

Generous Gratitude: Creation
“For the Beauty and Care of the Earth”
Genesis 1:26-28; Isaiah 55
November 24, 2019; 10:00 am
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO
Rev. Rebecca K. Poos

Genesis 1:26-28 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make humankind^[a] in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth,^[b] and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

²⁷ So God created humankind^[c] in his image, in the image of God he created them;^[d] male and female he created them.

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

An Invitation to Abundant Life

55 Ho, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and you that have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk

without money and without price.

² Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?

Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.

³ Incline your ear, and come to me;
listen, so that you may live.

I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
my steadfast, sure love for David.

⁴ See, I made him a witness to the peoples,
a leader and commander for the peoples.

⁵ See, you shall call nations that you do not know,
and nations that do not know you shall run to you,
because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel,
for he has glorified you.

⁶ Seek the Lord while he may be found,
call upon him while he is near;

⁷ let the wicked forsake their way,
and the unrighteous their thoughts;
let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on
them,

and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

⁸ For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.

⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth,

so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

¹⁰ For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return there until they have watered the
earth,

making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
¹¹ so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

¹² For you shall go out in joy,
and be led back in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you
shall burst into song,
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

¹³ Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;
and it shall be to the Lord for a memorial,
for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

FOR THE BEAUTY

For the beauty of the earth
For the beauty of the skies
For the love which from our birth
Over and around us lies

For the beauty of the hour
Of the day and of the night
Hill and vale
And tree and flower
Sun and moon and stars of light
Lord of all to thee we raise
This our joy ful hymn of praise

For the joy of human love
Brother, sister, parent, child
Friends on earth
And friends above
For all gentle
Thoughts and mild

What a gift! We've been given this amazing and incredible earth. The whole world, held in Gods hands – even the rough places, the friends and foes alike. God's got the whole world, and all of us, in Her hands.

The ancient Celts knew how to live as one with the earth, as do indigenous people around the world. There is no line between sacred and secular. We live on the land, are a part of the natural world, along with the creatures and the plants and trees.

When Christianity came to the Celtic lands, they *embraced* the ancient traditions and sacred druid celebrations of Mother Earth. The Celtic Christians embraced the life-giving notion of “two books”—that God, the Holy One, is revealed to us mortals in the little book of the Bible and the big book of creation. Not either/or, but both/and. Life embraces life—in all its forms.

An ancient hymn celebrates the sun as “God's eye,” the very *face* of God.

Morning hymn to the sun... (From Carmina Gadelica)

The eye of the great God,
The eye of the God of glory,

The eye of the King of hosts,
The eye of the King of the living,
Pouring upon us
At each time and season,
Pouring upon us
Gently and generously.
Glory to thee,
Thou glorious sun.
Glory to thee, thou sun,
Face of the God of Life.

Next time you see the sun, close your eyes and let the Face of the God of life shine upon you, warm and brighten your countenance. I've always felt I was being "kissed by God" when looking up to the sun. Now I know what I knew that intrinsically. It's true! The ancients have known this a long time.

CREATION CARES!

The natural world supports life and itself. Not just humans, but all of Creation works together!

Countless stories about of animals helping humans care for the earth and showing us how to love! Of trees helping us communicate in healthy ways.

Here are just a few examples. Good news of great teamwork happening all over the world, as human and creatures alike realize that we're all in this together!

Dogs seeding the rainforests

Last year, forest fires in central Chile wreaked havoc in the El Maule region with more than **100 different wildfires** sweeping through the area and destroying over a million acres of forest land. It was the worst wildfire season in the country's history, taking several lives and created an estimated **\$333 million of dollars** worth of damages. The animals were forced to flee to safer areas.

The job to replant endless acres of forests seemed like a daunting endeavor. That is until three unusual workers took up the task. **Six-year-old Das and her two daughters, Olivia and Summer** are three Border Collies who have been trained to run through the damaged forests with special backpacks that release native plant seeds. Once they take root, these seeds will help regrow the destroyed area.

Goats – helped with wildfire

The city of Laguna Beach, California has employed a unique method to help prevent wildfires in the area: 1,000 goats.

ABC News reports that the city is using more than 1,000 goats to chew through dry weeds and grass. Laguna Beach's Fire Marshall, James Brown, calls the vegetation "fuel" for wildfires.

Laguna Beach has used goats since 1992 and Brown said the program was "extremely effective." This is the largest group of goats the city has had in the history of the program; goats and herders from Peru have cleared 80% of this year's 250-acre goal.

“Penguin Swims Large Distances To Reunite With The Man Who Saved His Life”

71-year-old retired bricklayer Joao Pereira de Souza, who resides on an island village near Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, found the little penguin, soaked in oil and dying on the local beach rocks back in 2011.

Joao scrubbed the oil off the creature's feathers and fed him daily to rebuild his strength. He named him Dindim.

A week went by and Joao tried to release Dindim back into the sea. However, he would not leave.

And just a few months later, Joao's new best friend was back. He saw the fisherman on the beach one day and decided to follow him

home. For a period of five years, Dindlim had spent eight months of the year with Joao and is thought to spend the rest of his time with his own kind.

'I love the penguin like it's my own child and I believe the penguin loves me,' 'No one else is allowed to touch him. He pecks them if they do. He lays on my lap, lets me give him showers, allows me to feed him sardines and to pick him up.

'Everyone said he wouldn't return but he has been coming back to visit me for the past four years. 'He arrives in June and leaves to go home in February and every year he becomes more affectionate as he appears even happier to see me.'

Elephants - keeping vigil

A herd of elephants marched 12 hours to the house of Lawrence Anthony after he died—the man who saved them. They stayed there silent for two days.

Exactly one year after his death, to the day, the herd marched to his house again. It is something that science cannot explain.

Trees: DIANA BERESFORD-KROEGER

“Trees hold the answers to many of life's problems”

We find ourselves living in a special time. On the one hand, the climate crisis poses the most significant threat to our future that humanity has ever faced. On the other, we are better equipped than ever before to take on that challenge. To do so, though, we need to understand and respect the natural world as people once did. We need to see all that the sacred cathedral of the forest offers us, and understand that among those many offerings is a way to save the world.

The forest is far more than a source of lumber. It is our lungs. It cleans the atmosphere. It recycles water. It is our collective medicine cabinet. It is the regulatory system for our climate and

feeds our oceans. It is the cooling mantle of the planet. It is the health and well-being of our children and grandchildren. It is our salvation.

Trees offer us the solution to nearly every problem facing humanity today, from halting global temperature rise to defending against drug-resistant bacteria. And trees affect our lives, our cultures and spirit in many other ways. The tapestry of life, worldwide, depends on trees.

Trees talk to each other—in ways we are only beginning to understand! They listen to each other too! And encourage and protect—telling one another where and how to find sustenance and healing. We do well to listen to the trees.

Yesterday, some of us from CUCC attended a Celtic Spirituality Retreat at La Foret. We learned more about the connection these ancient Christians felt with the earth, and some of the spiritual practices they found to help them deepen that connection. We stood in the Labyrinth in the snow, in a circle, under a bright sun and bluebird sky. We sang a song together—a kind of chant vibrating through us into the earth and from the earth. A beautiful harmony—we had never sung together, this particular group of people, but practice was not necessary.

After our song, Father Brendan asked us to reflect quietly a moment and then share anything that moved us. I looked around at the tall ponderosas under that beautiful sky, all alive with dripping snow and fluttering birds and realized: They sang with us! The trees were part of our circle and part of the chorus—not just quiet observers, but inviting us into *their* circle.

Koala-sniffing dogs are on a mission to save animals from Australia's bushfires:

Dogs who have been trained to find and save koalas in the wild are helping to rescue the animals in Australia's devastating bushfires.

Bear, a border collie-koolie cross, is a detection dog who sniffs out live koalas (and feces!) during search and rescue operations in New South Wales'

"As a young, intelligent and high-energy dog, his energy made him less suitable as a pet and had led him to be put up for adoption again by early owners. So training him as a koala detection dog also gives him a secure future," Sterling said.

PEOPLE BEING GENEROUS WITH CREATION

People Made Koala Mittens For Animals Whose Paws Got Burnt In Bushfire

People have been creating little mittens for koalas burned in the Australian wildfires and my faith in humanity has been restored.

Numerous bushfires are currently wreaking havoc in Australia, affecting both residents and wildlife. As fires tear through habitats, locals have been discovering dozens of injured and dehydrated animals in need of help along the east coast.

In an attempt to help the suffering animals, locals have been creating both mittens and little pouches for marsupials to snuggle up in.

Moran Henn, a new friend of ours, Directs an environmental education center in Flagstaff:

Reflection:

I get to take kids outside. Lead field trips. Teach them about the natural world. They gift me with a short glimpse into their lives, which is both humbling and devastating. Exciting and heartbreaking.

One student was telling the group how his stepdad got arrested the night before. The sirens...police knocking down the door. One student didn't have snack because his mom didn't come home from night shift in time to pack his food. One student is hoping to finally be adopted. One student misses her family who could not get into the U.S. One student lost his brother this week.

One common theme is their joy throughout the day to be outside. To, even for a few hours, forget about the world and enjoy hiking, smelling pine trees, touching water, or seeing a hawk fly overhead.

We expect students to listen, to learn, to behave. But it is me learning everyday about the resiliency of children and the true gift of the natural world.

"Celtic spirituality views everything in terms of cycles. The beginning is winter. We stand in the west, in darkness, in winter and look East, hopeful for the sunrise."

We are in a time of turning. Of seasons. Of the church year. Of looking deep within ourselves and our community. Of looking into our hearts to find and bring forth our authentic selves. To find the love, grace and understanding there that God has put inside each one of us when She knit us together in our mother's womb, and the womb of Mother Earth.

Let us hold one another, as in a mother's arms, as we love and care for the earth and its children—for its

home is our home; its heart is our heart—one heartbeat.
Amen.



The Christian Celts give us a model for living out a faith that is rooted in the Earth.... Recognizing God's Presence in soil and sky, the turning seasons, in beasts and plants, they continued to relate to the Earth with love and wonder.



Tell your children that
the soil holds the ashes
of their grandparents.
That the earth is full of
the lives of our ancestors.
That the earth is sacred.

Navajo teaching