

## How Shall We Live

### INTRODUCTION

The season of Easter, or Eastertide, can be difficult to navigate. On the one hand, there is the ongoing unexplainable joy of Resurrection and the hope of new life. On the other hand, there is the inevitable feeling of “So, what?” as we notice that the world seems pretty much unchanged or perhaps even worse. This is exactly where we need to begin this series: “So, what? Christ is Risen!” That was our shout on Easter morning. “So, what?”

“What difference has it made, is it making, and will it make in our lives day by day?” That is the question we are asking in this series for the beginning of the Easter season: How shall we live? To guide us through this series and to help us answer this vital question, we have the Epistle of John. Perhaps it’s a surprising choice for some, but these letters can give us insight on life after Easter and how we might be witnesses to the kingdom, even as we wait for the fulfillment of the promise. We invite you and your congregation to explore what it means to be the church in a messy world as we consider how we shall live.

### Second Sunday of Easter – We Walk in the Light

April 7, 2024

[1 John 1:1-2:2](#)

Color: White

### PLANNING NOTES

Throughout this series, we are asking the question, “How Shall We Live?” as we explore the lectionary texts from 1 John. This short season is an opportunity to explore how our way of life is consistent with God’s invitation to us to live as part of Creation. We look for opportunities to align our lives more fully with God’s interconnected and interdependent Creation, including human and beyond-human creatures.

In the sanctuary, consider displaying images of Earth, our common home, as seen from orbit. Alternatively, offer opportunities for congregation members to see how they are connected to others. Options for seasonal displays that will bring out the theme of living in connection with others might include:

- Creating a place in the sanctuary where congregation members could participate in weaving fabric strips together to produce a hanging over the course of several weeks. Consider providing fabric strips in the green, brown, and blue of the natural world or fabric scraps that have prints on them showing animals, plants, soil, sunlight, or stars.
- Using live plants on the altar instead of cut flowers. Live plants will grow throughout the season, revealing more and more of their life. April in various parts of the world will bring different weather patterns, so local options will vary. However, many bulbs can be “forced” in pots if they

are planted inside before the season begins. These plants would then begin to show above the top of the soil on week one. By week three, there may even be buds or blooms.

This week, we explore what God is revealing about how we should live. Our worship materials and worship settings can demonstrate the revelation of God through word, song, image, and silence.

The author of 1 John uses a metaphor about light and dark. This may be a time to challenge your congregation to consider how some understandings of dark and light can be harmful because of the racism in our society; there are other options. Instead, consider what is revealed when we live in Christ. Although images and videos for this day may include the use of light and dark to convey the message, worship leaders also may use budding flowers or trees, doorways or entryways or passageways, and other symbolic options to indicate that what is revealed by life in Christ is relevant in settings beyond light and dark.

However, if the metaphor of light and dark is helpful to illustrate God's action in our lives, revealing how we should live, Rev. Fernando P. Sanchez suggests the concepts of lighthouse and beacon as illustrations of God's guidance.

*A lighthouse is a tower, building, or other type of physical structure designed to emit light from a system of lamps and lenses and to serve as a beacon for navigational aid, for maritime pilots at sea or on inland waterways. As Christians, we have a lighthouse called Jesus who is our beacon to navigate our personal journey of faith. The radiant light of a lighthouse shines in the darkness, as Jesus is our radiant light of faith, hope, love, and redemption. There is no darkness in our spirit. Remember, we will walk in the light of Easter, a new beginning, a new hope of life in Jesus our God. (Rev. Fernando P. Sanchez)*

This idea of what is revealed may be brought into worship through visuals that change and grow and transform throughout the time together, through the children's moment as a puppet comes out of its home and items from a bag are revealed, and through the creative use of song and story. If your congregation used a black cloth to cover the cross on Good Friday, consider using a bright yellow, white, or gold cloth draped over just one side of the cross this morning to signify the empty cross of Easter being revealed from under the fabric on this new day.

Engaging the theme from our lived experience, some of what is revealed is a need for repentance for arrogance, greed, and injustice. It is worth taking the time for confession during this season as we seek to understand more fully the systems and practices that divide rather than unite Christians and others of faith and conscience in protecting and preserving what God has created.

However, that is not all that is revealed. The text in verse 4 points readers to the fact that what is revealed in how we live in Christ is that joy will be full or complete. By living as part of Creation, interconnected with and interdependent on all of what shares this planet, in love and respect for the role of each organism and mineral, we reveal joy in our way of life. Even from the beginning of the first service, this worship series points to the joy that can be revealed when we live in harmony and peace.

*Rev. Laura Baumgartner, Seattle, WA (ancestral homelands of the Duwamish and Coast Salish peoples), is an elder in the Pacific Northwest Conference, serving Haller Lake United Methodist Church. She also participates in the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement.*

*The quote above is from Rev. Fernando P. Sanchez, O'Donnel, Texas (ancestral homeland of the Jumanos, Comanche, and Lipan Apache peoples), an elder in the Northwest Texas Conference, serving First United Methodist Church, O'Donnell. He is also part of the Worship Team of the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement.*

## PREACHING NOTES

"You're not doing the letters of John, are you?" There might be a few rolled eyes or raised brows about this choice, partly because there are some difficult issues here in the epistles of John. But also, because for many, they are relatively unknown. Sure, there are some famous quotes from these letters: "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God" (1 John 3:1); "Since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:8); "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18). There's good stuff there. and maybe we could build a series just around our favorite verses from these letters. We could call it "John's greatest hits" or something. These epistles are certainly worth our attention. So, while we aren't looking at these "greatest hits" verses, the texts the lectionary assigns are certainly appropriate for us this Eastertide.

So, this is Low Sunday. Most of us think that means sparse attendance. Or the choir's Sunday off. Or maybe just time to catch the congregation's breath after the excesses of the Easter celebration. And in an odd kind of way, that's not too far off. Not that any Sunday where we are able to worship God is a "low" experience, but there is a traditional sense that, in comparison to the high holy day of Easter, we are now back where we live, still basking in the glow, still living the promise, but reentering the march of days and the living of life. That is why we now have to ask how we shall live. Easter came; Resurrection happened; so what? It's like that old evangelist who supposedly said, "I don't care how high you jumped on the night you got saved, I want to know how straight you walked when you came back down."

1 John asks us how straight we will walk in the light of Easter. He has to work up to it, of course. You can't just leap into the meat of the argument right away. He ... time out. He who? John; we call him John because that is the name assigned to these letters. But who was this John? Well, the truth is, we don't know. Some think it was the John listed in the gospels as one of the original twelve. Others think it was another John. Some lump all the works that bear the name of John onto one person – the Gospel of John, the Epistles of John, and the Revelation to John the Evangelist. But that seems unlikely. Others talk about a community of Christians that may have been started by the apostle John who kept the stories and interpretations that they were told and wrote them down as a community and named them after their founder. We don't know. And maybe this isn't a part of the sermon preached on this day or in this series. Maybe we just take the shorthand John and run with it. It seems as good as any. The writer, this writer, this John. He, they, maybe even she, we don't know. It doesn't matter here. What matters is whether we are going to listen to the words and learn to walk. How shall we live now that Easter has come? Now that life has changed and Resurrection is real, how do we reflect that new reality as we walk about in this life every day of our existence?

As I was saying before I distracted myself with authorship questions, John takes a moment to get to the point. A classic preacher technique! But it also ties in with the beginning of the Gospel and indeed the whole biblical text: in the beginning. But here it isn't a reflection on what was, but on what is now revealed. The promise is now open to all; the life is accessible; the gift is within reach because of Jesus' death and resurrection. And the new reality in which we now live is one surrounded by joy. That's what the writer declares to us in these opening verses.

This new reality carries possibilities and responsibilities. The possibilities include fellowship—two-tiered fellowship at that. We have fellowship with Christ and then we have fellowship with one another. What a great bonus; rather, what an amazing design. We tend to want to focus on the individual. We imagine that faith is a personal thing, an internal thing, a me and Jesus thing. But the Bible consistently reminds us that it is a community thing. We are in this together. We support one another and encourage one another and disciple one another all along the way. We are not alone in our journey of faith. We have fellowship with one another—if we walk in the light.

Seems straightforward, doesn't it? Just walk. In the light. Simple and straightforward, right? We wish. It is true that the Johannine literature loves the light/dark binary metaphor. It appears in many places and therefore is our biblical precedent for using it. But it is problematic at best. The whole idea that light equals good and dark equals bad leads to a prioritizing of lighter-skinned people over darker-skinned people. And if your response to that statement is to roll your eyes and say we know better than that, you haven't been paying attention to how such images have been and continue to be used in our divided world. So, given that this has been a stumbling block to followers and still has repercussions in the present day, how should we respond? Simply appeal to our "better angels"? Ignore it and hope it goes away? Change the metaphor for something less contentious? Use it as a teaching point to make sure we don't make those sometimes-subconscious associations? You know your context and what would be the most appropriate. But we can't simply gloss it over and say no one would do that with this text, because some have, and some do.

This text is asking about our footprint. What kind of impact do we have on the world around us—the physical and the human? What example do we give of how we are to live in this world? Remember, this isn't just about you, the individual you, the "you and Jesus" you. This is about the community of faith, the fellowship we have with one another. That idea isn't simply a bonus for doing good work. Fellowship is at the heart of the faith. It is the sign and signal that we are not left to navigate this discipleship journey all by ourselves. We do it together, in partnership with the whole community of faith. We are part of a body. Yes, we have our individual roles to play, gifts to use, decisions to make, but the more we understand the interwoven nature of human community, the more we get a glimpse of what it means to live in the kingdom of heaven. When we acknowledge that our choices about lifestyle impact people on the other side of the planet, we catch something of what living as one body really means.

This is where the joy is to be found. John, invoking the editorial we, says, "We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete" (v.4). "We"? "Our"? There is communality in the idea of discipleship, of walking in the example of Christ. We live and work in an arena of mutual support, of shared wisdom and communal hope. And we are put back together when we fall apart by the loving arms of a community of faith. Walk, says John, walk in such a way that those around you are enlightened. Walk, says John, walk in such a way that the world is left a better place—cleaner, sustainable, abundant. Walk, says John,

because we are people of the Resurrection who know that death is not the final word but a promise of life.

#### LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Opening Prayer

God of abundance,

We are thankful

for the beauty all around us.

Weave us together in a life

full of goodness and joy.

Help us to move in harmony

with one another

and with all Creation.

Let us travel on your path

toward release in your presence.

Amen.

*Written by Rev. Laurie Bayen and Rev. Laura Baumgartner. Rev. Bayen, Cotati, CA (ancestral homelands of the Southern Pomo and Coast Miwok peoples), is an elder in the California-Nevada Annual Conference, serving Windsor Community UMC. She is involved with the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement. Rev. Baumgartner, Seattle, WA (ancestral homelands of the Duwamish and Coast Salish peoples), is an elder in the Pacific Northwest Conference, serving Haller Lake UMC. She is involved in the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement.*

*Call to Worship*

How shall we live when shadows gather?

**Drawn to God's unquenchable light, we are also drawn into one another's presence.**

What was hidden has been revealed; we are woven together with all Creation.

**When we live in the light, as God is in the light, we are one with each other.**

Let us worship God, who is our Light and Salvation.

*Written by Rev. Paul Mitchell, Walla Walla, WA (ancestral homelands of the Cayuse, Umatilla, Palus, and Walla Walla), senior pastor of Pioneer United Methodist Church. He is an elder in full Connection in the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference and is involved in the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement.*

## Communion Liturgy

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.**

Creator God, you revealed to us your Creation on earth.

The waters flowed, and the winds blew.

You set the cosmos into motion and created living beings.

You gave life to the plants and the sea creatures and the land animals.

You put into flight the birds and insects, and you made people to walk on the ground.

You blessed us all and called us good.

But when our love failed and we turned away,

You revealed a love for your people and all of Creation that never ends.

And so we praise you, with all the company of saints and sinners, singing your unending hymn:

**Holy, holy, holy God of power and might,**

**Heaven and earth are full of your glory**

**Hosannah in the highest.**

**Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord.**

**Hosannah in the highest.**

You continued to reveal your love for us in your son, Jesus,

who came to live among us and move as a human on this Earth.

When he dined with his friends, just before he was to be executed,

he reminded them of your love revealed in the gifts of bread and juice before them on the table.

He took the bread in his hands, gave thanks to you, broke it, and shared it with his friends, saying the familiar words,

“Take, eat. This is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me.”

And when the supper was over, he took the cup, again gave thanks for it, and shared it with all who gathered, reminding them,

“Drink this all of you. This is the cup of my covenant with you, for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

Together we proclaim the mystery of faith.

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

Still-creating Spirit,

Be poured out on those gathered here and on these gifts from the field in bread and juice. As we receive them into our bodies, make us your body. Unite us with those who have come before us in your kin-dom and with those who will come after us, now and always. **Amen.**

#### **Prayer after Receiving**

**Creative God,**

**We thank you for revealing your love to us in bread and juice. We recognize your presence in us and all around us, and we ask that you continue to reveal your love for all Creation to the ends of the Earth through our lives. Make us your people and use us to reveal the inbreaking of your kin-dom here and now: a world of justice and peace. Amen.**

*Written by Rev. Laura Baumgartner, Seattle, WA (ancestral homelands of the Duwamish and Coast Salish peoples), an elder in the Pacific Northwest Conference, serving Haller Lake UMC. She is involved in the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement.*

#### *Benediction*

Love will come to perfection in us when we can face the day of judgment without fear – because our relation to this world is just like Christ’s. There is no fear in love, for perfect love drives out fear. (1 John 4:17-18)

**Shine the light of your love upon us, O God, and reveal the goodness of Creation.**

Our salvation is bound together with Creation.

*Written by Rev. Paul Mitchell, Walla Walla, WA (ancestral homelands of the Cayuse, Umatilla, Palus, and Walla Walla), senior pastor of Pioneer United Methodist Church. He is an elder in full Connection in the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference and is involved in the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement.*

## **Pastoral Prayer**

*How to use these prayers:*

*These pastoral prayers are drawn from the lectionary texts for the first three Sundays following Easter 2024. Each prayer is written according to a pattern of praise, confession, and assurance.*

*Two optional segments are written in as part of the prayer. For those presiding in worship*

*settings where specific prayer requests are shared from the congregation, there is a section where these can be inserted following the second paragraph of each pastoral prayer. Another optional segment is at the end of the prayer. For congregations who have not prayed the Lord's Prayer elsewhere in the service, they may do so at the close of the pastoral prayers.*

*Is it faithful to read the Psalms through the lens of the climate crisis?*

*The psalms were written by a people who too often found themselves in conflicts with their neighbors. They cried for justice, protection, righteousness, and faith. In the Psalms,*

*restoration and peace were described with words telling of the strength of mountains, of*

*abundant harvest, flowing water, multiplying fish and animals, and songs of the earth in praise of God.*

*As we look at the harm done to the planet, we see some common cause with these ancient people. In that way and more, the psalms are both timeless and timely. If we listen to the verses, we hear their voices—and whole ecosystems and the planet itself—cry out.*

## **Pastoral Prayer**

Inspired by and drawn from [Psalm 133](#)

Creator God, maker and sustainer of all life, Dew-bringer, you draw water from the highest limestone crest to fill the deepest mountain springs of Mt Hermon. You have made these highest waters flow down deep yet rise again as they pour cascading into waterfall after waterfall; such glory! Forgive us, Lord! As we gather around your mountain-fed waters to drink all you have given, we have not been one people. We have jostled and shoved; we have taken too much; we have made suffering where you have offered Life overspilling! This is not your way.

*(Optional, the leader shares prayers of the people):* Listen to our prayers, the prayers of the people of your Creation, as we raise our hopes in you.

Mountaintop, Almighty God: You do not just offer the blessing of everlasting Life; you command it. We kneel at the foot of the waterfall. We are in the midst of your oasis. We drink at the pool of the Hermon Stream, breathing in your Spirit mist. We share this Life with our neighbors and your whole Creation of animals, birds, and fish. One world. One Word. One community. One everlasting Life. Amen.

*(Optional. The Lord's Prayer.)* To you, we raise the prayer taught to us by the Lord, Jesus Christ...

*Written by Rev. Richenda Fairhurst, Ashland, Oregon (Homeland of the Shasta and Takelma peoples). Richenda works with the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement and is a Climate Chaplain.*

**Commented [LB1]:** Life is used here to distinguish from life. It is meant to delineate from material creaturely life and show that sort of spiritual connection and combination with the eternal life and the life that is the essential gift that comes from God.



### Third Sunday of Easter – We Purify in Hope

April 14, 2024

[1 John 3:1-7](#)

Color: White

#### PLANNING NOTES

Easter is such a joyous, colorful, and vibrant celebration! Now in Eastertide, this second Sunday, Christ is still risen! The Creation is still waking up! This Sunday provides us with opportunities to continue the flow of hopeful beauty through the banners, pots of lilies and tulips and hyacinths, cloth weavings, or bare branches now covered in ribbons. Think about how the worship space can continue the Easter vibe, but also introduce new elements, so people don't think that Eastertide is just 'left-overs.' Though white and gold are liturgical colors in Eastertide, this second Sunday, we can also braid in the colors, sights, sounds, and smells of our watersheds and bioregions leading up to Earth Day Sunday, next week. Since we celebrate not only Jesus' resurrection but the living hope of all Creation, tap the imagination of the worship team to incorporate symbols of clean and healthy water, fresh and flowing air, dark and fertile soil, as well as the particular ecology of the neighborhood. These elements could be displayed through digital images in worship or with large containers of actual water and soil on or around the table, along with wands (or twigs like birch) of cloth strips or feathers to represent air. The goal is to celebrate the health and well-being of the elements sustaining our lives and the lives of God's beloved.

If your congregation is participating in the United Women in Faith's campaigns of ["Just Energy 4 All"](#) or the ["Breathe Again Collaborative,"](#) create ways for members of these groups to share what they have learned as well as incorporate a card-signing table after worship or an offering of postcards in worship!

*Rev. Nancy Victorin-Vangerud, Minneapolis, MN (ancestral homeland of the Dakota peoples), is a retired elder in the Minnesota Annual Conference. She is part of the Worship Team of the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement and is a UM Earthkeeper.*

#### PREACHING NOTES

This is going to be a gripping title, don't you think? "We Purify in Hope." We walk, ok. We abide, certainly. But we purify? How's that going to work in your context? Maybe your community has been wrestling with the issues raised with "purity culture," which sounds great on the surface but tends to elevate certain behaviors – or abstentions from certain behaviors – as more normative to the Christian faith than others. Much is said about sexual sins but not much about a host of other priorities to which Jesus drew attention. Maybe you have become aware of the emphasis on shame and not on redemption or grace. Maybe purity in your context is an unattainable ideal that only serves to frustrate those who are seeking to be disciples and to follow Jesus but find it simply too onerous and therefore are more likely to give up before really beginning.

On the other hand, maybe the idea of purity works for you. Maybe you understand the need to approach behavior or orthopraxis (right action) along with orthodoxy – or right belief. That is the point John is making in this text. Notice how hope sits alongside this action of purification. It is hope, claims

John – or the Johannine community – that leads to a desire for purity. And the model for this purity is Jesus. We purify ourselves as he is pure (v 3). With Christ, it is fulfilled – as he is pure. For us, it is a process; we purify ourselves. We are in the process of becoming like Christ. This doesn't mean that there is no destination, no striving, but it does mean that we have as much grace with ourselves as Christ would have with us.

And how much grace is that? "See what love," the text begins, "that the Father has given us that we should be called children of God." See what love! Do you hear the sense of amazement? Do you hear the joy that is inherent in this mind-blowing concept? For that is what we are, John writes, children, the very children of God. Incredible! This is the hope by which we are living, hope not as in an empty or vain wish. We are living in the new reality that has redefined our existence. We enter this Easter season with grateful joy, with the celebration of a new experience of life, and a promise that drives us to follow the path of Jesus.

But wait, if we keep reading, it seems like the joy is short-lived. We are given an impossible standard. "In him there is no sin" (3:5), we read. "No one who abides in him sins" (3:6). Now we're in trouble. What began in joy now comes crashing down in the reality of failure. "There is no place for us," we think, since no one who abides in him sins. And we are too painfully aware of our own sinfulness. We just came through the season of Lent and the self-examination there brought our sinfulness and our mortality into our awareness yet again. We can pretend to be sinless. Or can we? Go back a couple of chapters; go back to last week's text! We just read this! If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us (1 John 1:8). So, in chapter one, we admit our sinfulness; but in chapter three, we are called to be sinless to abide. How can this be?

Perhaps it would be helpful to translate verses five and six a little differently. What if those verses read:

*"You know that he was revealed to take away sin, and in him, sin does not continue to abide. No one who abides in him continues to sin (or is defined by sinning) and no one who continues to sin (or is defined by sin) has seen him or known him."*

In Christ, Paul tells us, we are a new creation. We have a new identity. We are no longer identified by sin. We are no longer trapped by sinful acts and thoughts. At the same time, John encourages us to work to rid ourselves of the sin that remains. And that in the power of the grace that comes from Christ, we can overcome thoughts and deeds and choose different paths and a different identity. God is not done with me yet might be a cliché, but it is also a truth that we can embrace, even as we seek to purify ourselves as he is pure. We are in process, and it is a shared process. We need one another to hold us accountable. We need the community to walk with us on this journey of purification—not for the purposes of judgment or condemnation, but for the purposes of encouragement and building up. That is why we are brought together into the body of believers so that together we can become more like Christ.

Another observation about this text is that we are awash in pronouns. The first issue is that they are masculine, which continues to cause the church problems in dealing with the real world and with our theology of a God who transcends human categories and limitations. How we choose to deal with this can be varied. We can avoid pronouns whenever possible, for example. The most straightforward way to do that is to put the proper noun in place of the pronoun. That brings us to the second problem. It isn't always clear what John is referring to when he uses pronouns. Sometimes it seems clear that he is

talking about God; sometimes it seems clear that he is talking about Jesus, and sometimes it could be either. Maybe that is on purpose. Perhaps when we are called to be like “him,” we see Jesus the Christ as the one who best revealed to us God and how God would choose for us to live in community in the world.

That is what we are aiming toward as we purify ourselves in hope—the hope in a new identity, the hope in a new community with new relationships, the hope of a new call to discipleship and all with the power of the Spirit to guide us as we journey.

### LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Opening Prayer

God of Hope,

We see your love

poured out for us

in all the world.

Make us more like you.

Teach us to live together

as one community

human and beyond-human,

creature and created

to your glory,

so your love is known

among all the living. Amen.

*Written by Rev. Laurie Bayen and Rev. Laura Baumgartner. Rev. Bayen, Cotati, CA (ancestral homelands of the Southern Pomo and Coast Miwok peoples), is an elder in the California-Nevada Annual Conference, serving Windsor Community UMC. She is involved with the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement. Rev. Baumgartner, Seattle, WA (ancestral homelands of the Duwamish and Coast Salish peoples), is an elder in the Pacific Northwest Conference, serving Haller Lake UMC. She is involved in the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement.*

*Call to Worship*

How shall we live when lavished with love?

**“We are God’s children, but it has not been revealed what we are to become in the future.”** (1 John 3:2)

Just as in our origins, our future is tied to our planet.

**Creator has given us partners for mutual flourishing.**

Let us worship God, who makes all things new.

*Rev. Paul Mitchell, Walla Walla, WA (ancestral homelands of the Cayuse, Umatilla, Palus, and Walla Walla), is the senior pastor of Pioneer United Methodist Church. He is an elder in full Connection in the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference and is involved in the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement.*

#### *Benediction*

“Love will come to perfection in us when we can face the day of judgment without fear – because our relation to this world is just like Christ’s. There is no fear in love, for perfect love drives out fear.” (1 John 4:17-18)

**Mountains and valleys, flora and fauna, receive your love and echo with praise.**

Our salvation is bound together with Creation.

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#### **Pastoral Prayer**

*How to use these prayers:*

*These pastoral prayers are drawn from the lectionary texts for the first three Sundays following Easter 2024. Each prayer is written according to a pattern of praise, confession, and assurance.*

*Two optional segments are written in as part of the prayer. For those presiding in worship*

*settings where specific prayer requests are shared from the congregation, there is a section where these can be inserted following the second paragraph of each pastoral prayer. Another optional segment is at the end of the prayer. For congregations who have not prayed the Lord’s Prayer elsewhere in the service, they may do so at the close of the pastoral prayers.*

*Is it faithful to read the Psalms through the lens of the climate crisis?*

*The psalms were written by a people who too often found themselves in conflicts with their neighbors. They cried for justice, protection, righteousness, and faith. In the Psalms,*

*restoration and peace were described with words telling of the strength of mountains, of*

*abundant harvest, flowing water, multiplying fish and animals, and songs of the earth in praise of God. As we look at the harm done to the planet, we see some common cause with these ancient people. In that way and more, the psalms are both timeless and timely. If we listen to the verses, we hear their voices—and whole ecosystems and the planet itself—cry out.*

#### Pastoral Prayer

Inspired by and drawn from [Psalm 4](#)

Righteous God, who ordains the rise and fall of the sun and moon and the ebb and flow of the snows and streams of Mount Hermon; Life-sustaining God, who sets the warblers and the wrens to feed fat on the crimson pods of the Hermon maple trees: They rest securely, nestled in the soft green leaflets of the birdsfoot trefoils.

Save us, Lord! Save our woods, our sibling creatures, our sustaining water. The heat rises, and the rain no longer fits in its securing cycle; it no longer feeds the Dan and Hermon Spring or the Jordan River as it once did. We are unsure. We no longer know the season-by-season refilling of the Jordan Valley, where the rock dove flew above our Lord. We do not know this land as Jesus did.

*(Optional, the leader shares prayers of the people):* Listen to our prayers, the prayers of the people of your Creation, as we raise our hopes in you.

Shining God, turn your face to us, your people, your community! You hear our cry! We repent of the lures that led us to drought, for they are worthless. We seek restoration of the cycles you ordained, of snow and rain, of the wren, the dove, and the trefoil. We step away from sin. We refresh ourselves in your righteousness. We rest secure and are assured in you. Amen.

*(Optional. The Lord's Prayer.)* To you, we raise the prayer taught to us by the Lord, Jesus Christ...

*Written by Rev. Richenda Fairhurst, Ashland, Oregon (Homeland of the Shasta and Takelma peoples). Richenda works with the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement and is a Climate Chaplain.*

## Fourth Sunday of Easter – We Abide in Christ

April 21, 2024

[1 John 3:16-24](#)

Color: White

### PLANNING NOTES

Our final week in the series, “How Shall We Live?” calls us to live out the love and joy we have found in our life in Christ. Images and videos for this week will display how people live out their faith in the world. Throughout the series, if your congregation has been creating something together or watching something bloom together, this week will be the culmination of that process. If a new hanging has been produced, a blessing of that hanging for use in worship would be appropriate. If plants have grown and bloomed or have come close to blooming, a congregational picture after worship with the plants would be a beautiful way to remember the day. Sending copies of the photo could extend your reach to any who are not able to be in worship in person.

Even more than the two weeks prior, this week, a theme of people living in harmony with other species and parts of the natural world will come forth. Our actions convey love to others when we live in harmony with respect and care. Our actions bring joy to our communities and to communities that share the planet, even if they are far from us geographically, when we put our faith in God into action toward peace and justice. From the opening prayer with images of gardens grown to feed and nourish to the children’s message in which each child represents part of the puzzle of this world where we live, and the sermon illustrations telling the story of activists motivated by their faith to work for justice in the world, this worship service is a call to action for all who are called by God, even though each person’s actions will be unique.

It might be appropriate on this day to schedule a “mission moment” in the worship service to highlight a mission activity of your church or a nonprofit organization active in your community with an invitation for congregation members to get involved in a new way to put faith into action. A youth group might present a display or offering from a fundraiser they have recently collected during a mission project. Inviting various groups within the church to share their service projects from the past year during fellowship time after worship might also be an effective way to highlight the ways that faith is already being put into action in your context.

It’s also important to note that putting our faith and love into action, as 1 John suggests, is not only an act of charity or an act of duty. It is a way of living out the love and joy that we experience when abiding in Christ with our whole selves. Sometimes charity can perpetuate injustice when it is done “to” people understood to be outside the community. Instead, the challenge for us today is to seek to be in community with, to be transformed by, and to be dependent on others, in mutual relationship.

*Rev. Laura Baumgartner, Seattle, WA (ancestral homelands of the Duwamish and Coast Salish peoples), is an elder in the Pacific Northwest Conference, serving Haller Lake United Methodist Church. She also is on the Worship Team of the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement.*

## PREACHING NOTES

“Get stuck in.” That’s a Britishism in case you hadn’t heard it before. It means “get to work” or “get to it” or “put your back in.” Or is that last one another Britishism? I get confused sometimes. Living over there for a while and living here most of the time, I forget which is which. I sometimes say the wrong thing in the wrong cultural environment. Do we say, “Put your back in it” or “Put your heart into it”?

Ah, that’s it. Put your heart into it. That’s how we indicate something is really important. That’s how we show that we are really committed, really involved, really connected. Right? Put your heart into it. When we really mean it, our hearts are in it. When they aren’t, when we are half-hearted or worse, then nothing happens. Or nothing of significance anyway.

And so, every now and then, you need to ask yourself if your heart is really in it. Every now and then, you have to do a test to see if this is something you are committed to doing. And this is called the “gut check.” Yeah, okay, it doesn’t make much sense. We seem to have slipped a little bit south, haven’t we? There seems to be a tangle of body parts here. The only explanation I have is that someone has been reading the first letter of John.

How’s that for a lead-in? From tangled body parts to our scripture text for the week. Just possibly a bit of a stretch. Or is it?

Okay, the heart is a given. It is right there. All over the place. John wants our hearts in it, that much is clear. But other than that, ... Well, there is the whole-body approach in the first verse of the passage. There is the total commitment thing - lay down our lives for one another. But surely that is meant in a more spiritual than body kind of way. Isn’t it? We sacrifice a little time and a little effort for one another. That’s pretty good, isn’t it? We don’t really expect, or even call for much more than that. Do we?

Verse 17 is interesting. That last phrase – “and yet refuses help” - sounds a bit different in Greek. It reads: *klei,sh| ta. spla,gcna auvtou/ (kleise ta splagchna auto)*. Peterson’s *The Message* paraphrases it like this: “but turn a cold shoulder and do nothing.” So, we moved from warm hearts to cold shoulders. But in Greek, it is even worse. The seat of emotion for the ancient world wasn’t the heart. The heart represents thought and will. When you do something with your whole heart, you are doing it as an act of will. It has less to do with emotion than it does with decision.

The emotions, on the other hand, were a bit lower. The word *spla,gcna* (*splagchna*) is actually bowels. Verse 17 says, “If we have the goods of this world, but when we see a brother or sister in need, we close our bowels against them, how does God’s love abide in us?”

Excuse me? Okay, set aside the ick factor for a moment and think about it. When that telephone call comes in the middle of the night; and as you feared, it is bad news of some sort, what do you feel? Isn’t there a queasiness in the pit of your stomach? When you hurt with those who hurt, doesn’t it hit you in the gut?

The problem is, we have learned to guard our feelings; we have learned to change the channel when the pictures of the hungry children appear. We have learned to turn the page when the paper is full of need and want and brokenness. “Nothing to do with me,” we think to ourselves. We have shut off our emotions; we have closed our bowels, says John.

The end of the third chapter of John asks for a gut check. Do we still care about what is going on in the world? Or has it gotten to be too much? Out of protection, we claim, we turn it off. There is simply too much, too much beyond our capacity to help. So, better take care of ourselves, it would seem.

Certainly, John is asking us to do something. "Let us love not in word or speech, but in truth and action." There is a call to get to work, to get stuck in. So, from time to time, we need to reassess our efforts when it comes to mission and service. We need to ask, "Is loving my neighbor just something I talk about, or is it something I do?" A good question, and one that we all need to be asking more often. All of us could do better, it seems.

There is another threat in this passage, at least it appears to me. John is asking us to care. What is all that stuff about the heart? Do our hearts condemn us? What does that mean? Is our heart in the right place? Are we at ease with our hearts? Maybe we should substitute "conscience" for "heart." Maybe John is asking us to put our conscience at ease or to get our conscience right with God by caring for our neighbor.

The key to this way of living comes from an unlikely place. The key to peace of mind or ease of heart comes from obedience. Yikes. Another of those uncomfortable words. Obedience has the reputation of getting in our way or getting in the way of freedom. We worship freedom in this country; it is the reason we are willing to do terrible things as a nation. For the sake of freedom. Obedience goes against the grain. And yet John tells us that peace comes from having Christ abide in our hearts. And Christ abides in us when we are obedient—when we act out of love, when we live as Christ lived. When we follow the example of the one we call Lord, when we are obedient to the command to love as he loved, then Christ abides; and when Christ abides, then our hearts do not condemn us, even when we stand in the presence of God.

John is calling for a gut check. He wants us to put our hearts into it. He wants us to abide in Christ. He wants us, out of obedience to the Lord of our lives, to let our whole lives reflect his life. He offers us peace, of the deepest most secure sort. But it isn't something that comes halfheartedly. He reminds us that Christ wants all of us. Mind, heart, guts - all of us.



## LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Opening Prayer

Living Word,

whose love abides in us,

You call us to love

in truth and action.

Give courage to our hearts

so we may love your beloveds.

Open our ears to the wisdom

of those you send,

who might otherwise be dismissed.

Transform our charity into justice

over all the earth. Amen.

*Written by Rev. Laurie Bayen and Rev. Laura Baumgartner. Rev. Bayen, Cotati, CA (ancestral homelands of the Southern Pomo and Coast Miwok peoples), is an elder in the California-Nevada Annual Conference, serving Windsor Community UMC. She is involved with the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement. Rev. Baumgartner, Seattle, WA (ancestral homelands of the Duwamish and Coast Salish peoples), is an elder in the Pacific Northwest Conference, serving Haller Lake UMC. She is involved in the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement.*

*Call to Worship*

How shall we live when we have more than enough?

**We have no greater praise to offer than caring for your creatures and Creation.**

The earth is our teacher – nurturing and tender.

**In this hour, O God, nourish us in the soil of your love.**

Let us worship God, the Ground of all Being.

*Written by Rev. Paul Mitchell, Walla Walla, WA (ancestral homelands of the Cayuse, Umatilla, Palus, and Walla Walla), senior pastor of Pioneer United Methodist Church. He is an elder in full Connection in the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference and is involved in the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement.*

### *Benediction*

"Love will come to perfection in us when we can face the day of judgment without fear – because our relation to this world is just like Christ's. There is no fear in love, for perfect love drives out fear." (1 John 4:17-18)

### **Form in us, O God, a community of creativity and collaboration.**

Our salvation is bound together with Creation.

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### **Pastoral Prayer**

*How to use these prayers:*

*These pastoral prayers are drawn from the lectionary texts for the first three Sundays following Easter 2024. Each prayer is written according to a pattern of praise, confession, and assurance.*

*Two optional segments are written in as part of the prayer. For those presiding in worship*

*settings where specific prayer requests are shared from the congregation, there is a section where these can be inserted following the second paragraph of each pastoral prayer. Another optional segment is at the end of the prayer. For congregations who have not prayed the Lord's Prayer elsewhere in the service, they may do so at the close of the pastoral prayers.*

*Is it faithful to read the Psalms through the lens of the climate crisis?*

*The psalms were written by a people who too often found themselves in conflicts with their neighbors. They cried for justice, protection, righteousness, and faith. In the Psalms,*

*restoration and peace were described with words telling of the strength of mountains, of*

*abundant harvest, flowing water, multiplying fish and animals, and songs of the earth in praise of God. As we look at the harm done to the planet, we see some common cause with these ancient people. In that way and more, the psalms are both timeless and timely. If we listen to the verses, we hear their voices—and whole ecosystems and the planet itself—cry out.*

### **Pastoral Prayer**

Inspired and drawn from [Psalm 23](#)

Shepherd God, you are the Lord of the stone-crest mountain and shepherd of the living Hermon Stream. Your flocks are rock thrush and rock hyrax, herds of swirled, mountain gazelle, schools of nibble fish, and us, your people. Creator, in your design, you gather us together with the mountain cherry and holy bramble, and we are brought close to you.

Forgive us for the destruction of your holy places, your flowing waters, your herds, and your flocks. We have darkened the valley. We have polluted your earth. We brought war, discord, and greed into your communities. We turn to you!

*(Optional, the leader shares prayers of the people):* Listen to our prayers, the prayers of the people of your reation, as we raise our hopes in you.)

Holy Parent, Father God! We rise from our sorrow. This is Easter! We will fear no dark place, not where the Banyan waters churn over the cliff, not in the deep underground of crystal water, not in the crevices of limestone or any other darkness. For you are with us. We will restore the wild wheat and herald the crocus. Our cups plunged into the cool springs will overflow! We rest as one community in the meadow of your love. Amen.

*(Optional. The Lord's Prayer.)* To you, we raise the prayer taught to us by the Lord, Jesus Christ...

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*Written by Rev. Richenda Fairhurst, Ashland, Oregon (Homeland of the Shasta and Takelma peoples). Richenda works with the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement and is a Climate Chaplain.*

## CONTRIBUTORS

We are so thankful to have members of the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement contribute to our worship resources for this series. You can find a full list of contributors below:

Rev. Laura Baumgartner

Seattle, WA (ancestral homelands of the Duwamish and Coast Salish peoples)

United Methodist Creation Justice Movement

Elder in the Pacific Northwest Conference, serving Haller Lake UMC

Rev. Laurie Bayen

Cotati, CA (ancestral homelands of the Southern Pomo and Coast Miwok peoples)

United Methodist Creation Justice Movement

Elder in the California-Nevada Annual Conference, serving Windsor Community UMC

Rev. Richenda Fairhurst

Ashland, Oregon (homeland of the Shasta and Takelma peoples)

United Methodist Creation Justice Movement

Climate Chaplain

Rev. Paul Mitchell

Walla Walla, WA (ancestral homelands of the Cayuse, Umatilla, Palus, and Walla Walla)

Senior Pastor at Pioneer United Methodist Church

United Methodist Creation Justice Movement, UM EarthKeeper

Elder in Full Connection in the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference

Carolyn Nichols

Maryland (ancestral lands of the Susquehannock and Piscataway peoples)

United Methodist Creation Justice Movement

Layperson, Epworth Chapel UMC in the Baltimore-Washington Conference

Rev. Fernando P. Sanchez

O'Donnel, TX (ancestral homeland of the Jumanos, Comanche, and Lipan Apache peoples)

United Methodist Creation Justice Movement

Elder in the Northwest Texas Conference, serving First UMC, O'Donnell

Rev. Kristina Sinks

Evanston, IL (ancestral homelands of the Potawatomi, Odawa (Ottawa) and Ojibwe Tribes)

United Methodist Creation Justice Movement

Provisional Deacon in the California-Nevada Annual Conference

Rev. Mark Terwilliger

York, PA (ancestral homelands of the Susquehannock peoples)

United Methodist Creation Justice Movement, UM EarthKeeper

Elder in the Susquehanna Annual Conference, serving Asbury York UMC

Rev. Nancy Victorin-Vangerud

Minneapolis, MN (ancestral homeland of the Dakota peoples)

United Methodist Creation Justice Movement, UM EarthKeeper

Retired Elder in the Minnesota Annual Conference

Crys Zinkiewicz

Nashville, TN (ancestral homeland of the Cherokee Tribe)

UM Creation Justice Movement, Communications Team, UM EarthKeeper

Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference Creation Care Ministry Team