eyes
and my eyes were opened.*

*I saw Glasgow, the holy city, coming down out of heaven;
shining like a rare jewel, sparkling like 'clear water in the eye of the sun';
and all the sickness was gone from the city,
there were no more suburbs and schemes;
no difference between Bearsden and Drumchapel.*

*I saw the Clyde running with the water of life,
as bright as crystal,
as clear as glass,

the children of Glasgow swimming in it...¹²*

© Doug Gay 1992

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Call to Worship

In the beginning was the Dream.

And the Dream was with God and spoke for peace.

In the beginning was the Dream.

And the Dream was with God and spoke for justice.

In the beginning was the Dream.

And the Dream was with God and longed for love.

¹² For his full text, see "Worship for Workers," https://worshipforworkers.com/blog/the-new-_____/.

We come to worship the God of the Dream in a spirit of peace, justice, and love, longing to glimpse the promise of a holy dwelling place for all creation.

Written by Sally Johnson, United Methodist Creation Justice Movement

Opening Prayer

Ever-dreaming God, come to us now, in this time, opening our imaginations to your promise for us, in us, and in all you have made. We pray in the name of your Dream made flesh, Jesus the Christ. Amen

Written by Sally Johnson, United Methodist Creation Justice Movement

Pastoral Prayer

God, you are in the song of the trees and the hungers of our hearts.

You dwell in the pulse of creation; there is no place where you are not.

We give you thanks for the expansive power of your still-creating love.

We pray gratitude for the wild goodness of being creatures called to wonder and freedom. You have created all that is, and you call it good. Give us the courage and wisdom to know ourselves as co-creators of your vision for abundant life for all.

Pulse of life, hear our prayer. Stir into the places of ecological despair the awareness that you are yet calling us to a new-created earth. Your Resurrection power extends to trees and hearts, imaginations and shared witness.

We name on this day the places needful of reminders of your steadfast presence

_____ *(list contextual concerns)*

We lift the complexity and harmony of life to your heart and trust that you hear and hold us as we pray in shared silence:

We claim kinship with the one who coaxed beauty out of trees, your son Jesus who is Christ.

Coax beauty out of us, living Spirit! Embolden us to be those who shape life, peace, and beauty.

We pray, we live, we long, and we love, seeking to live your vision. May we know your kin-dom come, even now; especially now.

Amen

Written by Rev. Elizabeth Macaulay, United Methodist Creation Justice Movement

Benediction

Here is the commandment...love one another!

Here is the commandment...love the planet that sustains us.

Let this love flow through the ordinary and the miraculous as we help bring into being the kin-dom of God, renewing the world.

So be it. Amen.

Written by Sally Johnson, United Methodist Creation Justice Movement

Sixth Sunday of Easter, Year C

May 25, 2025

The Tree of Life

PLANNING NOTES

The imagery of trees is centered in this week's texts and our worship experience because trees are sources of life. They provide oxygen we breathe, food that nourishes us, and shade that protects us. Make worship this week be like a tree, inviting participants to breathe in with the Spirit, to be nourished by the good word they hear, and to be protected from harsh conditions that challenge their convictions and the ability to live them out.

This week, you can interact with your terrarium or altar display in several ways that might invite new life. One option is to bring a small rake (from a sand tray) and "till" the soil around the plants to mix in the leaves you added last week. Another option is to add a small earthworm or caterpillar that could eat some of the large leaves added last week. If you choose this option, you should not leave the creature in the terrarium from week to week unless your terrarium is large and has plenty of food. You could also add a tiny figurine of an animal that can keep the plant company but doesn't require food. The idea is to have opportunities for interaction within the terrarium between the soil and the plant or between the plant and the animal.

Invite someone to speak who is advocate for environmental issues. If you have an Interfaith Power and Light organization or a United Methodist Creation Justice Movement contact near you, those might be places to start. They might talk about their experiences of working on behalf of trees and other parts of the natural world that don't have a voice in decision-making bodies like government or even church councils. The speakers might want to invite congregation members to a spring event in the area that celebrates the interdependence of creation.

PREACHING NOTES

This week, the lectionary invites us on a journey into the Holy City, where we can reflect on the infrastructure and ecology of peace, the peace the gospel text testifies to as Jesus invites his disciples to breathe and believe into the peace he shares with them. Both texts build a bridge together in witness to the peaceful, joyful love of God's regenerative kin-dom.

As recounted in Revelation 22:1-2, John saw a resplendent tree growing in the heart of the city, along both sides of a sparkling river flowing from the seat of power God shares with the Christ-Lamb. This generous tree produces twelve types of fruit, while the leaves "are for the healing of the nations" (22:2). John's vision resonates with another ancient prophecy (Ezekiel 40-47) of trees growing along the sides of the river, with fruit ripening each month and "their leaves for healing" (47:12). With Ezekiel, life-giving water flows as a river from the Temple. But in John's vision, years after the Temple's destruction, the whole city reveals the divine residence. God has become "all in all" (1 Cor.15:28).

Revelation 22 also resonates with the hopeful future Isaiah prophesied as God's invitation for "the nations" to come drink clear water flowing freely from the temple mount. (Is. 55:1-5). The welcome signifies that for these prophets, the New Creation signifies not a return to the Eden of Genesis (2:9), but a cosmopolitan hope. As Catherine Keller observes, "John was dreamreading a new multiplicity of nations, finally at peace in their differences...[T]he nations here branch into a healthy planetary life."¹³ Yet, John of Patmos observed that the "unclean" (21:27) remained outside the city. Inside, the "glory" of the "nations" and "kings of the earth" became subsumed into the immanent, omnipresent God-light, like a vast solar energy source (22:24).

In reflecting on the apocalyptic text, we will want to consider John's prophetic imagination seriously, but not literally. John's vision taps into the roots of an ancient archetype and cultural symbol. Across religious and philosophical traditions, the tree of life shows up again and again, signifying wisdom, kinship, nourishment, and abundance. Often, great trees mark historic places of treaty-making and shared peace commitments. They mark a point, a cosmic center from which peace flows into the world. Similarly, in our gospel text (John 14:23-29), Jesus invited his followers to share in a relationship where peace flowed, like his very breath, into them and out into the world (John 14:27). As we believe into Christ, we are drawn to the very ground of peace, sustained on the generosity and grace of God. The eighteenth-century pastor Richard Hutchins imagined the nurture of this relation in a poem he titled, "Jesus Christ the Apple Tree."¹⁴

Revelation's tree of life, with its nourishing fruits and healing leaves, can remind us of the ancient wisdom spoken anew today by Indigenous writers regarding *food as medicine*. Robin Wall Kimmerer, botanist and Citizen Potawatomi member, explains "Plants know how to make food and medicine from light and water, and then they give it away."¹⁵ White Earth activist Winona LaDuke explains the

¹³ Catherine Keller, *Facing Apocalypse: Climate, Democracy and Other Last Chances* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2021), 182.

¹⁴ "Christ the Appletree," Hymnary.org, https://hymnary.org/text/the_tree_of_life_my_soul_hath_seen.

¹⁵ Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Milkweed Editions, 2013), 10.

Anishinaabe wisdom of healing: “The recovery of the people is tied to the recovery of food, since food itself is medicine; not only for the body but for the soul, for the spiritual connection to history, ancestors and the land.”¹⁶

The connection between trees and healing can be seen further in the role trees play in photosynthesis, where leaves draw carbon dioxide and water from the atmosphere to produce various carbon-based sugars necessary for growth. Every part of a tree stores carbon, from the trunks, branches, leaves, and roots. Recent studies show how mature trees extract more carbon dioxide from the atmosphere than young trees, locking it into new wood. So, while planting new trees serves as a natural climate solution, protecting large, established trees provides greater potential in addressing the drawdown needed for climate targets.¹⁷

After they fall, decaying leaves enhance soil health, prevent erosion, and provide mulch that protects plants, retains moisture, and offers habitats for insects, small mammals, reptiles, amphibians and birds. While they grow, leaves release fragrances with chemical compounds that can calm our minds and boost our moods. Instead of consigning leaves to landfills as waste, where they rot and produce methane, leaves can be reclaimed as valuable for earth’s natural, sustainable cycles.¹⁸ Maybe John of Patmos was on to something we see more clearly now through our sciences—leaves are for the healing of nations, especially in our time of great environmental precarity!

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Call to Worship

In the beginning, the voice that whispered us into being still whispers, saying...

Let there be light!

In the wilderness, the voice that fed us from the heavens still feeds us. saying...

Let there be light!

In the story we share with this God of mystery and amazing love, the voice calls to us each and every morning, saying...

Let there be light!

Written by Sally Johnson, United Methodist Creation Justice Movement

¹⁶ Winona LaDuke, *Recovering the Sacred: The Power of Naming and Claiming* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: South End Press, 2005), 210.

¹⁷ University of Birmingham, “Mature Forests Are Vital in Frontline Fight Against Climate Change, Research Reveals,” PHYS.org (August 12, 2024), <https://phys.org/news/2024-08-mature-forests-vital-frontline-climate.html?ai=>

¹⁸ Brooke Franklin, “This Fall, Leave the Leaves!” US Department of Agriculture (October 17, 2022), <https://www.usda.gov/media/blog/2022/10/17/fall-leave-leaves#:~:text=Leaves%20create%20a%20natural%20mulch,overwinter%20in%20the%20fallen%20leaves.>

Opening Prayer

God of the stars and galaxies, God of the seed and Earth, we thank you that you continue to come to us, to amaze us, to laugh with us, to cry with us, to comfort us, and to show us that your love shines through us and your creation, bringing light to a darkened world. May this beauty and peace be reflected in this sacred circle. In the name of the Christ-presence, we pray. Amen.

Written by Sally Johnson, United Methodist Creation Justice Movement

Pastoral Prayer

Empowering Spirit,

God of our mothers and fathers,

Creator and Redeemer of all life,

We pray to you for your love-grounded peace.

We ask you to open our minds, free our hearts, bless our bodies,
and grace all our relationships.

We ask this of you because you have promised to help us,
just as you illumine in Revelation's prophetic vision.

You come to make a good world, a new creation-place where we can enjoy health, decency, safety, and even joy.

We pray to you, O God, to inspire us into this daringly just world.

We pray for new creation where love is greater than jewels
and more luminous than the sun or moon.

Let that love be shared around the tree of life.

Bless us again in your image and free our frightened souls.

So, shall we gather at the river?

Shall we soak in the river of many healings?

Shall we make every place where nature communes with humanity a temple for your creation?

Yes, O God, we shall gather at your river and your tree of life.

We shall bless the tree and the river and all living things.

We pray in the name of Jesus, in the way of love-grounded peace.

Amen

Written by Rev. Cooper Wiggin, United Methodist Creation Justice Movement

Benediction

Peace...peace I leave with you.

Peace...peace I offer you.

Peace...as we walk into the world to be the presence of the Holy to all we meet.

Peace...peace...peace...peace.

Written by Sally Johnson, United Methodist Creation Justice Movement

A Thanksgiving For A New Creation

Confession

Creator God, Your Eden flowed with mountain-fed rivers into lush valleys with orchards of pomegranates, grapes, and honeybees. The rain fell at the right time in the right amount. Even just a few decades ago, summertime was the season of shared community celebrations, weddings, parades, picnics, and growing crops. That has changed. This is not the Earth that Eden would recognize. Creator God, forgive us for our carelessness. Comfort those who suffer. We repent of this destructive path. Turn the hearts of those who would continue to do harm to this planet. Let us believe as you have taught us, that all things can be made new. Amen.

Written by Rev. Richenda Fairhurst, United Methodist Creation Justice Movement

Great Thanksgiving

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Almighty God, creator of heaven and earth. You formed us in your image and breathed into us the breath of life. In the times we turned away and our belief was tested, your love remained steadfast. You delivered us from captivity, made covenant to be our God, brought us to a land flowing with milk and honey, and set before us the way of life.

And so, with your people and your creatures on earth, and all the company of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

Holy are you, and blessed is your Son Jesus who is the Christ. By the baptism of his suffering, death, and resurrection, you gave birth to your Church, delivered us from slavery to sin and death, and made with us a new covenant by water and the Spirit for the whole of creation.

It was the waters of Earth that flowed as he was baptized. It was the form of a dove and the shape of the wind that blew to establish the presence of the Holy Spirit! It was the wilderness of this Earth where Jesus was tempted and refused temptation. It was the coolness of the cave and the freshness of the gardens, alive with palms and flowers and butterflies that greeted Jesus on Easter morning. And when the Lord Jesus ascended, he promised to be with us always, heaven and Earth together, a new creation.

It all happened right here.

On the night in which he gave himself up for us, he took bread, gave thanks to you, God of all Creation, broke the bread, and gave it to his disciples and all the people and said: "Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

When the supper was over, he took the cup, gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples and all the people, and said: "Drink from this, all of you; this is my Life, a new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ's offering for us, as we proclaim the mystery of faith.

Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and on these gifts of bread and wine/juice. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood.

By your spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory, and we share the heavenly banquet, believers together in this New Creation.

Through your Son Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in your holy Church, all honor and glory is yours, almighty God, now and forever.

Amen.

Written by Rev. Richenda Fairhurst, United Methodist Creation Justice Movement, using resources from the *United Methodist Book of Worship*. including:

- *United Methodist Book of Worship*, 66-67, The Great Thanksgiving for Easter Day or Season, with adaptation
- 557, *United Methodist Book of Worship* by Fritz Pawelzik with updates and adaptation.

Lord's Prayer

Serving the meal:

Cup bearer blessing: The cup of life and new creation.

Bread bearer blessing: The body of Christ, eat, live, and believe.

Final Prayer following Communion

(The following prayers were updated and adapted
by Rev. Richenda Fairhurst from 557 *United Methodist Book of Worship* by Fritz Pawelzik.

Choose one to celebrate Africa, Asia, the Americas, Europe, the Middle East
or Australia/New Zealand.

Extend the season and read the other variations next Sunday for Pentecost.)

Africa

Almighty God, Creator of all things, God of sun and Earth, you created us with your breath. You are here with us. As we tilled the soil, you opened the seed. Your rain watered the ground; your sun drew mango and sorghum out of the clay. Your mercy showered blessing after blessing over the land, its humans, and living things. Creeks flowed into rivers; wetlands fed turtles and butter fish. Healthy and fat buffalo, crested guineafowl, red goats, and Sanga cows graze on the green sea of the savanna. The yam is fat; the

cassava melts on the tongue; guavas burst bright pink inside their peels. Creator, Provider, we will care for this good Earth. In the name of Jesus who is the Christ, Amen.

Asia

Almighty God, Creator of all things, God of sun and Earth, you created us with your breath. You are here with us. As we tilled the soil, you opened the seed. Your rain watered the ground; your sun drew tugi root and mung bean out of the rich soil. Your mercy showered blessing after blessing over the land, its humans, and living things. Creeks flowed into rivers; wetlands fed turtles and catfish. Healthy and fat bison, junglefowl, and black goats graze near green oceans of rice. The fuzzy melon grows fat; the banana melts on the tongue; coconuts crack juicy and sweet out of their shells. Creator, Provider, we will care for this good Earth. In the name of Jesus who is the Christ, Amen.

The Americas

Almighty God, Creator of all things, God of sun and Earth, you created us with your breath. You are here with us. As we tilled the soil, you opened the seed. Your rain watered the ground; your sun drew jeweled corn and red tomatoes out of the rich soil. Your mercy showered blessing after blessing over the land, its humans, and living things. Creeks flowed into rivers; wetlands fed turtles and the water wolf. Healthy and fat bison, turkeys, elk and alpaca graze under green and gold mountains. The potato grows fat; the cassava melts on the tongue; berries burst sweet juice in their clusters. Creator, Provider, we will care for this good Earth. In the name of Jesus who is the Christ, Amen.

Europe

Almighty God, Creator of all things, God of sun and Earth, you created us with your breath. You are here with us. As we tilled the soil, you opened the seed. Your rain watered the ground; your sun drew apples and wild oats out of the rich soil. Your mercy showered blessing after blessing over the land, its humans, and living things. Creeks flowed into rivers; wetlands fed turtles and weed eels. Healthy and fat bison, graylag geese, mouflon sheep, and wild rabbits graze in the heather valleys. The turnips grow fat; roasted hazelnuts melt on the tongue, and round black currants leak red-purple juice over green leaves. Creator, Provider, we will care for this good Earth. In the name of Jesus who is the Christ, Amen.

Middle East

Almighty God, Creator of all things, God of sun and Earth, you created us with your breath. You are here with us. As we tilled the soil, you opened the seed. Your rain watered the ground; your sun drew chickpeas and wheat out of the rich soil. Your mercy showered blessing after blessing over the land, its humans, and living things. Creeks flowed into rivers; wetlands fed turtles and tilapia. Healthy and fat

Arabian oryx, sparrows, shami goats, and honeybees live and graze in the high plains and deserts. The figs grow sweet alongside olives and almonds; soft, syrupy dates cluster under green palms. Creator, Provider, we will care for this good Earth. In the name of Jesus who is the Christ, Amen.

Australia/New Zealand

Almighty God, Creator of all things, God of sun and Earth, you created us with your breath. You are here with us. As we planted, you opened the seed. Your rain watered the ground; your sun drew youlk potato and button grass out of the warm soil. Your mercy showered blessing after blessing over the land, its humans, and living things. Creeks flowed into rivers; wetlands fed turtles and ray-finned fishes. Healthy and fat kangaroo, brush-turkeys, bellbirds and kiwis forage through the bush. The wild, peachy quandong grows plump; the macadamias melt in a soft crunch, and the ribberries bring a showcase of red, purple, and bright pink clusters. Creator, Provider, we will care for this good Earth. In the name of Jesus who is the Christ, Amen.

Seventh Sunday of Easter, Year C

June 1, 2025

Becoming One

PLANNING NOTES

On this final week in the series, we recognize how interdependent we are with creation, and we celebrate that when we benefit, we also benefit others. Design the worship experience this week to empower participants to know their need for one another and for a supportive community beyond the church so that all celebrate the successes of even those who might be otherwise forgotten.

This may be another week to celebrate Holy Communion. If your practice is to have some stations with different types of bread (such as gluten-free, wafers, or pre-packaged), consider offering just one option that includes all the people in your congregation. Gluten-free, vegan Communion bread can be made at home or bought in many communities. Even if there are multiple stations to accommodate all the congregants, having one bread celebrates the unity of the body of Christ.

For the final week of the terrariums, consider adding lights. Add a small string of fairy lights around the outside of the terrarium. You could place a small battery-powered votive inside, but avoid having it in puddles of water.

Invite a youth or young adult to share a story from their perspective. They might tell when they met someone new and didn't at first recognize a connection until some event or mutual insight helped make the connection. The speaker could invite all generations to reach out beyond their comfort levels to get to know someone different so they might learn what it's like to encounter the world from a different perspective. Make time for these interactions during worship or fellowship time after worship.

PREACHING NOTES

How often do we read a news headline and hear that the Earth is once again crying out? This Eastertide, we have seen that the suffering of the Earth is not just an issue that involves one demographic or another—it truly is about all of us. What is beautiful in Revelation 22 is that the city gates are open to everyone. As we consider what to do about summers getting hotter, storms becoming more violent, crops failing more often, and the people and creatures who are suffering the worst of these consequences, we must realize that the centerpiece of this city is the Tree of Life. At this tree, we find our sustenance and are made a part of God's New Creation.

William Stringfellow writes that our efforts to build the New Creation will, at times, be short-lived.¹⁹ Still, we are called to build it anyway, because there will come a time when we are fully co-creative with God in the process of building the *everlasting* New Creation. When Jesus says in Revelation 22:12, “See, I am coming soon!” we as Christians must take that seriously! How do we respond? I believe we are called to always be building a starting place for the New Creation. We are called to act in unison as people who expect the kingdom of God to make an appearance here and now. The Resurrection teaches us to believe that when we collaborate with God, that might just be the thing that, in its own small way, kicks off the New Creation.

If you look before and after this passage, the author of Revelation states that the gates to the city are wide open. Our lectionary text skips over verse 15, which references the “immoral” and the “dogs.” In a close reading, we see that the author never states that those named in verse 15 are not *allowed* inside. They choose not to come in. While the treatment of those on the outside could be debated, what piqued my interest is that the text specifically names “those who practice falsehoods” as ones who are immoral.

In a world where people deny climate change and the need for robust climate justice theology and policy, Revelation 22 begs the question: “What is it going to take to get us there?” Right after the excluded verse 15, Jesus declares that he will be the one to bring us—all of us—into the city. It is at the invitation of the Spirit and the bride that we are called into the city (verse 17); once we are there, we turn around and invite yet more people in! The invitation is not limited to a certain group of believers; those who thirst can come and “anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.” Perhaps verse 17 can be our leverage text. As we consider what it means to be invited and then invite others in reciprocity, the text brings out the need for a broad invitation and a wide welcome: it will take *every body* to build the city of God.

This reminds me that there are those who are not listening to the truth that the climate is changing, but those folks are thirsty too. As a pastor in a rural community, I frequently find myself at odds with some folks who—while they farm and are directly impacted by the challenges of climate change—struggle to admit that something is wrong with our creation. While we work toward climate justice and creation care, we have to find a way to make space for those who aren't on board yet. At the end of the day,

¹⁹ William Stringfellow, *An Ethic for Christians and Other Aliens in a Strange Land*, (Wipf & Stock: Eugene, 1973), 138.

there will be those who may not be on our side now who will directly benefit from those of us doing the work to heal creation. As we try to balance the work of climate change and the work of accepting our neighbor, we cannot deny the value of the tree God has placed at the center of the city. This is one of the indicators that what we are working toward is not that which is going to pass, but that which is everlasting.

In scripture, often, we hear of the kingdom of God. In this text, it's not the kingdom of God but the city of God. That differentiation is important because John's apocalypse is not looking at re-engineering the empire in the image of God but imagining re-engineering the world back to the city. In the sprawl of the empire, it is easy to ignore our neighbors, but in the intimate town square, it is hard not to learn their names. Our scripture texts today call us to complete our journey of believing into Christ by becoming one (John 17:22) with one another and with all creation!

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Call to Worship

The roots of the Tree of Life run deep into the sacred soil.

The limbs of the Tree of Life reach out to embrace the goodness of all creation.

The trunk of the Tree of Life stands strong in the face of hatred and malice toward the least, the lonely, the left out.

The branches of the Tree of Life struggle toward the heavens, hoping to bring about God's reign of justice and love for all.

The winds of the Spirit breathe through the Tree of Life, bringing renewal and hope.

May our worship this day be a worthy offering that supports the Tree of Life and brings the goodness of the Sacred to our world.

Written by Sally Johnson, United Methodist Creation Justice Movement

Opening Prayer

Gracious Creator, you invite us into relationship with every breath. Settle us, center us, and calm us to the ever-moving flowing of your Spirit calling us to become one with you. We pray in humility and hope of grace. Amen.

Written by Sally Johnson, United Methodist Creation Justice Movement

Pastoral Prayer

Creating God, we look forward to the arrival of your city,

And we recognize our part to play.

The tree of life needs clean water;

The ground needs to be prepared.

Our work has begun.

Guide our hands in seeing to it.

We see that you are calling all people back to you

And that you have charged us with invitation and welcome.

There are those whom we might have called enemies before.

Open our hearts for reconciliation.

Loving God, open our minds to see the vision you have for us.

Allow our imaginations to take control

When our minds say, "That's not possible."

Make us dream of a city, not another empire.

Returning God,

Give us urgency

Let us not say what has been said too long,

"The next generation will fix it."

Raise us up as prophets

To proclaim the good news

That the time has come.

God-throughout-Creation,

Strengthen our hands to do the work

And make them soft to reach out to those on the fence.

Make our city one that knows no division.

Make us a prismatic reflection of your great love for us.

May we be the builders you ask us to be. Amen.

Written by Rev. Chad Hornsby, United Methodist Creation Justice Movement

Benediction

We are surrounded by the presence of the Holy.

We are held in the love of the Creator.

We are filled with the inspiration of the Spirit.

We are called by the life and resurrection of Jesus the Christ.

May we go from this place to live lives that hold this world in care and compassion, dreaming a New Creation as God's beloveds.

Go in peace...

Written by Sally Johnson, United Methodist Creation Justice Movement

FROM THE ANCIENT BREATH OF WISDOM

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From the Ancient Breath of Wisdom,

We, God's people now have come.

To embody what was spoken

To give life to what was begun.

Clothed in garments of holy boldness

Here we stand on sacred ground.

God's own image now unfolded

In the glory of sight and sound.

Here we bring our lives of passion.

Here we bring our voice of prayer.

In this place, we speak your Presence

By the stories that we share.

Make us truthful in our telling,

Filled with caring, held in hope.

As we claim your faithful promise,

Blessed on Earth as signs of Love.

In Communion now we gather
Christ's own body we become.

Women, bring your gifts for living;

Men, embrace this place, our home.

Children, teach us by example,

Simple joy and playful soul.

As we celebrate God's kin-dom,

Gracious Spirit, make us whole.