

General Conference 2024 – Prayer Walk at “The Green” Park

Welcome to “A Prayer Walk with Creation” by the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement in collaboration with the Upper Room Ministries and Abingdon Press. The meditations will begin at the park located at 400 South Tyron Street in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Have only one intention as you find your way to “The Green,” a park across from the Convention Center. That is, to experience God through creation. After you safely cross the road you will walk between two sculptures with books at the base. Walk forward up the stairs and onto the grass. If you find it empty, you may sit on a short wall or walk around it.

Meditation One: A Grassy Area

Become present to your surroundings in nature by being silent for a few moments.

Be mindful of your breathing and that you are sharing the air with the grass, the trees, the creatures, and the people present.

The lawn at the Green is made of Bermuda grass, fertilized with organic fertilizers. Its benefits to creation are a natural soil food-web and good air quality in the park. If you can reach the grass, touch it and receive what it has offered today.

Receive this blessing from the book *Earth Gospel*:

May you experience today both the wideness and the wildness of God’s grace— in sun and sky, wind and water, animal and plant, and in the drumming of your own heart.

When you are ready, walk across the green to the left path. Walk calmly and confidently with an openness to God’s revelation.

American poet Henry David Thoreau said, “My profession is to be always on the alert to find God in nature, to know [God’s] lurking places, to attend all the oratorios, the operas, in nature.”

As you listen call on God: Keep me awake, alert, and attentive to the unfolding music of your grace all around me and within me.

Meditation Two: The Fish

On the left you will see three fish sculptures. You may find a place to sit or walk around the circle.

Continue breathing deeply as you contemplate the creatures God has created.

Brazilian Bishop Haldar Camara said: The psalms teach us to lend our voice to all creatures: to the mountains and the waters; to the trees and the birds; to the light that comes from above and to the earth that provides for us; to the creatures of the sea, from the tiniest fish to the whale.

What are the creatures saying to you today?

Dutch mystic Beatrice of Nazareth in Belgium shared these words of poetry: “As the fish swims freely in the vastness of the seas, as the bird soars boldly in the vastness of the air, so I feel my spirit roaming free in the depths and the heights and immensity of love.”

Meditation Three: The Trees

Walk toward the center path leading out of the circle. Under the trees you will find five stone stools with mosaic tops. Find a seat anywhere or walk the triangle path as you listen for birds and rustling of leaves.

What do you hear? What do you see? What one small thing is God calling your attention to? If it is a leaf or rock on the ground you may hold it. If it is a tree, touch the bark and recognize your connection to the soil and sky through this tall friend.

English Mystic Julian of Norwich had this vision: “God showed me in my palm a little thing round as a ball about the size of a hazelnut. I looked at it with the eye of my understanding and asked myself: ‘What is this thing?’ And I was answered: ‘It is everything that is created.’ I wondered how it could survive since it seemed so little it could suddenly disintegrate into nothing. The answer came: ‘It endures and ever will endure, because God loves it.’ And so everything has being because of God’s love.”

The gift you are given is worthy of praise. And you also are a gift of creation. As the sunlight filters through the trees receive this blessing: “May you stand like a tree planted by a stream, bearing fruit in season, your leaves never fading, your yield always plenty.”

Meditation Four: The End of the Park

Walk further down the path and loop around the end of the park. Make your way back to the beginning on the paved path to the left. As you practice calm walking, and regular breathing pay close attention to what other people are doing.

How are others enjoying their experience outside?

St. Francis of Assisi spoke of a deep love of nature in his “Canticle of the Sun” in which he wrote, “Be thou praise, my Lord, for brother wind and for the air, the cloud, the serene and all kinds of weather, by which thou givest thy creatures sustenance.”

What sustenance are others enjoying today? What sustenance are you getting by being outside?

Meditation Five: Midway under the canopy

Find a seat facing the center of the park. You might be under a canopy or near a flower bed.

Be glad that we are out of the climate-controlled box for a while. Appreciate the bugs and the sounds around you. Contemplate this thought: Can Human beings exist apart from nature?

American Theologian Howard Thurman put it like this: “[We are] rooted and grounded in the earth. [We] belong to it, and it belongs to [us]... [We] cannot long separate [ourselves] from nature without withering as a cut rose in a vase.”

Imagine that you are one of the flowers nearby. You are rooted in the soil and open to the sun.

Pray with me: Holy One, each day, every moment you place your hand of blessing upon the brow of creation. In your touch, in your words, everything flowers, everything remembers the deep perfect loveliness within, the deep perfect loveliness of you. Amen.

When you are ready, continue walking down this path. If you have a prayer on your heart make it in two phrases. Say one half on inhalation and one half on exhalation. For example: (inhale) “What you create” (exhale) “I will love.” Inhale. Exhale. Use this breath prayer as you walk.

Meditation Six – Creation Suffers

Before you reach the entrance to the park, take a seat. Pause to consider the damage we have done to the earth with our waste. Feel the sadness of creation. Look around you. Do you see any garbage on the pavement? Or perhaps there something in your pockets you need to throw away? Hold on to these items while you listen to Kenyan Activist Wangari Maathai’s words:

“Repeated cycles of this abuse to the environment produce poverty, insecurity and desperation. Can we honestly ask God to intervene, or do we write letters to the relevant ministers of government?... Do we make the connection between environmental degradation and the problems which communities face every day? When we make that connection, the God in us will move and energize us. It will guide us from apathy to action, from being observers to doers in the hope that those actions can make a difference.”

As you look back over “the Green,” pray with words from the Christian Conference of Asia, 1991:

Forgive us, Creator God, and reconcile us to your creation. Teach us, Creator God of Love, that the earth and all its fullness is yours, the world and all who dwell in it. Call us yet again to safeguard the gift of life. Amen.

Everyone has unique talents to contribute to the care of creation. You may hear new ideas for you and your community while in Charlotte. Be open to trying something new. At the end of this devotional you will find bins to deposit the items you have collected. Thank you for caring. It makes a world of difference.

Meditation Seven – Thanksgiving

Before you leave this gentle place, bask in what God has done with you in this prayer walk with creation. Bask in how your human nature has communed with the rest of nature and, also, with God.

Breathe deeply. Feel your heartbeat. Listen to the natural world speak to you.

We close with this benediction from Celtic Daily Light:

God bless the earth that is beneath us
The sky that is above us
The day that lies before us
Your image deep within us.

Amen. Amen.

Now you will cross the road, looking for traffic. Find the recycle and landfill cans and toss the collected garbage in there. We return to the climate-controlled box blessed and grateful.

This has been “A Prayer Walk with Creation,” a gifts of prayer from United Methodist Creation Justice Movement. It was produced by members of the Northern Illinois Conference of the United Methodist Church. The Portugues translation was a curtesy from the Love Your Neighbor Coalition. Meditations came from the book *Earth Gospel* by Sam Hamilton-Poore. Instructions for prayerful walking came from the book *50 Ways to Pray* by Teresa A. Blythe. To God be the glory now and forever. Amen.