

The Serviceberry

United Methodist Creation Justice Movement
Season of Creation Worship Resources, 2025
based on book of the same title, by Robin Wall Kimmerer

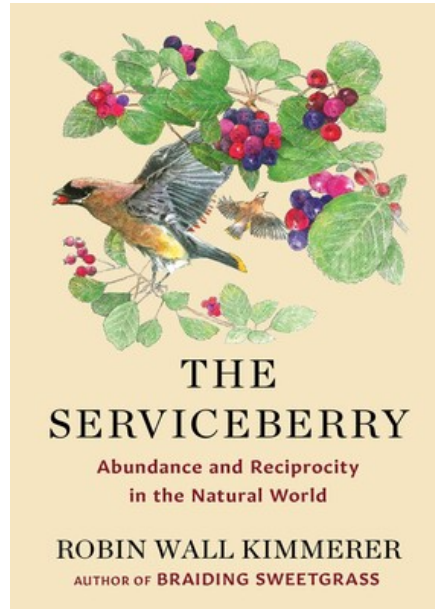


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Introduction to the Resources

These resources are designed for worship planners and Christian educators to use during the Season of Creation 2025, but can be adapted for use in worship or education settings at any time, with permission of the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement. Each week, there is a theme, connected to a Scripture passage, and a suggested quote from The Serviceberry text. Worship leaders may choose to read both the text from Scripture and from The Serviceberry in worship, if that fits with the context and practice of their congregation.

There are four weeks of worship resources, assembled by week. Worship leaders and Christian educators may use any part of them or all of them. There are two communion liturgies provided, both listed under Week 1, the traditional Sunday for communion in many United Methodist Churches. One of the liturgies is more traditional and the other involves serving less traditional foods and can easily be adapted to a Love Feast instead of traditional communion. Alternatively, a worship community could choose to use them on separate weeks during the series.

This resource includes activities that can be used in children's moments, Sunday schools, and/or youth group. Leaders in each context are invited to adapt these resources, as needed, to the age group, interests, and reality in which they serve. Supplies are listed for the activities. Also included is a "repeat aloud" prayer for the close of children's moments or Sunday school, and a suggestion for activities children and families may find engaging between weeks.

An excellent resource to accompany this series is Robin Wall Kimmerer's picture book, *Bud Finds Her Gift*, which will be released on Sept 2. It is a beautifully illustrated edition for children about interconnectedness and the gift economy, told so kids can relate. The recurring refrain in the book, of "*Everyone, from the day of their birth, was given a gift to share with the Earth,*" can become something for even the youngest to hold on to throughout. These resources, however, do not explicitly call out connections between the weekly themes in worship and *Bud Finds Her Gift*.

Small groups of adults may also wish to read The Serviceberry together. Reflection Questions for small group study are included with each week's materials.

Weekly Summaries and Quotes from the Text

Series Summary

The psalmist proclaims that the Earth belongs to God, yet our neglect of this sacred gift has led to ecological crises. Robin Wall Kimmerer depicts the serviceberry as a metaphor for the flourishing of creation that deserves our respect. Drawing on Scripture, Indigenous wisdom, and Kimmerer's insights, we will examine how gratitude, reciprocity, and justice prompt us to care for creation. Join us in September as we cultivate a right relationship with the Earth that leads to the flourishing of life. Each week, a Sacred Scripture may be paired with a reading from *The Serviceberry*. Suggested quotes from *The Serviceberry* are provided below, in abbreviated form.

Sept. 7 | First Week of Creation (pp. 1-26)

Key words: GIFT ECONOMY

Most of us learned to say thank you after receiving a gift, but often we take the gifts of God's creation for granted. Robin Wall Kimmerer describes the serviceberry as part of a "gift economy," where creation flourishes through generosity rather than hoarding. In Genesis 2:4-8, 15-17, 19, God assigns humankind the role of caring for the garden.

Book Quotes:

"In the Anishinaabe worldview, [...] not just fruits [...] are understood as gifts, rather all of the sustenance that the land provides [...]. When we speak of these not as things or natural resources or commodities, but as gifts, our whole relationship to the natural world changes." " (p. 8)

"To name the world as gift is to feel your membership in the web of reciprocity. [...] if we acknowledged that everything we consume is a gift [...] we would take better care of what we are given." (pp. 22-23)

Sept. 14 | Second Week of Creation (pp. 29-50)

Key Word: RECIPROCITY

Treating land and water as "natural resources" for our exclusive use leads to ecological problems. Instead, we are called to live in balance with creation through mutual care. Indigenous wisdom emphasizes the principle of reciprocity,

which means giving back as much as we take. In Luke 12:13-21, Jesus teaches against greed.

Book Quotes:

“In a gift economy, [...] the practice for dealing with abundance is to give it away. [...] The currency in a gift economy is relationship, which is expressed as gratitude [...] interdependence and [...] reciprocity. [...] The economic unit is ‘we’ rather than ‘I’, as all flourishing is mutual.” (pp. 32-33)

“These two economic worldviews, of prosperity gained through individual accumulation and prosperity gained through sharing of the commons, underpin the history of colonization in this country. The whole enterprise [...] was designed to [replace] the notion of land as a source of belonging [...] with the idea that land is nothing more than a source of belongings. This required a narrowing of the definition of well-being, from common wealth to individual wealth, from abundance to scarcity.” (p 37-38)

Sept. 21 | Third Week of Creation (pp. 53-82)

Key Word: INTERDEPENDENCE

Sometimes we talk about nature as somewhere we go, but we are part of nature and share a deep interconnectedness with the rest of creation. In 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Paul teaches that each part of the body is essential to its function. Just as the body of Christ is interconnected, so too is all creation.

Book Quotes:

“What might Serviceberry teach us here?...[Quoting Valerie Luzades]
‘Serviceberry...provides a model of interdependence and coevolution that is the heart of ecological economics. Serviceberry teaches us another way to understand relationships and exchange. A Serviceberry economy as our model prompts the opportunity for articulation of the value of gratitude and reciprocity as essential foundations for an economy.’ Reciprocity—not scarcity. Valerie points out that even ecologists are reevaluating the assumption that intense competition is the primary force regulating evolutionary success. [...] Cooperation is a better model [than competition] not only for surviving but for thriving.” (pp. 74-76)

Sept. 28 | Fourth Week of Creation (pp. 85-105)

Key Words: HOPE FOR CREATION

Too often, salvation is spiritualized, and heaven is painted as otherworldly. But the renewal of creation is part of God's redemptive work. In Isaiah 55:10-13, the prophet promises a restored environment through God's word that transforms barrenness into abundance.

Book Quotes:

"I cherish the notion of the gift economy [...]. A sense of belonging and relationship and purpose and beauty [...] can never be commoditized.[...] I want to live in a society where the currency of exchange is gratitude. [...]"

"[K]indness [...] multiplies every time it is shared, rather than depreciating with use." (pp. 90-91)

"How do systems change? [...] The natural process of ecological replacement highlights two mechanisms at work [...]. Succession relies in part on incremental change [...] but it also relies on disturbance [...] to let new species emerge and flower [...]. I want to see emerging gift economies nurtured in the gaps carved out of the overbearing market economy." (pp. 100-101)

Worship Slides

Created by Rev. Laurie Bayen

Slides for calls to worship, opening prayers and benedictions, as well as slide templates, a video blackbird serenade, and photos of serviceberries, can be found here: [Serviceberry Slides](#)

Worship Planning Notes

by Kelly Vaughan & Rev. Laurie Bayen

Use of the book cover art (please use the whole image, not part of it) is permitted by the publisher, and is a good source of inspiration for colors and imagery—green leaves, berries that are native to your area, and birds that eat them (perhaps photos, feathers, stuffed animals). Choose fabrics with textures that mimic the veins of the leaves on the front cover art. You might consider using recorded birdsong as a prelude or call to prayer.

Looking at the artistic image from the book’s back cover, of cupped hands holding berries, you might look at thrift stores or garden centers for a “cupped hands” ceramic dish, bowl or planter (or borrow one from a congregation member; ask your gardeners for help locating items!) which could serve as a centerpiece for your altar. Each week, you might fill the hands with a different item inspired by the week’s Scripture passage/theme, such as berries, grain, water, or seeds.

Other “berry” ideas: Notice how berries usually change color at different rates—even on the same plant. Each week of the series could reflect these changes. If fresh, local berries are not available, store-bought fresh cranberries hold up particularly well.

If you cannot find a “cupped hands” bowl, clear glass containers also make great containers for berries (and for some berry varieties, you can even nest a candle on top).

A large, dead tree branch can be another useful “anchor” piece for your worship space, which can be decorated with fabric, strings of lights, fresh branches or other greenery—all of which can be rearranged from week to week.

Consider adding a water feature as a reminder of nature and of baptism. A clear bowl of water, a fountain, or flowing fabric and rocks made to look like water all might work.

Another item that can add texture and depth to a worship space is potted live wheatgrass or catnip; grow your own or purchase from a pet food store. Plants can be removed from pots so the seeds and roots are visible as well as the green leaves. Whole plants can be placed on a tray or in glass jars and tucked among other items in the altar space.

The blue butterfly that is a feature of the back cover art might also inspire the addition of a silk butterfly (or more than one)—perched on a bowl, the branch, or “hovering” (suspended by wire) over the altar scene or the water feature.

Other images inspired by the book’s stories that you might consider using: metal buckets (for holding berries or water) and wooden crates. You might make your own version of the “Free Farm Stand” sign—or simply the word “Free” painted on a rough piece of wood or written on a small chalkboard. Or change the message on the sign each week to match the theme for the day.

Possible guests you might invite to talk about their work and how they connect to the Holy through their calling:

- Local park ranger
- Volunteer docents from a nature preserve
- Arborist
- Owner or worker at a local garden center
- Master Gardener
- Science teacher
- Permaculture consultant
- Representative of a local environmental non-profit

Offer a prayer of blessing and a meaningful, tangible gift for your guest—perhaps a basket of produce from church members’ gardens, homemade preserves, or a home-baked pie.

Week 1

Liturgical Resources

Opening Prayer

by Rev. Kelby Werner

Sustainer God, you breathed life into the whole of creation. You called creation good. You filled the earth with birds and fish, plants and mammals, rocks and soil—the building blocks of all that is and will be.

We come before you today in awe and admiration for the gifts of creation that you have supplied for us. While we continue in worship of you, remind us that as we embrace, enjoy, and utilize the gifts of creation that we too are created beings, made in your image, and called to be a gift to one another and for the whole of creation. That as we accept your gifts, through your love and grace, we may be also sustainers, creators, and gift givers. In thanks we pray, Amen.

Call to Worship

by Rev. Paul Mitchell

We've heard it said, Take a lesson from the ravens.

They don't sow or reap.

Notice how the flowers grow.

They neither labor nor weave!

God makes the sun rise on bad and good alike.

God's rain falls on the just and the unjust.

§

Yet we know, "Everything that makes our lives possible –
the splints for baskets, roots for medicines,

the trees whose bodies make our homes,
and the pages of our books –
is provided by the lives of more-than-human beings.”

Be glad in The Beloved and rejoice, you who love justice!

Exult, you upright of heart!

Pastoral Prayer, Week One

Inspired by Psalm 36

Rev. Richenda Fairhurst

Creator God, in creating the Earth you created the whole universe. Your justice reaches into the deepest sea, your faithfulness reaches beyond the highest clouds, and your love is stronger than the mountains. Sustainer God, your love is without price, intended for all living things, humans and animals both. You feed us, and you offer us drink from the spring of life, which is a gift beyond imagining. This same gift, of pure water and natural bounty, this gift we have wasted with our greed, our pollution, and our faithlessness. Hear our cry and our confession. Hear our prayer raised to you.

[Optional: Prayers of the people]

Forgiving God, our Salvation, set our hearts right. We will be stewards as you intended. We will build up the bounty of your house. We will gather with our neighbors at your table! For under the shelter of your wings, the universe is made whole, all who gather here will drink from the river of joy, and rejoice again in the spring of life. Amen.

[Optional: The Lord's Prayer]

Offertory Prayer for Week 1 (Gift Economy)

by Rev. Dr. Brian Smith

God of abundance, your grace is generous and overflowing. We give thanks for the many gifts of your creation: sunlight and rain, seed and soil, fruit and flower. Teach us to recognize the Earth not as a possession, but as a sacred gift. Bless our lives and what we bring, that we may return your generosity and honor the garden you have entrusted to us; in Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Benediction

by Rev. Paul Mitchell

The just flourish like a palm tree,
and grow as tall as the cedars of Lebanon;
transplanted in the house of The Beloved,
they flourish in the courts of the Most High –
still full of sap in old age,
they still produce abundant fruit.

§

To give is to love.

To love is to live.

To live is to grow.

To grow is to flourish.

§

May we who follow Jesus

enter into Communion

with God's self-giving love.

May we sing the life and love

of Christ in the world

this day and beyond.

Sermon Primer

by Pastor Ross Janovec

Primary Themes: gift economy, reciprocity in nature, abundance in nature

Secondary Themes: mutual aid, ecological reciprocity, community well-being

Embracing the Gift Economy of Creation

Genesis 2:4-8, 15-17, 19 depicts humanity's original relationship to creation not as owners or consumers, but as stewards, as trustees, within a gift economy. God puts humans in the garden to "tend and keep it," creating a relationship that involves reciprocity rather than exploitation. Genesis, as a book of beginnings, discloses that creation is already a gift economy rich in resources that are not scarce, and abundance is the practice.

Imagine living in the Garden of Eden as Adam and Eve as we absorb how Robin Wall Kimmerer sees the gift economy at work in the created world, "the plants who shower us with goodness [...] are gifts from our plant relatives, manifestations of their generosity, care, and creativity."¹ She invites us to see creation not as resources to be managed but as relatives bearing gifts, capturing the true essence of creation as gift—unearned, freely given, and abundant beyond measure.

Consider a time when you experienced awe within creation. I'm thinking of those moments, those spaces that we say took our breath away. But what took your breath's place? As you paused in that moment, in that space, breath taken away, how was the Divine, the Creator, making their presence known?

Standing at Kootenai Falls in northwest Montana, I experienced one of my own breathtaking moments, yet there was something unexpected, perhaps ironic, at that moment as well. I began to experience this sense of isolation as I transitioned from Denver's crowded streets to my first appointment at Kootenai River Parish because this space in creation felt completely foreign. In that moment, the mist and white noise both enveloped me as I paused there, and I realized I was more connected to the holy others in this place than I had been in any metropolitan area. The falls showed me that our connection with creation reveals we are never truly isolated from the abundant life that surrounds us in the natural world.

In a gift economy, as Kimmerer explains, "Wealth is understood as having enough to share, and the practice for dealing with abundance is to give it away."²

¹ Robin Wall Kimmerer. 2024. *The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World*. Scribner. p. 7

² Robin Wall Kimmerer. 2024. *The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World*. Scribner. p. 32.

This stands in stark contrast to our modern economic systems that prioritize accumulation and scarcity. In that moment at the falls, I was gifted with an abundance of wisdom that transcends that single moment, yet also continues to bear new fruits even now, fruits that are ripening in their own time as I imagine abundant possibilities together.

Another such moment I find myself returning to in search of wisdom is one that I recall from my time at Camp Fontanelle, located along the Elkhorn River in northeastern Nebraska. As July arrived, our camp cooks would not so subtly imply that we should direct our hikes with campers toward the various elderberry patches growing near the river. Watching children with progressively fuller buckets and increasingly stained hands brought me joy beyond the tasty pies, cobblers, and other treats that would follow. I was witnessing those children participate in the gift economy of nature, receiving its abundance with gratitude.

The stained hands of the campers at Camp Fontanelle revealed to me a deep lesson about our connection to nature. The campers who picked elderberries without a worry of running out practiced what Walter Brueggemann calls Sabbath economics, which represents a form of “...resistance because it is a visible insistence that our lives are not defined by the production and consumption of commodity goods.”³ Alongside the work of resistance can come anxiety, which stems from what he calls “the myth of scarcity”—the false belief that there isn’t enough to go around, driving us to accumulate rather than share.

A Sabbath perspective that rejects scarcity by trusting in divine abundance manifests at our dining tables through our relationship with food, in both our understanding and the choices we make. Norman Wirzba develops this understanding through his theology of eating, which presents creation as an act of hospitality that reflects the relational nature of the Trinity. What Brueggemann helps us recognize in our economic systems is what Wirzba helps us taste in our daily bread.

According to Wirzba, this sacred participation in creation’s gifting reaches its peak in the biblical concept of Jubilee (Leviticus 25). The biblical concept of Jubilee demonstrated to Israel that the land and its fruits existed as gifts to be

³ Brueggemann, Walter. 2017. *Sabbath as Resistance, New Edition with Study Guide: Saying No to the Culture of Now*. Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, p. 141.

shared, rather than as commodities for accumulation. What Wirzba helps us understand at our communion tables is that Jubilee expands to the broader community's economic life.

As you prepare to preach on the gift economy, consider:

1. How might your congregation reimagine its relationship with creation as gift rather than commodity?
2. What practices could help your community move from a scarcity mindset to recognizing abundance?
3. Where do you see examples of gift economies operating in your local context?

Sermon Illustrations

Rev. Richenda Fairhurst

Beekeeping and churches!

An example of bees. Beekeeping offers us a visible and material (and delicious) example of the gifts given by the creator to benefit the whole of creation.

Across the US, many congregations in a number of denominations have worked to transform church lawns into prayerful and celebratory gardens. With a desire to be faithful stewards, congregations are replacing ornamental plants with native plants, often with attention to stewardship of water and in order to support and attract pollinators.

Some congregations have taken that effort a step further, by bringing in and caring for honeybee hives, and creating apiaries, in both urban and rural settings. In many places around the world, beekeeping is necessary to sustain diet and health of the community, see the article featuring Ghana, below. In the US, where natural, homegrown honey is available in a good grocery store, home beekeeping isn't needed.

An unfortunate side effect to having honey available so easily in a store is that the community itself loses the experience of the gift of honey, a gift that rises freely and naturally between the pollen and the honey, the bee and the flower, the Creator and the creation. This shared gift for almost all human history has been an integral part of life, and shared experience. (see this photo of [the Denbury Millenium Tapestry](#) that depicts a monastery and farm scenes.)

No one would dispute the gift that is honey, not the bears, birds, or small children who enjoy it. Honey may appear on our breakfast tables, but honey is not a single serving in the morning kind of gift. It is a gift straight from the Creator, to be sure, but in a circular way, a system of gifting and celebration that benefits the bee, the flower, the land, the bear, and life itself in the nurturing and reproduction of that life.

A Couple of Bible References

Proverbs 24:13-14a

My child, eat honey, for it is good.

The honeycomb is sweet in your mouth.

Know that wisdom is like that for your whole being.

Exodus 16:31-32

The Israelite people called it manna. It was like coriander seed, white, and tasted like honey wafers. Moses said, “This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Let an omer of it be kept safe for future generations so that they can see the food that I used to feed you in the desert when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.’”

Reference Articles

These articles help tell the story of beekeepers in The United Methodist Church and other traditions.

[How sweet it is: United Methodists and bees](#). This article was also carried by *The Christian Century*, [How United Methodists around the world find faith through beekeeping](#). June 2021. This article profiles the beekeeping ministry of Rev. Mark Price and Christ UMC in Tennessee. The article also mentions First UMC in Ogden, Utah, which had a beekeeping ministry for about eight years. That effort is no longer going, as the leaders of that ministry moved away. A staff member I spoke to at that church lamented the loss. In that conversation I was reminded again of the need for wider discipleship addressing environment and God’s amazing creation. Better support will allow United Methodists to sustain our vital natural ministries, reclaiming our heritage and faithfully working to “teach our children well” (Deuteronomy 6.)

[A harvest of knowledge](#). Unhappily, this post is not dated so there is no way to know the current situation for those featured here. But as a devotion with prayer, the post gives insight into United Methodist support in the good efforts of Global Ministries, UMCOR and other faith-based organizations in supporting local farmers in Ghana, where beekeeping and honey production is of growing importance.

[A buzz about bees](#) from Episcopal News Service—includes a [two-minute video](#). A story about St. Mark's Episcopal's beekeeping efforts in an urban setting, in Seattle. The small roof-top apiary received a blessing from the Episcopal bishop, and the ministry includes efforts in beekeeping at Episcopal churches in Colorado, Upstate New York, Tennessee, and Paris, France.

Photos for the sermon

UM New Service has photos posted of the Tennessee apiary effort through Christ UMC in Franklin, Tennessee (see story, above). You can [view the photos in Flickr](#), but note that they are marked as *all rights reserved*. To use them, you must first email UM Communications and ask permission, newsdesk@umcom.org.

[Bee collecting pollen from a purple flower](#). Unsplash photo, free to use. Krzysztof Niewolny photographer.

For photos of honeybee hives, check out the page on Unsplash from [Alvéole Buzz](#), based in Montreal. Example: [hive frames with bees](#) and [busy hive bees](#), unsplash free to use license.

[Close up bees](#), unsplash free to use license, Boba Jaglicic photographer.

Historical connections. This [photo depicts the Denbury Millennium Tapestry](#) and is available from Flickr. See the photographer's [request for attribution](#). Photo by JMC4 – Church Explorer, uploaded July 2024. [CC BY 2.0](#)

Music Notes

By Rev. Kristina Sinks

Hymn Suggestions

Title	Reference
Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing	UMH 400
God, Who Stretched the Spangled Heavens	UMH 150
How Can We Name a Love	UMH 111
Love Divine, All Loves Excelling	UMH 384
On Eagle's Wings	UMH 143
Table of Plenty	W&S 3173
Earth Maker, Source of the World and Our Wisdom	www.hopepublishing.com/Images/HymnodyPDF/hm_5425.pdf
One Bread, One Body	UMH 620
How Great Thou Art OR O Mother Earth	UMH 77 (or find new lyrics here)
Creation Sings	W&S 3018

Contemporary Music Suggestions

Title	Composer	CCLI	OneLicense	Copyright/ Reference
Your Grace is Enough	Matt Maher	4477026	#86592	© 2003 Thankyou Music Ltd; SPIRITANDS ONG.COM PUBLISHING
Love is Something (Magic Penny)	Malvina Reynolds			copyright 1955 and 1958 Northern Music Corporation, renewed 1986
God of Wonders	Marc Byrd, Steve Hindalong	3118757		© 2000 Never Say Never Songs; New Spring; Meaux Mercy; Storm Boy Music
Consider the Ravens	Dustin Kensrue	No licensing, permission required		

Choral Anthem Ideas

Let All Creation Dance by James Biery (Morningstar Music Productions)
Come to the Water W&S 3114

A Traditional Great Thanksgiving with Thanks for the Gift of Creation

by Rev. Richenda Fairhurst

A SERVICE OF WORD AND TABLE I

United Methodist Book of Worship, with adaptation.

A pastoral prayer may be prayed.

If you choose one of the pastoral prayers that accompany this Season of Creation series, do not end with the Lord's Prayer, as the Lord's Prayer will be prayed later in this liturgy.

INVITATION

Pastor stands behind the Lord's table.

Pastor: In the beginning was the Word. God parted the waters and created the dry land. And God rejoiced in the plants, the animals, and in the human beings God made. This table and this meal—the bread and the juice/wine—are gifts of our Creator. A Spiritual gift of unimaginable Grace, and a living gift of grain and fruit unique in all the universe to this Earth, this home, this good Creation.

We are invited to this table. In the name of Jesus born in Nazareth, son of God, and anointed Christ, you are invited to repent of sin, heal of brokenness, and eat and drink together as we celebrate this Holy Communion.

Therefore, let us speak the truth together as we repent, seek healing, and celebrate.

CONFESSION AND PARDON.

Pastor: Merciful God, it is the truth that even as your love for us never fails, our own efforts to love our neighbors and steward your creation have not been as they should be.

People: We have not loved you with our whole heart.

Pastor: Merciful God, you call us to trust in you and live faithfully, abundantly, and peacefully together. Yet we have rejected your gifts, and sin has made shadows on this Earth.

People: Free us from sin that we may return to you.

Pastor: Gracious God, we ask you, let the shadows disperse! Let us hear the songs of your creation. In the sound of the running stream, in the song of birds, and in the echo of high tide on a sandy beach, we will listen and be glad!

All pray in silence.

Pastor: Hear the good news! See the living world everywhere, alive! The gifts of life flow without ceasing. The foundation of this Earth shall never be shaken. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!

People: In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!

Pastor: **Glory to God. Amen.**

THE GREAT THANKSGIVING

Presider: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Presider: Lift up your hearts.

People: We lift them up to the Lord.

Presider: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

People: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Presider: It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Almighty God, Creator of heaven and earth. You formed us from the clay in your image. The air we breathe you first breathed into us as the breath of life.

Though we may turn away, your love remains steadfast. You bless us with the gifts of earth freely given, you speak to us through the prophets, and your covenant claims us as your own.

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

**All: Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.**

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

Presider: Holy are you, and blessed is your Son Jesus Christ. Through the flight of a dove, and in the waters of the Jordan River, Your Spirit anointed him to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, and to announce that the time had come when you would save your people.

In his earthly ministry, starting with his steady steps on that muddy river bank, Jesus led and taught your people to seek the kin-dom/kingdom of God. He healed the sick, fed the hungry, and ate with sinners. By the baptism of his suffering, death, and resurrection you gave birth to your Church, delivered us from slavery to sin and death, and made with us a new covenant by water and the Spirit.

When the Lord Jesus ascended, he promised to be with us always, in the power of your Word and Holy Spirit.

The pastor may hold hands, palms down, over the bread, or touch the bread, or lift the bread.

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

The pastor may hold hands, palms down, over the cup, or touch the cup, or lift the cup.

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

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

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

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

By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at his heavenly banquet. Through your Son Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in your holy Church, all honor and glory are yours, almighty God, now and forever. **Amen.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

And now, with the confidence of children of God, let us pray:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial,
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.**

BREAKING THE BREAD

The pastor lifts and breaks the bread while saying:

Presider: Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf. The bread which we break is a sharing in the body of Christ.

The pastor lifts the cup in silence, or while saying:

The cup over which we give thanks is a sharing in the blood of Christ.

GIVING THE BREAD AND CUP

The words for serving the bread and juice.

The body of Christ, given for you. **Amen.**

The blood of Christ, given for you. **Amen.**

When all have received, the Lord's table is put in order.

The following prayer is then offered by the pastor or by all:

All: Eternal God, we give you thanks for this holy mystery in which you have given yourself to us. Grant that we may go into the world in the strength of your Spirit, to give ourselves for others and care for this good earth, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

A Honey Communion / A Love Feast

Rev. Richenda Fairhurst

Find:

- A Liturgy for a Honey Communion
- Explanation and Ideas to help you plan
- Photos for the table, bulletin, and/or for inspiration

Honey Communion, A Liturgy

GRACE

Leader: God of abundant sweetness, ripe fruit, and golden grains, bless this meal. Bless the gifts of food that nourish us in health and spirit. Bless the soils where the seeds make roots, bless the rain, bless the flowers that grow and bloom, bless the pollinators and, especially today, bless the honeybees. Bless the humans who nurtured the hives, harvest the honey, and bless those who prepared it for our table. Amen.

People: Amen.

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

Leader: Creator God, we confess we have not acted as stewards of this earth, as you intended. Our modern world uses up the forests, soils, and water far faster than this planet, your creation, our earth, can replenish. We waste what is given, including food and grain, and are not watchful that our neighbors have enough.

People: Forgive us. Teach us to be the stewards you wish us to be. Let the Spirit come.

Pause

Leader: Bountiful God, your mercy is without measure. Your abundance is everywhere a sign of your love and care for us and every creature. We will turn and remember your laws. We will seek your perfecting Grace. In Jesus's name, we are forgiven, and freed to follow you.

All: Amen.

THANKSGIVING FOR THE GIFTS OF CREATION

Leader: The Lord be with you!

People: And also with you!

Leader: Lift up your hearts!

People: We lift them up with gratitude and hope for all creation!

Leader: Praise be to God!

All: Praise be to God.

Leader: On the day that God created all things, God separated the waters, formed the land, and blessed it with life. God created the plants and animals and every living thing. God said, "Let the waters swarm with living things, and let birds fly

above the earth.” And God blessed them: “Be fertile and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let the birds multiply on the earth.” And God said, “Let the earth produce every kind of living thing: livestock, crawling things, and wildlife.” And God saw how good it was.

And God created human beings. And God said, “Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth, and take charge of it, the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, and everything crawling on the ground. I give to you all the plants and seeds on the earth, and the fruit they produce. These will be your food.” God saw everything God had made: it was supremely good. (Genesis 1)

A BLESSING FOR THE HONEY AND THE FEAST

Leader: God of Life, bless this honey, bless us who gather, let us take to heart these words from the Book of Proverbs:

My child, eat honey, for it is good.

The honeycomb is sweet in your mouth.

Know that wisdom is like that for your whole being.

If you find it, there is a future.

Your hope won't be cut off.

Leader: Let all God's people say Amen.

People: Amen.

Leader: And now, with your people on earth and all the company of heaven we praise your name. This meal is a taste of Genesis, a taste of the creation as God created it. This meal is also a foretaste of the day when Christ will come in final victory, and we will feast at the heavenly banquet. All praise, all honor, and all glory to God. Amen.

People: Amen.

Leader: The table awaits! Let all God's people partake of this good meal!

Explainers and Ideas for the Honey Communion / Love Feast

What is a Love Feast? John Wesley and early Methodists held Love Feasts as a way to gather around both Word and Table in the early decades of Methodism. Food was served at these feasts, and they included a time of reverence and reading of scriptures as people reflected on a community meal shared together as the body of Christ. [Methodists still practice Love Feasts today.](#)

Theme: A suggestion here is to center your feast around pollinators and honey, as these gifts show well the themes of this series, of natural gifts, reciprocity, interdependence, and restored creation. Honey is also referenced in the Bible with things that reflect the goodness and sweetness of God's love, God's provision, and God's community. (See the sermon illustrations for Week One to read more about honey as a shared and special gift of creation.)

Choose an officiant. Because this isn't Eucharist, Methodists do not need to ensure an ordained priest or pastor presides to bless the meal. Whoever is planning the worship series, however, should ask the pastor to help plan the event and/or participate in the liturgy, as a Love Feast is still a spiritual and celebratory occasion. In planning, there is an opportunity to ask those close to creation care and environmental stewardship in your church to be part of the service and liturgical readings.

Plan the occasion: Take some time to plan with others, answering questions such as, "Who will share the Word and prayers?" "Who will help others?" "Will a potluck also be celebrated?" "Who will help with set up and clean up?" Then there is the community celebration. In addition to the liturgy, below, you could include a skit from the youth group or a hymn.

Prepare the space: Plan to celebrate the Love Feast where the community usually shares a meal together, such as in the fellowship or dining hall or as part of an outdoor picnic. Have plenty of seating and ensure there is a place where the "honey communion" table can be set in view of celebrants.

Prepare the table: Prepare a table to showcase the theme and sacred elements of your feast. Decorate with images of honeybees (see links to possible photos, below) and/or projects from the children's Sunday School class or Messy Church

such as a papier-mâché beehive or paper flowers. You could add elements from the church or community garden, depictions of other pollinators, or native flowers, whatever makes sense for your community.

Incorporate your landscape: A number of churches have gardens on their properties, to include vegetable, pollinator, native, rain or prayer gardens. Other churches have contributed to community garden or land-restoration efforts outside the church. If you have a garden such as this, or sent a work team to restore a river or habitat, perhaps also display clippings of leaves or flowers that might be related to those projects. You can also add photographs of those things to display at your celebration.

What to serve for the meal. A Love Feast is usually a meal, the meal could be as simple as a continental breakfast, it could be a lunch potluck or plated dinner. It's your choice as this is your celebration. In selecting what to serve for the meal, remember that this feast honors God for the gifts of creation. As such, perhaps choose or suggest food items that are simple, nutritious, and made with local ingredients as much as possible. Try not to use any plastic, as [plastic is harmful to soil and pollinators](#). Washable, reusable, or compostable dishes and food wrap are hopefully easy to find.

What to serve for the “honey communion.” A Love Feast is a shared meal, but for this occasion we are taking another step. As part of, and in addition to, the meal, adding the “honey communion” is a way to specifically reflect on the gifts that come from bees and pollinators. You can do this any number of ways, but in keeping things as simple as possible, you can simply set out bread and honey on the table to eat. You could place a plate of sliced bread and honey on the special table you have decorated, or it can be set onto the buffet or potluck table as part of the meal. It matters less where or how people are invited to take and eat the bread and honey: what matters most is the opportunity to reflect on how good and sweet it is!

Also, while the focus here is most specifically on honey, we are celebrating honey as a gift of the honeybee, as God created it! This opens yet more opportunities to celebrate that as part of making honey, honeybees pollinate flowers that produce all sorts of fruit. Fruit pollen is part of the honey recipe! It could be part of the celebration too. In addition to offering bread and honey, then, you can also add

sliced fruit and/or different types of jam—strawberry, peach, blueberry, mango—to share. A jar of grape jelly might also be a really fun and symbolic addition to the table.

Adding the Liturgy. As you share your meal and honey communion, share also the Love Feast liturgy included here. The liturgy serves as a grace to gather the people and bless the meal.

Photos for the table, bulletin, and/or inspiration

Sample spread, [a photo of fruit with sliced bread and pots of honey and jam](#). This is an Unsplash photo, so it is free to use. It is helpful to credit the photographer, Esperanza Doronila, and link back to the photo if you can.

Sample spread, [a photo of bread, fruit, and jam](#). Just add honey! Unsplash photo, so it is free to use. It is helpful to credit the photographer, Matilda Jarl, and link back to the photo if you can.

For the bulletin / worship PowerPoint, [a photo of bread, jam, and honey, with room for words to be added](#). You could use this for the bulletin adding the time and day the church will celebrate the “honey communion” and Love Feast. Unsplash Photo, so it is free to use. It is helpful to credit the photographer, Sharon Waldron, and link back to the photo if you can.

Honey in a jar, [a photo of a jar of honey with a drizzler](#). Unsplash photo, so it is free to use. It is helpful to credit the photographer, Art Rachen, and link back to the photo if you can.

Honeycomb, [a closeup photo of a section of honeycomb](#). Unsplash photo, so it is free to use. It is helpful to credit the photographer, Cristina Marin, and link back to the photo if you can.

Resources for Leaders of Children and Youth

By Rev. Laura Baumgartner, Rev. Tura Foster Gillespie, Ann Mayer and Carolyn Nichols

Theme overview: Most of us learned to say thank you after receiving a gift, but often we take the gifts of God's creation for granted. Robin Wall Kimmerer describes the serviceberry as part of a gift economy, where creation flourishes through generosity rather than hoarding. In Genesis 2:4-8, 15-17, 19, God assigns humankind the role of caring for the garden. For children and youth, connecting gratitude with the act of caring for plants and other animals in the garden will guide this lesson.

Supplies Needed:

- Berries or grapes, wrapped in a gift box. Check for food allergies beforehand and try to arrange for a fruit that none of the children in your congregation are allergic to (for children's time in worship)
- Items for a scavenger hunt. If in the sanctuary, it could be hymnals, Bibles, bulletins. Additionally, have an abundance of items hidden (or in plain view) so there is enough for all participants to collect the desired objects. Also, have enough prizes for everyone to get one when they finish. Hide clues that children can find at each station and/or have a helper ready to give clues to children who need hints. (for children's activity).
- Snack idea for Sunday School or Youth Group: energy bars/dried fruit leather
- Pine cones, peanut butter, birdseed, string or other means to hang the pine cone (for birdfeeder craft idea)
- Cookie ingredients, if making cookies

Children's Time in Worship:

Show children the gift box you brought (filled with berries or grapes) and ask them what they think might be in it. Tell them you will give them a hint: it's a gift from God. If they don't guess, give them another hint: in some places, it can be used to tell time (because the plant it grows on flowers at a certain time and fruits at a certain time and is harvested at a certain time). If a third hint is needed, tell them that it's something they'll be able to receive and share with others.

Have the children unwrap the gift together and share the berries or grapes with one another and with some in the congregation. Talk about the different colors and tastes they notice. If the fruit has seeds they can see or taste, point them out. If not, wonder with them where the seeds might be. Ask whether children know any other kinds of berries or grapes besides the ones that they found in the box. Remind them that berries and grapes grow on plants and that plants grow because of rain and sun and that God provides rain and sun and plants and fruits free of charge for people and other animals.

Ask children where their berries or grapes usually come from, since unwrapping them from a present is not the normal way that they appear ready to eat for most people. Expect responses such as the grocery store, the refrigerator, parents, the fruit bowl, vines on a hike, or the garden. Explain that some of those ways to get berries and grapes have a cost associated with them, such as buying grapes or berries at the grocery store or picking them from a You-Pick farm. Other times, they are kind of like a gift, with no obvious cost associated. When we pay money for the foods we eat, some of it goes to the people who tend the plants and animals and bring them to our tables. It can be a moment when we recognize our thanksgiving for their role in our food supply. Whether or not we pay money for grapes and berries, there are ways that we can show our appreciation for the plants that grow them and the people that care for the plants. Elicit examples from the children for how this works, such as watering the plants and not littering or saying thank you to the people who work in the grocery store when they help us find something we are looking for. Bring them to the idea that we each have a gift that we can share that will benefit our community the way that grapes and berries are gifts from God that benefit our community.

Conclude with a repeat-aloud prayer:

Dear God, Thank you for the gifts of nature and the gifts you give each of us.
Teach us to share them with our neighbors as we go. Amen

Children's Sunday School Lesson Ideas:

Begin the lesson with the children with an age-appropriate reading or telling of the story from Genesis 2:19, when God asks Adam to name each animal. Talk about giving names to things and how it can be an act of caring. Elicit examples

of stuffed animals, pets, cars, or other items that the children have named. Consider asking about other ways that the children can care for animals and plants, as Adam cared for the animals and plants in the garden. Help children arrive at the idea that caring for others is a way to show gratitude or thanks for them. When all are cared for, everyone has enough and all are valued for their part in the community.

Play a game to embody the theme of abundance in the gift economy

To help children connect with the idea that everyone gets what they need, rather than what happens in many competitive games, where only one team wins, explain that in today's scavenger hunt, all the teams that finish will get a prize.

If your children are old enough to read, give them the first clue in writing. If they can't read yet, explain to them how they will find their first item and how subsequent clues will be revealed.

Sing a Song

If children don't know it, introduce the song "The Magic Penny." If they do know it, sing it together. Remind them of the idea that money isn't the only currency and that sometimes when we give something away, it isn't gone.

[Love Is Something, if You Give It Away \(Magic Penny\) \[with lyrics for congregations\]](#)

Discuss gifts that nature provides/Snack

Describe the use of pemmican in native communities. Pemmican is dried serviceberries and dried meats ground together. Kimmerer explains that pemmican was the first energy bar that her people could pack for hikes or other outdoor activities in the book, *The Serviceberry* (p. 5). Ask children about what they like to take for snack mix, trail mix, or energy bars. Consider how to make them (dry the fruit, grind other ingredients) and other gifts that students can make. Depending on the age of your children, some of the other discussion questions listed below for youth groups may be appropriate in your group. You may wish to provide dried fruits, trail mix, or energy bars for a snack.

Make a Gift Together

There are many options for how children might make a gift for someone else. Help children use their gifts for their community by creating a gift for someone else. Some possibilities are listed below.

- Make a bird feeder using peanut butter, birdseed, and a pinecone. Talk about how this is a gift for the birds.
- Bake cookies for a shut in, or have a food drive.

Youth Group Lesson Ideas:

Begin the lesson by introducing the theme of abundance in nature. Sometimes in our culture, we are encouraged to take more than we need or to buy more than we need, creating shortages and encouraging a scarcity mindset. However, creation is abundant, rather than scarce. If we care for creation, and treat it as a gift, rather than something we need to control, we will experience abundance for ourselves and for others.

Engaging with Scripture

Ask someone in the youth group to read today's focus Scripture, Genesis chapter 2, verse 4 to the end of the chapter. Many people in the group may be more familiar with the creation account from Genesis 1 that happens in 7 days with humans being created at the end of the order. Encourage students to name any surprises in this version of the creation story. Expect answers such as the creation of humans before plants and other animals and no mention of the number of days of God's blessing or resting at the end. They may also be drawn to the last line in the chapter that the first people felt no shame in their nakedness at this point in the story. Rather than reading on to chapter 3 and getting into the possibility for shame to enter, remain with chapter 2 for the youth and encourage them to recognize that each person and each component in creation is part of a greater whole, in relationship with one another, and that shame was not present.

Ask the students where they notice anything in abundance in the story. Perhaps they will name that the streams watered the whole surface of the ground (in abundance) or that there were all kinds of trees (an abundance of trees) or that the land near the river Pishon had gold and onyx (abundant minerals) or that God created an abundance of possible companions for the first human. They may also note that even the fact that there is more than one

story about God creating is a sign of abundance and that the abundance of stories in the Bible is a demonstration that multiple voices and multiple perspectives are valued and included in the canon.

Activity

If youth group generally includes an icebreaker or other activity, consider a scavenger hunt, as described for children above, where each team is awarded the prize when it completes the hunt. If you have time, you could even complete a competitive scavenger hunt in which only one team gets the prize and then repeat in a way that each team wins a prize at the end, to discourage competition and encourage collaboration. Point out that today's scavenger hunt was designed so that the prizes are abundant and the need for competition is minimized because everyone can find all the clues and complete the game. Scarcity and competition are one way to look at the world. Abundance is God's way of creating and encouraging us to live in the world.

Discussion Prompts

Engage youth in questions such as those listed below to encourage them to reflect on the concepts of abundance, gratitude, and a gift economy.

- What gifts do we receive from nature?
- What gifts in nature make you glad?
- Have you ever picked a berry off a vine or bush? Was your berry picking something you did to earn money or not? How would that change the experience? Kimmerer talks about berry picking as medicine (p. 104). How did it make you feel to pick the berry/berries? Did you think about how the plant had produced the berry that would taste sweet to you? How would you be different if berry picking were a regular part of your daily life (or if it is, how does berry picking shape you)?
- Service berries are a calendar plant for some people (p. 3). What plants are signs for you in your area of a certain time of year?
- How are humans created to be part of and to care for creation? (Today's scripture says humans were created for the purpose of tending the garden.)
- Where do you see abundance in creation?
- The concept of alternative currencies may be raised, related to Kimmerer's ideas throughout *The Serviceberry*, including p. 14, 33, 42, 91. How could thinking of currency differently change the way we live in the world? If we

think of sharing or gratitude as our currency instead of dollars, how would that change who we are and how we show up in the world?

Closing

If youth group generally ends with a circle or prayer time, or the opportunity for members of the group to name their lived experience, a prompt for this time could include to identifying a gift from nature that they are particularly grateful for, a gift in themselves that they can commit to using for the sake of the community or the planet, or an alternate currency like love or trust or joy that they can spread this week.

Carrying the theme through the week

Issue this challenge to students and leaders:

As you move between now and next week, try to notice God's creation. Notice what is beautiful and what is ugly. Notice what is damaged and what is cared for. Notice how you are connected and disconnected to the natural world. Try to spend at least fifteen minutes each day outside without an agenda other than being present.

Also, read one or more of these books. Consider sharing it with your family or in a group.

Children's book suggestions for Week 1:

- *Jingle Dancer* by Cynthia Leitich Smith
- *Rivka's Presents* by Laurie Wallmark
- *The Quiltmaker's Gift* by Jeff Brumbeau
- *Elmer and the Rainbow* by David McKee
- *Brother Eagle, Sister Sky* by Susan Jeffers
- *A Mango in Hand: A Story Told Through Proverbs* by Antonio Sacre
- *I Ate Sunshine for Breakfast: A Celebration of Plants Around the World* by Michael Holland FLS and Philip Giordano

Reflection Questions for Small Groups:

- What gifts in nature make you glad?
- Kimmerer writes that “gratitude and reciprocity are the currency of a gift economy⁴”. What could the currency of gifts within a human economy look like when aligned with the reciprocities of nature?
- How does Kimmerer expand your understanding of “recycling” and “energy flows”?
- Kimmerer observes that “we live in a time when every choice matters.” What choices have others made that affect you today? What choices have made the most impact for the planet (sustainable and unsustainable?) What choices are you willing to make to nurture the abundance of creation (one small and one large)?

⁴ Robin Wall Kimmerer. 2024. *The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World*. Scribner. p.14.

Week 2

Liturgical Resources

Opening Prayer

by Rev. Kelby Werner

God of abundance, we come to you in praise and adoration, our hearts thankful for the blessings that you have so freely given to us. Remind us today, as we take a break from navigating our world that is so set on possessing, that we are your people who live in your abundance.

It was you who told us that a life dedicated to hoarding worldly possessions is a life wasted. Let our lives instead reflect your generous Spirit. Orient our hearts to your generous will. May we accept the abundance of others and share our own abundance that all people may grow together in community in the light of your love and peace. Amen.

Call to Worship

by Rev. Kelby Werner

One: When God's grace falls abundantly upon us,

All: May we embrace God's grace and share God's grace.

One: When God's abundant love overflows within us,

All: May we embrace God's love and share God's love.

One: When we find God's blessings abundant in our lives,

All: May we embrace God's blessings and share our blessings with all we meet.

One: For we know that it is God who creates all things, that to hoard the limited abundance of our world is to take abundance from one another.

All: Then let us receive and give God's grace and love, sharing the abundant blessings of our world with all people, that in giving and receiving we may find new ways to live and flourish. Glory to God, Amen.

Pastoral Prayer, Week Two

Inspired by Psalm 67

Rev. Richenda Fairhurst

God of grace and blessing, your light shines brightly on all living things! Divine One! We have been made by your own hands, of clay and life itself, formed from this earth to live on this soil as caretakers, keepers, and neighbors. Yet too many have failed in our duty. Under our watch, fires and storms rage and we are afraid. Strengthen us. Let us reclaim the gift of your grace. Correct us and restore us by your great mercy. We raise our prayers in Jesus's name and call out to you.

[Optional: Prayers of the People]

God of all living things, you have heard our prayers. Our joy flies high again, through the shining clouds and then dives to skim the waters you have created, rising again above the forests, then flowing as a waterfall to swoop down the mountains! Our joy is an eagle! Your blessing restores the harvest, sustaining and filling us. Let the people thank you! Let the people thank you! Amen.

[Optional: The Lord's Prayer]

Offertory Prayer for Week 2 (Reciprocity)

by Rev. Dr. Brian Smith

God, who lives in the mutual love of divine community, you call us to mirror your self-giving pattern. Yet, we confess that we have taken from the earth without returning care. Receive our gifts as tokens of our intention to give back, live justly, tread gently, and nurture what sustains us. Bless our offerings that we may foster healing for the land and all who depend on it; in Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Benediction

by Rev. Paul Mitchell

All the ends of the earth have seen
the salvation of our God.

**Shout to the Most High, all the earth,
break into joyous songs of praise!**

Let the sea and all within it thunder;
the world and all its peoples.

**Let the rivers clap their hands
and the hills ring out their joy
before Creator,
who comes to judge the earth,
who will rule the world with justice
and its peoples with equity.**

§

To give is to love.

To love is to live.

To live is to grow.

To grow is to flourish.

§

May we who follow Jesus
enter into Communion
with God's self-giving love.

**May we sing the life and love
of Christ in the world
this day and beyond.**

Sermon Primer: Week 2 – Reciprocity

By Pastor Ross Janovec

Primary Themes: reciprocity in creation, mutual care, giving, and receiving

Secondary Themes: abundance mindset, Honorable Harvest, relationship with creation

Moving from Gift to Reciprocity

In the previous week we studied how creation operates as a gift economy, in which resources flow freely, and abundance is meant to be shared. We considered how naming the world as gift transforms our relationship with creation. This week, we continue our exploration by examining the natural response to receiving gifts, which is reciprocity through giving back with gratitude.

The Parable of the Rich Fool in Luke 12:13–21 presents a strong counternarrative to the story capitalism tells us about how to be in relationship with one another. Jesus presents a story about a man who obtained a large harvest and decided to construct larger storage facilities instead of distributing his wealth to others. The man's fatal error did not stem from receiving abundance because the land had provided him generously, but from his reaction to that gift. He hoarded rather than participated in the circle of giving and receiving. "This very night your life will be demanded from you" comes the divine judgment. "Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?"

As Robin Wall Kimmerer writes, gratitude for receiving gifts must be followed up by "reciprocity: to give a gift in return".⁵ The natural flow from receiving to giving stands opposite to the Rich Fool's method of accumulating wealth for self-sufficiency. Kimmerer explains that Serviceberries nurture a community model of reciprocity, where relationships rather than self-sufficiency define safety and security, rather than self-sufficiency.⁶

When I first moved to Denver for seminary, I was transitioning from working at a church camp and mourning the loss of worshipping outside, fully immersed in the created world. The concrete jungle felt stifling in many ways, so I started looking for outdoor worship experiences. Through the Wild Church Network and connections with United Methodists in the metro area, I discovered The Land UMC, which has become my spiritual home over the last four years as it seeks to nourish the sacred relationship between the Creator and all creation.

At its peak, The Land's entirely off-the-grid community garden, worked by volunteers from surrounding churches, provided five hundred to six hundred

⁵ Robin Wall Kimmerer. 2024. *The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World*. Scribner. p. 13.

⁶ Robin Wall Kimmerer. 2024. *The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World*. Scribner. p. 72

pounds of fresh produce to the local food bank, serving a food desert in that part of the metro. I like to imagine that the folks who entered the food bank expected to receive boxed or canned items, lacking nutritional value, but instead came to discover an abundance of fresh produce that can enhance their meals. In effect, The Land creates a bond between creation and people who require the abundant gifts of the land through its community garden. We hope that by channeling this gift into someone's nourishment, they will be able to "gift it forward," creating an ongoing cycle of reciprocity.

The exchange of gifts between people follows the pattern Kimmerer describes as the distinctive feature of gift economies: "Gratitude and reciprocity are the currency of a gift economy, and they [...] multiply [...] with every exchange".⁷ The gift of relationship, gratitude, and care grows in strength as it moves through a community, unlike material goods, which tend to decrease in value over time. Our abundance grows in size when we share it with others instead of shrinking.

The Land's Conservation Statement beautifully articulates this reciprocal relationship: "While we develop the 9.6 acres of property, we seek to do so ethically and sustainably, constantly asking ourselves how we can live 'with' the land and not just 'on' the land (The Land Corporation and Janovec, n.d.)." The difference between existing with the land versus existing on it represents the fundamental principle of reciprocity. The act of living "on" the land indicates one-way exploitation but living "with" the land means maintaining mutual care and consideration. The statement acknowledges "the wisdom of indigenous communities who have coexisted harmoniously with the environment for centuries" and the importance of "incorporating their knowledge and practices" for sustainable transformation.

These indigenous teachings on the Honorable Harvest offer practical wisdom for cultivating reciprocal relationships with the natural world. The principles include asking permission before taking, taking only what is needed, minimizing harm, using everything that is taken, being grateful, and sharing what you have taken. The practices of harvesting transform the act of depletion into participation with creation's continuous renewal and abundance.

⁷ Robin Wall Kimmerer. 2024. *The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World*. Scribner. p. 14.

Kimmerer emphasizes these teachings when she reminds us that “we are called to harvest honorably, with restraint, respect, reverence, and reciprocity.”⁸ The calling asks us to consider how we can contribute value to the systems that support us through personal actions and collective involvement in a continuous process of shared development.

As you prepare to preach on reciprocity, consider:

1. How might your congregation move from passive gratitude for creation’s gifts to active reciprocity?
2. What specific ways can your community give back to the natural systems that sustain you?
3. How does the Rich Fool’s story challenge our modern assumptions about success and security?

References

The Land Corporation and Ross L. Janovec. n.d. “Get Involved.” *The Land UMC*.

Accessed June 3, 2025. <https://thelandaurora.org/getinvolved>.

⁸ Robin Wall Kimmerer. 2024. *The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World*. Scribner. p. 63

Sermon Illustrations

Week Two, Reciprocity

Rev. Richenda Fairhurst

Food Production and Farmworkers

Returning to the example of the story of the fool who built bigger barns in Luke 12, and expanding that story gives us some illustrations in the world right now.

Since Jesus told that story, things have changed. God's law is that we must care for creation and care for our neighbor. Those things come together when God tells us to leave enough of the harvest in the field so the poor can glean what they need (Leviticus 19:9-10; Matthew 12:1-4), and the animals of the air, land, and soil also have enough (Psalm 147:9).

What would Jesus's story sound like if Jesus was here today? He might start by asking us to think about how that barn got so full in the first place? Globally there is enough food to feed everyone in the world, yet in our greed we demand bigger and bigger harvests. We forget our gratitude for rain, soil, and sun, as well as forgetting our planetary limits.

Today, agricultural practices mean lots of plastics, pesticides, herbicides, and oil- and gas-derived fertilizers to boost crop production and build those barns bigger, and bigger.

We cannot enjoy the harvest if we sicken ourselves, our neighbors, our farms and our farm workers. Our soils are sick with microplastics and the pesticides we apply. They poison water, soil, animals, and people. The petrochemical fertilizer is contributing to the carbon pollution that is causing deadly heat waves.

The heat makes crops less productive and less nutritious. Rising heat also means suffering for people who work outdoors or in hot greenhouses. The heat means suffering also for the plants and animals that cannot escape it.

How can reciprocity transform our hearts so we return to balance, refreshing aquifers, healing our soils, and ensuring dignity for farmworkers?

A Few Bible References

Matthew 12:1-3

At that time Jesus went through the wheat fields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, so they were picking heads of wheat and eating them. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, “Look, your disciples are breaking the Sabbath law.” But he said to them, “Haven’t you read what David did when he and those with him were hungry?”

Proverbs 12:11

Those who work their land will have plenty to eat,
but those who engage in empty pursuits have no sense.

Deuteronomy 29:22-25

Future generations, your children after you, or foreigners from distant lands will say: Look at all that land’s plagues and the sicknesses that the Lord laid on it! Look at all its land burned by sulfur and salt, unsuitable for planting, unable to grow or produce any vegetation, as devastated as Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which the Lord devastated in anger and wrath! Indeed, all nations will ask: Why did the Lord do this to this land? What led to this terrible display of anger? They will deduce: It was because those people abandoned the covenant of the Lord.

Reference Articles and Links

[On Farms, ‘Plasticulture’ Persists](#) from Civil Eats, a good overview of the degree to which plastics are harming food production. “U.S. farms are covered in plastic, from the sides of greenhouses to plastic mulch, hoop houses, irrigation tubes, and more. As it degrades, plastic accumulates in soil and in plants, with potential threats to food safety.”

Video. Three-minute video from the UN stating the problem of agricultural plastics, and solutions. [Three ways to improve the management of agricultural plastics](#)

[Sustainable Agriculture and Creation Care Theology](#). How one regenerative farm ministry tackles food justice and radical hospitality in a rural ministry setting. Stories from Faith+Lead at Lutheran Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Heat affects yields in plants, from Columbia University: [How Climate Change Will Affect Plants](#), “an increase in temperature speeds up the plant lifecycle so that as the plant matures more quickly, it has less time for photosynthesis, and consequently produces fewer grains and smaller yields.”

[Food Justice. We seek to embrace a food economy based on the values of stewardship, sustainability and justice](#). From the General Board of Church and Society of The United Methodist Church.

Video. A short video from the National Farm Worker Ministry, [Harvesting Justice With Farm Workers](#). The National Farm Worker Ministry lists its partners to include the General Board of Church and Society, UMC Global Ministries, and the Methodist Federation for Social Action.

From the Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church, 2024, [Rights of Farm Workers in the US](#).

[Seminary Hill Farm](#) (the [2024 report](#) PDF) at the Methodist Theological School in Ohio, a United Methodist seminary with its own sustainable farm. In addition to supporting sixty share families and other food sharing, Seminary Hill Farm distributed 8,300 pounds of vegetables to food-insecure families. This real farm teaches ecotheology and healthy farm-to-table practices to seminary students. There’s even a group of students who call themselves “soil-keepers.”

Photos for the sermon

Find photos from Seminary Hill Farm on their [Insta](#) and [Facebook page](#), you will need to request permission to use these photos.

[Plastic wrapped saplings](#). Unsplash photo, free to use, photo by Duta Waskita.

[Plastic seedling pots](#). Unsplash photo, free to use, photo by Laura Ohlman.

[Plastic watering cans](#). Unsplash photo, free to use, photo by Wolfgang Rottmann.

Music Notes

By Rev. Kristina Sinks

Hymn Suggestions

Title	Reference
God, Who Stretched the Spangled Heavens	UMH 150
O God Who Shaped Creation	UMH 443
Take My Life, and Let It Be	UMH 399
When the Poor Ones (Cuando El Pobre)	UMH 434
Come, Ye Thankful People, Come	UMH 694
How Can We Name a Love	UMH 111
They'll Know We Are Christians By Our Love	TFWS 2223
The Servant Song	TFWS 2222

Contemporary Music Suggestions

Title	Composer	CCLI	OneLicense	Copyright/Reference
Justice Will Sprout from the Ground	Benjamin Jay Thomas	Not licensed, permission required		https://benthomasonline.bandcamp.com/track/justice-will-sprout-from-the-ground
Testify to Love	Henk Pool Paul Field Ralph Van Manen Robert Riekerk	CCLI Song # 2572844	#38748	1996,1998 EMI Blackwood Music, Inc. (MAIN); Universal Music Corporation.
Trees We'll Never See	Amy Grant	Not licensed, permission required		© 2023 Amy Grant Productions
So Will I (100 Billion X)	Benjamin Hastings, Joel Houston, Michael Fatkin	7084123		© 2017 Hillsong Music Publishing Australia

Resources for Leaders of Children and Youth

By Rev. Laura Baumgartner, Rev. Tura Foster Gillespie, Ann Mayer and Carolyn Nichols

Theme overview: Treating land and water as “natural resources” for our exclusive use leads to ecological problems. Instead, we are called to live in balance with creation through mutual care. Indigenous wisdom emphasizes the principle of reciprocity, which means giving back as much as we take. In Luke 12:13–21, Jesus teaches against greed. Rather than greedily storing things up in barns and storehouses as the rich man in Jesus’s story does, Kimmerer tells the story of a hunter who stores meat from the hunt “in the belly of my brother.”⁹ Reciprocity rather than greed will be the focus of this lesson.

Supplies Needed:

- Compost, soil, live worms, or food scraps in a clear jar with a lid (for children’s time in worship). If you have children who may open the jar when you don’t want them to, consider sealing it closed with some hot glue. If you have students who won’t be able to see into the jar with their eyes, leave the jar so it can be opened, and make selections for what to put in the jar that can be identified by smell or touch such as soil, worms, or dry grains of rice, rather than rotten foods.
- Banana in its peel or a whole apple or a carrot with the greens still attached and knife and cutting board (for snack)
- Red wigglers (to start a worm bin compost program)
- Compost bins for the fellowship hall and other public spaces at church (if you will be starting a compost program at your church)
- Radish seeds, small pots, and potting mix that includes compost to plant them in (to grow plants)
- Marshmallows or Goldfish crackers; straws, tape, plates or bowls. See link in *Tragedy of the Commons* activity (for youth simulation)

Children’s Time in Worship

Share with children that you’ve brought something to show them. Allow the children to examine the contents of the jar you brought and identify anything they can name. Help them identify anything they can’t name. Ask them whether

⁹ Robin Wall Kimmerer. 2024. *The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World*. Scribner. pp. 31–32.

they know why the contents of the jar are important to them, or how they benefit from the contents of the jar. Bring them to the understanding that worms can be part of a process called composting that breaks down leftover food items and turns them back into soil where new foods can grow. The contents of that jar (whether it's soil, compost, worms, or food scraps) are part of a process in which something that we are done with can become something of value again.

Remind children that God created a connected world. Every living thing depends on other living things for health and life. A drought anywhere on the planet may warm the oceans and intensify storms that crash onto far-off shores. Fires in Canada can spread toxins that are breathed by people living in Mexico. Every living thing on the planet requires the water that comes down as rainfall, and the oxygen in the air that we all breathe is made by plants in forests and oceans around the world. The plants also need the carbon dioxide that people breathe out for their own process. People live because plants live and plants live because people live. That's how God made it.

Conclude with a repeat-aloud prayer:

Dear God, Thank you for making me part of your world, and for the air we breathe and the space to play. Help me show my love for you by taking care of your world. Amen.

Children's Sunday School Lesson Ideas:

Begin the lesson with the children with an age-appropriate reading or telling of the story from Luke 12:16-20 when Jesus warns against accumulating great wealth or possessions. Talk about examples of when children have given away items for others to use or received used items to use instead of buying new. Elicit examples of hand-me-down clothing, donations of clothing that they've outgrown, sharing lunch with a friend who forgot theirs, or participating in food drives at their school or in the church. Perhaps they are aware of things their parents do such as donating blood or giving to charitable organizations. Help them come to the understanding that both giving and receiving are necessary and valued in God's world.

Play a game to embody the theme of reciprocity

To help children connect with the idea of giving back in a reciprocal way, play a collaborative game such as Chuck the Chicken or Magic Mind Trick.

Instructions for these and other collaborative games can be found here:

<https://www.playworks.org/game-tags/cooperative-games/>. Ask them to reflect on how this game is different from a game such as Tug of War, in which one team wins and the other loses. Help them come to the understanding that when we work collaboratively for a solution in which everyone can be part of a common shared outcome, we are acting reciprocally, rather than from a place of greed.

Sing a Song

If your children are still learning The Magic Penny from last week, consider singing it again to reinforce their learning it. Another song that highlights reciprocity in the idea of walking together, working together, and being part of one community together is “They’ll Know We Are Christians by Our Love” in The Faith We Sing, number 2223.

Discuss reciprocity in nature/Snack

Compost bins are a great example of reciprocity in nature. Show children a banana in its peel or a whole apple or a carrot with the greens still attached. Ask them whether they think the entire fruit or vegetable sounds like a good snack. Remind them that usually we remove the banana peel, the apple core, or the carrot greens before eating the rest of the fruit or vegetable. Use the knife and cutting board to demonstrate removing the parts we don’t usually eat and cutting the rest into pieces you can distribute to the children. While they enjoy their snack, ask what could be done with the leftover parts. Rather than throwing them away, suggest that they could be composted. If your church doesn’t already have a compost program, talk with the children about what would be needed to start one. Alternatively, consider inviting them to discuss with their families how they compost at home. Some may have a garden compost arrangement while others may live in an area where municipal compost collections are made. Set aside the leftovers from the snack to add to the compost in whatever way is most appropriate to your context. Help children understand that compost is a great way to turn unused food scraps, yard waste, and other organic materials into healthy soil in which to grow new plants.

It might even be fun to point out that some people say the church is a lot like a compost pile. People can bring themselves in whatever state they are, whether they feel sad or happy, used up or full, and together God will work with them and turn them into figurative places where faith can grow and new life is possible.

Make a compost project together

Depending on your context, there are several directions this project could go. Help children find a way to engage in reciprocal community with plants by composting. A few ideas are below.

- Take the compost scraps from the snack to the compost area of your church or a local community garden and mix them in. If the compost bin where you place your scraps is outside, look for worms and other compost critters that help with the transformation into healthy soil. Alternatively, look for critters under a rock in the church yard and inventory the insect population that is part of the reciprocal community in your area.
- Make a worm bin composting system for your classroom or for the church kitchen. You will need red wigglers and a box or container with air holes. You may wish to refer to the book *Worms Eat My Garbage* by Mary Appelhof for more information before beginning this project.
- Begin a compost collection program at your church. Talk with your local municipality about options for where the compost may go. Advocate for coordinated composting if it doesn't already exist in your area. Post signs about what to compost and what to exclude from composting according to the rules of the program available to you.
- Collect fallen leaves and crush them or shred them. Provide each child with a bag or jar to take some home and apply to soil in a garden, near a tree, or at a park. Teach them that in autumn months, mulch such as fallen leaves can enrich soil for growth that will come later in the spring.
- Plant radish seeds in soil that includes compost

Youth Group Lesson Ideas:

Begin the lesson by introducing the theme of reciprocity in nature. Remind students of the reciprocal nature of photosynthesis (plants making oxygen that animals need to breath) and respiration (animals making carbon dioxide that plants need to grow). In *The Serviceberry*, Kimmerer lists guidelines for an Honorable Harvest¹⁰ that may be interesting to youth as an example of how reciprocity could be part of human experience as well. Consider engaging students in writing a table grace or table blessing, based on the guidelines of an Honorable Harvest.

Engaging with Scripture

As is customary in your group, have someone read the focus Scripture for the day from Luke 12:13-21. Ask students about their ideas of inheritance. They may be more familiar with inherited traits such as eye color and propensity to disease, rather than possessions the way that Jesus describes inheritance in the parable. Elicit ideas about “stuff” and whether there are patterns in their families about how people treat their stuff. Some families may have heirlooms that are passed down generation to generation and others may regard stories or experiences as treasures more precious than material goods.

Encourage students to consider alternatives to the rich man’s strategies in the parable that Jesus told. What else could he have done with his surplus? What other options did he have? If it is not suggested, guide the discussion to using what we have to help others.

Activity

Kimmerer describes the concept of the Tragedy of the Commons¹¹ in *The Serviceberry* to illustrate the difference between greed-based strategies and reciprocity-based strategies for living. The Tragedy of the Commons can be simulated with youth using marshmallows or Goldfish crackers as described here:

https://francisapes.weebly.com/uploads/9/9/4/5/9945479/lab_2_tragedy_of_the_c

¹⁰ Robin Wall Kimmerer. 2024. *The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World*. Scribner. pp. 64-65.

¹¹ Robin Wall Kimmerer. 2024. *The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World*. Scribner. pp. 59.

[ommons.pdf](#) or here: <https://teachingapscience.com/tragedy-commons-5e/>. These simulations may be familiar to students who are taking or have taken AP Environmental Science.

Discussion Prompts

Engage youth in questions such as those listed below to encourage them to reflect on the concept of reciprocity and the simulation of the Tragedy of the Commons.

- In the simulation, what strategies allow a common resource to remain at a stable level? What strategies lead to hungry people? What strategies lead to accumulation of resources for just a few people?
- Can you think of another time when one person helped someone, and then later the person who was helped does the helping? Does that ever happen with animals or plants?
- Nature gives so much to us, how can we give back to nature?

Closing

If the youth group generally ends with a circle or prayer time, or the opportunity for each member of the group to name their lived experience, a prompt for this time could include identifying something they can commit to doing this week to give back to someone who has given to them or naming an emotion they experience when collaborating rather than competing, or a quality they want to grow in themselves that will build their ability to collaborate such as trustworthiness or compassion.

Carrying the theme through the week

Issue this challenge to students and leaders:

Between now and next week, take some time to stand or sit with your feet firmly on the natural ground (not a paved place). Feel the connection with the earth. Imagine the weight of the earth pushing against your feet. Imagine the history of the land you are connected with. How does it feel to be connected to the ground? Think about the ways the indigenous people may have used the land and been sustained by the land before colonization. Then think about the ways the land still sustains us.

Also, possibly read one or more of the books. Consider sharing it with your family or in a group.

Children's books suggestions for Week 2:

- *Berry Song* by Michaela Goade
- *Hello, Rain!* by Kyo Maclear
- *Fair Is Fair* by Sonny Varela
- *A Very Big Problem* by Amy-Jill Levine and Sandy Eisenberg Sasso
- *A Tree Is Nice* by Janice May Udry
- *Where Does God Live?* by Holly Bea
- *Hope: 50 Ways to Help Our Planet Every Day* from Penguin Random House, Australia

Reflection Questions for Small Groups:

- Where have you seen the two worldviews Kimmerer describes in play? What about in the history or emerging context of the UMC?
- How can we give back to creation?
- How can we practice gratitude toward plants, soils, waters, and creatures in creation?
- How do you envision the congregation or faith community in which you participate more fully embodying ministries of reciprocity within creation?
- Kimmerer gives examples of mutual aid and neighborhood networks emerging in the face of social and environmental crises. Share what you know about your community or neighborhood, and identify action steps toward building reciprocity in relations (different from charity).

Week 3

Liturgical Resources

Opening Prayer

by Rev. Kelby Werner

God of creation and community, in your love we have been made equal, beautiful, and diverse. In this time of worship, place into our hearts a spirit of reciprocity, recognizing that as we have been called into relationship with you, so too are we called into relationship with one another. Your sacred calling to use our diverse gifts to support, uplift, and care for one another.

We know that alone we are limited, our resources scarce, but in cooperation with one another, in cooperation with our earth, in cooperation with you who give us life and breath, there is bountiful flourishing to be found. That through cooperation, all creation may live in joyful interdependence fully able to embrace your joyful love and peace. Amen.

Call to Worship

by Rev. Paul Mitchell

The world tells us “Compete to thrive.”

**Paul teaches “If all the parts were alike,
where would the body be?”**

“They are, indeed, many different members
but one body.”

**We are learning “cooperation is a better model,
not only for surviving but for thriving.”¹²**

Let us worship Creator,
who makes us one.

¹² Robin Wall Kimmerer. 2024. *The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World*. Scribner, p. 76.

Pastoral Prayer, Week Three

Inspired by Psalm 65

By Rev. Richenda Fairhurst

Good and Holy God, who strengthens the mountains and calms the roaring seas! God, you are among us, you make the earth abundant, providing grain, and drenching farmland to bless the growth of the food that feeds us. Yet too many have sinned against you. We have degraded the land, cut down the forests, and blasted the mountain for eager gain. This destruction cannot last! Hold open the gates of night and morning and be known! Turn the evildoers away! Hear our prayer for our neighbors, our families, and this good earth.

[Optional: Prayers of the People]

Restoring God, you are with us. You bring everything that is good! You have heard our cry! Our strength flows from you! You who have made life in balance. By the hummingbird and the bear, the lizard and the firefly, you crown the year with your goodness. The desert, the hills, and the meadowlands burst with dew! The farmland grows lush. Hear, and shout, O human! Break out in song! Amen.

[Optional: The Lord's Prayer]

Offertory Prayer for Week 3 (Interdependence)

by Rev. Dr. Brian Smith

Triune God, whose life is shared in perfect unity, you created all things to be part of one living whole. Help us see ourselves not as separate from creation but woven into its web of life. May our offerings reflect our deep connection to all your creatures. Bless us and our gifts so that we may nourish both human and more-than-human communities; in Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Benediction

by Rev. Paul Mitchell

All creatures depend on Creator

to feed them at the proper time.

Give it to them — **they gather it up.**

open your hand — **they are well satisfied.**

Hide your face — **they are terrified.**

take away their breath — **they die and return to dust.**

send back your breath — **fresh life begins**

and God renews the face of the earth.

Glory forever to Creator!

§

To give is to love.

To love is to live.

To live is to grow.

To grow is to flourish.

§

May we who follow Jesus

enter into Communion

with God's self-giving love.

May we sing the life and love

of Christ in the world

this day and beyond.

Sermon Primer

By Pastor Ross Janovec

Primary Themes: interdependence in nature, ecological reciprocity, community well-being

Secondary Themes: natural cycles, baptism, body of Christ

Recognizing Our Interconnectedness in Creation

We studied creation as gift and our responsibility for reciprocity during the last two weeks. We will now explore the basic truth that binds all creation together

through our deep connection with nature. 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 uses the body as a metaphor to show how each unique part helps the entire body. The natural framework for understanding our connection with the wider community of creation comes from the image of interconnected parts forming a unified whole.

Robin Wall Kimmerer writes, “Food in our mouths is the thread that connects us in a relationship simultaneously spiritual and physical, as our bodies get fed and our spirits nourished by a sense of belonging”.¹³ This sense of belonging extends beyond human community to include our membership in the web of creation. As she notes, “To name the world as gift is to feel your membership in the web of reciprocity.”¹⁴

If there is one thing to know about me, especially when I am outside, it is my zealous appreciation for fire. Since early in my life, camping with my parents, to all those campfires with my Boy Scout troop, to a seemingly infinite amount of campfires at countless camp and retreat centers, to even the candles I light at home, I find the flame as an expression of the divine that represents just how much it intersects with the cycles present across the created world.

For me, any campfire starts with considering what ingredients from the created world will best suit the type of fire we need or want. What is the created world around me offering as a gift to that fire? What wood, tinder, brush, or grass is available? For me, I am a stickler for the log cabin style. It takes a lot of convincing for me to use another setup. There is something symmetrical and balanced about piling up the logs, two on the ground, then reaching up to the sky, two by two, as tall as needed for the fire’s purpose. Yet, this structure also presents a welcoming container to hold all the necessary materials to start a fire, then feed the fire, keeping it hot as long as necessary or until it naturally burns out.

There is something so cyclical about fires for me. These trees that are gifting this fuel to the flame are reciprocating their elements back into the air and ground for a new generation of creation’s beings to thrive from in their own time. Then,

¹³ Robin Wall Kimmerer. 2024. *The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World*. Scribner. p. 9

¹⁴ Robin Wall Kimmerer. 2024. *The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World*. Scribner. p. 22

when the fire must come to an end, at least for now, water in many different forms quiets the roar of the fire, dispersing the ashes with all their nutrients over all the land that can soak in those sources of life and vitality.

Fire and water—seemingly opposing forces—exist in a harmonious, interdependent relationship. Fire converts what was once solid into ash and smoke while water transports these nutrients to the soil to create new life. The elements function as a single system. The sacred dance of creation and dissolution, of transformation and renewal, mirrors the deepest patterns of our existence.

The dance between fire and water represents a key aspect of baptismal theology. Through baptism, water represents both death and life because we surrender our sinful nature to receive new life through Christ. Thomas Berry teaches us to view baptism through an ecological lens as he explains that “the universe is composed of subjects to be communed with, not objects to be used.”¹⁵ Through baptism, we begin our participation in this communion by acknowledging water as a living being with which we establish relationship.

The Celtic Christian tradition accepted this understanding by recognizing natural elements as manifestations of divine presence. The Celtic perspective of water as a living being changes our understanding of Paul’s metaphor because he shows how all creation exists as a single interconnected web of life. A reaffirmation of baptism that includes both fire and water elements can represent the natural processes of death and rebirth.

Kimmerer reminds us that “Abundance is created by recycling [in a circular economy], by reciprocity”.¹⁶ This understanding of circular transformation is central to both ecological and baptismal thinking—elements are not consumed and lost but instead transformed and reborn.

As you prepare to preach on interdependence, consider:

¹⁵ Thomas Berry. 2006. “Evening Thoughts: Reflecting on Earth as Sacred Community.” In *A Communion of Subjects: Animals in Religion, Science, and Ethics*, edited by Paul Waldau and Kimberley C. Patton. Columbia University Press. p. 149.

¹⁶ Robin Wall Kimmerer. 2024. *The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World*. Scribner. p. 16.

1. How might your congregation experience the body-of-Christ metaphor in light of the abundance of life existing in the ecological systems present around your community?
2. What natural cycles in your bioregion might illustrate interdependence?
3. How could a reaffirmation of baptism incorporate both symbols of fire and water?

Sermon Illustration

by Ann Mayer

Kimmerer relates water to manna from heaven,¹⁷ and ponders what would happen if we tried to sell manna. Consider retelling the story of manna in the desert (from Exodus 16) in the spirit of midrash. It's imagining our interconnectedness with all creation.

The story is about the children of Israel wandering in the desert. They were in the wilderness. They were on their way to the Promised Land, the land of milk and honey. But it took a very long time to get there, and they had just begun. They had no idea what they were getting into.

They remembered their years of slavery in Egypt. They remembered that they worked very hard and were not treated well, but they remembered that they always had food to eat.

Now they were in the desert and the provisions they brought along were running low. They had been gone only about six weeks or so when they began to grumble about being hungry. They were so hungry that they began to think slavery was a better idea than this freedom.

According to the story, the entire community began to complain. They said to Moses "Why didn't you let us die in Egypt? At least we had bread and meat to eat there! Now we will die of starvation! All you are leading us to is more sand!"

Moses told them that it was God who led them out of Egypt. Told them that God would save them now. Moses said that God would provide some miraculous food from heaven! God would take care of their hunger and their dissatisfaction. But

¹⁷ Robin Wall Kimmerer. 2024. *The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World*. Scribner. pp. 24-5.

why should they trust Moses, and why should they trust this invisible God that they did not know?

So, that very next morning there was the formation of dew. When the dew lifted, there, over the surface of the wilderness, they saw a fine and flaky substance, a substance that looked like frost on the ground. When they saw it, they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, “That is the food that God has given you to eat. This is the food that has come down from heaven.”

How silly, this didn’t look much like food! They didn’t know what to do with it. But they were really hungry. Moses said they could bake it or boil it.

So they gathered it like Moses instructed. Some baked it and some boiled it—but somehow they figured out ways to eat it. They ate till their stomachs were satisfied. God had showered a feast upon them. They called it manna.

Moses told them to eat their fill and not to leave any for morning—more would be provided in the morning, and the next morning, and the next morning. How could this be? How would this stuff appear every morning? What if it didn’t appear? Some were afraid that it wouldn’t be provided each day, so they ate less and held some for morning. When they did this, the manna got rancid during the night and was not edible the next morning.

Now, the instructions were different on the sixth day: on that day they were to gather double the amount and save it for the next day; it wouldn’t get rancid. So, it turned out, they didn’t have to gather on the seventh day of the week. On that day they got to rest. Some went looking anyway, but didn’t find anything.

When they were in Egypt, they had to work very hard every single day in order to eat. The story says that God was testing the children of Israel. But this was much easier than what they had to do for food in Egypt. What was the test? Who was this invisible God who provided food each day? How did they know this daily provision would continue to show up every day?

That was the test – they must rely on this ancestral God to provide food each day. Would they have faith that divine nourishment would continue to be provided every day? The test of the Israelites was not a test of endurance or sacrifice, but a test of character under conditions of plenty. Freed from the need to work hard every day just to eat, what would they do?

The food kept showing up. It kept showing up for the forty years they were in the desert. It kept showing up until they reached the Promised Land.

There in the desert they were living with an abundance of food; all they had to do is trust that it would be there, trust that God would continue to provide this abundance. They learned to trust that what they needed would be provided.

They say that the manna contained all the different flavors the people enjoyed. To some it tasted like cream; to others it tasted like honey; to others it tasted like cake. Maybe even blueberries or mangos. Chocolate? Boysenberry pie? Gourmet veggie pizza? It was amazing food that wasn't like anything they had ever had, and was like everything they had ever had as well. Everyone found it satisfying.

The story says that the manna would melt as the day went on and the sun got hot. It formed streams and would flow and it would trickle into the ground, eventually joining all the bodies of water on the earth.

Animals would drink from the streams of melted manna, and drink from the water it flowed into. These animals flew and crawled and swam all over the earth sharing the manna with all who ate these animals.

The water evaporated and rained back down, causing the manna to nourish the plants that grew upon the earth. So today, when we eat, all the different foods we eat, we continue to eat what is provided by the sacred mystery to the children of Israel on their way to the land of milk and honey. In this way, God still provides for our nourishment through everything we eat.

Music Notes

By Rev. Kristina Sinks

Hymn Suggestions

Title	Reference
Like the Murmur of the Dove's Song	UMH 544
Many Gifts, One Spirit	UMH 114
Mil Voces Para Celebrar	UMH 59
For the Beauty of the Earth	UMH 92
Mountains Are All Aglow	UMH 86
Rise to Greet the Sun	UMH 678
How Can We Name a Love	UMH 111
God of the Sparrow God of the Whale	UMH 122
This is My Song	UMH 437
I Am Your Mother ("Earth Prayer") (1993)	TFWS 2059
We Belong to One Another - Amanda Udis Kessler (Nettleton/Come Thou Fount) no charge, no licensing, no reporting needed	www.youtube.com/watch?v=hF-1xAMh4AI

Contemporary Music Suggestions

Title	Composer	CCLI	OneLicense	Copyright/Reference
God of Diversity	Colin Gibson and Margaret Bond	7092190		© 2006 Gibson, Colin; Bond, Margaret
Hold Us Together	Matt Maher, Steve Wilson	5553657		© Meaux Mercy; Skyline Apartments; SPIRITANDSONG.COM PUBLISHING; Thankyou Music Ltd
Blowin' In the Wind	Bob Dylan	Not licensed, permission required		® Originally Released 1963, 1964, 1965, 1966 Sony Music Entertainment Inc.
Singing for Our Lives (We Are a Gentle, Angry People)	Holly Near			fpuucanton.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/hymn-170-we-are-a-gentle-angry-people.pdf
Blue Boat Home (Hyfrydol)	Peter Mayer			open.spotify.com/track/0l1tYtXt1bUM0s65UI8Zvu
Keep Us All Close	EastLake Music			www.multitracks.com/songs/EastLake-Music/A-Million-Miles/Keep-Us-All-Close/

Resources for Leaders of Children and Youth

By Rev. Laura Baumgartner, Rev. Tura Foster Gillespie, Ann Mayer and Carolyn Nichols

Theme overview: Sometimes we talk about nature as somewhere we go, but we are part of nature and share a deep interconnectedness with the rest of creation. In 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Paul teaches that each part of the body is essential to its function. Just as the body of Christ is interconnected, so too is all creation.

Many studies have shown that being in nature is good for us. It is good for our physical, emotional, psychological, social, and spiritual well-being. Similar to what Paul claims in his letter to the Corinthians that the parts of the body can't live well without one another, and people in the church can't live well without each other, so too the various components of the natural world need one another to thrive in community. What we might not think about is that people are also part of the system of the natural world and we need the rest of creation to live our best lives.

The Divine is present within us and within all of the plants, animals, soil, water, and air that we share the planet with. God is also all around us. God created humanity to be part of the natural world, not separate from it. This lesson focuses on how we are strengthened by a connection with nature and in fact, connecting with nature is connecting with God, who is present in nature.

Supplies Needed:

- Set up a few chairs or carpet squares at the front of the church for musical chairs. Have a few extras close by to add when the music stops. Arrange for a musician to play snippets of a familiar hymn tune or children's song or have a recording ready to play for musical chairs. (for children's time in worship)
- Container of water (for Sunday School discussion)
- Water cups for every child and something salty (for snack)
- Eyedropper with water and eyedropper with nail polish remover, waxed paper (for Sunday School activity)
- Water cycle coloring sheet (for Sunday School)
- Blue tablecloth for blessing activity and recording of "Wade in the Water" or a similar song (for youth group activity)

- Foot-washing materials, including a bowl, a pitcher, and a towel (for youth group activity); if you plan to offer foot washing to the congregation, plan to make an announcement in a way that gives people the chance to wear removable footwear.

Children's Time in Worship

This morning in worship, play a game with the children. If you have more than ten children who generally come forward for Children's time, you may want to set up multiple areas where ten children at a time can play musical chairs (or musical carpet squares). For smaller numbers of children, start with fewer chairs and you may want to prepare a few adults who could get recruited during the game to play along.

Explain to children that you would like them to play a familiar game in a different way. When the music starts, they will walk around the chairs (or carpet squares). When the music stops, they will need to sit down on one of the chairs (or carpet squares). However, they can't sit down until there is someone who can sit in every space. Instead of removing chairs (or carpet squares), you will be adding them at various moments during the game. So, the object will be for children to invite others to be part of the game and join the circle.

Play a few rounds of the game, as time allows. Then, while children are sitting down, explain that just as in our game, we kept growing our understanding of who was in the game and whom we needed to be able to play, God helps us do that in real life too. God helps us grow our understanding of who is our neighbor, so we include our families, our neighborhoods, our churches, other plants and animals, and even the water, soil, rocks, and sky among the community that God created to live and work and play together.

Conclude with a repeat-aloud prayer:

Dear God, thank you for the water that refreshes us and keeps us alive. Teach us to use water well and share it with our friends, neighbors, and even strangers. Amen.

Children's Sunday School Lesson

Greet the children and welcome them to Sunday School. As you begin, engage with them about the parts of their bodies. Encourage them to name the body parts that are easy to point to like arms, legs, feet, fingers, and noses. Ask them whether they've ever thought about what one body part might say to another? Maybe the arms would say something to the feet about making sure not to fall because the arm doesn't want to get scratched up. Maybe the feet would say to the nose to move closer to something that smells good. Using age-appropriate language, explain that the Bible has something to say about what body parts might or might not say to one another. Proceed by reading or telling of Paul's explanation to the Corinthians about how the parts of the body work together from 1 Corinthians 12:15-17, 21. Explain that he is talking about body parts, but he's also talking about the church and how people need one another. Expand the concept to include even the natural world, and that people depend on other animals, plants, rocks, wind, rain, and oceans and they depend on people too, the way that Paul describes body parts depending on one another. If appropriate, you may introduce the word *interdependence* to describe how we need one another.

Play a game to embody the theme of interdependence

If your children did not participate in musical chairs during worship, you may wish to use the idea above for a game during Sunday School. Alternatively invite children to tell a story together, by building on one another's ideas. With children in a circle, begin the story with something simple such as, "There's a squirrel that lives in a tree." Then invite the child sitting on one side of you to add a sentence about that squirrel and what it likes to do or eat or visit or others that live in the tree as well. Proceed around the circle so each child can add a new idea to the story. When everyone has had a chance to add an idea, you can build on the story by introducing new characters, new adventures, or a challenge for the squirrel. When the story starts to spin out of control, thank the children for their creativity and bring the storytelling to an end. Point out that this helps us to see how we can value and collaborate with what everyone brings.

Sing a Song

Consider reviewing songs from the last two weeks and perhaps introducing either [Make New Friends but Keep the Old, One Is Silver and the Other Gold](#) or [Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes](#) that relate to this week's theme.

Discuss interdependence in nature/Snack

Water is an important part of how we are interdependent on the natural world. We need water to live and we need to protect water supplies and keep them clean so they can go on nourishing life for many generations after us. Show children a glass or container of water. Ask them what they know about water. Expect them to say they drink it, they need it to live, wash with it, water plants with it, and clean with it. If necessary, expand their thinking by explaining that everything we eat needs water. Fruits and vegetables need water; our bread products come from grains, which need water to live; even the meat we eat comes from animals that need water to live. It is integral to our being. Even the processed foods we eat came from something that needed water to grow. If you have a salty snack for children, ask them to taste it and notice how it might make them feel thirsty. Pour each child a cup of water and encourage them to taste it. Ask them whether they can taste where all that water has been before. Probably they won't be able to taste it, but that water has been in rivers and streams, the ocean, animals, plants, and rain for millions of years. Remind children that the same water they drink was also part of a drink that a dinosaur once took when it was thirsty many years ago.

Learn about the water cycle together

When children have finished eating and drinking, clear their snacks but stay at the table and encourage them to share what they know about the water cycle. Perhaps begin by asking what will happen if water is left out on the table overnight or even all week until Sunday School next week. Most will hopefully be able to say that it will evaporate. If possible, connect evaporation to other phase changes that water goes through to produce rain, snow, sleet, and clouds.

Place some waxed paper in the middle of the table where the children can see it and use your eyedropper to add drops of water to the waxed paper. Try to keep each drop separate by adding it to a different part of the waxed paper. Ask the children to describe the drops. They should notice that they look like bubbles and stick up from the waxed paper. Also, they should notice that they don't

evaporate very fast. You may be able to use the eyedropper to move drops around on the paper or even divide up a large drop into smaller drops. Try not to squeeze air into the middle of the drops as that will affect how they evaporate, which is what we want to guide children to observe.

Explain that you are going to add another kind of liquid to the waxed paper (nail polish remover) and that you'd like to ask them not to touch the new liquid because if it gets on their fingers it can remove any nail polish they have on and if they touch their eyes with the liquid on their fingers, it might make their eyes itch or hurt. Use a second eyedropper to add drops of nail polish remover to the waxed paper. Again try to keep the drops separate from one another so the drops of water can be compared with the drops of nail polish remover. Ask children to notice whether the nail polish remover drops are different in any ways from the water drops. They should be able to see that the drops are flatter and more spread out on the waxed paper. In addition, they will probably observe that the nail polish remover evaporates much more quickly than the water.

This activity can be extended in various ways, as well.

- You can also observe the evaporation of water and nail polish remover on paper towels or on the tabletop itself. Each surface will also change the observations a little bit. The paper towel will absorb the two liquids before they evaporate, spreading them out to different circumferences. The tabletop will likely be very similar to the waxed paper, but may be a different color, making it possibly easier or harder to observe, depending on your lighting. Do not put nail polish remover directly on a painted or finished wood table because it will damage the surface.
- If you wish to invite children to explore the steps in the water cycle more fully, provide a coloring sheet for them or ask them to draw a cloud, a river, and the water that evaporates out of the river into the cloud, and rains back from the cloud into the river.
- If possible, invite children into the worship space to touch the water in the baptismal font. Possibly invite a congregation member who remembers their baptism to come and talk with children about what the waters of baptism mean to them.

Youth Group Lesson Ideas:

Begin the lesson by introducing the theme of interdependence in nature. Explain that there are many ways that components of the natural world are interdependent. Most youth are probably familiar with the water cycle and the ways that water moves throughout the natural world, and how people interact with water in various states. If they are less familiar, it might be worth pointing out that other nutrients such as nitrogen, phosphorus, sulfur, and carbon also cycle in nature. Throughout each of these cycles, organisms (including animals such as people) interact with nutrients and non-living parts of God's creation, transforming the nutrient into a form that is needed by another part of the system. Nutrient cycling is one example of a way that God has created the natural world to be interdependent, one part depending on another part.

Engaging with Scripture

Ask a youth group member to read today's focus Scripture, 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. Ask students what Paul was talking about when he wrote about body parts. If necessary, help them come to recognize that he is using body parts as a metaphor for the church. By noting how body parts have to work together for the good of the whole, he is saying that people in a church have to work together for the good of the whole. Pause for a moment for them to think about ways that people in a church need one another. Perhaps they will be able to identify that committee members rely on one another, or that the teachers of a Sunday School class need the children to be able to teach and the children need the teacher to get their lessons ready. Maybe they will be aware that when someone is sick, others will often pray for them and may even provide the person's family with meals for a while. If necessary, point out ways that your church is needed in your community, as meeting space, a voice for justice in your town, or to provide volunteers at local food banks, tutoring centers, or for other community projects.

Help youth to extend their thinking to also note that the same principle Paul describes in the church applies beyond the church as well, into the natural world. Just as the members of a church need one another and the members of a community need the church, so do the components of nature need one another.

Discussion prompts:

This week, engage students in discussion before the activity, to gauge their readiness and encourage participation in the activities. Use as many or as few of the discussion prompts as you need for your students.

- On page 47, Kimmerer talks about “natural laws.” What laws of nature do you know (e.g. gravity, an object in motion stays in motion unless an unbalanced force acts on it, conservation of energy and conservation of mass)? What are human laws (e.g. speed limits, you have to go to school or be homeschooled)? How are they different from each other (you can’t break laws of nature but you can break human laws)? Are there laws of nature that govern how we live with other creatures on the planet? What in our current way of life is in contradiction to laws of nature?
- Can you think of things in the natural world that you depend on for existence, such as water or food?
- Kimmerer talks about food filling both physical and spiritual needs, and describes the serviceberry as providing the spiritual food of belonging, which she calls the most vital of foods.¹⁸ This may be something youth can relate to the concept of manna in the wilderness as described in Exodus 16 (see also sermon illustration). What are the spiritual foods in your life that bring you a sense of belonging to the community or the world?
- What other Bible stories do you know in which water is important to the story? (Jesus’s baptism, woman at the well, Israelites get water from a stone, Jesus walks on water, Jesus washes the feet of his disciples)
- What are the different things water represents in the Bible?
- During baptism, we use water, a normal part of life, to symbolize God’s presence with us. We sense God’s presence in the water. Where do you notice God’s presence in normal, everyday things?

Activity

Depending on your church context, specifically whether the youth group meets when adults are also in the building or not, there are two options for an activity for this lesson.

- If the youth group meets during worship and there is a fellowship time with youth and adults afterward, consider inviting youth to create a foot

¹⁸ Robin Wall Kimmerer. 2024. *The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World*. Scribner. p. 9.

washing station in the fellowship space. As a way to engage with water and note the ways that we are interdependent with water and that people can serve one another, youth may be able to offer to wash the feet of congregation members, as Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. If washing the feet of congregation members isn't something that youth can do, they may also wash one another's feet.

- If foot washing is impractical in your context or if you prefer an option that invites more reflection, consider inviting youth to offer one another blessings with simulated water. Play a recording of "Wade in the Water" or another similar song during this time. Lay a blue tablecloth on the floor and assign four youth to each be in charge of one corner of the table cloth. They will gently move the cloth up and down a few inches, while leaving the center of the tablecloth on the floor, to create the effect of "ripples" in a body of water. Invite each youth to take a turn sitting in the middle of the tablecloth while those at the corners create ripples in the water. All youth who are not sitting on the tablecloth then take turns naming the ways they are thankful for the person and how they call on God to bless that person. Ideally, if time allows, each youth has the opportunity to sit in the middle and hear the blessings of the group for them and to be part of making the ripples for others.

Closing

For the prayer time or circle time this week, consider inviting youth to name the ways that they are interdependent on one another, or offer a word of thanksgiving for something that they depend on, or to name a way that they can be depended on for the benefit of their family or community.

Carrying the theme through the week

Issue this challenge to students and leaders:

As you move about between now and the next session, think about how you are connected to the natural world and how you might feel disconnected from it. Watch for the ways you are sustained by nature with or without you noticing.

Also, possibly read one or more of the books. Consider sharing it with your family or in a group.

Children's books suggestions for Week 3:

- *Bud Finds Her Gift* by Robin Wall Kimmerer
- *Julia's House for Lost Creatures* by Ben Hatke
- *Hair Love* by Matthew Cherry
- *Best Friends: We Are Better Together* by Roger Priddy
- *The King Penguin* by Vanessa Roeder
- *All The World* by Liz Garton Scanlon
- *I Can Do Hard Things: Mindful Affirmations for Kids* by Gabi Garcia
- *An Adventure through the Water Cycle with Drip the Raindrop* by Cara Moyers
- *Loos Save Lives: How Sanitation and Clean Water Help Prevent Poverty, Disease, and Death* by Seren Boyd
- *The Everywhere Atom: A Journey through the Carbon Cycle and Climate Change* by Christine Shearer
- *What if There Were No Bees: A Book about the Grassland Ecosystem* by Suzanne Slade

Reflection Questions for Small Groups:

- How does interdependence shape creation care?
- In your group, read through the ancient indigenous guidelines of the Honorable Harvest and share with one another the guidelines that resonate with you and challenge you? How would embodying these guidelines lead to alternative practices within your community?
- Where can you see examples of what Kimmerer terms “abundance stored in the belly of my brother”?¹⁹
- How might the principles of mutualism and abundance, rather than scarcity and competition, apply to church communities? To human societies?
- What alternatives or transformations to our capitalist global economy can you imagine? As you have read through this book, what examples from nature and from indigenous cultures have resonated with you and help strengthen the argument that such alternatives are possible and might lead to thriving?

¹⁹ Robin Wall Kimmerer. 2024. *The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World*. Scribner. p. 72.

Week 4

Liturgical Resources

Opening Prayer

by Rev. Kelby Werner

God of hope, we acknowledge that our world is one in which your abundant and sustainable resources are taken for granted, hoarded, and wasted for earthly profit. In this moment, we come to you as intentional community seeking you in praise and worship with the weight of the world laying heavy on our hearts.

O God, let us instead feel your presence, for we know that there is nothing on earth that compares to your love of creation, to your goodness, and to your abundant kindness. Allow us to put our hope in you with the knowledge that through you all things are possible. Let your goodness and love wash over us that we may be your presence of kindness on this earth. That in this kindness, we may find a wider more diverse community, an end to exploitation and injustice, and a world defined by your perfect peace and love. Amen.

Call to Worship

by Rev. Kelby Werner

One: Children of God, when we recognize the ways in which our society takes advantage of God's abundance, how will we answer?

All: God of hope, renew us this day that, in your abundance, we may find new ways to support your creation.

One: Children of God, when our efforts toward change leave us feeling drained, how will we answer?

All: God of hope, replenish us this day that, in your love, we may stand invigorated, ready to accomplish your work.

One: Children of God, just as rain sent from heaven waters the earth, nourishing life and accomplishing its purpose, let God's presence wash afresh over us.

All: Renew and refresh us, O God, that we may embrace your presence so that we may be your conduits of hope in our world.

Pastoral Prayer, Week Four

Inspired by Psalm 96

by Rev. Richenda Fairhurst

God of glory, God of beauty and grandeur, of sanctuary and justice! Even the trees and forests shout joyfully to you! You make the earth rejoice by your power and glory. Let us be as faithful as the forest. Let us be as worthy as the rolling hills and meadows of the countryside, to know your power and tremble at your justice. Forgive us; see us trembling. You who made the heavens and every blade of grass knows the damage humans have done to one another and your creation. You call us to justice. We cry to you! Hear our prayers!

[Optional: Prayers of the People]

Just and righteous One, you turn our hearts to righteousness. We will again be as you demanded and ordained; we shall be good and worthy stewards of this earth. And by your firm hand we will join the chorus, “God has set the world firmly in place; it won’t be shaken.” God is coming to establish justice on the earth! God is coming! Let the earth and all people rejoice! Amen.

[Optional: The Lord’s Prayer]

Offertory Prayer for Week 4 (Hope for Creation)

by Rev. Dr. Brian Smith

God of renewal, when you send forth your word, the world is made new. Plant in us a hope rooted in your promise to restore the earth. As we offer our gifts, may our giving contribute to your work of redemption and bloom into beauty where it is most needed; in Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

Benediction

by Rev. Paul Mitchell

With powerful deeds of justice

you answer us, God our Deliverer,

in whom all the ends of the earth

and the farthest seas put their trust.

You set the mountains in place by your power,

having armed yourself with might.

You still the roaring of the seas,

the roaring of the waves,

and the tumult of the peoples.

The fields are covered with flocks

and the valleys are blanketed with grain.

They shout and sing for joy!

§

To give is to love.

To love is to live.

To live is to grow.

To grow is to flourish.

§

May we who follow Jesus

enter into Communion

with God's self-giving love.

May we sing the life and love

of Christ in the world

this day and beyond.

Sermon Primer: Week 4 – Hope for Creation

By Pastor Ross Janovec

Primary Themes: ecological restoration, renewal, hope, resilience

Secondary Themes: resurrection, redemption, new creation, ecological succession

Hope for Restoration in Creation

We have spent the last three weeks studying creation as gift, our responsibility to reciprocate, and our essential connection with all living things. Our exploration concludes by examining hope as an active process of renewal instead of a passive form of wishing.

The biblical passage Isaiah 55:10–13 presents one of the most powerful descriptions in scripture about ecological restoration through the image of “mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. Instead of the thornbush will grow the juniper, and instead of briers the myrtle will grow.” The prophet portrays creation as an active force that participates in God’s redemptive mission instead of serving as a static background.

Fire mitigation stands as a common redemptive task that absorbs substantial bandwidth and energy from summer camp and retreat centers. Before human interference many natural areas in the created world experienced periodic fires that cleared overgrown vegetation to allow fresh growth. The nutrients from burned plants would nourish the next generation while clearing space for new plants to establish themselves with less competition.

Now, many natural spaces are so disrupted that they no longer experience these regenerative burns. Stewards such as camp professionals must manually replicate this clearing. What was once a natural process has fallen to humanity to continue facilitating spaces that depended on that rhythm long before human presence was established.

I admit I feel a deep sadness as I reflect on this reality—a sadness grounded in recognizing how human activity has disrupted these natural cycles. Yet within

this recognition lies a seed of hope—that even after disruption, restoration remains possible.

Robin Wall Kimmerer writes, “How do systems change? How can we move toward the just communities we need and want? The natural process of ecological replacement highlights two mechanisms at work in replacing a complex system that dominates the landscape and seems too big to change. Succession relies in part on incremental change, the slow, steady replacement of that which does not serve ecological flourishing with new communities”.²⁰ This requires some amount of disturbance for new life to flourish.

This dual nature of ecological change speaks deeply to me. The patient persistence of succession coupled with the transformative power of disturbance. Fire that once seemed only destructive becomes generative. The ashen ground that appeared lifeless reveals itself as fertile. What looked like an ending becomes a beginning. Is this not the pattern of resurrection that pulses through all creation?

Wendell Berry reminds us that “the care of the earth is our most ancient and most worthy, and after all our most pleasing responsibility. To cherish what remains of it and to foster its renewal is our only hope.”²¹ When we participate in restoration, we engage in a profound spiritual practice.

Kimmerer offers this vision for our collective future: “To replenish the possibility of mutual flourishing, for birds and berries and people, we need an economy that shares the gifts of the earth.”²²

Hope for creation means holding the tension between grief for what’s lost and commitment to what can be restored. It means seeing ourselves not as saviors of a passive earth but as participants in an active community of renewal. It means

²⁰ Robin Wall Kimmerer. 2024. *The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World*. Scribner. p. 100.

²¹ Wendell Berry. 2018. *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*. Edited by Norman Wirzba. Counterpoint. p. 14.

²² Robin Wall Kimmerer. 2024. *The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World*. Scribner. p. 105

recognizing that, like fire in a forest, the disruption of harmful systems can create space for new life to emerge.

As you prepare to preach on hope, consider:

1. Where have you witnessed ecological healing after disturbance? What spiritual lessons did you find there?
2. What systems in your life or community might need gentle succession or beneficial disturbance?
3. How might our faith community become agents of the right kind of ecological change?

Sermon Illustrations

by Rev. Richenda Fairhurst

Restoration of wild rivers and after wildfires

God is revealed in the creation. From the majesty of the forest to the raw power of a rushing river, the prayerful can see in the natural world a celebration of life. Yet even rivers and forests have natural cycles of destruction and regrowth. Because they too, are part of living ecosystems, including cycles of drought, fire, and flood.

Healing is an inherent capacity of the creation. Native plants and animals play essential roles in the return of damaged ecosystems, both when the cycle is a natural disruption, or when the cycle is disrupted unnaturally, such as in the climate-fueled storms and fires that cause such harm today.

For example, wildfires. While made worse by climate change, wildfire is also part of the natural cycle of landscapes. Following a wildfire, flowers called “fire followers” bloom and grow. The fire poppy is one such flower. The red, yellow, and green of that flower are among the first signs of a recovering forest. For prairie land, fresh green shoots are the happy outcome after natural fire.

As God has called human beings to be stewards, with that call comes the inborn capacity for stewardship. That means inherent in humans is the God-given and God-ordained capacity for restoration. Humans are more than caretakers. We are also repairers, defenders, and protectors, and we can accomplish what God intends (Isaiah 55:11).

Some specific examples of rewilding and restoring river ecosystems:

The Klamath River, which starts in Oregon and runs through Northern California to the Pacific Ocean, is a dramatic success story. A decade of work culminated in the removal of three aging hydroelectric dams in 2024. The speed of restoration of the Klamath shows the capability of the land to heal and of humans to be stewards of the healing process.

Preparation for the Klamath River restoration included years of gathering native seeds and clearing invasive plants. When the reservoirs emptied, the bare soil was seeded by hand as well as by helicopter. The plants grew, animals returned, and the salmon, a key species for a healthy ecosystem, swam again up the river.

The Meuse River, Netherlands. In the Netherlands, the rewilding of the Meuse came from the growing crises of worsening flooding and troubled fisheries. The project brought back wild horses, otters, and people; a million visitors a year come to enjoy its life and beauty.

The Elwha River, Washington State. In Washington state, dam removal and restoration of the Elwha River twelve years ago reclaimed eight hundred acres for nature, plants, animals, and salmon.

These stories show the hope in creation! Restoration efforts are possible and essential, and must also include addressing climate change, plastic pollution, and other destruction of God's Earth.

A Few Bible References

Mark 4:26-28

Then Jesus said, "This is what God's kingdom is like. It's as though someone scatters seed on the ground, then sleeps and wakes night and day. The seed sprouts and grows, but the farmer doesn't know how. The earth produces crops all by itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full head of grain"

Proverbs 24:27

Get your outside work done;
Make preparations in the field;
Then you can build your house.

Psalms 1:2-3

persons who love the Lord's instruction, They are like a tree replanted by streams of water, which bears fruit at just the right time and whose leaves don't fade. Whatever they do succeeds.

Article and Reference Links

River Restoration

A story of the Klamath River. [The river that came back to life: a journey down the reborn Klamath](#). “Less than a year after four dams were removed from the river, life has blossomed along its banks, presenting new challenges and joys of recovery.” Also, from NOAA, an earlier story with photos, [World’s Biggest Dam Removal Project to Open 420 Miles of Salmon Habitat this Fall](#).

Video. [Klamath river before and after scenes, dam removal](#), 2024, two minutes.

A story of the Meuse River in the Netherlands. [‘This is what a river should look like’: Dutch rewilding project turns back the clock 500 years](#). “Europe’s largest river restoration is making changes across the entire landscape, bringing benefits to wildlife and people.”

A story of the Elwha River in Washington state. [Rewilding the Elwa River](#), “Twelve years after dam removal, salmon are returning and wildlife roam on newly restored land.”

Urban rewilding! A story from Chicago’s Wild Mile. [Rewilding Rivers: A Tale of Floating Wetlands in Chicago](#). Also see this three-minute video from a local news station, [The world’s first floating eco-park right here in Chicago](#).

Fire Restoration

[The Washoe Tribe brings back cultural fire to restore forests, plants amid climate change](#). “In the Western U.S., extreme wildfires are damaging tribal lands. Climate change has only made the situation more dire. That’s why the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California is working to reintroduce intentional, cultural fire. These are once-banned burning practices they use to restore the health of their forests and plants.”

Wild Repair – The Fire Followers. [Fire Followers](#). “California’s chaparral ecosystem, one of the world’s few Mediterranean climate zones, harbors

remarkable ‘fire follower’ plants that emerge after wildfires in response to charred soil, smoke, and increased sunlight, playing a vital role in the landscape’s natural recovery cycle.”

A story from Montana and the Dakotas on Prairie Fires: [From the ashes, a grassland revival](#)

“Our grasslands evolved with fire. We’re helping to bring fire back, safely and intentionally.” Also includes a seven-minute video, [Our Amazing Grasslands—Prescribed Burns](#).

Photos for the sermon

Fire Followers. Wikipedia. [Papaver californicum – the true “fire poppy”](#) one of the flowers called “fire followers.”

Klamath River work team. [Wood River Wetland north of Klamath Falls with a student work team](#), 2021, from the Bureau of Land Management. Remember to credit the photographer, Heidi Anderson, as well as BLM, and link back to the photo if you can. CC BY 2.0. Also a photo of [the Klamath River in Oregon](#) by Bob Wick, Bureau of Land Management.

Klamath recovery. [New plant growth in the basin of a drained reservoir on the Klamath River](#). Photo from NOAA, photographer Tommy Williams.

Elwa River. [The Elwha River from within Olympic National Park in May 2022](#). Wikimedia, photographer Sea Cow, CC-BY-SA-4.0

Music Notes

By Rev. Kristina Sinks

Hymn Suggestions

Title	Reference
How Can We Name a Love	UMH 111
The Trees of the Field	TFWS 2279
Morning Has Broken	UMH 145
It Is Well with My Soul	UMH 377
Creation Sings	W&S 3018
Earth Maker, Source of the World and Our Wisdom	www.hopepublishing.com/Images/HymnodyPDF/hm_5425.pdf
Song of Hope (Canto de Esperanza)	TFWS 2186
Hymn of Promise	UMH 707

Contemporary Music Suggestions

Title	Composer	CCLI	OneLicense	Copyright/Reference
Workin' on a World	Iris DeMent			www.youtube.com/watch?v=VOS70iLE1lc&pp=0gcJCf0Ao7VqN5tD
The Age of Miracles	Mary Chapin Carpenter			www.youtube.com/watch?v=MkyuZ3HuLvs&themeRefresh=1
Trees We'll Never See	Amy Grant	Not licensed; permission required		© 2023 Amy Grant Productions
Of the Earth	Gary Rand, Lenora Rand	7195087	63fe4b9202c8b	© 2022 Plural Guild Music
Build Your Kingdom Here	Chris Llewellyn, Gareth Gilkeson, William Herron	6186078		© 2011 Thankyou Music Ltd
As It Is in Heaven	Ed Cash, Matt Maher	4669748		© 2005 SPIRITANDSONG.COM PUBLISHING; Thankyou Music Ltd; Wondrously Made Songs

Resources for Leaders of Children and Youth

By Rev. Laura Baumgartner, Rev. Tura Foster Gillespie, Ann Mayer and Carolyn Nichols

Theme overview: Too often, salvation is spiritualized, and heaven is painted as otherworldly. But the renewal of creation is part of God's redemptive work. In Isaiah 55:10-13, the prophet promises a restored environment through God's word that transforms barrenness into abundance. Throughout this week's lessons, we consider the places where the natural world needs renewal and the reasons for hope that the renewal that is needed will be realized.

Supplies Needed:

- Something broken—a toy, cup, a branch, etc. and glue, tape, twine or whatever is necessary to fix the broken items. In the case of a branch, bring water and soil (for children's time in worship)
- Post a pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey game and on an adjacent wall a blank sheet of poster paper or butcher paper, large enough for all children to be able to add to it simultaneously. Bring a variety of art supplies (for Sunday School game)
- Radish plant if you planted seeds in Week 2—Try reducing the water you provide during the week so on Sunday it might be a little wilted (for Sunday School project)
- A snack that can be created together, such as the ingredients for refrigerator cookies, Rice Krispies Treats, snack mix, or trail mix and a common bowl and spoon in which the ingredients can be combined, and any equipment needed to finish the snack, and a spoon

Children's Time in Worship

Show children the broken object you have brought with you and ask them how you could fix it. If it's something that is easily fixed with glue or tape, allow them to make suggestions and follow their guidance to repair the item.

If you have a broken branch or a leaf off a plant, ask whether they think that the plant can be repaired. They may not think so or they may have suggestions. Help them come to the realization that once a branch or leaf breaks off a tree, it can't start growing on the same tree again but sometimes it can participate in new

growth in a different way. Sometimes plants that have a piece break off grow new roots and start growing in a new place. This usually works best for a leaf or shoot off a plant. In other cases, broken branches or fallen logs can become a home for other organisms to grow, such as birds, mosses, ferns, and even baby trees. Sometimes we call these logs that house new life “nurse logs” because they nurse other plants and animals when they are small the way nurses help babies in hospitals grow.

Ask children whether they are aware of places in creation where something is broken or where something needs to be fixed. They might be aware of places in your community where litter collects or where the water is not safe to swim in during some parts of the summer. If you live in an area prone to wildfires, they may have been affected by smoke, and some may have even known of or experienced an evacuation. Some may have experienced floods or droughts or storms that caused damage to habitat. In some cases, children may be aware of development that has required trees to be cut down or wetlands to be filled in. The natural world needs our help and God’s help to be repaired after some of these events. Consider together how plants and animals are able to return to an area that has been damaged in some of these ways.

Give children the opportunity to realize that God cares for all God’s people and all creation and has provided what we need, even after something breaks. We have hope for all creation because God is present with us and is still providing new ways for life to be renewed.

Conclude with a repeat-aloud prayer: Dear God, thank you for renewing creation and giving us wisdom to help you. Show us how to spread hope for all the creatures that share this planet with us. Amen.

Children’s Sunday School Lesson

As children come into Sunday School, invite them to think of an animal, whose noise or behavior they can mimic. Perhaps some can roar like a lion and others can cluck like a chicken. Maybe one person can sing a birdsong and someone else can stand on one leg like a flamingo. Take turns asking them to demonstrate their abilities and sharing what animal they are mimicking. Share with them a reading or telling of Isaiah 55:12, in an age appropriate way. Ask them whether it

can work backwards from what they were just doing when people mimicked something in nature and whether trees can mimic people and clap their hands?

Help them come to the idea that there are ways we learn from plants and animals, not just how to do what they do, but how to live together and how to be careful with one another. Engage children in a brief description of some lessons we might learn from nature including these or others:

- Bloom where you are planted (an idea that for some people is encouragement to find reasons to be happy with what we have, rather than always wanting more)
- There is a season for rest (as deciduous trees let go of their leaves and rest from making energy in the winter, we also need periods of rest when we set aside being productive for a time)

Learning from nature the ways that lead to life reminds us of God's love for all creation and gives us hope for new life, even in times when new life is hard to find.

Play a game to embody the theme of Hope for Creation

Show children the pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey game. If they don't know how to play, explain the rules. Give anyone who wants a turn the chance to see how close they can get the donkey's tail to the donkey.

Then, direct their attention to the blank paper on an adjacent wall and the art supplies available. Explain that the game is being transformed so there's no one right place for things to be added and there's no winner who will get their art supplies closest. Instead, everyone will be able to add to the new game at once and together, all the creations will form one big diagram. Rather than where the tail needs to go, encourage children to add color to the poster paper in ways that describe to them what God might look like or how God might be present throughout all creation. There is no wrong answer to this prompt and some children might choose to add their own ideas individually while others might work together to create rainbows or forests or other sections with multiple parts.

Help children use the supplies you have provided. If you are using paints and smocks, assist children to find ways they can avoid damage to their clothes.

As you draw the time for creation to a close, note that when we learn the lessons of Creation and embody them in hope, we make beautiful things together, instead of having only one winner.

Sing a Song

Any of the songs that were introduced in the three previous weeks may be sung and “The Trees of the Field”, number 2279 in *The Faith We Sing*, would be a great addition to go with this week’s Scripture.

Discuss Hope for Creation in nature/Snack

During snack time this week, give each child a cupful of one ingredient of the snack mix they will create together. Encourage each one to pour their ingredient into a common bowl. Use a spoon to mix the ingredients and note that when each person adds their component, the snack is closer to done and ready to eat. Explain what else has to happen to make the snack ready to eat and how that will happen.

During any time that the children have to wait, or while they are enjoying the snack, ask them whether there are ways they can also participate in providing hope for plants or animals around the church. If you have one, show them a plant that has not had enough water this week and ask them whether they can help give it a drink of water.

Do a Hope for Creation Project together

Choose from these options or others that your children suggest for ways that they can participate in bringing hope in your community.

- Pick up litter in the churchyard or participate in litter pickup event in the community.
- Participate in a prayer walk in your neighborhood and pray for your neighbors and give thanks to God for the plants and animals, water, air, rocks, and soil that you notice. Pray also that God will use you to restore any areas of your neighborhood that need restoration.

Youth Group Lesson Ideas:

Begin the lesson by introducing the theme of hope for creation in nature. Students may be familiar with environmental challenges such as climate change, water pollution, floods, famine, and drought. Help them to dream about how they and others in the faith community can be part of remediation strategies for these challenges.

Engaging with Scripture

Ask a member of the group to read the focus Scripture for this week's lesson, Isaiah 55:10-13. Ask students to identify signs of hope in the text. Encourage youth to remember that even though it's sometimes hard to see, hope is possible. Ask them what gives them hope. If necessary, prompt them to think about hope in their personal lives, hope in their family life, hope in the church, the community, the nation, and the world. Try to encourage them to listen to one another's ideas without judgement or pushback.

Discussion prompts:

Again this week, allow the discussion to lead the group to select an activity that will embody the ways that group members feel called to engage with the theme. These prompts may be helpful.

- Kimmerer describes biomimicry and asserts that we can learn from the way that nature transitions during ecological succession.²³ Specifically, human systems can learn to transition from patterns of exploitation to patterns of reciprocity through incremental change and creative disturbance. What are incremental changes we can make? What are creative disturbances we can lead?
- Do you know of places that need to be cleaned up or repaired? Do they need incremental change or creative disturbance?
- What is needed for repair—remove invasive species to make space for native species, more efficient irrigation systems, fewer herbicide or pesticide applications, etc.? It may be helpful to refer to greening property language in UMC General Conference 2024 legislation.
- What places need environmental restoration most?

²³ Robin Wall Kimmerer. 2024. *The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World*. Scribner. p. 73 and p. 100.

- What does creation say to you about who God is?

Activity:

Allow the participants in your group to name what they feel called to do in the way of restoration and remediation. Help them plan how to engage in effective and strategic ways to bring about change in their context. Some examples might include

- Maintain trails or yards on church grounds, working to remove invasives or plant native species
- Volunteer with a local organization that does trail maintenance or advocacy on environmental issues. Contact your local Interfaith Power and Light for more opportunities.
- Work with your pastor or worship committee, as appropriate, to plan a pet blessing as a way of giving blessings to animals and other elements in the natural world.
- For more ideas on how to give back to creation, see Kimmerer's descriptions of direct and indirect actions.²⁴

Closing

As the final session of this series draws to an end, invite students to name one way that they have grown or learned as a result of the lessons and activities, one action that they will take on behalf of creation, or one person they are thankful for who is making a difference on behalf of creation in their community or beyond.

Carrying the themes beyond this series

Issue this challenge to students and leaders:

As the series ends and a new study begins, continue watching for signs of restoration in the natural world. When you see autumn leaves fall from a tree or plant or new leaves in spring, pollinators visiting flowers, pumpkins or grasses or fruits turning brighter colors when ready for harvest, say a silent prayer of thanksgiving for the ways that nature models incremental change and creative disturbance, both of which can lead to new life. Assemble friends and allies who share your values and organize for the incremental changes that can adjust

²⁴ Robin Wall Kimmerer. 2024. *The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World*. Scribner. pp. 13-14.

patterns in your context and the creative disturbances that can create new patterns of reciprocity and abundance, with God's help and grace.

Also, possibly read one or more of the books suggested below. Consider sharing it with family or another group.

Children's book suggestions for Week 4:

- *The Together Tree* by Aisha Saeed
- *'Ohana Means Family* by Ilima Loomis
- *Good People Everywhere* by Lynea Gillen
- *The Good for Nothing Tree* by Amy-Jill Levine and Sandy Eisenberg Sasso
- *Butterfly House* by Eve Bunting
- *Wangari's Trees of Peace* by Jeannette Winter
- *We Are Water Protectors* by Carole Lindstrom
- *The Boy Who Grew a Forest: The True Story of Jadav Payeng* by Sophia Gholz
- *Fatima's Great Outdoors* by Ambreen Tariq
- *Just a Dream* by Chris Van Allsburg
- *Sparrow Girl* by Sara Pennypacker

Reflection Questions for Small Groups:

–What kind of goodness do you need right now? What kind of goodness do you receive? What kind of goodness are you giving right now?

–Today, where is environmental restoration most needed in creation?

–In what ways may congregations become catalysts of incremental change and creative disruption bringing about common good, healing and flow of well-being? How might God's Spirit be energizing flows for change through relations of gift-giving and receiving in your personal life and in the life of your congregation, locally and globally?

Contributors



Rev. Laura Baumgartner (she/her) is the pastor at Haller Lake United Methodist Church in Seattle, WA, traditional homeland of the Duwamish and Suquamish peoples. She worked for many years in her first career as a high school chemistry and environmental science teacher in the public schools. Laura also serves on the board of Earth Ministry/ WA Interfaith Power and Light, the Steering Committee of the Aurora Reimagined Coalition, and is a founding member of the Emerald City Ringers. She is an advisory member of the Commission on Environmental Stewardship in the Pacific Northwest Conference and Global Ministries EarthKeeper. Rev. Baumgartner lives with her husband, Eric, and their dog, Calvin, in Seattle, Washington, where she enjoys paddleboarding, baking, swimming, ringing handbells, reading, and planning their next adventure.



Rev. Laurie Bayen is an elder serving Windsor Community United Methodist Church, about 70 miles north of San Francisco. She is a commissioned Earthkeeper and directs the Sacred Ground project, a climate justice-focused audio guide to scenic parks, vistas and trails in Northern California available on the free Otocast smartphone app. She and her spouse, Albert, enjoy hiking, camping and sailing. Laurie also sings with Vinyl Revival, a five-voice women's acapella vocal jazz ensemble.



Rev. Richenda Fairhurst works at the intersection of faith and climate change, working with the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement and Fossil Free UMC to encourage faithful Creation care and stewardship in The United Methodist Church and beyond. She has served churches in Oregon and Washington and is a Global Ministries EarthKeeper. From her home in Southern Oregon, she co-hosts the UMCJMovement Café, and serves as a member of the board of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon where she chairs the Creation Justice Committee and Oregon Interfaith Power and Light. She is a member of the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference.



Tura Foster Gillespie is a provisional deacon in the Northern Illinois Conference of The United Methodist Church. She is the founder and content creator for Teaching Cultural Compassion, a ministry that focuses on helping churches through the use of diverse secular picture books, thereby aiding churches and parents in raising compassionate, empathetic, anti-racist kids.



Ross Janovec is serving with the Kootenai River Parish (Troy & Libby, MT) as he pursues ordination as an Elder with the Mountain Sky Conference. After spending most of his life in eastern Nebraska, he began a journey west where he recently completed his Master of Divinity at the Iliff School of Theology in Denver. This westward path, which began at Camp Fontanelle, has deepened Ross's commitment to creating intentional Christian communities where relationships with each other and the created world can flourish. Above all, Ross carries one essential truth: none of us are free until the entirety of the created world is free.



Ann Mayer, M.Div., is a United Methodist EarthKeeper, a Native Plant Steward, and is active in the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference. She is an Eco-feminist Theologian with a passion for Social Justice, Creation Care, and helping people to connect their faith with care for the earth. Ann is currently serving as lay leader at her local church, Federal Way UMC.



Rev. Paul Mitchell is a second-career and second-generation pastor serving Pioneer United Methodist in Walla Walla, Washington. His first career was in architecture in the early days of Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) training and certification. His transition into ministry came in response to the convulsive cultural responses following September 11, 2001. Rev. Mitchell has focused on the Season of Creation in September for over a decade and is currently seeking to expand intersectional attention to environmental justice throughout the year in worship, study, and service.



Carolyn Nichols lives in Rocky Mount, NC and is a layperson serving at Englewood United Methodist Church in Rocky Mount, North Carolina in the North Carolina Conference and a member at Epworth Chapel UMC in the Baltimore-Washington Conference. She is active in the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement.



Rev. Kristina Sinks is a graduate of Garrett Seminary with a focus on Ecological Regeneration and Worship Arts. She is an ordained Deacon in the UMC (California-Nevada), and serves as co-chair of the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement's Worship Working Group, whose work has been published by Discipleship Ministries.

Kristina sings and manages tours for the music collective [The Many](#) and serves at [GreenFaith](#), a global, multi-faith climate justice organization.

Kristina resides in the Chicago area on the traditional, unceded homelands of the Council of Three Fires—the Ojibwa, Ottawa and Potawatomi—with her fiancée, Rev. Abby Holcombe, and beloved puppy Habibi.



A native of the Prairie State, Brian C. Smith has served as a United Methodist pastor in county seat, urban, and suburban communities since 1994. He enjoys birding by ear, biking through forest preserves, snowshoeing in the North Woods, and kayaking on the Great Lakes. Brian has transformed his parsonage backyard into a living sanctuary with native plants, including three small serviceberry trees he planted this year. After persuading his husband Joe to become beekeepers together, the bees have shown them the power of working together for the common good.



Kelly Vaughan spent her entire life in Sonoma County, California, until relocating three years ago to rural Kentucky, where she joined Mayfield First UMC, which is still rebuilding after losing its building to a devastating EF4 tornado in December 2021. Once passionate about designing altars and serving as a Lay Speaker and Lay Leader in California, Kelly has turned her enthusiasm toward becoming a Master Gardener, learning about native plants, and making connections through service in her new community.

	Nancy Victorin-Vangerud is a retired clergy in the MN Annual Conference, who served for 14 years as Chaplain at Hamline University. She lives in south Minneapolis, where she gardens, forages and cares for fruit trees. Nancy is a graduate of Texas A&M University, with an MDiv and PhD from Vanderbilt University. A MN Hopeful Earthkeeper, Nancy currently participates at Hennepin Ave UMC in the Creation Collective, and teaches an adult education class called "Faith's Imagination."
<i>Picture not available</i>	Leighton Wingate is a lifelong Methodist who is a member of Haller Lake United Methodist Church in Seattle, Washington, where he enjoys singing in the choir. He is a freelance proofreader and copy editor and worked more than thirty years on daily newspapers.

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