40 Days of Climate Justice: A Lenten Devotional
A celebration of the creativity and passion of the communities and people connected to the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.

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Immanuel Karunakaran, original painting on canvas.
Title: Gospel in the Groaning World

Editors: Troy Spencer and Karl Anliker
An Introduction by Erik Christensen

Over the years I have imposed ashes on the foreheads of infants just days old and adults who could not know that this would be their last year of life. I have made the sign of the cross in moments of silent reverence in cavernous sanctuaries and in fleeting exchanges on street corners as people went about their business. The constant, for me, has been the recognition that life is short and precious and a gift, and that we are mortal and finite and prone to forget how soon we will be gone and reduced to ash ourselves.

At the start of this academic year the LSTC community heard testimonies from those who have experienced first hand the impacts of the present climate crisis in the form of the flood that wrought so much destruction in the Kerala state of southern India; the hurricanes that have devastated Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and peoples throughout the Caribbean with escalating frequency; and the storm that broke through the levee in New Orleans over a decade ago, making homeless thousands of families and providing an early warning of the disasters to come. We witnessed from afar the blazing fires that burned all across the American west, as entire neighborhoods were reduced to ash.

If climate change ever seemed too abstract to hold our attention, those days are over. Instead, we now grapple with the struggle to stay hopeful about our ability to make a meaningful impact on a crisis of apocalyptic proportions. Hope, however, is more than an emotion — it is a discipline. It is a stance toward the future that takes seriously God’s promise of salvation, redemption, and reconciliation. It is a refusal to let the reality of death to define the gift of life.

What follows here is a devotional guide to accompany you through the forty days of Lent. Here you will find poems, prayers, passages of scripture, calls to action, and artistic reflections. What each of these offerings have in common is the dual awareness that the very earth is in peril and yet each of us, small and fragile as we are, can and must practice hope wherever, whenever and however we can.

We therefore invite you, whoever you may be, to the discipline of Lent. We invite you to the practice of hope that emerges from an honest reckoning with the reality of death. We invite you to unearth the story of your own deep connection to the suffering of the land, the sea, the sky. We invite you to repent, to turn and take hold of God’s promise of abundant life. We invite you to remember the power that is your baptismal birthright, and to use that power in service of the life we share with all of God’s creation, the earth and all that lives upon it.

Pastor Erik Christensen
Pastor to the Community & Director of Worship
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
Ash Wednesday, 2019
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Day 1: March 6
Lost Hope by Stephani Shumaker

She sees the rising of the tide,
And thinks it is finally time to decide.

She takes her daughter and heads to the roof,
But even there doesn’t seem to be waterproof.

She cries out in desperation losing hope,
Hoping the heavens above would catch sight with their astronomical telescope.

If only it weren’t the middle of the night,
Then surely they would be able to catch a flight.

Out of this hell hole and into a world,
Where climate and justice weren’t political.

But back to reality with a sweeping wave,
As hurricane Harvey brings them to their grave.
Day 2: March 7
A Reflection by Alice Dowd, age 11

Global Climate Change is a topic everybody should be talking about. It is important and will affect everyone’s future. Kids like me and little babies are the ones who are going to see the effects even more when we are older. Black people and poor people and people in Africa and other countries are getting hurt the most. Sea animals and birds are being affected too. They are breathing the pollution in the air made by the oil companies and factories. The sea animals are getting caught in trash, there is no way to help them, and no one is trying hard enough to do anything about it.

When I think about Global Climate Change I feel sad. You would think the President and people in power would take it seriously. They are especially not taking it seriously for how it is going to affect kids. My friend Sakeena and I wrote a letter to Donald Trump about Global Climate Change and got back a form letter. They don’t even care.

But I care. Not just for me but also for the younger kids after me because I want them to live in a better place and not have pollution everywhere. I want to swim in clean water. I want there to be animals. I want them to be swimming in happiness. I want there to be food for them and not have their ecosystem wiped out. I want there to be ice in the arctic for the polar bears. I want to be able to go outside and not worry about breathing smoke. I want to see clear skies and not gray smog. I want there to be more solar machines and green energy instead of energy sources that hurt the earth.

God cares, too. God is probably really pissed at us. God made the earth and made it to flourish and not to be destroyed and harmed. In the Bible it says earthquakes are going to come and Jesus is going to come down and that’s how it will all end. What kind of earth is Jesus going to find when Jesus comes back? God is going to judge us for this. We have to start making a world where we can feel happy and free, not worried about everything around us.
Day 3: March 8
An Action Item by Karl Anliker

I have a deep commitment to mental health services. I have anxiety and have struggled to maintain regular medication needs and to access further mental health services that can help me flourish.

The following article from the American Journal of Nursing details the link between mental health and climate change. The authors write about acute and long term effects of climate change on mental health. I know that even as the effects of climate change are already upon us, the city of Chicago is not prepared to address the mental health needs of our city. Far too often mental health care falls to emergency rooms and 911 calls when we can invest in all of our neighborhoods with free mental health clinics.

The climate crisis is deeply connected to mental health crisis around the world. So, as a faith filled response which considers my own experience I have an invitation for how we can be involved today! During this lenten season, we can make our voices heard by calling the City Council of Chicago who have the power to fund mental health clinics. Here is my plan and I invite you to consider your own faith filled response.

May God bless the prayers of your feet marching, your voices calling, and your hands writing. In the name of God, Holy Mother who cares for our minds, hearts, and all creation. Amen.

Phone: (217) 782-2000: Illinois State Switchboard or call your state legislator with contact information from [https://www.illinoispolicy.org/maps/](https://www.illinoispolicy.org/maps/)

Hi, my name is _____. I am a resident of _______ and I am very concerned about the lack of investment in mental health services in Chicago. I would like to leave a short message for my legislator. After the city council vote to reopen mental health clinics on February 27th only involved considering 6 clinics, I know that it’s not enough. We need real, effective statewide funding for mental health services. I support the recent legislation included in House Bill 2486 and Senate Bill 1673 that would provide more funding for mental health services across our state.

1 Trombley, Janna MS, RN; Chalupka, Stephanie EdD, RN, PHCNS-BC, FAAOHN, FNAP; Anderko, Laura PhD, RN, “Climate Change and Mental Health” American Journal of Nursing 117, no.4 (2017), 44-52.
[https://journals.lww.com/ajnonline/fulltext/2017/04000/Climate_Change_and_Mental_Health.aspx](https://journals.lww.com/ajnonline/fulltext/2017/04000/Climate_Change_and_Mental_Health.aspx)

2 [https://chicago.suntimes.com/news/state-group-proposes-more-better-funding-mental-health-services/](https://chicago.suntimes.com/news/state-group-proposes-more-better-funding-mental-health-services/)
Day 4: March 9  
Scripture: Ecclesiastes 3:1–8; John 12:27–36

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:  
a time to be born, and a time to die;  
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;  
a time to kill, and a time to heal;  
a time to break down, and a time to build up;  
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;  
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;  
a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;  
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;  
a time to seek, and a time to lose;  
a time to keep, and a time to throw away;  
a time to tear, and a time to sew;  
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;  
a time to love, and a time to hate;  
a time for war, and a time for peace.

Ecclesiastes 3:1–8 (NRSV)

“Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. The crowd answered him, “We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?” Jesus said to them, “The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.”

John 12:27–36 (NRSV)
Day 5: March 11
Image Reflections: Charlotte Anliker and Anonymous

“God = Mother earth. Capitalism kills.”
-Charlotte Anliker

“Mother earth surrounded by the colors I see in the beauty of the world. Dollar signs circling her trying to pollute her beauty.”
-Anonymous
Day 6: March 12
A Reflection and Prayer by Christina M. Montgomery (She/her/hers)

Isaiah 58:6-12 (NRSV)

So often the ways we carry out social justice become siloed. We do not consider the interdependence of our world and ignore the impact of our actions. However, you cannot care for humanity without caring for creation. This passage from Isaiah makes a connection between the justice and renewal that is needed for humanity and creation. Do you see the ways caring for creation is directly related to caring for the poor, the disenfranchised, and the forgotten? For instance, what groups are affected by polluted water? Or, as climate change advances and global temperatures become more extreme, what populations are at risk of death due to exposure? How can you care for creation and humanity simultaneously? No matter who you are, you must take caring for creation as an urgent call to action.

Let us pray.
God of all creation, we as fallen people are greedy and concerned with our own welfare above the welfare of your creation. We seek to be more than what you created us to be and in doing so forget our call to love one another and care for the gifts you have given to us. Embolden us in your unfailing love to take on the tasks that you have given us to care, protect, and restore all of your creation, that which we see value in and that which our limited scope cannot see its worth. Guide us to seek justice for the earth and one another with your merciful and sustaining hand. With all creation we cry, Amen.
Day 7: March 13
An Action Item by Troy Spencer

God of Creation, you were there at the start, the very beginning, and breathed life into the dust. As we venture through this holy time, we remember we walk on holy ground, breathe holy air, and use holy water. You have given us more than we could ever need yet we squander it. The Earth groans, Creation cries out in anguish. But hope is not lost. God, you know best - there is work to be done. We hold Creation tenderly in prayer and ask for your strength to leave this time of prayer with a clear call to action. We rise with conviction, with strength, with power to act. You are with us. Amen.

Prayer is a wonderful spiritual practice and there is power in prayer however prayer alone will not fight climate change. It is time we put into action what we pray for – the end of human-influenced and exacerbated climate change. You matter in this work. You have incredible power to put behind this movement and it comes from the Creator of all things. God is with you. So rise up with conviction and act.

Try this practice: develop a relationship with a green being. Grow or buy a plant, care for it, and develop a relationship with it. Talk to it, be friends with it, and watch it grow. Not only are there numerous health benefits to having a plant around but creating a relationship with Creation is part of how we can be in deep relationship with the Creator. While you create this relationship, think about and remember the prayer you read to begin today’s spiritual practice. The Earth groans, Creation cries out in anguish.

You can do something about it. You have the power. Act.
Day 8: March 14
A Prayer by Maija Mikkelsen

Good and gracious Creator God,
We are in awe of the majesty of your Creation.
We cherish the towering mountains, the refreshing springs, the wide plains,
and the vast oceans of your Earth.
We repent for the ways in which we have destroyed the Creation you have entrusted to us.
We repent for the policies we have implemented that are in direct opposition to your call for us to care for your Creation.
We lament and we cry out in fear as we are just coming to realize what we have done.
Be with us as we work to undo the damage that we have done.
In your most holy and creating name, we pray to you, Mother God.
Amen
SONNET XII by Daniel Collins

From azure sea to verdant meadow
Rocky crag to the dark hill-
Scorching blaze or frigid chill
The Holy Spirit becomes known.

Sister river flows fresh cool water
Brother vineyard greets us with wine
It's only though a matter of time-
You and I know their days have number.

We were warned about their coming.
Prophets came and prophets went-
And let no one go about thinking.

"For me it's not at all relevant"
The Gift of God is eternal life
But so is earth heaven-sent.
Day 10: March 16

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.
We bless you from the house of the Lord.
The Lord is God, and he has given us light.
Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar.
You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God, I will extol you.
O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

Psalm 118:26–29 (NRSV)

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you, desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

Matthew 23:37–39 (NRSV)
Day 11: March 18
Mother by Charlotte Anliker

Your Mother loved you
from the moment she laid her eyes on you
She wanted to give you everything you needed
Everything you wanted
She provided and you were happy
But as you grew, your demands grew
She gave all that she could
And you took and you took
Off you went, sustained by all your Mother had given you
Never thinking of her, never thinking of the cost of your demands
But it wasn’t enough
You needed more and more and more
You came back to find your mother
She had always provided for you
But she was gone
She had nothing left to give you
You had taken it all
And had given nothing in return
Day 12: March 19
Image Reflections: Mekota Fogg and Anonymous

“God has connected us to creation. God is damaged by our sin and greed. The blood of Christ has been shed for us, but we have to stop the Earth’s bleeding. Nature is no longer able to fly free and open, but it is confined by our industrialization. We as God’s creation can leave behind our greed to give the winds back and become one complete tree instead of our own broken branches grounded by grace.”
-MeKota Fogg

“Mother Nature, is money the source of the pain? I see pain, the inability to move.”
-Anonymous
Day 13: March 20
A Reflection by Madeline Tallman

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. 11 And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.’ 12 And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. (Mark 1:9-12)

Out of the water, the heavens torn apart, the Spirit descending like a dove, and driven into the wilderness. The story of Jesus’ baptism, as told by Mark, is almost creation whiplash. These elements of the earth, and even elements beyond the earth, swirl together in this story about the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. Other gospels focus on the people involved, but Mark emphasizes the elements. God’s affirmation of Jesus’ ministry is communicated through that which God has created. A river. The heavens. A dove. The wilderness. Decidedly non-human things.

My own baptism was a lot closer to what people experience today in mainline protestant congregations. An infant in my parents’ arms, the pastor poured water over my bald baby head and declared my sins forgiven, the cross of Christ marking me forever. Surrounded by godparents and the congregation, I was welcomed into the family of God – made up of humans.

What if these two baptismal experiences could collide? The human with the non-human. All of it the creation of God. What if we recognized our baptismal promises of new life in the natural cycle of this earth? What if we saw our own baptism reflected in creation’s continuous baptism? Leonardo Boff writes, “Of course, the entire universe is involved in making the human being; but it is not only the human being that it makes but all other beings as well.”

Climate change makes humans the center of creation, the purpose for creation, and the authoritarian over creation. Our fight for greed and control becomes the golden calf in the story of humanity. A story made up only of humans.

And yet, baptism isn’t just the beginning of a new life; it’s a calling to live into a new life. A calling to live into the wonders that God created and to renounce the powers of this world that rebel against God. Climate change is a power that tries it’s hardest to rebel against God. And living into our baptisms means doing all we can to rebel right back. We are called into a new life, where creation – the human and non-human alike – are called beloved.

Day 14: March 21
An Action Item by Sarah Derrick

This action item is written in collaboration with ELCA Advocacy’s call to action on Opposing a Time Limit on Food Benefits (https://secure2.convio.net/elca/site/Advocacy?cmd=display&page=UserAction&id=1115)

We know that hunger is a crisis deeply connected to climate change. Changing weather patterns, drought, surplus rain, and rising sea levels are all contributing to changes in how food is raised and grown, affecting access to healthy and nutritious food here in the United States and around the world. Currently, the Department of Agriculture (USDA) has proposed a Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) rule that would put time limits on food benefits for unemployed and underemployed people who can’t document a designated number of weekly work hours or job training. People who cannot meet the documentation requirement would lose SNAP eligibility after three months regardless of how hard they are trying to find work or advance job skills.*

Access to nutritious food is a human right, and as we strive for a world whose climate can support sustainable agricultural practices, we also remember those are facing hunger today, and we commit to speaking out to our elected officials to protect SNAP benefits.

Register your opposition to the Proposed Rule by the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) by making a public comment before April 2, 2019 on "Requirements for Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents."

Reasons to oppose the rule:
- Sidesteps Congress, which rejected these changes when it enacted the 2018 Farm Bill.
- Causes serious harm to individuals who cannot afford to lose benefits on which they rely for daily bread.
- Does not improve the health outcomes or employment outlook of those impacted by the proposed rule.
- Harms grocery retailers and agricultural producers by reducing the amount of SNAP dollars available to spur local economic activity.*

Here is a sample letter from which you can draft your own letter of opposition, addressed to the US Department of Agriculture:*

U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

To Whom It May Concern:
I am writing to comment in opposition to USDA's Proposed Rulemaking on SNAP requirements and services for Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs).

As a person of faith, I believe in the dignity of work and the value of standing up for those working to lift themselves out of poverty in the United States. I am opposed to this rule because

[Add your own story of how you have experienced the importance of SNAP Benefits: yourself or people you know]

I strongly oppose the proposed rule that would expose even more people to the arbitrary food cutoff policy by limiting state flexibility regarding area waivers and individual exemptions. By the Administration's own calculations, the proposed rule would take food away from 755,000 low-income Americans, cutting food benefits by $15 billion over ten years. The Administration does not estimate any improvements in health or employment among the affected population.

The Administration proposed rule seeks to ignore the intent of Congress, which just concluded a review and reauthorization of SNAP in the 2018 Farm Bill and did not make the changes proposed. The rules governing areas' eligibility for waivers and individual exemptions have been in place for nearly 20 years. In that time, the waiver rules have proven to be reasonable, transparent, and manageable for states to operationalize.

As a person of faith, I strongly oppose the proposed rule that would expose even more people to the arbitrary SNAP food cutoff policy and harm our community.

Sincerely,
[Name]
[Address]
[City, State, Zip Code]
[Your email]

(*Source: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Advocacy, “Oppose Time Limits on Food Benefits)
Day 15: March 22
Prayer of Gaia by Eddie Rosa Fuentes

Almighty God
My father, my mother, my creator
I need your help
I need you.

Do you know who I am?
It is me, your beloved creation
Some people call me Gaia
and others Pachamama

Lord, I am desperate,
I don’t know what to do!
You gave me a responsibility
But I have failed
You gave me the responsibility
Of sustaining life
But I have failed!

Where are you Lord?

Everyday more and more species are dying.
And I try, and I try, but what I do is not sufficient
I try to produce good conditions for your creation
To survive, but I am not able.

Where are you, God?

I know that everything you created was Good
Not just Good, but supremely good.
But it is so hard to understand
How that last specie you created
Cannot coexist with the rest of creation.
I do not understand
How you give them the opportunity
To use your creation to feed, protect themselves
And enjoy
But instead of taking care of your creation,
What they always want is to, like they said,
Capitalize things, and they end up forgetting
The purpose you have created them for
—Coexistence.
Where are you God?
Have you seen how they harvest the food
And they send it to a place with thousands
Of fruits and vegetables
So they can choose,
But when they do not choose
That food start to get rot and
They just throw it away.
Meanwhile, members of their same specie
Are dying because of hunger.
They take the food from themselves
They kill each other.

Where are you God?

I have tried to communicate with them.
I have sent drought, floods, I have changed
The trajectories of hurricanes
To see if they can understand, but they don’t.
God give me the capacity to speak their same language,
Allow me to articulate in words
What is necessary for them to understand
So it’s not too late.

However, It seems it is too late.
Amen.
Day 16: March 23

Let me sing for my beloved
my love-song concerning his vineyard:
My beloved had a vineyard
on a very fertile hill.
He dug it and cleared it of stones,
and planted it with choice vines;
he built a watchtower in the midst of it,
and hewed out a wine vat in it;
he expected it to yield grapes,
but it yielded wild grapes.
And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem
and people of Judah,
judge between me
and my vineyard.
What more was there to do for my vineyard
that I have not done in it?
When I expected it to yield grapes,
why did it yield wild grapes?
And now I will tell you
what I will do to my vineyard.
I will remove its hedge,
and it shall be devoured;
I will break down its wall,
and it shall be trampled down.
I will make it a waste;
it shall not be pruned or hoed,
and it shall be overgrown with briers and thorns;
I will also command the clouds
that they rain no rain upon it.
For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts
is the house of Israel,
and the people of Judah
are his pleasant planting;
he expected justice,
but saw bloodshed;
righteousness,
but heard a cry!

Isaiah 5:1–7 (NRSV)
“No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; for each tree is known by its own fruit. Figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.”

Luke 6:43–45 (NRSV)
Day 17: March 25
A Prayer by Cassandra Nagle

Our Creator,
who lives and reigns and moves within us,
You are holy, and precious, and good.
May your creation thrive.
May your vision prevail
within us, around us, among us.
Shower us with your grace.
Wash away our brokenness and pain.
Help us extend grace to ourselves, to others, to creation.
Lead us along the path of peace.
Instill in us a desire to protect creation and created beings.
You are love. You are peace. You are hope.
Forever and always.
Amen
Day 18: March 26
A Reflection by Adam Dowd

War is costly. We often think of the cost of war in terms of number of lives lost or perhaps the price tag that comes with acquiring arms and buying bombs. We may even consider the value of young soldiers’ humanity being traded for “peace” at home and abroad. What we often fail to consider is the cost of militarization on the environment. The U.S. Military is one of the leading polluters in the world. Why does this get overlooked? Unlike other forms of military costs, it can’t be dressed up with patriotic words like “service” or “defense.” There is no way to spin the very real damage done to the environment by depleted uranium, gas, jet fuel, munitions and ordnance, and chemicals like Agent Orange which was specifically designed to erode plant life and suppress its regrowth. Very few people are willing to critique the military as a major polluter because it can be considered unpatriotic. However, the harm posed to the environment from continual involvement in war is a international threat.

Jesus tells us whoever lives by the sword will die by the sword. But it is not only human beings who are dying. There is no way to slow Global Climate Change without reducing militarization and U.S. Imperialism. If we want to bring God’s reign here on earth, we must look towards the vision cast by the prophet Isaiah and start beating our swords – and bombs, and guns, and tanks – into plowshares. We need to rid ourselves of tools for war and turn instead to tools that will cultivate the earth. Instead of being at war with the planet, we need to tend its wounds and care for it.
Day 19: March 27
Image Reflections: Amber Kalina, Karl Anliker, and Anonymous

“As a nurturer, the Earth is happy to give of herself. As a lover, her life is bound to the lives of all that grows, breathes, and exists. What care she provides. Yet, what exploitation we return... when we treat her as a slave, and when we see her goodness as only for us.”
- Amber Kalina

“Is she burning and consumed by greed? Or is she rising with wings towards the infinite possibilities of her endless branches?”
- Karl Anliker

“The angel has arrived.
Holy rage consumes
the cotton paper.
Like the embers of a wildfire,
A promise of a new hope.
The angel has arrived.”
- Anonymous
Day 20: March 28
A Prayer for Creation in Ecological Crisis by Kate Gerike

“In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.” [Genesis 1:1-3]

Lord, we stand in awe, wonder, and fear at the power, complexity, and vastness of you and your creation. We look at the world and see the pain and suffering of your world, this world that we live in, your environment, and your creatures devalued. We mourn what is lost and cannot be recovered. We grapple with our role in its destruction. We witness the power of your creation through extreme temperatures, hurricanes, floods, tornados, earthquakes, and fires. And we are afraid.

“God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.’” [Genesis 1:28]

Lord, in our actions, we have participated in the dominance of humanity. And we have seen, firsthand, the damage that dominance driven by greed, self-preservation, and ignorance has brought to your creation. Instead of turning our backs, show us how to bear witness to this pain. Show us how to wrestle with the consequences of our actions. Help us to embrace a more expansive vision of life, to support the wholeness of your creation, and to align our actions with how you would wish us to be in the world.

“God saw everything that God had made, and indeed, it was very good.” [Genesis 1:31]

Lord, help us not forget that your creation is good. You looked at your creation and seven times you called it “good.” In our grief, in our guilt, in our fear, remind us that you also created us to love, to be joyful, to find peace. Free us to embrace the “goodness” of your creation.

“So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that God had done in creation.” [Genesis 2:3]

Lord, we ask not for permission to turn away from the work of restoration but that we might feel rejuvenation in our moments of rest. We ask not that you take away our feelings but that you embolden us not to “feel” in a vacuum.
Help us to rest – if only for a moment – in your blessed seventh day, so that we might be sustained for the work you have called us to do. Amen.
Day 21: March 29
A Reflection and Prayer by Christina M. Montgomery (She/her/hers)

Isaiah 58:6-12 (NRSV)

So often the ways we carry out social justice become siloed. We do not consider the interdependence of our world and ignore the impact of our actions. However, you cannot care for humanity without caring for creation. This passage from Isaiah makes a connection between the justice and renewal that is needed for humanity and creation. Do you see the ways caring for creation is directly related to caring for the poor, the disenfranchised, and the forgotten? For instance, what groups are affected by polluted water? Or, as climate change advances and global temperatures become more extreme, what populations are at risk of death due to exposure? How can you care for creation and humanity simultaneously? No matter who you are, you must take caring for creation as an urgent call to action.

Let us pray.
God of all creation, we as fallen people are greedy and concerned with our own welfare above the welfare of your creation. We seek to be more than what you created us to be and in doing so forget our call to love one another and care for the gifts you have given to us. Embolden us in your unfailing love to take on the tasks that you have given us to care, protect, and restore all of your creation, that which we see value in and that which our limited scope cannot see its worth. Guide us to seek justice for the earth and one another with your merciful and sustaining hand. With all creation we cry, Amen.
Day 22: March 30  
Scripture: Exodus 32:7–14; Luke 15:1–10

The Lord said to Moses, “Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf, and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!’” The Lord said to Moses, “I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are. Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation.”

But Moses implored the Lord his God, and said, “O Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, ‘It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth’? Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, ‘I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.’” And the Lord changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.

Exodus 32:7–14 (NRSV)

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

So he told them this parable: “Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. “Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Luke 15:1–10 (NRSV)
Day 23: April 1
A Reflection by Bristol Reading

When my husband Michael and I moved to Chicago so I could start seminary at LSTC, Michael took a new job in public affairs and environmental sustainability for McDonald’s Corporation. This was a somewhat ironic job change for a few reasons. First: we don’t eat meat or dairy, due to health and environmental concerns, which means we can’t eat much at McDonald’s. Second: Michael had previously spent years working for Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), a nonprofit that leverages corporate partnerships to achieve broad environmental goals. EDF’s first corporate partnership was actually with McDonald’s, working to replace those polystyrene clamshell burger containers with more sustainable paper packaging.

When Michael started working for McDonald’s, he got to see the same issues from the corporate perspective. It’s complicated. When our careers came up in polite conversation – mine with the church and his with McDonald’s – people tended to be baffled, or even upset. Our respective employers rarely elicited a neutral reaction. Throughout his career in corporate sustainability, Michael and I have had many hard conversations about the ethics of large corporations. I’ve also learned a lot from him and his work.

The reality is that market-based solutions can have a huge impact on the environment, and there are effective and ineffective ways to pressure a brand to move on a specific sustainability issue. Lots of people choose to simply opt-out of consuming certain products that they don’t feel are ethical.

Sometimes, though, you really love a product and want to be able to consume it, or, sometimes, there is no accessible, affordable, or sustainable alternative to something you need.

Whatever your specific environmental concern – sourcing, waste, consumer safety, etc. – consider pressuring companies to make change with your voice as well as your dollars. Here are three basic steps of what that could look like:

1. Work with brands you love
   There are plenty of ways to put pressure on companies you hate, and you can also consider interacting with companies you love. When you demonstrate that you’re a loyal customer, brands have a financial stake in your continued patronage. Your concerns become their concerns. When possible, collaborate with other customers of that brand who share your concern and communicate directly and personally with someone who works at the company (rather than, say, hitting up their general press inbox). You can also get involved with organizations that have strong corporate partnerships already in place, like EDF, Ceres, World Wildlife Fund, or The Nature Conservancy.
2. Demonstrate that you know the issue
Do your research to understand what the company and others like it are already doing on the issue. Companies are absolutely thinking about future impacts of climate change, and when one player in the industry makes a significant climate commitment, it puts greater pressure on competitors to step up and do likewise. Communicate that you’re happy to see your targeted brand making progress on environmental issues, and use that as a launchpad to ask for future action you’d like them to consider. Consumers are not responsible for figuring out large-scale solutions, but you bring more to the table when you understand the landscape.

3. Stay in the conversation
If your concern gets traction from a brand, be prepared to understand the many different constraints they face in pursuing a solution. For companies of any size, making major operational or strategic changes is time-consuming, complex, and costly. Consider what compromises you as a customer might be willing to make, on price for instance, in order to move toward the goal. And don’t forget to keep communicating with other people. If you really trust a brand, share about their products with people you know. Brand advocates can be incredibly influential, which is also what makes them incredibly valuable to companies. That brings us right back to first step: when you’re a valuable customer, you have more leverage to make the brand want what you want.
Day 24: April 2
A Poem by Remy Remmers

I've walked these paths
    In the summer
    In the fall
    In the winter
    In the spring
    In the summer again
I have watched them fade and grow
    Have I not done the same?
We are cyclical creatures
    creatures of habit
Yet, in these woods
    there is always new life
as if to show you it could -
    - survive anything
Yet these paths are never quite the same
but enough to bring me back
    to bring peace
Day 25: April 3
An Action Item by Mathew Berger

We give you thanks, O God, for the waters of life:
For water to bathe in, water to drink,
For waters to play in and waters of beauty,
For water that inspires wonder, and water that gives life to our planet.
We give you thanks, O God, for the waters of life.
We give you thanks O God, for the waters of this place:
For water from our tap, for rain and snow,
For Lake Michigan and the Chicago River.
We give you thanks, O God, for the waters of this place.

This is how one particular Thanksgiving for Baptism begins. In worship we often praise God for the ways in which water sustains our life. Scientists have reported that the water cycle is drastically impacted by climate change. Climate change disrupts “drinking water supplies, sanitation, food and energy production.”

Our baptismal life sets us free to “care for others and the world God made.”

One way we can care for God’s world is by advocating for just and equitable legislation like the Green New Deal. The Green New Deal aims to “secure clean air and water, climate and community resilience, healthy food, access to nature, and a sustainable environment for all.” You can read more about the Green New Deal at http://newconsensus.com/green-new-deal/

Our elected representatives need to know that this is something we need them to act on. Your voice matters; take action by calling your representative and tell them to endorse a Green New Deal.

Here’s a script from 350 action to help you make that call:

Hi, my name is [YOUR NAME], and I’m calling to ask that [REP’S NAME] support a plan to stop the climate crisis that’s actually in line with what the world’s top scientists and United Nations say is necessary. That starts with them supporting Congresswoman Ocasio–Cortez’s special committee to develop a plan for a Green New Deal bill.

Please endorse Alexandria Ocasio–Cortez’s Resolution for a Select Committee on a Green New Deal.

A Green New Deal can get us off fossil fuels to 100% renewable energy over the next decade in a way that prioritizes the needs of low-income and people of
color communities who have been on the frontlines of climate impacts. It can put people back to work earning a family-wage. It’s a bold, progressive solution at the scale of the crisis we face.

Can [REP’S NAME] support the resolution?

Thank you.

This call script is taken from https://act.350.org/call/house-dems-support-a-green-new-deal/
You can find more information including your elected representative and their contact information at that web address.
Day 26: April 4  
Image Reflections: Daniel Collins, Cassandra Nagle and Anonymous

“Hail Mary, Full of Grace, the Lord is with thee, Blessed art thou and thy suffering children upon the earth. Herod builds a wall around them and destroys them before birth while poisoned water and suffocating air seek to kill the last tree. Intercede for us in our indifference even til our last breath, Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.”  
- Daniel Collins

“Creation has great value. The earth is both resolute and constantly changing. Is she in pain? Is the earth in pain? What are we going to do about it? How can we grow in awareness of what she needs?”  
- Cassandra Nagle

“I see a woman who is like a tree and money swirling around her, harming her. She is brown, women of color are the most affected. It makes me reflect on the gendered connections to the environment and the earth.”  
- Anonymous
Day 27: April 5

A Prayer by Sarah Coen-Frei

Hi God,

I’m pissed and also ashamed.

I’m pissed because things are really falling apart. The earth is really broken right now. She is literally screaming and begging us to stop hurting her and we won’t. She wants a different kind of relationship, one where there is mutuality and respect instead of abuse and violation. And I don’t blame her.

I hate how we are gaslighting her. She responds to our harm through extremes in weather and I hear people say “can’t be global warming if it’s getting colder.” Are they serious? Or do they just not want to feel the shame I feel right now? Or do they not want to make any changes?

I hate how she is about to walk out the door, and we sit there and say “sounds like too much change too quickly.” We don’t make the effort to even ask her to stay or make a damn promise to change.

I’m ashamed because I could be doing more, I should be doing more to protect her, to amplify her voice. And I want transform my shame into guilt. Because shame is about self and guilt is about actions.

I need corporation and governments to feel the weight of responsibility and guilt for their actions and inactions. Their abuse is both violent and neglectful.

Sometimes I feel hopeless. But other times I think about salvation. I know it’s coming for earth too God. I know you haven’t forgotten her or us. It gives me energy and hope again. I pray it does for her too.

My relationship with earth has been estranged at times and I don’t know if you feel comfortable being a go-between but if you do, tell her I love her. Let her know she isn’t alone. Maybe remind her about salvation.

Thanks for listening,

Sarah
Day 28: April 6
Scripture: Exodus 12:21–27; John 11:45–57

Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go, select lambs for your families, and slaughter the passover lamb. Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood in the basin. None of you shall go outside the door of your house until morning. For the Lord will pass through to strike down the Egyptians; when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over that door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you down. You shall observe this rite as a perpetual ordinance for you and your children. When you come to the land that the Lord will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this observance. And when your children ask you, ‘What do you mean by this observance?’ you shall say, ‘It is the passover sacrifice to the Lord, for he passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt, when he struck down the Egyptians but spared our houses.’” And the people bowed down and worshiped.

Exodus 12:21–27 (NRSV)

Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what he had done. So the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council, and said, “What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation.” But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all! You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.” He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God. So from that day on they planned to put him to death. Jesus therefore no longer walked about openly among the Jews, but went from there to a town called Ephraim in the region near the wilderness; and he remained there with the disciples. Now the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves. They were looking for Jesus and were asking one another as they stood in the temple, “What do you think? Surely he will not come to the festival, will he?” Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that anyone who knew where Jesus was should let them know, so that they might arrest him.

John 11:45–57 (NRSV)
Day 29: April 8
A Reflection by Vinod Wesley

Earth Communities as Eco Missionaries (A Reflection on John 4)

Introduction: In the month of March 2014, an important caption in an Indian newspaper called “The Hindu” captivated everybody’s mind in the context of climate change. It said “Women farmers leading the way – The Tamil Nadu women's collective raises crops awareness in India”[1], was an important eye opener for many that the solutions for climate crisis today can emerge from the margins. This is a real story highlighting that the “suffering becoming the Saviors”, a story where the “missionized becoming the missionaries” today.

It has been widely recognized now that the patterns, protagonism and perspectives of the margins can only save the earth in the context of climate crisis as climate justice is rooted in social injustice. What is important for the Indian context is that these protagonists and preservers of the earth are the Dalit communities today along with the tribal and other subaltern communities. The social ecological perspective and the recognition that ‘cry of the earth as the cry of the poor’ not only locate the mission at the margin but recognizing the agency of the subalterns attempting for mission from the margins and inviting missionaries from the margin.

For the Dalits in India, Climate justice includes primarily justice and liberation from the caste system which further exacerbates climate impacts on them. In this justice mission the Dalit communities have become active agents in the struggle for mitigation and adaptation thus providing a model for ‘subaltern(Dalits) as eco-missionaries’ to save the world.

John chapter 4 records one of the most interesting conversations of Samaritan Women and Jesus happening around water. A conversation, which signifies the breaking of racial boundaries, sharing of resources, exchange of knowledge and wisdom and willingness to move forward with the messiness of life, yet being the transforming agents for the community. In the Indian theological context Samaritan women are compared with Dalit women relating to the caste experiences faced by them.

The questions that the Samaritan woman asked Jesus, portrays the similar courage of the Dalit women raising their voices and questioning existing structures.

9 The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?”
11 “Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?” Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?

15 The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.”

19 “Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”

28 Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?” They came out of the town and made their way toward him.

What I see in these above texts are the courageous voice of the Samaritan woman questioning and highlighting the racial divide, a practical question of getting one’s livelihood resources, the spiritual quest for a sustainable and peaceful living, the urge to unite communities for combined efforts towards transformation and the willingness to take the life-saving truths and strategies to everybody.

I see the similar attitude in the life of Dalit women combating climate change in India. In December 2009 during the Copenhagen summit three Dalit women who attended the summit burned their badges outside the conference area. This created a great spark in the media. When Narsamma Masanagari, Manjula Tammali and Sammamma Begari travelled from India to Copenhagen to take part in the UN conference on climate change, they wanted answers to some pressing questions:[2]

“We came to find out if there is a real struggle against climate change, if the conference would include small and marginalised people like us, or if it is only for the rich? Climate communities must have a place in such a forum. It is important to bring in the voices of the small and the excluded. If you really want to understand climate change, then come and talk to people like us,”

These questions are very similar to the Samaritan woman in John 4. Through these questions the Dalit women point out that the rejection of Dalit women in climate talks is similar to the exclusion made to them due to caste oppression. On the other side they are the earth communities who work with the earth and care for both the earth and their communities. “We were once salves to caste system, then now to intensive agricultural system and now to climate change also” was one of the most recurring statements of the Dalit communities regarding climate change. In spite of all these things struggles Dalit women have been showing to this world that through organic and alternative agricultural methods solutions for climate change emerge from the margins. “Tamil Nadu Women’s Collective” is a South India collective a more than 100,000 Dalit women engage in organic and alternative agricultural method. It is a very democratic process, a grass root effort combating climate change,
caste system, capitalist development strategies and sharing the messianic truth that their method can be saving act for the earth and earth communities. The Samaritan woman in John 4 and the Dalit women in India teach us that we need to pay attention to the alternative and inclusive vision of the earth communities, to respect their agency and their missional engagements, to invite ourselves to be partner in their mission, to respect their religiosity and their spirituality, to value their earth based epistemologies. The Dalit women today in different parts of the country are the Samaritan women who challenge the dominant structures in initiating new discourses coming out of their oppressive structures to save the world. Dalit women today exhibit the same passion, intuition, courage, and the sharing of the gospel for the liberation of the community like that of the Samaritan woman. These women who live with the earth – ‘the organic women’ have the living waters i.e the solution to save the subaltern earth and earth communities from victimization of human greed with their sustainable and organic methods.

The smaller narratives from different Dalit communities will give us the importance in understanding the pluralism of sustainable epistemologies and life forms which will promote biodiversity challenging the monolithic profit oriented market practices causing climate crisis today. Dalit communities as the climate and eco-missionaries as the protagonists and preservers of the earth today defines mission as “from below” and also claims the social space for all other subaltern communities in affirming their agency and claiming their commitment in the saving mission of earth. They teach us that the earth communities are not only the victims but Eco-missionaries today. The Dalit women Narasamma said in protest in the Copenhagen “come to us”. This is an invitation from the earth communities. Let us join with these missionaries to save the earth.


Day 30: April 9
A Reflection by Kelsey Kresse

We all have a self interest in working for justice for our environment. Each and every one of our lives literally depend on major change in the way the inhabitants of this Earth treat God’s creation. However, sometimes the overwhelming dread of the impending destruction of the Earth can keep us from seeing how locally important these issues are to us as individuals. Whether you have a very developed self interest in climate justice or are just starting to understand how this work is important to you, visioning your self interest in a concrete way can be a great way to develop your stake in this work. Join me in a tactile activity! Gather photos, reminders, or fragments of your favorite places in creation. You can gather these things physically in the form of samples of water, flower cuttings, or printed photos OR you could do a digital collage of images, sounds and your own words to describe the places most important to you. You could even do a combination of these things. Gather your markers of your favorite places in creation and think about how they are damaged by humans, are made better by thoughtful intervention, or are being left to reclaim themselves to the earth. Meditate on how these places in creation make you feel, bring you joy, and renew your spirit. Think about how these places are affected by climate change, thoughtless human intervention, depletion of resources or greed? Use your collection of images and symbols to ground yourself interest in this work, return to it when you need a reminder and add to it as time goes on in an ever evolving self interest for climate justice.
Day 31: April 10
A Prayer by Jason Fugate

Dear Lord,

Thank you for all that You have made.
Allow us to move past our selfish ways.
Open our eyes to see the wondrous world You created.
Cast out the greed from our hearts.
Help us think of those who are most affected by the damage we do to Your world.
Protect all species from pollution and destruction.
Dispel the belief that all ecological damage can be undone.
Create the sense of urgency necessary to enact change.
Let us be great servants for Mother Earth.
End the desecration of Your handiwork.
Remind us of the beauties beyond our world and the vastness You have created.
Grant us the wisdom to care for this world for generations to come.
Thank you for all that You have made.

Amen.
Day 32: April 11
A Reflection by Francisco Herrera

“The sun rises and the sun sets and rushes back again to where it rises.”
Ecclesiastes 1:5

Lent entered my life in Geneva, Switzerland during a cold, grey Spring in 2002. The days were cold because about one month before I had been unceremoniously dropped by my conducting teacher for being disorganized and inconsistent, colder still when my girlfriend back in the United States then dumped me two weeks after my teacher; and grey because now numb and free of the two lone tethers of my life I was floating and unsure of what to do.

Ecclesiastes knew, however – the Teacher had answers.

“What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun. Is there a thing of which it is said, “See, this is new”? It has already been, in the ages before us.” (1:9 - 10)

Ecclesiastes and me were everywhere together those six weeks – in late-night café discussions with other patrons, in silent corners during breaks in orchestra rehearsal, even naked under sheets and alone as I waited for sleep to put a merciful end to another pointless day. Music and relationship had been my fuel and guides for years, but despite my dedication they up and left me one day without even the slightest feint of a goodbye. Making it worse was the fact that I was stuck in a land not my own, speaking a language that was not my own, and having to travel by bus for 40 minutes just to find a friend that could watch over me as I cried – healing was slow and finding a new course in such placid waters was even harder.

Yet unperturbed by my desolation, Ecclesiastes calmly reminded me how, despite their novelty, my stunted feelings were nothing new, nothing new at all. Precious, yes. Holy, yes. MINE, yes – but not new. And chances were if I kept living life in the rich and vulnerable ways I had been I would be ravaged by such suffering again. And though this knowledge didn’t ease my pain, it did tame it.

And it was my first church community that acted as the midwife to all of this messy, screaming, freshly born insight – the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Geneva (www.genevalutheran.ch). The congregation’s worship life and coffee talks with their pastor, the Rev. Dr. Stephen Larson, helped me make the crucial link between my own struggles and the primal groan that is Jesus’ inexorably loud shout on Good Friday (15:37). And this link not only helped me
stabilize my pain, but even helped me connect it to both humanity and God’s own despair, giving timid strength to my wearied spirit.

And the Teacher had something to say about them, too, this new church home, reminding me across the centuries how...

...two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help. Again, if two lie together, they keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone? And though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one. A threefold cord is not quickly broken. (4:9 – 12)

So for many a cold, gray Spring day I rose early to study and practice and pray as I tuned my viola with my ear and attuned my heart to God’s mysterious will. As I patiently awaited Easter, the Lord gently blew life onto the secret fire burning beneath so much dead ash, and its cautious glow eventually illuminated a next and eternal guide for my soul.

The cross.

The cross and the promise that something terrible and amazing lay on the other side.

And the sun rose and the sun set and then rushed back to where it rose and likewise I rose and set and rushed and rose again along with it.
Day 33: April 12
Image Reflections: Jason Fugate and Kelsey Kresse

“Excess strangles creation. It is time to let God breathe new life into the world.”
- Jason Fugate

“Mother earth weeps for us to end the monetization of her materials. She is bleeding and we are selling her loss of life for a profit. She can recycle some of the waste we throw at her but she cannot handle all of the poison we flood her roots. We are attacking her from land, sea, soil, and air. She is inundated with the poison of our greed. She waits for us to care for her as we are called.”
- Kelsey Kresse
Day 34: April 13  

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: These are the appointed festivals of the Lord that you shall proclaim as holy convocations, my appointed festivals. Six days shall work be done; but the seventh day is a sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation; you shall do no work: it is a sabbath to the Lord throughout your settlements. These are the appointed festivals of the Lord, the holy convocations, which you shall celebrate at the time appointed for them. In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, at twilight, there shall be a passover offering to the Lord, and on the fifteenth day of the same month is the festival of unleavened bread to the Lord; seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not work at your occupations. For seven days you shall present the Lord’s offerings by fire; on the seventh day there shall be a holy convocation: you shall not work at your occupations.

Leviticus 23:1–8 (NRSV)

Now the festival of Unleavened Bread, which is called the Passover, was near. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to put Jesus to death, for they were afraid of the people. Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was one of the twelve; he went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers of the temple police about how he might betray him to them. They were greatly pleased and agreed to give him money. So he consented and began to look for an opportunity to betray him to them when no crowd was present. Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and prepare the Passover meal for us that we may eat it.” They asked him, “Where do you want us to make preparations for it?” “Listen,” he said to them, “when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him into the house he enters and say to the owner of the house, ‘The teacher asks you, “Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?”’ He will show you a large room upstairs, already furnished. Make preparations for us there.” So they went and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

Day 35: April 15
A Reflection by Elle Dowd

My children are from Sierra Leone; a small, West African country formerly colonized by Great Britain. In August of 2017, after years of paperwork and visits, I was headed back to Sierra Leone with Adam and Alice to pick up Jessica and bring her to the United States as an official and legal part of the Dowd Family. We left just after completing CPE, with only a day in between to pack. In the days leading up to travel our trip became suddenly unclear as reports of flooding and fatal mudslides in the capital city of Freetown came pouring in.

We were able to continue with our trip and to bring Jessica to the United States. But although my family was relatively unaffected this time, it made very real to me the ways that climate change were already affecting countries like Sierra Leone. And while some countries can afford preventative measures to deal with the crisis that comes with increasing volatile weather caused by climate change, Sierra Leone – ravaged by colonialism, a recent civil war, and most recently Ebola – lacks the infrastructure to prevent or respond widespread human suffering.

There are people in Sierra Leone that I care about. Villages that birthed my girls. Children that grew up with my children. Extended family members who have become my family. None of them deserve to suffer consequences of a global catastrophe. No one does.

Over 1,000 people died in the mudslides that summer. Out of nowhere, the earth swallowed them whole and entombed them there. When we say that global climate change hurts people of color and the global south first and worst, it is a reality that is already happening.
Day 36: April 16
A Prayerful Submission by Maeve Schurz

This is “The Canticle of the Creatures” a Franciscan prayer from 1225.

I heard this prayer from a Catholic Theological Union student in my class on
caring for the dying and bereaved. I love the beautiful imagery of creation as
family—brother, mother, sister. We should all view creation as our relatives,
someone we love unconditionally and someone we care for and defend like
family.

Most High, all-powerful, good Lord,
Yours are the praises, the glory, and the honor, and all blessing,
To You alone, Most High, do they belong,
and no human is worthy to mention Your name.
Praised be You, my Lord, with all Your creatures,
especially Sir Brother Sun,
Who is the day and through whom You give us light.
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor;
and bears a likeness of You, Most High One.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,
in heaven You formed them clear and precious and beautiful.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind,
and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather,
through whom You give sustenance to Your creatures.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,
who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
through whom You light the night,
and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.
Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth,
who sustains and governs us,
and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs.
Day 37: April 17
A Reflection by Kadi Billman

...those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”

Isaiah 40:31

Inspired by Henry David Thoreau’s statement, “There is no remedy for love but to love more,” Jan Richardson’s “Blessing for the Brokenhearted” resists easy comfort for sorrow, but marvels

...the mystery of how a heart so broken can go on beating, as if it were made for precisely this—

as if it knows the only cure for love is more of it,

as if it sees the heart’s sole remedy for breaking is to love still,

as if it trusts that its own persistent pulse is the rhythm of a blessing we cannot begin to fathom but will save us nonetheless.

There is a park called Big Marsh, not much more than a half hour drive from
Hyde Park (11555 South Stony Island Avenue), where it is possible to see eagles and great blue herons. Some of the ruins of nine steel mills are still visible in this region. The land is scarred by what the mills left behind. Communities still live with the aftermath of the mills’ rise and fall.

It is a marvel that a land so devastated and broken by toxins in the air and soil still continues to exhibit such a “persistent pulse” for life. It is a marvel that people whose bodies were so damaged by hard labor in the mills and whose hearts were so broken by the foreclosure of those mills (which was accompanied by the loss of pensions and—for so many—the opportunity to earn a true living wage) still continue to beat, especially through loved ones who still abide in and hold dear Chicago’s old steel mill neighborhoods.

It is this persistent pulse, this still-beating heart in all of Creation, which call to my imagination as I approach Lent. I savor the Creation imagery that fills Jesus’ encounters (“Consider the lilies…” “A sower went out to sow…” “I longed to gather you as a mother hen gathers her chicks…”), and rail against the power of the forces that break our planet, our communities, our lives. It is hard to hold it together: this wonder, this rage; this hope, this despair; this beauty, this ugliness. It is even harder to face my own complicity in those forces that undermine and destroy what most gives life; the seduction of the short haul gain privileged over what matters most.

So I approach Lent with a prayer of wonder and longing for that “persistent pulse” that moves the eagle to soar, refocuses our gaze on the lilies of the field rather than Solomon’s robes, and energizes us for the struggle to preserve and protect the life of our planet. May our hearts continue to beat in rhythm together, in solidarity with all of Creation, trusting the One who longed to gather all the “chicks” together, and whose heart continues to beat in them all. Amen.
Day 38: April 18
A Reflection by Tobita Chow

*For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.*

(Romans 8:19–21)

If you go to your closet and check the tags on your clothes, you will probably find some that say, “Made in Bangladesh.”

Imagine the Bangladeshi garment worker who made that shirt, or those pants. Imagine their hands stitching that piece of clothing together, which you now wear right against your skin.

Statistically, that garment worker is most likely a woman. She is most likely a migrant from a rural part of the country, who hoped to find a better future in the factories in the cities. And she is most likely a climate refugee.

A quarter of the land in Bangladesh is less than 7 feet above sea level. Climate change is causing heavier monsoons, flooding rivers, and rising seas, which are already washing away villages or destroying farmland with salt. Every day thousands of rural Bangladeshis flee to urban areas in order to escape these effects of climate change. The global garment industry, which employs around 4 million people in Bangladesh, draws heavily from this population, and takes advantage of their economic hardship as climate refugees to keep their wages low. (The minimum wage in the garment industry is now $95 per month.)

Although Bangladeshi garment workers are some of the most oppressed and lowest paid workers in the global economy, they are not doomed to powerlessness. Earlier this year, and not for the first time, 50,000 Bangladeshi garment workers went on strike for higher wages, defying arrests, severe police violence, and mass firings. One of the striking workers was shot dead, but this only provoked further strikes. Imagine the courage, conviction, and collective discipline this takes.

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It is sometimes said that climate change is a threat to future generations. This is an understatement. The climate crisis is already here. We see it in extreme weather events in the US, such as the wildfires that raged across California last year. But the impacts are much worse in the Global South (also known as “developing countries” or the “Third World”). Bangladesh is among those at greatest risk, with tens of millions of people set to become climate refugees by 2050. This is a great injustice, as countries like Bangladesh have historically contributed a very tiny fraction of the carbon emissions that cause climate change.

We know that God’s creation is not in vain. Humanity is not doomed to be destroyed by climate change. In “the revealing of the children of God” there is the power to liberate creation – from the desolation of climate change, and from pollution and ecological damage of all kinds. This is God’s promise to us. But this promise seems so distant from us, hidden behind despair over the suffering already caused by climate change, with the prospect of so much more suffering to follow.

We feel separated from God’s promise for a renewed creation in large part because of our separation from each other. Racism and nationalism are powerful forces undermining all attempts to create the kind of bold response we need to address the climate crisis. One way this shows up is in the ways in which environmentalists and other activists in the US often look down on people in the Global South, imagining them as helpless victims, rather than as potential comrades in a shared struggle for a better world. This is to ignore their power, which is to undermine our own. But imagine what would be possible if the children of God – of all nations – revealed themselves by the millions in shared struggle for a better world.
Day 39: April 19
A Reflection by Samantha Nichols

He shall judge between the nations,  
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;  
they shall beat their swords into plowshares,  
and their spears into pruning hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
neither shall they learn war any more.  
Isaiah 2:4

Sitting in the basement of a country church in Wisconsin, my dad talked to parishioners about the nuclear freeze movement. It was the early eighties. After watching Ted Koppel interview Paul Newman about the need for a freeze, my dad reached out to a couple friends at his church. Together, the three of them wrote a letter and distributed it to local congregations so they could educate folks about the issue and help them contact their elected officials.

Sitting on the first floor of the Metro Toronto Convention Center in 2018, I had tears in my eyes as I listened to my dad share his story. I had just attended a moving session on nuclear weapons at the Parliament of the World’s Religions and wanted to learn more about his experiences. I knew he cared about the nuclear freeze movement, but I had no idea he had organized churches around the issue. As a seminarian and community organizer, this is the exact sort of work I understand as central to my call to ministry.

The threat of nuclear catastrophe remains and will get worse as nuclear states seek to modernize their arsenals. Meanwhile, the world is staring down yet another existential threat: climate change.

With these two issues, these threats, these crises, these seemingly insurmountable problems swirling around in my head, the words of the Prophet Isaiah take root in my heart.

“They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.”

What does it mean, today, to beat our swords into plowshares? To beat our spears into pruning hooks?
I think it looks like redirecting the hundreds of billions of dollars the U.S. will spend on nuclear weapons over the next decade towards a just transition to renewable energy. Over half of all federal discretionary spending goes towards the military compared to a mere 3% towards energy and the environment.

The sentiment of this verse is that we are called to transform that which is destructive into creative, useful, and peaceful tools. This is absolutely the time when we must be creative as we are up against a fast-ticking clock, a clock that constantly reminds us of how little time we have left to make a real difference in the face of climate change.

Lent is a time of repentance, an opportunity to turn back towards the God who never turns away from us. This Creating God who gave us the gift of a beautiful and life-giving earth is calling us back, calling us to beat our swords into plowshares, our spears into pruning hooks, our nuclear weapons into green energy, good jobs, and global partnerships.

May we find ourselves in church basements, offices, and sanctuaries speaking to our siblings in Christ, urging them to investigate local, state, and federal budgets to determine where swords and spears are being funded at the expense of all people and our planet. May we come together as God’s children, protecting and preserving that which God has given to us by storming the halls of power and demanding that those who claim to represent us put people and planet first.
Day 40: April 20
A Reflection by Andrew Baumgartner

"With the whole people of God in Christ Jesus, let us pray for the church, those in need, and all of God’s creation."

This is one possible invitation to intercessory prayer suggested by the worship resource *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. Each week, the church has the opportunity to remember before God the created world. Each week, the church asks for assistance in stewarding this world God has made. Each week, the church pleads for the renewal of fields, forests, water sources, and ecosystems. Each week, not long after these prayers are spoken, that same church is sent back into that world, to participate in that which it has prayed for.

Over the last few decades a movement has arisen that has given increased presence and attention to creation and ecological concerns in the liturgy itself. The incorporation of creation into worship is nothing new, of course; from the earliest Christian gatherings the earth has played a crucial role. From the orientation of the worshipping community toward the rising sun in the east, to the cosmic calculation of the date of Easter, to increased awareness of the seasons and the changes they bring, the church’s worship life has been influenced and shaped by creation from the beginning. The modern liturgical renewal movement has accentuated these ancient eco-liturgical practices and has staked the bold claim that the earth itself is a fellow worshipper with us when we gather in the liturgy.

Perhaps you’ve noticed this, even if you haven’t consciously articulated it. The way the light in the worship space changes as the year progresses, creating new angles of sunlight and casting everything in a different shadow. The way the abundant, crashing use of water in baptism looks a lot like waves crashing on a shore. The way Christmas comes just as the days start getting longer in the northern hemisphere and sunlight begins to return.

If we truly include and honor creation in our liturgy and welcome the earth as fellow worshipper, should we not also attend to the brokenness and hurt of the earth as we would any other member of our assemblies who seeks help? The earth is crying out in crisis now. How do you honor the pleas for prayer from our fellow worshipper, the earth? How are you affected by creation’s crying out?
We are called to address climate change not only because it threatens humanity (though it certainly does), but because we are in deep community/communion with the earth, in worship and in our lives. Perhaps if we can experience fellowship with creation in worship we can begin to see the earth not as incidental or simply something from which we can extract resources, but as holy, good, and worthy of protection.

How do you understand care for the earth as part of your baptismal vocation? How does striving for eco-justice intersect with and support other justice work? How have you experienced the answer to prayers for the renewal of the earth, and how is God calling you to be more engaged in that act of renewal?