

Home Worship Service October 18th, 2020

Welcome

We acknowledge the Passamaquoddy People and their stewardship of this land throughout the ages



Opening Words

Just to be is a blessing. Just to live is holy.” Breathe in the warmth and light of the Divine all around you. Give thanks for the wondrous gift of your own life. Receive this day with delight- open to its possibilities for you and for this beautiful and beloved world!

Opening Music

MV 12 Come Touch Our Hearts

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kFua28pCZHq>

[by Gordon Light] Golden Ears United Church

Litany of Praise for Creation

The Earth. . . is a sparkling blue and white jewel... laced with slowly swirling veils of white... like a small pearl in a thick sea of black mystery.

(Edgar Mitchell, US Astronaut)

All creation is a song of praise to God.

O moving force of Wisdom, you encircle the wheel of the cosmos, you encompass all that is, all that has life, in one vast circle.

All creation is a song of praise to God.

It could be that god has not absconded but spread, as our vision and understanding of the universe have spread, to a fabric of spirit and sense so grand and subtle, powerful in a new way that we can only feel blindly of its hem. (Annie Dillard, naturalist writer)

All creation is a song of praise to God.

...stardust is not just fairy-tale magic; it is what we are really made of... (Elisabet Sahtouris, Ecofeminist)

All creation is a song of praise to God.

Great Spirit... give me the strength to walk the soft earth, a relative to all that is!

...all over the earth the faces of living things are all alike...

This is my prayer; hear me! (Black Elk, Oglala Sioux)

All creation is a song of praise to God.

There is not anything new to be born. It has been within you from the beginningless beginning. It has only to be awakened, to become aware of itself in you.

All creation is a song of praise to God.

...for in God we live/ and move/ and have our being. (Acts 17:28)

All creation is a song of praise to God.

When you stand in the presence of the moon, you become a new creation.

...The elementary particles of your body have absorbed an influence and in that sense they - and you - are brand spanking new, a human being resonating everywhere with moonlight. (Brian Swimme, physicist)

All creation is a song of praise to God.

We shall not cease from exploration/ And the end of all our exploring/ Will be to arrive where we started/ And know the place for the first time. (T. S. Eliot, poet)

All creation is a song of praise to God

Readings from Ancient and Modern Wisdom

Matthew 6:25-34. Consider the lilies

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink,* or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your Creator feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?* And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will God not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, “What will we eat?” or “What will we drink?” or “What will we wear?” For your Creator knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kin-dom of God* and God’s righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Wild Geese by Mary Oliver

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
For a hundred miles through the desert repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
Love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
Are moving across the landscape
Over the prairies and the deep trees,
The mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
Are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
The world offers itself to your imagination,
Calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting,
Over and over announcing your place in the family of things.

Reflection

Communing with Creation in these times

This Creation Season

Most every fall, we ponder Creation-
This fall, how can Creation help us through?
Today’s creation litany reminds us- those of all spiritual paths have looked to earth and sky and sea and all that dwells therein,
And found solace, and joy, and awe, and a sense of enduring Divine presence.
And some of you have found this , these last months-
Now, more than ever, Nature has been your refuge, as you swam or paddled or hiked or gardened or walked the dog or explored the Atlantic bubble-
And nature , visible creation, reminded you that some beauty and wonder still remain,
Whatever else may come and go.

But is this enough to get us through this COVID time?

You may well wonder.
I’m likely more of a hermit than you are- but even I am not sure nature replaces all that’s disappeared from life these last few months-
And not everything in nature is pleasant.
The physical world , the physical universe has its own difficult stories-

Stars burning out,
Species becoming extinct,
Natural disasters where there is too much wind and fire or rain or drought. , diseases which snatch away life and health,
the processes of aging and mortality,
Which, the further I get into them, the less I like them.
Being physical beings in a physical world is not always a picnic.

So what do we make of Creation?

We may see Creation as a reason to praise and thank God.

But what of the more painful parts, the breakdowns , the diseases, and dying itself- are we about to give thanks for those?

Do we see them as God's plan?

I can't - I've seen too much suffering.

Do we see them as a product of human sin- humans' eating the forbidden fruit to somehow wrecking what would otherwise have been perfect?

I don't .

Again I've seen too much undeserved suffering.

This I do know- change, constant change , is part of our human condition, part of the world's condition, the universe's condition.

Stars are not forever, our cells are not forever, our bodies are not forever.

We depend on all kinds of things going right in the outside world and in our physical being- and sooner or later, they don't , not any more.

And COVID makes this all even more painfully obvious -

No easy answers, but..

No easy answers - there never were.

Think of Jesus , speaking to his followers on a mountain-

He speaks of life-forms that come and go in a short time-

The grass, the lilies-

As for birds, many baby birds don't make it, and most birds live a lot less long than we do, as far as can be made out.

And yet it's from these short-lived beings that we are to take inspiration-

That they are loved, and cherished, by the Holy One,

Not given an additional life-span, not exempted from mortality or from whatever may shorten their time,

But still dwelling in the Love that outlives everything and everybody,

We dwell in that same Love.

Jesus' first friends expected their lives to be short- they were lucky to make it to 40- illness and death confronted them daily.

They had reason to know the future was not promised.

So what do we learn from this ?

If the future is not promised- and it is not for us either-

Then , like the birds and the lilies, what we have is today, now.

I remember an old prayer in the Anglican morning prayer book, " O Lord our heavenly father, almighty and ever-living God, who has safely brought us to the beginning of this day"..

As a child I thought - well , big deal,.

As an aging adult, I do give thanks - that in spite of all that could have happened, here I still am.

I don't know why me, why should I still be here when others are not?

I am not in any way more deserving than they.

The best I can do is accept this day as a gift.

And yes, consider the wisdom of nature-

The lilies who do their best to be lilies, even in a short time,

The birds who notice the gifts of the earth and enjoy them, and use their wings to fly to amazing places, while they can,

And yes, my cats- and other companion animals.

Mary Oliver said this beautifully in a poem about a dog who wasn't going to have a very long life, even for a dog:

I ask Percy how I should live my life

Love, love, love, says Percy.

And hurry as fast as you can

along the shining beach, or the rubble, or the dust.

Then, go to sleep.

Give up your body heat, your beating heart.

Then, trust.

This year, many of us had to face the mortality of beloved pets.

They can be our teachers - our pets can- in not thinking about tomorrow,

But fully enjoying the simple blessings of this day-

A meal, a sip of water,, playing with something I might put in the trash, finding the sunny places to nap, and paying probably more attention to me than I ever paid to them- knowing where I was, what I was doing, happy to spend time with me even if they'd already spent time with me half an hour ago.

We humans would not give up our sense of yesterday or our sense of tomorrow.

Planning may give us pleasure, even , who knows, in our last days.

But we have been learning-

When life seems precarious, when plans are extra iffy, when losses are many,

We can learn from other creatures by embracing today-

Finding reason to give thanks-

Watching for what reminds us of God, of Love, of Light,

Savouring, while we can, the autumn colours- so today is the day to enjoy them.

And finally, "our place in the family of things"

There's more as Mary Oliver reminds us in Wild Geese.

I've remembered this poem as I have sat outside this time of year and watched the geese gathering - and calling to each other- on the move.

Trusting themselves to the air , the wind., to whatever wisdom will get them where they need to go.

And I think of the air, always on the move,

Rivers- you cannot step into the same one twice-

The eternal movement of the tides-

The falling of leaves into the ground-

germination and the regeneration within the soil-

Nothing remains as it was.

Neither do I.

My body changes and ages, and one day will disappear into All that Is.

And for now, yes, I bear, as you do, the marks, the scars, of what has been and what has gone.

Nature teaches us the ancient wisdom of impermanence, and of inter-being. That I am , you are , of the same substance as all that is,

That the remains of ancient stars have found their way into our being and our being will find its way into many forms of being yet to come.

Everything speaks our kinship to all that has been and is and ever will be.

And so, "no matter how lonely, the world offers itself to our imagination"

And truly we find our home, we find our vocation, we find our meaning "in the family of all things ".

Nothing can take this from us- and for this we give thanks!

Amen.

Music for Reflection

MV 36

Each Blade of Grass

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YNweAtDKA8o>

[Wehlander/Good] sung by Ali Anningson, accompanied by Norma Caswell

Minute for Mission

Sharing Circle Lifts Indigenous Voices

Our gifts for Mission & Service support community ministries as well as Healing Fund projects like the weekly sharing circle at St. Matthews Maryland. This community ministry offers health and wellness programs to meet basic needs and help families thrive.

One of the programs is a weekly sharing circle led by an Indigenous Knowledge Keeper, followed by a simple lunch. One participant describes her experience there:

The Elder opened the sharing circle with a prayer and lit some sage, one of the traditional medicines used by Indigenous peoples. When sage is burned, the smoke cleanses a person's body, mind, and spirit so they can put aside their worries and be present. Also, it is believed that smoke can carry a person's prayers to the Creator.

Once the circle opened, we all took turns sharing anything we wanted. The Elder taught us about the Anishinaabe Creation Story, and later we talked about what we learned.

After the sharing circle we had lunch. The bannock was delicious! I was happy to chat with one of the Indigenous participants who was a long way from home on the west coast of British Columbia. She first came to St. Matthews Maryland three years ago looking for services, and the warm reception encouraged her to return for programming. Eventually, she started to volunteer and built her confidence as a helper.

I was grateful to them for providing such a safe place for the participants to build relationships, learn about health issues, and support their goals for health and wellness.

If Mission & Service giving is already a regular part of your life, thank you so much! If you have not given, please join me in making Mission & Service giving a regular part of your life of faith. Loving our neighbour is at the heart of our Mission & Service.

Offering Prayer

[thank you to all who continue to give to support our faith community and Mission and Service . Your generosity is greatly appreciated .]

With joy, O Beloved, we receive the gift of this faith community, and all the gifts of family, friendship, community and creation. With joy, we give what we can, so that this gathering place may remain, so that this faith community can remain, so that our service to your world may continue. As we continue to build hope for our future may we find blessing in sacred receiving and sacred giving, today and each day. May it be so

Prayers of the People

Holy One, today we give thanks wherever we can,
For each living being, human or animal, who enriches our lives,
And for those whose memory we deeply treasure.
We give thanks for the rhythm of the seasons, the tides, growth old and new.
We give thanks for all that we experience of grace, of beauty, of wonder, all that opens us to your presence, deepens our trust, nourishes our faith.

We pray for this church and your church all around the world, as we do our best to connect with each other and with you in these challenging conditions.

May we deepen in love and compassion .

May we find new ways of caring, new ways of communing, new ways to persevere day by day-
As we open to the moments of grace and blessing we need ,
As we find and nurture seeds of hope wherever we can.

We give thanks for this beloved creation, the land, the sea, the plants, the birds,
The flowers, the vegetables, the fish- of all kinds,
In such rich , amazing diversity.

We pray that we may care for it well, making choices that preserve this natural world, and the habitat of your creatures.

May we learn to share its gifts equitably, especially with respect for our indigenous relations, who were the stewards of these lands and waters before any of our settler ancestors.

May we all learn how to share this world peaceably and justly with all sorts and conditions of people.
May this pandemic season deepen our reflection on how to love one another, and love this creation , better.

We pray for those who are suffering in body, mind and spirit, and those who have lost loved ones,
Remembering many in our community who are grieving recent sad losses.

In a moment of silence we hold them in Love and Light .

May they, and all of us, find comfort and courage.

May we know we are always surrounded and upheld by your Compassion.

These and all the silent prayers of our hearts we offer in the name of the one who taught his friends to pray together : Our Father [or Creator or Mother or..) etc.

Ministry and Mission Joys and Concerns

Next Sunday is Zoom & Home Worship.

Music for Going Forth

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QqKj78m18LY>

Called by earth and sky MV 135. Pat Mayberry. *Sung by Virtual choir of Collier St United Church*

Words of Parting and Blessing

Dare to journey forth, even through deep waters and unfamiliar landscape. May the spirit breathe through you always. May Wisdom light your path. May you know that Love travels with you wherever you go, and hope lives within you, wherever you may be.

Blessing Dance with the Spirit [Jim and Jean Strathdee]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=znay0YpnElq>

Call to awareness quotation from Abraham Heschel
Litany of creation Reproduced from www.webofcreation.org)
Other prayers by Jane V. Doull