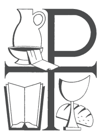
Call to Worship

Liturgy, Music, Preaching, and the Arts

Continuing the tradition of *Reformed Liturgy & Music*



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Greening the Liturgy

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Liturgy, Music, Preaching, and the Arts

Continuing the tradition of *Reformed Liturgy & Music* (1971–2000) and *Reformed Liturgics* (1963–69), *Call to Worship* seeks to further the church's commitment to theological integrity, corporate worship, and excellence in music, preaching, and other liturgical art forms.

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Introduction

Kimberly Bracken Long

Let there be greening,
birth from the burning,
water that blesses and air that is sweet,
health in God's garden,
hope in God's children,
regeneration that peace will complete.

These lines from Shirley Erena Murray's hymn "Touch the Earth Lightly" (GTG 713) serve as the prayer that undergirds this issue titled "Greening the Liturgy." Ecological concerns have long been part of the church's ministry, but a new urgency has emerged as the effects of climate change are no longer future fears but present dangers.

Some may argue that praying is not enough, and of course they would be right. But it is also true that our worship shapes us for living the Christian life, and part of that vocation is to care for the planet. Paul Galbreath helps us to understand more deeply how the sacraments form us for that work. Gail Ramshaw's essay, and the eucharistic prayer that accompanies it, help equip us for the task. Even in our dying we can care for creation, as Ben Stewart shows us in his article on green funerals.

These pages also include stories of particular congregations who are following God's call to live in new ways. Ashley Goff tells how Arlington Presbyterian Church in Arlington, Virginia, was led to tear down its building in order to make way for affordable housing and a green space that serves the community as well as the church. Mark Zaineddin shares his conversation with Allen Brimer, pastor of Farm Church in Durham, North Carolina, so that we can get a glimpse of how that community blends urban farming with Christian worship. Writing from his perspective as pastor of Chapel of the Pines in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, Andrew Taylor-Troutman tunes our ears to listen for the songs and sermons of trees; his hymn, "The Earth Prays in Trees," allows us to add our own song to theirs.

In this issue, we also remember one who remains dear to many, Chip Andrus. A friend and colleague in ministry, he exhorted us to sacramental living, enticed us to delve more deeply into the practice of daily prayer, and enlivened our worship and our lives with music and laughter. The remembrances that appear here will remind old friends of his many gifts, and make those who never met him wish they had.

I want to express my gratitude to our four columnists, Mary Beth Anton, David Lower, Peter Ncanywa, and Sally Ann McKinsey Sisk, who have faithfully served for the last year and a half. I, for one, will miss their insights, wisdom, and candor.

I pray that this issue sparks your imagination and encourages you to continue seeking what God would have you do to help heal the planet. May the words, images, and songs that grace these pages call us to practices that could, indeed, change the world.

Kimberly Bracken Long

John Stuart

Feature Articles

Starting with the Earth: The Sacraments and Creation Care

Paul Galbreath

A Place to Start

"In the beginning, God created the heaven and earth." These opening words in Genesis are a confession of faith that our lives on this planet that we call Earth is dependent on God's act of creating and sustaining life. This affirmation remains at the center of Jewish and Christian faith and offers a starting place for our exploration of the relationship between worship practices and caring for creation. Far too frequently, though, we have overlooked and moved past these seminal words. Instead of starting with creation, we have rushed on to explore other aspects of the sacraments in terms of particular biblical warrants, spiritual categories, or church traditions that we have uncritically accepted. In this essay, I want to explore the basic connection between the gift of creation and the development of the Christian practices we call sacraments. I will start with a brief exploration of the role of ritual theory and the development of Christian sacraments before turning to examine the resources that Reformed Christians have to help us more clearly make the connection between sacramental practice and earth care.

Ritual Development and Christian Sacraments

Ritual theory provides important insights on the ways in which all religious practices use certain basic elements to embody the claims of a particular religious tradition. Religious people draw on the stuff of creation in order to embody the claims of their faith traditions. Food and water are basic components of religious rituals around the world. Such a recognition need not lead to generic, universal claims or synchronistic equivalencies. Religious traditions surround the physical elements of creation in order to embody faith in distinctive, particular ways. Christian stories told around the pouring of water into the font are distinct from the purification rites of Hindus in the Ganges River. While we share common interests in the gift of water that sustains life, we also have our own unique perspectives.

We should be clear, though, that the earth is a common source for our rituals. Water, bread, wine, oil, food, and other gifts of the earth's bounty provide the elements on which religious traditions draw in order to link and embody particular religious practices and teachings. Here, different religious traditions rely on the same "stuff" that the earth provides. There is no unique source of holy water that is distinct and separate from the earth's water. Or to state this positively from a Christian perspective in light of the biblical creation narratives: all water is holy in that it is part of God's good creation that continues to sustain life on this planet. Although some Christian communities speak of consecrated bread and wine following prayers and gestures offered over the elements, the bread and wine brought to the gathering come first as gifts from the earth. Or to state this positively: the earth's goodness provides the basis for the prayer and action of the community.

The earth's goodness provides the basis for the prayer and action of the community.

Recent scholarship exploring the practices of early Christian communities provides insight into the development of the sacraments. There is a growing consensus among liturgical theologians and historians that a diverse array of practices existed within the nascent Christian movement around shared meals (communion) and initiation rites (baptism). The weekly meal (Eucharist) ranged

Paul Galbreath is professor of theology at Union Presbyterian Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina.

from the common diet of bread and wine to potluck suppers (1 Cor. 11) and banquets that at times also included cheese, olives, honey, milk, and fish. The diversity was largely dependent on the nature and resources of the local Christian community (and particularly reliant on those who sponsored and provided space for the gatherings). A consistent practice at the meal gatherings was the collection of food and provisions for those who were absent and/or marginalized in the community, such as widows and those who were imprisoned, for example. In his stunning work on the origins of the Eucharist, Thomas O'Laughlin underscores that the "starting point looks back to the activity of thanksgiving in the earliest communities, and their memories of Jesus in relation to this activity."[1] Cultivating the practice of thanksgiving as the community gathered around a shared meal was central in the formation of *koinonia* in the community. The meal itself in the midst of diverse practices and theological claims prompted an awareness of the primary role of thanksgiving for the goodness and bounty of the earth created by God to sustain us. O'Laughlin proposes that a way for Christian communities to reclaim this basic purpose of cultivating a deep sense of thanksgiving for God's sustenance in our eucharistic celebration is to begin by recognizing that the food on our communion tables comes to us as the raw materials from the earth which we transform into food, that is, the wheat that is harvested to produce bread and the grapes that are picked to become wine and juice. "It is worth recalling that the origins of blessing God at a meal—the eucharistic activity in which we see Jesus engaged—belongs to a world that was close both to agriculture and the basic food production processes."[2] Here the Christian practice of celebrating the Lord's Supper is grounded in the vocabulary of thanksgiving that guides participants to see the world as God's good creation and to recognize our calling and responsibility to care for the earth.

> Cultivating the practice of thanksgiving as the community gathered around a shared meal was central in the formation of *koinonia* in the community.

Similarly, the development of Christian baptismal practices drew on a wide variety of customs and traditions that dealt with forgiveness and cleansing. Water was central to Jewish purification rites, Greco-Roman bathing customs, and the initiation rites of ancient mystery religions. The baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist in the Jordan River as an act of forgiveness and renewal for Jews provided a template for the development of ritual actions by the early followers of Jesus. As the Christian movement spread across the ancient world, communities developed their own particular ways of welcoming newcomers into the fledgling Christian community that included different modes of washing (immersion, submersion, pouring) depending on the source of water as well as adapting the use of oil from local bathing customs (before and/or after bathing).

In the midst of these diverse practices that developed in local Christian communities, Justin Martyr articulated a preference for maintaining the connection between baptismal practice and living or running water. In the *Didache*, or *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, from the late first or early second century, Justin Martyr describes and recommends the options for baptismal practice in this way:

> Now about baptism: this is how to baptize. Give public instruction on all these points, and then "baptize" in running water, "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." If you do not have running water, baptize in some other. If you cannot in cold, then in warm. If you have neither, then pour water on the head three times "in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."[3]

In the midst of diverse practices, the importance of showing the connection of baptism as the rite of Christian initiation with water as a primary source of life and sustenance remained primary. This perspective was articulated in a theological way by Melito of Sardis, a second-century bishop who described Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River as a "universal baptism" in which all of creation participates. Theologian Linda Gibler reflects on the awareness of the sacredness of water by noting that "for at least the first two hundred years of Christian tradition water was not blessed for baptism. Clean, living water did not need to be blessed."[4]

In summary, the Christian rituals of Eucharist and baptism (which we call sacraments) carry from their earliest celebrations a deep connection to the earth. Given these associations between the sacraments and creation, how can we rediscover the

implications of sacramental practice and earth care? I am not advocating that we need to go outside for baptisms or try to reconstruct an early Christian agape meal. Nor am I arguing that because Christian meals took place in households and catacombs, or baptism began with living water in and from rivers and streams, that somehow we must return to these practices. What I am suggesting, though, is that we have lost sight of the natural associations between baptism and the earth as a result of the way our celebration of the sacraments has evolved through history. Furthermore, I want to propose that by reexamining Reformed history and theology we can find clues about how to move forward in constructive ways.

The Earth as Theater of God's Glory

We start on and with the earth as this good gift that testifies to God's love. A consistent theme throughout Scripture is the beauty of creation that invites us to add our voices in praise of the Creator. The Bible is filled with references to the goodness of the earth and its bounty. The land itself features prominently throughout the biblical narratives as a sign of God's presence and provision. Recent biblical and liturgical scholarship has paid increasing attention to the role of the earth and its significance as both a theological witness of God's presence and as a place to encounter God. For example, the popularity of the *Green Bible* in which references to the earth are highlighted in green has provided a visually compelling way to illustrate the centrality of the earth throughout Scripture while also bringing together diverse theological voices that offer insights into the importance of environmental activism.[5] Similarly, the call for a season of creation came from a group of biblical and liturgical scholars who proposed a designated period of time during each liturgical year to focus on the earth.[6] Whether or not one agrees with the entirety of these projects is less significant than the growing awareness from broad ecumenical perspectives of the urgent need for Christians to read Scripture and live in ways that address the pressing environmental crises of our time.

On this very point, Reformed Christians have an important voice to add to the conversation about constructive ways for the church to provide moral, spiritual, and physical leadership that demonstrates a Christian commitment to caring for the earth.[7] Given our historical and theological commitment to the primacy of Scripture as the basis for worship (particularly in terms of the use of biblical warrants), we are poised to rediscover the important connection between Scripture's witness to the goodness of God's creation and our responsibility to care for it.

It is interesting to note that this work does not begin from scratch (*ex nihilo*). Even when we have minimalized the presence of the earth in Scripture or have used the earth only as a metaphor for what was claimed to be a deeper spiritual truth, hymnody has often given voice to the incarnational claim of God's presence in the world around us (to cite but one example, note the continued popularity of "For the Beauty of the Earth"). Similarly, even when we overlook the earth's place in Scripture, the Psalms remain a central witness to the earth's role in showing forth the glory of God.

The Psalms, historically significant in Reformed worship, suggest ways to align our biblical and theological commitments with our ethical responsibility to care for the earth. In Psalm 148, sun and moon and stars join with sea monsters, fire, and all manner of weather—hail, snow, frost, and stormy wind—in a doxological symphony of thanksgiving to the Creator. Mountains, hills, fruit trees, and cedars beckon us to add our voices to the song of praise that rings through creation.

Calvin urges us to "not be ashamed to take pious delight in the works of God open and manifest in this most beautiful theater. . . . It is the first evidence in the order of nature, to be mindful that wherever we cast our eyes, all things they meet are works of God."[8] He is clear that the theater of God's glory does not in itself provide what he calls "saving knowledge," nor does he ascribe to a natural theology whereby humans discern a path to God via nature without divine involvement. For Calvin, sin blinds us to the clear signs of God that are around us. It is only by acknowledging our own finitude that we recognize our dependence on God as the source of all life. This prompts us to hear and receive the promises of Scripture. Nevertheless, Calvin consistently points to the beauty of creation as ample evidence to the goodness of God who creates and sustains the world.

The Sacraments and the Earth

Calvin clearly follows in Augustine's path in describing the sacraments. Beginning with Augustine's definition of a sacrament as "a visible form of an invisible grace,"[9] Calvin describes the sacraments as signs and seals of the covenant. He notes that the sacraments "consist

of physical elements of this world" that, through the work of the Spirit, communicate Christ's presence as a means of confirming the gift of faith given us by God.

There are valid reasons that Calvin objected to the liturgical practices of his day that pointed to the sacramental elements as objects of devotion in themselves. Whether it was the water in the baptismal fonts, which in some medieval churches were locked up so that people would not steal the water to use for its magical properties, or the consecrated eucharistic elements that were placed in chapels as a focal point for devotional practices, Calvin objected to what he perceived as superstitious impulses that might lead people to mistake creation for the Creator. Clearly, for Calvin these practices triggered his perpetual fear of idolatry. Nevertheless, there are ways for Reformed Christians to find consonance between Calvin's insights on the gift of creation and the physical elements of the sacraments.

Calvin objected to what he perceived as superstitious impulses that might lead people to mistake creation for the Creator. Clearly, for Calvin these practices triggered his perpetual fear of idolatry. Nevertheless, there are ways for Reformed Christians to find consonance between Calvin's insights on the gift of creation and the physical elements of the sacraments.

What intrigues me about reading Calvin in this way is the recognition of how quickly we often dismiss the clear emphasis on creation as witness to God's glory and its relationship to the physical elements of water, bread, and wine that are central to the gathering around font and table. Note the way that the Directory for Worship affirms this connection: "Because God created the world and called it good, we use material gifts in worship."[10] It is these physical elements or material gifts that we as Christians gather around to offer our thanks and to ask God's blessing on our lives. Or as the Directory states it: "The first Christians, following Jesus, took three primary elements of life—water, bread, and wine—as symbols of God's self-offering to us and our offering of ourselves to God. We have come to call them Sacraments: signs of God's gracious action and our grateful response."[11]

Christian Discipleship in the Twenty-first Century

Why don't our Christian rituals more clearly acknowledge our dependence on the earth as God's good gift? Why do we insist that spirituality is not connected with our bodies and the earth? As we have seen, we have the resources from Scripture and theology to help guide us as we proclaim and protect the earth as God's creation and recognize the gift of incarnation in the physical and material signs of God's presence among us. The water that rains down from the heavens—water that we collect to pour in our baptismal fonts and over our bodies as a way of marking ourselves as beloved children of God and followers of Jesus Christ—continues to provide us with a source of new life. Similarly, as we gather around bread and wine and share it with one another, we offer our thanksgiving to God as the source of all that sustains us on this journey.

As Christians, what we are facing is not just an ecological crisis; we are facing a spiritual crisis that cries out for us to reconnect with the water near our homes. I live in Asheville, North Carolina, where the French Broad River runs through the town and provides us with the water, habitat, transportation, sanitation, brewing, and recreation that are essential to our way of life. It is this local water that is basic to our health and well-being and it is this same local water that is the source for our rituals and religious celebrations.

Polluted and privatized water diminishes the power of the ritual to embody God's generosity and graciousness.

Ethicist John Hart connects the availability of accessible, unpolluted water in the world with the ability of baptismal water to evoke images of cleansing and new life. Polluted and privatized water diminishes the power of the ritual to embody God's generosity and graciousness. The image of living water, clean and available to all, conveys God's goodness and provision in creating a world that sustains life. Hart concludes,

> Throughout the world today . . . environmental degradation and water privatization have caused water to lose its nature and role as *living water*, as a bountiful source of benefits for the common good. Water is losing also its ability to be a *sacramental* symbol, a sign in nature of God the Creator.[12]

Water does not belong to the church. We rely on it, but it is not ours; it is an essential element of God's creation. As Christians, we care about the quality of water in the world around us not only because of its importance in our daily lives, but also because it is the water that runs down our foreheads in our baptisms when we are claimed as beloved children of God. It is water that physically connects us with the deep truth that our healing depends on our connection to the good earth that God creates and sustains.

Perhaps there is an important lesson for us to learn in this regard from our ecumenical friends in the Anglican Church of Canada. Recently, they have included the option of adding a baptismal vow that links discipleship with earth care:

> Presider: "Will you strive to safeguard the integrity of God's creation, and respect, sustain and renew the life of the Earth?"
> Baptismal Candidate: "I will, with God's help."[13]

The addition of this vow provides a clear articulation that Christian faith includes a commitment to care for the goodness of God's creation. This acknowledgment provides a starting place for both the community and individuals to build upon as we live out our baptismal promises. It makes clear that following Jesus includes respecting and caring for the earth. It challenges us to make choices in our daily lives as Christians that work for the healing of creation.

Similarly, our prayers of thanksgiving at the communion table can come to reflect our gratitude for the daily bread that we who are food secure so often take for granted. Reclaiming eucharistic practices that welcome the stranger and provide for the marginalized in our society will help align our sacramental practices with the needs of our community (and will push our congregations beyond the tendency that we have to become myopic and self-absorbed). This vision of an enriched and vibrant sacramental life is rooted in Scripture and connected to the earth. It recognizes that our Christian practices draw on the earth's resources for which we give thanks for God's goodness: for the water from which life emerges, and on which it depends, and for the food that grows from the earth's rich soil that we harvest, prepare, and eat and that sustains our lives. Reconnecting our sacramental practices with the earth makes it clear that our responsibility as disciples of Jesus Christ includes a commitment to environmental action and sustainable lifestyles that promote the well-being of all of creation.

Epilogue

I don't know if my friend and colleague Chip Andrus, whose life we are honoring in this issue of *Call to Worship*, would agree with all of these suggestions, but I know he enthusiastically and wholeheartedly endorsed attempts to recover links between sacramental practice and care for creation. Nowhere was this more evident in his life than in his deep love of the Mulberry River in his home state of Arkansas. Chip always described his experiences of floating down the river in baptismal terms. Each time he visited his cabin was a holy occasion, a deeply sacramental experience in which he was immersed in the water and renewed his baptismal vows. For Chip, the rhythm of these days was marked by daily prayer and an engagement with the beauty of creation that surrounded his cabin. He showed me the pictures of his visits to this holy place where he would make pilgrimage for prayer, reflection, and song. These images functioned for him as icons, as sacred reminders of a place where he regularly encountered and felt God's presence. Chip understood it as one of the "thin places" where heaven and earth come together, the kind of place that he wrote and sang about in the lyrics of one of his songs:

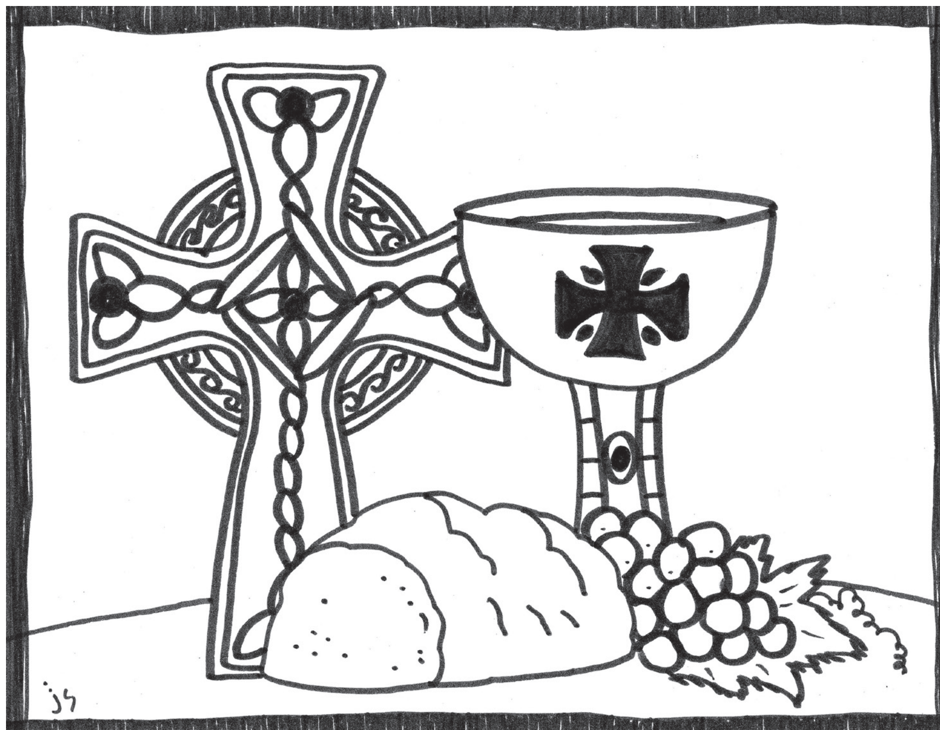
> There's a place I go, when I'm feeling like this
> and people I know only when it rains.
> Here I go,
> prayin' for rain.
> There's times I know, when I'm feeling like this
> that I've just got to go to the riverside.
> Let it go.
> Pray for rain.
> O Lord, I am sending it up to you:
> prayin' for rain."[14]

For Chip, this baptismal psalm captured the way that he approached his life: grounded in prayer, surrounded by community, immersed in water, open to the future.

O God, . . . we thank you for your
servant Chip,
whose baptism is now complete in death.
We praise you for the gift of his life,
for all in him that was good and kind
and faithful,
for the grace you gave him,
that kindled in him the love of your
dear name,
and enabled him to serve you faithfully.[15]
. . . Give rest, O Christ, to your servant with
all your saints,
where there is neither pain nor sorrow
nor sighing,
but life everlasting.[16]

Notes

1. Thomas O'Laughlin, *The Eucharist: Origins and Contemporary Understandings* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 7.
2. O'Laughlin, 107.
3. *The Didache,* VII, trans. by Cyril Richardson in *Sacraments and Worship: The Sources of Christian Theology*, ed. Maxwell Johnson (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 107.
4. Linda Gibler, *From the Beginning to Baptism: Scientific and Sacred Stories of Water, Oil, and Fire* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010), 8.
5. Stephen B. Scharper and Hilary Cunningham, comps. and eds., *The Green Bible* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993).
6. Norman Habel, David Rhoads, and Paul Santmire, eds., *The Season of Creation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011). Note the way this proposal has expanded since the initial publication: https://seasonofcreation.org.
7. To this end, see my *Leading into the World* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014) on the need to develop biblical and theological vocabulary and liturgical actions that clearly articulate and embody Christian commitment to earth care practices.
8. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I, XIV, 20, ed. John McNeill, trans. Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 179.
9. Augustine in Calvin, II, XIV, 1, p. 1277.
10. Directory for Worship, W-1.0204, *Book of Order: The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*, Part 2 (Louisville, KY: The Office of the General Assembly).
11. Ibid.
12. John Hart, *Sacramental Commons: Christian Ecological Ethics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 90.
13. www.anglican.ca/news/covenant-and-care-a-baptismal-promise-to-safeguard-creation/3006799/.
14. Chip Andrus, "Prayin' for Rain," on *Let It Rain Down* (CD Baby, 2016).
15. *Book of Common Worship* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 921.
16. Ibid., 925.



John Stuart

The Eucharist and an Ecological Crisis: Arlington Presbyterian's Call to Love the Body of God

Ashley Goff

In 2016, our church demolished its building. The congregation of Arlington Presbyterian Church (APC) was compelled by a new vision that was so strong it was more vital than the preservation of the building. Or, to put it another way, the walls of the building could not contain our call from God.[1]

Though it may seem counterintuitive, demolishing the church building and raising a new 173-unit affordable housing structure in its place was the most faithful, ecologically responsible response to the crisis of rising housing costs in our community. Looking back, one can see how the story of Jesus' last meal before his death can help tell APC's story.

At that meal, Jesus broke the bread and poured out the wine, and in so doing prepared his disciples for his death. With the Eucharist, Jesus offered a ritual that would center his disciples in their roles as leaders and in the values that grounded them. I imagine Jesus hoped that these twin lights—their identities and their values—would guide them through the subsequent confusion and uncertainty.

The Eucharist

At the start of the Eucharist story, Jesus knows he will be put to death and that his death will have a profound impact on the world, starting with his disciples. It is telling that Jesus felt the most important priority was to share a last ritual with his closest disciples. He sent Peter and John to make preparations for a Passover meal. When the hour came, Jesus took the bread, gave thanks, and then broke it, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." Jesus then did the same with the cup, saying, "This cup is poured out for you. This is the new covenant of my lifeblood." After the breaking, pouring, and sharing, Jesus and his companions went to a garden and prayed together.

The next day Jesus was crucified on the cross, and three days later God broke through the doors of death. Jesus was resurrected and appeared, unknown, in the garden. He was raised but unrecognized on the Emmaus road until the breaking of the bread. New life and the unknown merged in the breaking of the bread.

Creating room. Giving thanks. Breaking. Sharing. Garden. Death. Resurrection. Back to the garden. On the road. Moving back into the depths of the community. These are the actions of the Eucharist. The bread and the cup do not call us to walk in the ways of the familiar but to take on, as Jesus did after his resurrection, a new way of living and being. Eucharist moves us more deeply into the hearts and lives of our neighborhood, which is a microclimate of the planet, the body of God.

Resurrecting a Church and Its Congregation

Arlington County, a metropolitan suburb of Washington, D.C., has also undergone a dramatic transformation, rapidly becoming one of the most expensive places to live in the United States. Thousands of longtime low- and middle-income residents have been displaced. Along with these departures, our church membership declined precipitously. The congregation had reached a crossroads.

The members of APC were called by these circumstances to work through an intentional process of discerning their identity and mission. As they let God take them on this eucharistic

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journey of resurrection, they attuned themselves to the Holy Spirit and connected themselves to new understandings and holy possibilities.

Though resurrecting our church building in a new form might seem drastic, the congregation knew it could not go on as it had before. The call was not to resuscitate the community.[2] We were not going to solve the issue of affordable housing in Arlington County. However, we could not simply reproduce the familiar either. Whichever course we chose, we knew APC wasn't going to look, smell, or feel the same.

As a result of this discernment process, Arlington Presbyterian members were able to see themselves as part of the ecosystem of South Arlington. APC members then lived out the eucharistic actions of preparing, blessing, breaking, and sharing—stretching the footprint of their church into a radical new shape.

The sacrament proclaims that whatever we do and say around the communion table invokes the way we live and the worldview we inhabit.

From this viewpoint, one can see how the Eucharist is more than the breaking and pouring of earthly elements. The sacrament proclaims that whatever we do and say around the communion table invokes the way we live and the worldview we inhabit. The table of bread and cup, prayer and song gives us a structure and ritual to guide discernment work and decision-making, especially during times of crisis. As Larry Rasmussen puts it,

> How, then, do we hymn the Earth differently? How do we write and sing a new song for a strange land, even though it be our own? How do we do it with our neighbors, all our neighbors—human and other-than-human—when Earth is "hot, flat and crowded" and borders and walls no longer protect? Where do we turn when we discover that the religion we have lived by since the industrial-technological era emerged—eternal and exponential economic growth—is an illusion, dogma masquerading as common sense and kept alive by willpower and little else?[3]

Preparing and Creating an Upper Room

> Faith begins by letting go,
> giving up what had seemed sure,
> taking risks and pressing on,
> though the way feels less secure:
> pilgrimage both right and odd,
> trusting all our life to God.[4]

Peter and John asked Jesus: Lord, what do we need to do to create a space to remember the Passover meal, the meal that reminds us of God's vision of liberation and freedom? Jesus sent his disciples to the city, out into the world, to meet with a stranger who would show them the way.

In similar fashion, Arlington Presbyterian asked God: What do we need to do to create a new way for us that is shaped in your resurrected Spirit? God sent Arlington out to the crossroads of Arlington County to find the way. This is how APC prepared itself to see God's call to create Gilliam Place.

Since April 21, 1908, Arlington Presbyterian has been located near the Alcova Heights neighborhood on Columbia Pike, one of the main arteries through Arlington County that is affectionately called "the Pike." The four-mile radius that encompasses the zip code of the church, 22204, has become home to almost fifty-four thousand people. It has been called a "world in a zip code" because 130 different languages are spoken within this tiny geographic area.

Although the church has long been known for its active faith expression in the community around justice issues, recent dramatic shifts in neighborhood demographics had cooled the congregation's sense of identity and purpose. These shifts pushed APC to question its future call and mission within the community. At the same time, APC's congregation had also started to feel the strain imposed by the building's increasing repair needs along with a membership decline that mirrored patterns observed across the PC(USA). Susan Etherton, a ruling elder at APC, said that the building felt more like a "millstone" than a pillar in the community.

In 1999, APC's Session voted to participate in the Transforming Congregations project of National Capital Presbytery, a three-year program to help congregations find ways to reach out to their communities and become more effective churches.

From that point on APC, with the pastoral leadership of Rev. Sharon Core, engaged in intentional discernment processes to reimagine its operating vision. In 2012, APC focused on three elements of

an emerging vision: to nurture disciples of Jesus Christ, to be a place of crossroads and connection, and to use the property to provide affordable housing to the South Arlington community.

APC rooted itself in the calling of the church as expressed in the *Book of Order* (F-1.0301) of the PC(USA). Part of that calling states:

> The Church is the body of Christ. Christ gives to the Church all the gifts necessary to be his body. The Church strives to demonstrate these gifts in its life as a community in the world (1 Cor. 12:27–28).

Between 2000 and 2013, as APC was discerning its future, Arlington County lost 13,500 affordable housing units for low-income individuals and families, primarily as a result of rent increases. Escalating home prices put single-family homeownership out of reach for many middle-income families.[5]

For many congregants, this loss represented a call to transform the church building into affordable housing, but for some the vision for this extreme transformation was difficult to embrace. Some congregants felt enlivened by this new, faithful endeavor. Some felt betrayed. Resurrection took place on many levels as the congregation's process of inquiry, conversation, and discernment generated new ideas and paths forward.

Throughout it all, APC leaders covenanted together to pray, read the Scriptures, worship, and listen. As Jesus sent Peter and John to the city, God sent APC members out into their larger community to listen to the stories of their neighbors. Leaders set a goal of talking to a specific number of people each week, and each volunteer was responsible for reporting back the results of their conversations to the group. They rode the buses. On Saturday mornings, volunteers set up a table in the church's parking lot, located right near a bus stop, to ask questions and listen to neighbors talk about life on the Pike. APC members didn't just "think through" their crisis of identity and mission. Their listening practices along with the faith formation practices of prayer, Bible study, and worship created space for radical transformation.

This relational work was transformative to the process. As Kristl Hathaway, a member at Arlington, remembers:

> We had two lunch meetings with the teachers from the preschool located in our old building. Lots of ideas were swirling around in our heads, and affordable housing was among many. I had been thinking that housing should be a government function and we should focus more on the ways to meet the social and spiritual needs of the community. At this lunch, it all came together for me—community consists of all the people who are woven into this fabric. We heard of the child care workers who wanted to be part of the same community with the families they served—meeting them out shopping or at the county fair, staying late to talk with a worried parent—but were only able to afford housing outside of Arlington.

APC members connected the crisis of their own congregational life to the life of the surrounding neighborhood. They stepped into the crisis of the neighborhood, and that put the transformation of individuals, the congregation, and ecology—how neighbors were relating to their environment—at the center. As Jesus blessed the bread before the breaking, the stories of the neighborhood blessed the visioning process. Moreover, these stories were the lifeblood of the process. Even as death sat at table as the demise of their building, those stories anchored congregants in the values and the vision for new life they could not yet fully see.

Using this time of discernment as a faith formation experience required a profound openness to ambiguity and messiness. It was a process that, over time, changed not just *what* people were thinking about the future of APC but *how* they were thinking about what was next.[6]

Breaking of the Bread and Pouring of the Cup

On November 2, 2014, the members of Arlington Presbyterian Church voted to sell their building and land for $8.48 million to Arlington Partnership for Affordable Housing (APAH), a nonprofit developer committed to creating affordable housing in the county.[7]

Soon after, the sale was approved by National Capital Presbytery. APC's Session recommended to APAH the building be named Gilliam Place, after Ronda A. Gilliam (1906–1970), the first African American ruling elder at APC and a faithful disciple

and visionary within the community. Demolition was set for July 2016.

"Breaking up is hard to do. God always has a remnant to work with and God always does something new with what's broken," said Dudley Sadler, an APC member.

Before the APC building could be remade into its new purpose, the congregation needed to clear space. Like at the tomb, resurrection of the building could only take place in an empty space. As the congregation prepared for the breaking and pouring out of the building, they had to do something with all the stuff APC had accumulated over the years.

As continued faithful disciples in this call process, APC lived out "demolition theology" as they found homes for all the stuff in the building. The pews were carefully removed and donated to a congregation in Sterling, Virginia. From the choir room, volunteers filled fifty-three boxes with church music, which was distributed to other churches. The pipe organ found a grateful new home at Calvary Presbyterian in Alexandria, Virginia. In fact, the organ prompted that congregation to reinvest in themselves, raising money to renovate their building and coming together in person to carefully wash and help install the precious donation.[8]

As APC member Don Peebles put it, "The great miracle was that we found homes for the vast majority of what we had. It seems to me that our relationship with stuff often defines our relationship with Jesus: There are times we worship the stuff and lose Jesus in the stuff."[9] The congregation was even committed to finding an Earth-honoring way to dispose of the deconstruction waste that couldn't be reused or recycled.

In the breaking, the congregation also wished to honor certain tokens from the church's first incarnation. As the demolition began, the two cornerstones were removed from the façade and saved.

Later, the cornerstone was broken open. The contents were locked in a metal box, which by 2016 was dented and worn and nibbled by wildlife. However, congregants did find an intact copy of the *Presbyterians Advance*, a precursor to the current *Presbyterian Today* and a bulletin from the initial groundbreaking worship service, including the prayer for the cornerstone laying.

Part of the prayer read:

> We give Thee humble thanks that Thou hast moved upon the hearts of Thy people to begin in this spot the building of a House of Prayer. As Thou didst of old, inspire with wisdom, skill, and consecration those whose hands and hearts are busy with this work.
>
> And grant, O Lord, that Thy people who worship here may love the habitation of Thy House that they may be a holy temple unto Thee. O Gracious Lord establish and make sure the foundation of this House and hasten the day when the whole building fitly framed together shall grow unto a holy temple acceptable to Thee.

Though initially APC member Susan Etherton worried that breaking the building would somehow damage the legacy of the church, she said that witnessing the contents of the box demonstrated that the spirit of APC was intact.[10]

Sharing at the Table

We are living in the Anthropocene, the name given for the planet's most recent geologic time period that affirms for the first time that humanity is the most powerful force defining planetary nature itself. However, the rules that govern the natural systems on God's Earth cannot be rewritten. Given this tension, APC knew we couldn't take life as we knew it and just "green" it over. Charles Eisenstein points out that humans believe they can manage "planet Earth like a machine, controlling the inputs and measuring the outputs . . . [yet] Earth is not a machine; it is alive, and it will remain hospitable to life only if we treat it as such."[11]

"Greening" our liturgy has been much more than simply finding ways to recycle or even seeking out biblical narratives that encourage us to be active stewards of God's planet.

For APC, "greening" our liturgy has been much more than simply finding ways to recycle or even seeking out biblical narratives that encourage us to

> The land forces us to ask, "Are we living our values?" and "How do our choices touch others?"

be active stewards of God's planet. It has been a thoughtful and ongoing process to discern how we live our values in the world in big and small ways. It has kept our eyes open to the impact we have, intentional or otherwise. It reminds us to organize our faith around God's land and neighbors. Again and again we return to the Eucharist practice so that we may remember who we are. From this grounded place, we can enter each cycle of our own resurrection, moving ever closer to the loving way Jesus set before us the night before his death.

In March of 2017, APC learned that our developer, APAH, wasn't going to need twelve thousand square feet of the purchased lot. APAH intended to sell this part of the property to another developer who would then build two large single-family homes. In collective discernment, APC was called to purchase the land back from APAH. In June, APC closed on the purchase of the land with the intent to use the twelve thousand square feet as a community garden, a place where we could learn life together with our neighbors.

The APC congregation resurrected this weed-tangled, unruly land into a garden space filled with native plants. The intent is to create a place of restoration for both humans and the natural world. And like the garden in which Jesus prayed with his disciples, this garden has become a place for liturgical restoration for our congregation.

On the fourth Sunday of every month, when the temperature is above fifty degrees, we worship in our green space. APC members circle their chairs and crowd onto blankets; we sing, pray, and listen as the Word of God is proclaimed outdoors. APC's kids blow bubbles, teach each other cartwheels, dabble in the bird bath water, and push toy trucks through the soil.

Though my voice usually goes a bit hoarse as I stretch my words to reach all those gathered, I cherish our outdoor services. It is not simply beautiful; our green space also holds APC accountable to the sharing called forth in the Eucharist story. How do we put the elements of the planet, rather than humanity, at the center? As we break the bread, do we break with the illusion of the familiar and hymn the Earth differently? As we pour the cup, the lifeblood of God, how do we mirror the giving nature of God?

The land forces us to ask, "Are we living our values?" and "How do our choices touch others?" By this, I mean that while we fully inhabited the church building as a congregation of faithful Presbyterians, in our green space, we cannot forget that we have multiple identities: as followers of God's Holy Way, as Anthropoceneans,[12] and as settlers on colonized land.

When we worship in the garden, we do not worship on neutral land. The breeze blows in from the now-polluted ancient fishing ground of the Chesapeake Bay and Potomac River across land that was formerly hunted by the Nanticoke, Powhatan, and Piscataway tribes, who have been all but decimated. From our green space, it's an easy stroll to Freedman's Village, a settlement created by the U.S. government for people emancipated from slavery in the mid-to-late 1800s.[13] While we care responsibly for the trees in the green space, southern trees were a "harbinger of death for black people."[14] What we see in our green space isn't always what we get. Our green space, like the land around us, has histories seen and unseen. It's our liturgical work, grounded in the Eucharist, that calls us to resurrect histories of the land so that the past may be seen and guide us in God's way forward.

The Eucharist, like the land on which we worship, takes us to the stories that give life and death. APC's story, the stories of our vulnerable neighborhood, and the stories of our biblical ancestors converge in the garden as a collective. As in the ancient stories we inherit, leaving the old and becoming new was not a sudden event for APC. It took preparation and blessing, breaking and sharing over a period of time to see and imagine how God was doing a new thing.

Just as our history is an inextricable part of our ecology, so is our current impact on the natural environment and the way our power and privilege allow us to move through our communities. To green our liturgy requires us to see the full scope of our influence and impact. We could have kept the space for ourselves, but we saw that our neighbors needed it more, so we took it upon ourselves to make room for them.

To green our liturgy requires us to see the full scope of our influence and impact. We could have kept the space for ourselves, but we saw that our neighbors needed it more, so we took it upon ourselves to make room for them.

For cost reasons, the cross that was affixed to the top of APC's steeple was allowed to tumble to the ground during the demolition. It was retrieved out of the rubble with dents, cracks, and a deep bend that occurred when it hit the ground with force. The cross represents a transformation story that holds its own bumps and bruises, its own wrestling match with death and resurrection.

The cross will be part of our new worship space at Gilliam Place, anchoring the story of APC, the neighborhood, and Arlington County's past and present as we all move forward into God's future. In the time of the Anthropocene, with our unprecedented powers as humans to dominate the planet, the Eucharist grounds us to a "Christian way of being that emerges from groaning creation itself, lived in the manner of Jesus."[15]

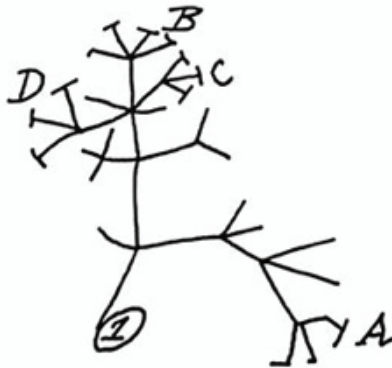
For congregations longing for a new age—for yourselves and God's body, the planet—prepare, break, pour, and share. Keep on preparing and breaking and pouring and sharing. As APC's beloved Dudley Sadler said, "Breaking up is hard to do. God always has a remnant to work with and God always does something new with what's broken."

Notes

1. Part of a public statement that Jon Etherton, member of Arlington Presbyterian Church, made before the Historical Affairs and Landmark Review Board of Arlington County, January 22, 2014.
2. For a practical and theological story of a congregation seeking resurrection rather than self-preservation, see Anna B. Olson, *Claiming Resurrection in the Dying Church: Freedom beyond Survival* (Louisville: KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016).
3. Larry L. Rasmussen, *Earth-honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 5.
4. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), "Faith Begins by Letting Go," *Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal* (Louisville: KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 684. This hymn was used as a guiding liturgical resource for APC throughout the discernment process.
5. "Arlington County Affordable Housing Master Plan," website of Arlington Partnership for Affordable Housing, accessed January 10, 2019, https://apah.org/why-apah/community-need.
6. For more on crisis and climate change, see Sarah S. Amsler, "Bringing Hope 'To Crisis': Crisis Thinking, Ethical Action and Social Change," *Future Ethics: Climate Change and Apocalyptic Imaginatio*n, ed. Stefan Skrimshire (London: Continuum International, 2010), 129–152.
7. Arlington County government does not directly create, build, or maintain affordable housing in the county. The work of affordable housing is done through partnerships in the county with financial incentives coming from the Arlington County and the Commonwealth of Virginia. For more on Arlington Partnership for Affordable Housing, see https:/apah.org/. APAH's mission statement is "to develop, preserve, and own quality, affordable places to live; to promote stability and opportunity for our residents; and to advocate with the people and communities we serve."
8. For more on the "organ transplant," see www.washingtonpost.com/local/with-organ-transplant-two-churches-find-a-home-for-a-beloved-instrument/2018/09/23/13e04256-bf56-11e8-90c9-23f963eea204_story.html?utm_term=.db0008e00f71/.
9. Email exchange with Don Peebles, January 9, 2019.
10. Email exchange with Susan Etherton, January 10, 2019.
11. Charles Eisenstein, *Climate: A New Story* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2018), 49.
12. Lesley Head, *Hope and Grief in the Anthropocene: Re-conceptualising Human-Nature Relations* (New York: Routledge, 2016).
13. For more information on Freedman Village, visit the Black Heritage Museum in Arlington, Virginia, and see www.nps.gov/arho/learn/historyculture/emancipation.htm, accessed January 10, 2019. Note: this page was accessed during the U.S. government shutdown. During the shutdown, government websites were not kept current and updated.
14. Carolyn Finney, *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 119.
15. Larry L. Rasmussen, "How Do We Hymn the Planet in the Anthropocene?" (lecture, Yale Divinity School of Sacred Music, New Haven, CT, June 2018).

The Nest and the Hunt: Some Notes on Ecological Prayer

Gail Ramshaw



I am grateful that the churches are now developing assembly worship materials, new hymns, and memorable eucharistic prayers that express an ecological worldview and urge responsible stewardship of God's creation.[1] Yet as Christians begin the journey of praying less egocentrically, and more ecocentrically, it is important to acknowledge that several traditional Christian claims present speed bumps in our path.[2] These theological claims permeate the Christian tradition and may be maintained, more or less, if not by all the readers of this journal, then by perhaps a majority of baptized believers throughout the earth.

Traditional belief #1: God created a paradise. According to the Christian theological tradition, God, the primordial and continuing Giver of life, began the creation of the earth by establishing a paradise in Eden. This proposal, borrowed from pagan cosmogonic myths and upheld by snatches throughout the Bible, taught that since God is life, everything that God created was unambiguously imbued with life. Furthermore, all of God's created matter was good for humankind, who were originally immortal. There was no death in paradise. Not even the food chain necessitated the death of animals: the church fathers taught that all creatures ate only plants.

Traditional belief #2: Nature that is judged harmful to humankind is divine punishment for sin. According to classic Christian teaching, death entered the earth only after the fall. Humans, evicted from paradise and denied access to the tree of life, became mortal. Punishment for sin marred God's entire creation. "Thorns and thistles" arose to punish the man, and labor pains to punish the woman. Despite the explanation given about infirmity in John 9:3, many Christians still view personal and communal disaster as divine punishment and seek to discover whom to blame.

Traditional belief #3: An afterlife in heaven compensates for an earthly life fraught with misery. God is outside of the created order, visiting it only through Christ in the Spirit. Since the fall, the life that God promises is eternal, outside the time and place of this earth. The goal of the faithful is to endure the hardships of this existence on their way to "a new heaven and a new earth," in which thorns and thistles, cancer and tsunamis, will be no more.

Traditional belief #4: Christianity is not a nature religion. Some of the world's religions look to the cyclical renewal of the forces of nature as the source of life. However, classic monotheisms have asserted that it is primarily through human history, not through nature, that God saves us. Christians

Gail Ramshaw, a retired professor of religion, studies and crafts liturgical language from her home outside of Washington, D.C.

look to Jesus of Nazareth and to the Pentecost Spirit released in Jerusalem, not to the spring equinox, for life. Nature will let you down; God will not.

Some Reflections on These Beliefs

"An Earth Eucharistic Prayer," printed on page 17, stands in response to these traditional beliefs. This thanksgiving at the table attempts not only to praise God for the salvation granted to humankind in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, but also to thank God for the actual created earth. The attentive worshiper will encounter here an understanding of God's creation quite different from that of classic Christianity, toward—I hope—a more mature contemporary faith.

About belief #1: The story in Genesis 2 of God's creation of paradise, while attesting to God's magnificence, is a prescientific myth that must be moderated for our time. On nature's "tree of life" as evoked by Charles Darwin, humans were not originally immortal, and death has always been part of God's design for the earth. Christians need to find speech that does not suggest a rejection of scientific discoveries of God's creation. Perhaps if we accept God's creation of death, of an earth marked by the balance of life with death, myriad life forms with massive extinctions, sunshine with cataclysmic volcanoes, we will be better equipped to face the death of ourselves and those we love. Death is not always evil, but may be an expression of divine wisdom. Can we once again conduct funerals, acknowledging death, and not merely "celebrations of life," as if life is all there is?

About belief #2: As a Lutheran, I maintain the grim reality of human sinfulness and the dread power of evil, without imagining that either causes earthquakes. Labor pains are not women's punishment but the result of our ancestors coming to walk upright and developing enlarged skulls. Can we praise God for such a creation, so marked by ambiguity, while at the same time begging for God's forgiveness for our individual and communal sin? On the cross God accepted the reality of death. Christ's dying sanctifies our death, and with the death of sin, mercy can flourish.

About belief #3: The Christian hope that when this earth is finished, God will create a new heaven and a new earth ought never excuse a lack of care for this earth. When in John 11:24 Martha expresses her belief in the resurrection at the end of time, Jesus responds by naming himself. Can this earth, and our life in Christ on this earth, be our primary concern?

About belief #4: I agree that Christianity is not a nature religion. Life and death come from God, who is beyond the created order. Christ is God incarnate, that which is beyond time and space brought here. Yet Christianity is learning to what extent it can see nature as one sign of God's salvation. I hope that with ecological eyes Christians will view the genuine earth, our nineteenth-century Romantic poetry giving way to a contemporary reflection on a universe beyond our imaginings.

Many of the eucharistic prayers in the Western churches invite us to join with angels and saints to sing the Sanctus. The version of the Sanctus suggested as the refrain for this thanksgiving comes from Isaiah 6: "The earth is full of your glory." Admittedly, there is more than the earth that proclaims God's glory. But in the words of this eucharistic prayer, we can join the ancient prophet in seeing God's glory, not only in a myth of perfection, but in the earth that God actually created, in this recognizable bread, in this swallow of "well-aged wines." As the prayer states, we are creatures of dust, and mortals, and God's children, and as such we can offer thanksgiving for this earth.

Notes

1. See for example Paul Galbreath, *Leading into the World* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014).
2. For a lengthy essay on some of these issues, see Gail Ramshaw, "Liturgical Considerations of the Myth of Eden," *Worship* 89 (2015): 64–79.

Even the sparrow has found a home

John Stuart

An Earth Eucharistic Prayer

Gail Ramshaw

Much Christian praise evokes the ancient belief that God created earth as a paradise in which death was contrary to the divine will. In response to centuries of scientific discovery, this Earth Eucharistic Prayer confesses a God who created a world in which from its beginnings life contended with death. Thus Christ's death and resurrection do not deny God's natural order, but rather epitomize and sanctify it. The refrain can be sung by the presider or cantor, then repeated by the assembly, most simply the first time on sol, then la, then ti, and lastly do.

An Earth Eucharistic Prayer[1]

O God triune, how majestic is your name
in all the earth.
Over the eons your merciful might evolved our
home, a fragile tree of life.
Here by your wisdom are both life and death,
growth and decay,
the nest and the hunt, sunshine and storm.
Sustained by these wonders, we creatures of dust
join in the ancient song:
The earth is full of your glory: **the earth is full
of your glory.**

O God triune, you took on our flesh in Jesus
our healer.
In Christ you bring life from death; we remember
his cross, we laud his resurrection.
Broken like bread, he enlivens our body.
Outpoured like wine, he fills the earth
with goodness.
Receiving this mystery, we mortals sing our song:
The earth is full of your glory: **the earth is full of
your glory.**

We praise you for the heart of Jesus
so filled with your love for this earth:

On the night before he died he took bread, and
gave thanks,
broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:
Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.
Do this for the remembrance of me.
Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks,
and gave it for all to drink, saying:
This cup is the new covenant in my blood,
shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness
of sin.
Do this for the remembrance of me.

Gathered around this table, we your children unite
in this song:
The earth is full of your glory: **the earth is full
of your glory.**

O God triune, you create the worlds, you uphold
the living, you embrace the dead.
Send forth your Spirit, and renew the face
of the earth.
Strengthen us for our journey with this meal,
the body and blood of Christ.
Give us a future that trusts in you and cares for
your earth.
Empowered by your promises, we rise from our
deaths to praise you again:
The earth is full of your glory: **the earth is full
of your glory.**
Amen, and Amen. **Amen, and Amen.**

Note

1. "An Earth Eucharistic Prayer" appears in Gail Ramshaw, *Pray, Praise, and Give Thanks: A Collection of Litanies, Laments, and Thanksgivings at Font and Table* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2017), 76–77. Reprinted with permission.

Gail Ramshaw, a retired professor of religion, studies and crafts liturgical language from her home outside of Washington, D.C.

John Stuart

Fertile Ground for Green Funerals

Benjamin M. Stewart

This article offers guidance for greening the funeral. In many ways, the funeral has always been ecologically grounded. It may be the original ecological ritual. Human cultures seem to have returned their dead to the earth with reverence for the body and the elements as far back as we can explore in human history. Today, recovering the ecotheological dimensions of Christian funerals has been made easier by two important developments. First, the rapidly growing natural burial movement has generated excellent literature, a network of support providers, and a growing number of dedicated natural burial grounds. Second, the current liturgical rites available for ministry at the time of death, including the 2018 *Book of Common Worship*, have included ample textual and ritual resources that are easily adapted for green funerals. There are challenges, too. Some funeral service providers have been slow to adapt to the need for green burial practices or have practiced "greenwashing," repackaging dubious products and services as "green," usually at a premium price. And not every community has a local conservation burial ground yet. Therefore, this article offers guidance in navigating resources, service providers, and practices for green burial wherever your community is located, concluding with some notes on the funeral rites in the 2018 *Book of Common Worship*. These rites are generally similar to other funeral liturgies in the English-speaking ecumenical family and therefore the discussion here should be helpful beyond the Presbyterian community. In any case, this consideration is centered in seven principles for greening the funeral.

There are many good reasons for recovering natural burial. First, it is important to be clear that many cultures aren't *recovering* natural burial. They never lost it. Among recent immigrants, Muslim and Jewish communities, Christian monasteries, Native American nations, and rural cultures are groups who have maintained traditions of natural burial in North America.[1] So a first reason for practicing natural burial might be to sustain one's own traditional culture or to learn respectfully from other traditions, including the historic practices of one's own ancestors.

The current movement to *recover* natural burial began with dissatisfaction with changes in the funeral industry: bodies being whisked away at death without an opportunity for care, vigil, or prayer and ritual; the artificiality of chemical embalming and its impact on the health of the embalmers; expensive and overbuilt burial vessels that inhibited the body's return to the earth; cremation practices that seemed more industrial than pastoral or ecological; and cemeteries that had become sterile mown fields with more buried concrete and steel below the ground than bodies.

In response, green burial recovers and foregrounds the natural dimensions of our return to the earth.[2] Experienced caregivers help create space for caring for the body and keeping vigil. Honoring the integrity of the body, the health of the caregivers, and the well-being of the land and water, no toxic embalming chemicals are used. Burial vessels might be a simple pine box, a shroud, or a woven basket. And the place of burial is most often some sort of preserve—a place of flourishing life for

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Burial vessels might be a simple pine box, a shroud, or a woven basket. And the place of burial is most often some sort of preserve—a place of flourishing life for a diversity of creatures. Those gathered at the burial often participate in closing the grave, mounding up the earth and planting indigenous plants and trees at the grave.

a diversity of creatures. Those gathered at the burial often participate in closing the grave, mounding up the earth and planting indigenous plants and trees at the grave. The principles below include even more reasons that people choose natural burial, but already we have seen a number of compelling considerations: tradition, simplicity, cost, natural aesthetics, authenticity and honesty, interest in ritual and prayer, the integrity of the body, and the healing of the earth.

Remember that it's natural. Green burial is natural not only ecologically, but also in the sense that it isn't difficult or complex. In today's dominant cultures, it can be hard to remember that our ancestors from every part of the world have returned their beloved dead to the earth, to ashes, to dust, without guidebooks, websites, or articles in liturgical journals. Many of us have buried beloved pets whom we have considered members of our family, returning them to the earth simply and with dignity. The point is that natural burial doesn't need to be complicated. Only recently have cultural forces conspired to make this natural process artificially cumbersome (more about that below). Since natural burial has been suppressed in many communities in the United States today, the practices require some countercultural courage and extra planning. Therefore, in order to keep things in perspective, it is helpful to remember that "greening the funeral" is literally one of the most natural things in the world.

In a brief reflection on the elemental simplicity of natural burial at Gethsemani Abbey in Kentucky, Gregory K. Hillis reflected,

> never before had the words Christians recite on Ash Wednesday—remember you are dust—been as real to me as they were at that moment. More importantly, I had never experienced death as something beautiful before this funeral. What I witnessed was the care and love of a community for one of their brothers, a care that extended to the very depths of the grave.[3]

The beauty of natural burial can be described as uniquely powerful, the barriers sometimes portrayed as imposing, and the practices themselves framed as exotic or mysterious. But at the heart of natural burial is something as common and simple as the ground beneath our feet.

We are dust. This simple truth is a foundational teaching of Christianity, but it still catches us by surprise. Many of us are directly addressed with these words from Genesis every year at Ash Wednesday: "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." In a sort of ritual near-death experience, the ashes are like the dust of the grave pressed into our skin while we are still living. Being confronted with the physicality of the earth and the inevitability of death causes us to wonder, "How shall we live?" What Ash Wednesday does with a short phrase and a smudge of ashes, natural burial does with an earthen grave, a body reverently laid to rest, and a community of flourishing life under the heavens, causing us to ask, "How shall we live among our fellow creatures?"

Engagement with the dust at death is part of the Bible's wisdom tradition. This tradition includes a few core perspectives on mortality: human life is short, like grass that withers and fades (1 Pet. 1:24), like a watch in the night (Ps. 90:3–4), like a breath (Ps. 144:4); all plants and animals, including humans, die and return to the earth from which we were made (Eccl. 3:19–20). Death in this tradition recalls the image of God shaping a body from the earth and breathing into it to create a living being. At death, our origins in the earth and in God are apparent again: "The dust returns to the earth as it was, and the breath returns to God who gave it" (Eccl. 12:7).

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This teaching about our origin in the earth—and our rightful return to it—is much more fully expressed in Eastern Orthodox funeral rites than in Western ones. Some Western funeral resources have begun to draw on Eastern traditions, including, as noted below, some of the texts in the most recent *Book of Common Worship*. Texts that draw on what I have called "the dust wisdom tradition" are welcome reforms within our published funeral liturgies. Natural burial, however, *embodies* this wisdom about mortality, complementing texts with a vivid experience of the body's profound relationship to the earth.[4]

Natural burial resurrects suppressed knowledge. Familiarity with natural burial didn't fade away by accident.[5] Advertising strategies have intentionally distorted cultural perspectives about burial. Expensive metal caskets were introduced with a marketing campaign that reframed traditional simple wooden coffins as shameful and disrespectful to the dead. Phobias about bodies were exploited to falsely market chemical embalming as good for public health (there is no evidence of any health benefit from routine chemical embalming).[6]

Narrow understandings of gender and science also warped burial practice. Until relatively recently, both births and deaths were normally occasions for women to preside: midwives cared for mothers and babies at birth, and at death many of these same midwives washed and dressed the bodies of the deceased. From the eighteenth to the twentieth century this vocation became largely taken over by officially credentialed men as part of a movement that framed both birth and death as dangerous and needing to be tamed and sterilized. Both processes largely moved out of the home and out of the oversight of women, and were increasingly considered by dominant cultures to be understandable only by male experts with special, nonpublic knowledge.[7]

Theology has also played a role in suppressing familiarity with natural burial. Distorted versions of Christianity have sought to leave the earth behind through death, abandoning hope that the earth and its creatures can be healed and renewed. This has sometimes encouraged contradictory dispositions toward the body: while the body could be described as a shell to be left behind for a disembodied heaven, the body might also be the focus of preservation efforts (embalming, watertight caskets, sealed vaults) so that it can be retrieved for a future bodily resurrection leading somewhere beyond earth. Both approaches seem to forget the dusty truth Ash Wednesday tells Christians to remember, as well as Revelation's ecological proclamation of trees and rivers of life on a renewed earth.[8]

Thus, while natural burial is indeed "natural" in a number of senses, recovering the practice in North America today involves resurrecting what Michel Foucault called "subjugated knowledges," ways of knowing that have been suppressed, deemed primitive and unworthy, in an assertion of social power.[9] Therefore, recovering the knowledge of natural burial is not simply about relearning practices. It inevitably disrupts social hierarchies through an earthy aesthetic, a more inclusive understanding of expertise, and a theological accent on God's healing love for mortal bodies and this earth—ways of knowing that have been suppressed by the powerful to deadly effect. In this way, in some senses green burial, even in the act of burying the dead, participates already in the revolutionary dynamics of resurrection.

In natural burial, the integrity of the body and the flourishing of the earth become even more prominent.

Body and earth are crucial elements. These are central symbols at the Christian funeral. In natural burial, the integrity of the body and the flourishing of the earth become even more prominent. We could probably welcome people into the Christian faith without using water. We could probably speak of communion with each other and God without bread and wine. This would, however, alter the meaning of Christianity, and, many of us agree, diminish it. Are the body and the earth similarly crucial at our rituals of death? Thomas Long makes the case that the *body*—and its accompaniment through death to the grave—is a key Christian sign of the solidarity of God with us throughout life, and especially in our suffering and death.[10] Long argues persuasively for the ministry of accompaniment to continue all the way to the place of burial or interment or scattering (including going to the place of cremation), which is to say all the way to the earth and its elements. The funeral that accompanies the body to the earth embodies the central Christian motif of steadfast divine solidarity.

Bodies and earth have always been central to the meaning of Christian death. However, in an era of

ecological crisis, their meaning is even more urgent. We have no rite that more fully ritualizes how our bodies come from, depend upon, and return to God's beloved earth than the funeral. Our bodies, Augustine wrote, are "the earth we carry."[11] Natural burials ritualize this truth. "Memorial services" without a body and the earth do not. Thus, memorial services can be richly meaningful supplements to the central actions of natural burial, but they cannot replace the central ritual of returning the body to the good earth. The centrality of the body and the earth means that a few ritual locations rise in prominence: care for the body at the time of death, accompaniment of the body or cremated remains at the funeral, and a gathering at the grave that honors the process by which the body itself becomes holy ground.

Of course, a funeral may take place when no body can be recovered, or when someone is missing but presumed dead. Even in these cases—perhaps especially in such cases—there is a powerful longing to care for a body and to offer it peaceful rest in the earth. To avoid speaking and ritualizing our hoped-for connection to the body and the earth in such a situation would be pastoral malpractice. When no body can be present, a service of commendation that perhaps includes a tree planting ritual in a conservation burial ground would offer a pastoral funeral rite that aptly acknowledges the longing for the body and offers space for prayer and for rest in the earth and in God.

Resurrection imagery is diverse. Popular imagery and even some funeral texts can imply that resurrection is primarily about an individual somehow escaping the grave and the earth itself. The focus is tightly centered on the individual without including much of the wider context around them. The scriptural imagery of resurrection is far more evocative. Resurrection is like a seed falling into the earth to die and bear much fruit (John 12:24), the sun dawning on a darkened valley (Luke 1:78–79), an earthquake disrupting the power of armies (Matt. 28:2–4), a mysterious gardener in the springtime (John 20:15), a rumor carried on the run in fear (Mark 16:8), and a fruitful tree of life healing the nations (Rev. 22:2). Natural burial offers a powerful ritual setting for these expansive images.

The practices of natural burial are especially resonant with images of a flourishing landscape. For example, consider how the tradition of a reader calling out the verses of Psalm 23 in the procession to the grave resonates in a natural burial ground with woods, meadows, and a stream: "The Lord . . . makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters." Or the tradition of reading from Psalm 121, "I lift up my eyes to the hills; from where is my help to come? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth."[12] The liturgies of Sunday, Easter, and burial in the early church all drew on the imagery of cosmic renewal. As Christians recover practices of green burial, it is only natural that these older, suppressed ecotheological traditions might be recovered and adapted for contemporary use.[13]

The natural burial movement is a liturgical renewal movement. During the twentieth century most Christian denominations in North America reinvigorated the embodied and sacramental dimensions of worship: real bread and a common cup, baptism with generous amounts of water, sharing the peace as an embodied act, more frequent celebrations of Holy Communion, a wider diversity of worship leaders beyond only the pastor, a more robust approach to the liturgical seasons and festivals, and a stronger embrace of the arts in worship. Across the spectrum of worship practices the trend toward a deeper incarnational dimension was evident—except in funeral practices. Just as the urgency of the environmental crisis became increasingly evident, and as the need for regularly acknowledging the connection between human embodiment and the flourishing of the earth became a global emergency, contrary to the other trends in worship, bodies and the earth began to vanish from Christian funeral rites. Memorial services without a body became more common. Fewer funerals even included the act of burying the dead.

What the churches failed to recover, the natural burial movement championed. Its efforts to recover the human body and the earth as central symbols

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of the funeral may be understood as an extra-ecclesial liturgical renewal movement. Churches can certainly learn from this movement. And of course churches will bring a distinctive set of theological perspectives, hymns, and texts to the basic practices of natural burial. Happily, the composition of the natural burial movement is relatively diverse: outdoor-enthusiast seniors doing end-of-life planning, people dissatisfied with the sterility of the funeral industry, practitioners of traditional religion as well as spiritual seekers, members of the funeral consumer rights movement, environmental justice advocates, those seeking simplicity and frugality in burial, and, poignantly, families who experience sudden or tragic deaths disproportionally seek out the beauty of natural burial grounds. Within this diverse movement, members of churches are increasingly finding a place.[14] Readers of *Call to Worship* are situated both to learn appreciatively from the natural burial movement and to offer education and leadership within Christian communities for natural burial.

The above principles articulate some of the touchstones for a recovered practice of Christian natural burial. The final section below briefly highlights how two ritual locations in the 2018 *Book of Common Worship* funeral rites—vigil with the dying and committal to the earth—engage with some of the ecotheological dimensions of natural burial practices. As noted above, the vigil with the body and the committal to the earth, as in the early church's practice, both rise in prominence in natural burial, with a full funeral service being more clearly a station along the way between the place of death and the return to the earth.

Vigil with the Dying: Prayer at the Time of Death

The 2018 version of the *Book of Common Worship (BCW)* includes a liturgical resource that is especially useful as part of the bridge between hospice and natural burial care. The rite of "Prayer at the Time of Death" offers resources for preparation for death with family and loved ones gathered with the dying person. Within the rite, a few texts are especially noteworthy for their ecotheological dimensions. The three options for the opening sentences all beautifully hold together an acknowledgement of the natural reality of death with the enduring faithfulness of God. Death in this rite is natural, not necessarily a catastrophe, and yet death is an occasion of clear need in which God's abiding presence and care are sought. The onset of death is approached in light of the gift nature of existence itself. A number of the prayers draw on the imagery of humanity's creation from the earth. The opening prayer begins, "Eternal God, keeper of our days, look on N., whom you created in your image."[15]

The commendation in this rite is one of the most profound blessings the church can offer. In it, the leader offers a benediction with the laying on of hands that blesses the journey of the dying person into death, deeper into the mystery of God. The third option for the commendation is the most resonant with natural burial, remembering that God "breathed into us the breath of life."[16] The prayer continues with a kind of ritual assent for the dying person to depart this life in peace: "N., depart in peace, in the name of God the creator who formed you." The commendation concludes with a classic prayer composed with archetypal natural imagery of evening rest: "O Lord, support us all the day long, until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then, in your mercy, grant us a safe lodging, and a holy rest, and peace at the last."[17]

The creation imagery in the phrases noted above from the *BCW* ("created in your image," "breathed into us the breath of life," and "the creator who formed you") helpfully link the earthy Genesis creation narratives to our mortality. This is a key theme for Christian natural burial. However, these phrases do not actually name "dust" or "earth" in the prayers and blessings. (Indeed, neither the rite "Prayer at the Time of Death" nor "Comforting the Bereaved" contain a single reference to "earth" or "dust.")[18] However, some other similar resources do invoke the image of dust. For example, one commendation blessing includes the encouragement, "We entrust you to God who created you," continuing with, "May you return to the one who formed us out of the dust of the earth."[19] Those who use the *BCW* for these rites might gently adapt phrases to include such scriptural images that specifically name the earth from which humans have been formed and to which we return. Those who are practicing natural burial without embalming might consult the remarkable rite for washing, anointing, and clothing a body in preparation for funeral and burial recently published in the volume *In Sure and Certain Hope*.[20]

Returning to the Earth: The Committal

The committal rite is both highly functional and profoundly symbolic in natural burial: the body (or cremated remains) is physically returned to the earth to rest, while the body and the land also signify participation in the resurrection hope of a healed and restored creation, "the life of the world to come." Especially in a conservation burial ground, the liturgical setting speaks powerfully, and so while the texts have important work to do, a holy economy of speech is normally kept at the grave.

The *Book of Common Worship* provides four slightly different options for texts spoken at the moment the body is directly returned to the elements. They are composed for four situations: earth burial, burial at sea, at the cremation of a body, and at the committal of cremated remains. This is a welcome acknowledgement of the ecologically distinct modes of returning a body to the elements. The *BCW*'s modest adaptations might be followed in natural burial with an additional sentence from Scripture that further evokes the return to the earth. For example, for an earth burial of a body or cremated remains, the sentence might be "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24). For burial at sea, perhaps words from Psalm 46, "We will not fear, though the earth be moved, and though the mountains shake in the depths of the sea. . . . The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold."[21] At a cremation, "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; the earth is the Lord's, the world and all those who dwell therein" (Ps. 24:1). And if cremated remains are being placed in a columbarium, perhaps, "The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord endures forever" (1 Pet. 1:24b-25a).

Just before the final blessing in the committal rite the *Book of Common Worship* includes a remarkable text, adapted from Eastern Orthodox rites and made more widely available recently through the *Book of Common Prayer*. The text is worth quoting in full:

> You only are immortal, the creator and
> maker of all.
> We are mortal, formed of the earth,
> and to earth shall we return.
> This you ordained when you created
> us, saying,
> "You are dust, and to dust you shall return."
> **All of us go down to the dust;**
> **yet even at the grave we make our song:**
> **Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.**[22]

This text holds together the bracing truth of Ash Wednesday with the surprising song of Easter—all unfolding beside the earthen grave. Imagine this text spoken at a natural burial, where the assembly is welcomed to take part in closing the grave. A dozen or so shovels allow everyone to help fill the grave, mounding it up, and planting seeds or indigenous plants and trees in the burial mound. "All of us go down to the dust; yet even at the grave we make our song."[23] In a conservation burial ground, a place of death, the Easter song resounds with hope that even in death God is making all things new. A burial in such a place is an act of faith in God's renewing power. The natural burial movement and resources such as the *Book of Common Worship* can help us turn even our graveyards into fertile grounds for renewal and resurrection in this age of ecological emergency.

Notes

1. See, for example, Vine Deloria, "Death and Religion," in *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 2003), 165–184.
2. Two accessible introductions to the practice are Elizabeth Fournier, *The Green Burial Guidebook: Everything You Need to Plan an Affordable, Environmentally Friendly Burial* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2018); and Mark Harris, *Grave Matters: A Journey through the Modern Funeral Industry to a Natural Way of Burial* (New York: Scribner, 2007). See also the website of the Green Burial Council, a nonprofit organization that educates the

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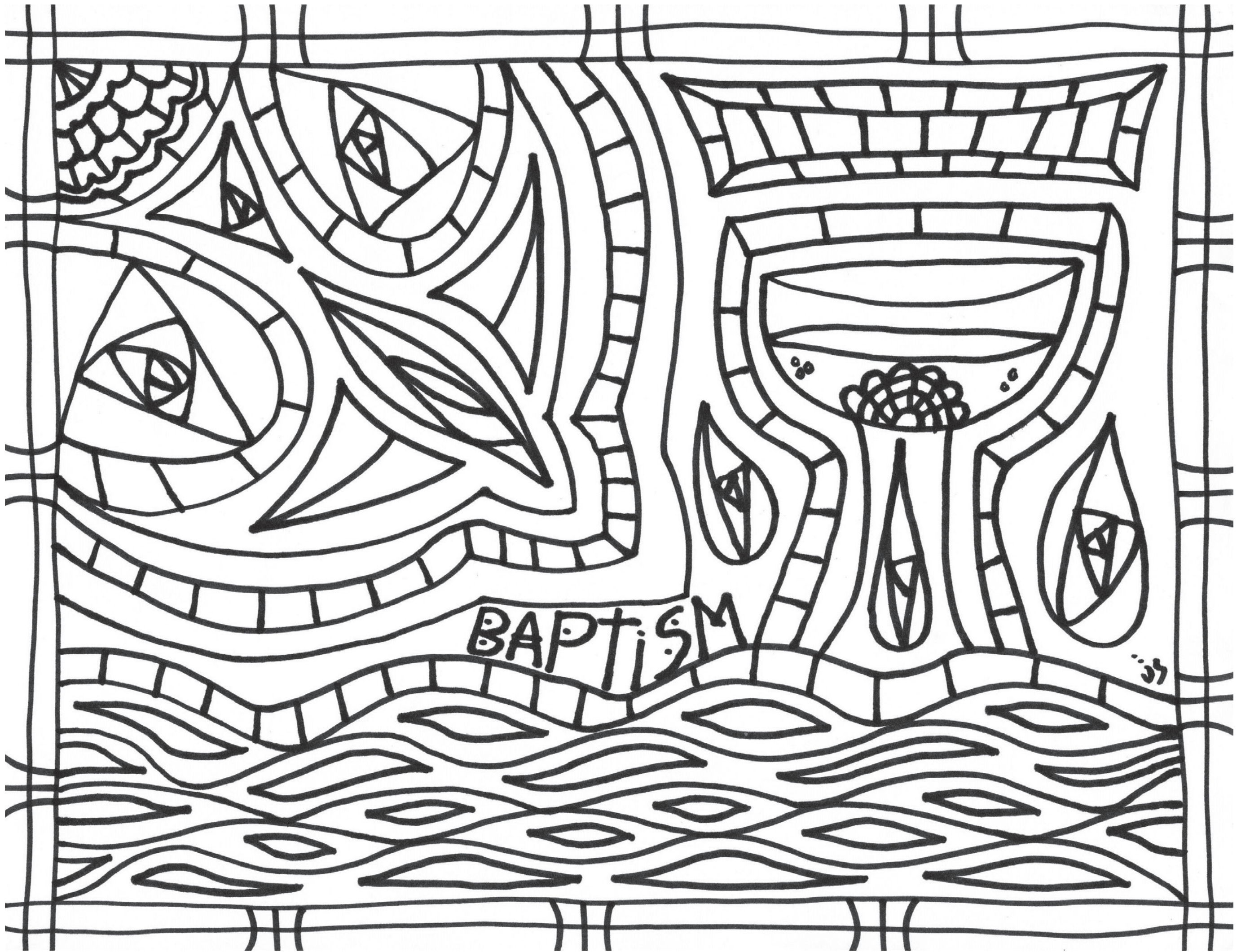
public and certifies natural burial service providers, https://greenburialcouncil.org.
3. Gregory K. Hillis, "A Burial at Gethsemani," *Commonweal* 145, no. 3 (February 9, 2018): 39, www.commonwealmagazine.org/burial-gethsemani.
4. I have explored these themes more fully in "All Flesh Is Grass: Natural Burial as Embodiment of Wisdom Literature's Mortality Tradition," *Proceedings of the North American Academy of Liturgy* (2017): 153–63.
5. For an extraordinary monograph that highlights the intersectional and political dimensions of the marginalization of natural burial, see Suzanne Kelly, *Greening Death: Reclaiming Burial Practices and Restoring Our Tie to the Earth* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2015).
6. The classic (now updated) exposé that launched the funeral consumer rights movement is Jessica Mitford's *The American Way of Death Revisited*, rev. ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998).
7. See the remarkable guidebook with state-by-state information on caring for the dead, Joshua Slocum and Lisa Carlson, *Final Rights: Reclaiming the American Way of Death* (Hinesburg, VT: Upper Access, 2011).
8. See Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker, "So Great a Cloud" in *Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of This World for Crucifixion and Empire* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008), 56–83.
9. I am grateful to Suzanne Kelly for this connection to the work of Foucault: ". . . a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to the task or insufficiently elaborated; naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity." Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Vintage, 1980), 82.
10. Thomas G. Long, *Accompany Them with Singing: The Christian Funeral* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).
11. Augustine, writing of the human condition, describes the human body as *haec terra quam porto*, "this earth that I carry." Augustine, *Confessions,* 12.2, ed. James J. O'Donnell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), www.stoa.org/hippo/frames12.html. I first encountered this phrase in Larry L. Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 275.
12. Translation is from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2006).
13. See, for example, on the cosmic and ecological dimensions of Easter, Anscar J. Chupungco, *Shaping the Easter Feast* (Washington, DC: Pastoral Press, 1992); on the ecological cosmology of Sunday sacramental liturgy, Brock and Parker, *Saving Paradise*; Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Ground: A Liturgical Cosmology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003); and Benjamin M. Stewart, *A Watered Garden: Christian Worship and Earth's Ecology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2011).
14. For example, one of the largest conservation burial grounds in the United States is Honey Creek Woodlands, in Conyers, Georgia, operated by the Monastery of the Holy Spirit. I have offered guidance for congregations seeking to launch natural burial ministries in an accessible book chapter: "Natural Burial," in *In Sure and Certain Hope: A Funeral Sourcebook*, ed. Melinda Ann Quivik (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2017), 117–127. For an accessible academic study of religion and spirituality in natural burial see Douglas Davies and Hannah Rumble, *Natural Burial: Traditional-Secular Spiritualities and Funeral Innovation* (New York: Continuum, 2012).
15. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *Book of Common Worship* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 773.
16. Ibid. 774.
17. Ibid. 775.
18. The rites use the word *earth* twice, but in these rites both instances are referring to "the world" and not to soil, dust, or clay.
19. The Office of Worship for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *The Funeral: A Service of Witness to the Resurrection,* Supplemental Liturgical Resources 4 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1986), 13.
20. Rebekkah Lohrmann, "Rite for Preparing the Body for Burial," in *In Sure and Certain Hope*.
21. Translation from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship.*
22. *Book of Common Worship*, 792–793.
23. Following the spoken text, one can imagine a musician leading a simple refrain of "Alleluia" as the grave is filled. Other simple chants or refrains might also be sung, interspersed with silence as the work of burial continues. Alternatively, the funeral assembly might be able to sing the setting of even more of this text in a piece composed by Mark Mummert, published as "All of Us Go Down to the Dust," *Evangelical Lutheran Worship,* hymn 223. Mummert has also published an essay describing the process of composing the piece, "All of Us Go Down to the Dust," *CrossAccent: Journal of the Association of Lutheran Church Musicians* 22, no. 3 (Fall/Winter 2014): 44–46.



John Stuart

The Work of Our Hands

Mercy Community Church's Incarnational Practices of Art

Brittany Fiscus-van Rossum and Chad Hyatt

Stepping into Mercy's basement space from the streets, one is inundated with colorful sights, strong smells, and boisterous joyful noises. It is an experience of the senses. Outside it may be chilly, dreary, and gray—all concrete, brick, and unwelcoming sidewalks, but through these rented doors are embodiments of warmth, hospitality, and dignity. On any given day of worship at Mercy (which happens four to five times a week) coffee is brewing, vegetables are stewing, voices are laughing and sharing stories and greetings, and the combination of a gathering of human bodies and turned-up heating is warming chilled faces and fingers. The walls and doors of this church are bright shades of purple and orange, and filling every available space are vibrantly colorful works of art. Above one's head, tapering across the room as in a Buddhist temple, are handmade prayer flags depicting the names and faces of community members both present and past: a diverse communion of saints. More than once I have compared stepping through Mercy's open doors to being dunked in baptismal waters, as this active engagement of so many senses can leave one feeling a bit like being submerged and surrounded by the Holy Spirit herself.

Mercy Community Church is a thirteen-year-old grassroots ecumenical congregation that meets in the borrowed basement space of a big Presbyterian church on a busy street in the heart of Atlanta. While many of Mercy's community members live on the streets in the surrounding area, it is a place where people in and out of housing come *together*

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to practice Christian hospitality and mutually empowering community. There are hot meals and a clothing closet, the sharing of resources, but there is much more to this place than such offerings of hospitality. Mercy's days are structured by worship, prayer, the study of Scripture, meals, and classes, and sprinkled within all these practices is the incarnational work and presence of art.

Jesus and the Woman at the Well (John 4:1–42)
This mural attempts to portray the radical power of the encounter between the woman and Jesus. Many images show Jesus standing and gesturing, towering over the seated woman, clearly the one holding power between the two. But I (Chad) am not convinced at all that John wants to paint that kind of picture. Even though John's Gospel reflects a high Christology, the Jesus of that Gospel interacts with human beings in ways that are much more true to life, engaging in long, fluid conversations rather than tossing out provocative questions and clever rejoinders. The conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman is just this sort of encounter: a meeting of two confident people, interacting and respecting one another in a mutual and honest dialogue. Our image conveys this truth by having both persons seated on the rim of the well, both gesturing in animated conversation. They see each other at eye level. They are equally empowered. The simple folk art style aims to show the sign quality of the encounter rather than portray a naturalistic depiction from the artist's imagination. Both are people of color. The woman is dressed in fabrics that are vaguely Latin American, and Jesus is wrapped in a kente-like cloth. The sun is abnormally large and high overhead, picking up on both the detail in the story that the encounter takes place at noon and John's theme that Jesus is the light of the world. Beside the woman is a spilled and soon-to-be-forgotten water jar, for as Jesus suggests to her, she has found water far more satisfying in the system-shattering conversation she shares with Jesus. Their conversation overturns expectations about religion and race, gender and community. Finally, this image is one of two that are prominent in our worship space: a place not unlike that Samaritan well, where people of different races and genders, housing and traditions are invited to encounter one another as beloved human with beloved human, where mutual theological conversation can lead to a life-giving and satisfying encounter with the Spirit of Christ, quenching the longing of our hearts.

A House of Love in the City
This image was created as part of a fund-raiser for another agency that commissioned partner organizations to create a design on a door that they provided. As is often true in art, that happy coincidence gives a unique charm and truth to the art itself. It is a door, a symbol of welcome or exclusion. On the surface of the door, we used a combination of simple art mediums—chalk, marker, and paint—which is in keeping with the simple and "found" nature of both our community and our approach to goods. The image is what amounts to our community logo: a basic house symbol with an over-sized heart filling it, vibrant and colorful, while the shadowy outline of a cityscape surrounds and looms above it. We often use the contrasts in the image to talk about our self-understanding as a community—something small in the midst of so much bigness, vibrant and messy color in the

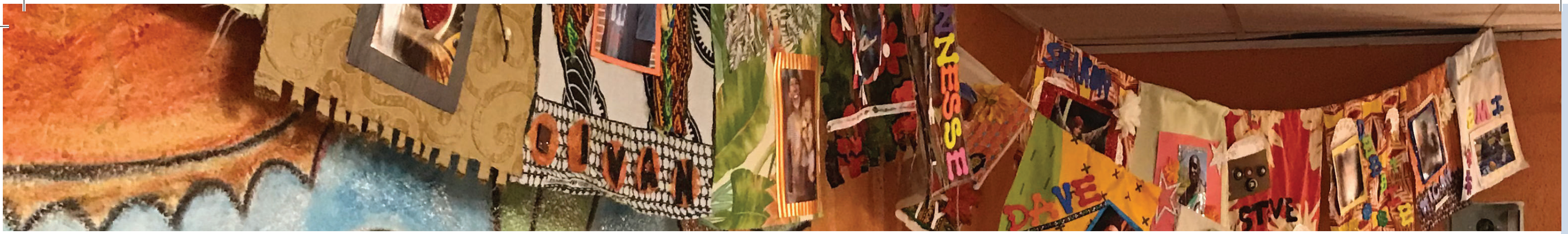
midst of monochrome conformity, overflowing love in the midst of shadow-casting and distant, tall edifices beyond our reach, a place of welcome and a little home in the midst of dominant systems that loom large in our lives as human beings building our own kind of community together. Our church is named in both English and Spanish, reflecting both our diversity and our vision of hospitality, with the words *mercy* and *misericordia* being most prominent. Unique to this particular depiction of this common image in our community are the tongues of fire that emanate from the base of the house of love, unexpectedly taking on the shape and look of roots. Perhaps it reminds us that we are rooted in the fiery outpouring of God's own love for us, and that something as simple as our love for one another can shine brightly amid the shadows where we all dwell.

The Crucifix

The cross itself is made from wood salvaged from an old barn, held together by old-fashioned dowels. The surface is rough and textured. The corpus once again depicts Christ as a person of color. Certainly, the historical Jesus was not a fair, blue-eyed European but a Palestinian Jew from the Eastern Mediterranean. As James Cone has articulated so well, quite apart from historical arguments, Jesus is in fact "theologically Black," in that God has come to us as a human being who is one with all of us who are oppressed and exploited by systems of violence and power.[1] That is what it meant to be a poor Jew in Jesus' time. That is what it means to be lynched on a tree in any time. This is the raw symbol at the heart of our faith. This is the scandalous sign that dares reorder our ways of being together as human beings in this world. A Jesus of color, whether he is Latino or African or Asian, is a necessarily subversive sign in a church and national culture where far too many images of "white Jesus" are accepted as the norm. It actually matters what we envision God to look like if in fact we envision ourselves as wonderfully created in God's likeness. For members of our community, many of whom are persons of color, it matters that the God who liberates us all comes from below, where the poor are beaten down, and not from above, where power is cynically twisted for the benefit of a few. In our work with women and men on the streets and in prisons and jails, it is painfully obvious that racism is very real in the systems that control access to wealth and health and power. Jesus is a tortured prisoner, publicly executed by the state. In this painting, his wounds are nonrealistic—jagged triangle and diamond shapes, roughly drawn in charcoal—but graphic, with red chalk dabbed with water and left to dry, creating vivid streaks of blood that run from his head and feet, hands and side, and soaking into the soiled wrap that girds his waist. His feet are awkwardly and painfully bent, an idea taken from a crucifix at a local Trappist monastery. The image was drawn on an outline of gesso using chalk and charcoal, hand-rubbed and detailed, sealed with Modge Podge Glossy.

Jesus Feeds the Multitudes

The second mural that figures prominently in our space of worship is a depiction of Jesus and the feeding of the five thousand, a story that is among the few outside of the Passion narrative that is found in all four Gospels. The medium is chalk and charcoal on a stucco-covered concrete wall that has been lightly sanded. The chalk and charcoal were applied and blended by hand, then sealed by layers of Modge Podge Glossy that were first sprayed then brushed. Palm trees are used as a framing device, which is also used on the mural of *Jesus and the Woman at the Well*, giving a connective symmetry between the two murals that face each other from opposite sides of the room. Jesus is in the foreground, while the crowds look on in the background. Interestingly, Jesus is not looking at the crowds but backward over the shoulder at us, as if to say, "You give them something to eat" (Mark 6:37), or perhaps to invite us to join the waiting multitudes. He carries on his back two sacks that contain the meager supplies that he will generously share, miraculously providing more than the hungry crowds can eat: two small fish and five loaves of bread. The crowd is drawn to suggest people of many different races and from many different places—and they are not



"biblically attired," but rather, they are wearing the clothes of everyday poor and working folk from around the world. Once again, Jesus is portrayed as a person of color, but with longer, straighter hair and beard. The inspiration for this slight variation in my usual style came from a friend and parishioner, an African American man who appreciated the Afrocentric depiction of Jesus I typically employ but once wondered, "What would it look like if you drew Jesus with straight hair?" I decided to take up the challenge, and I liked the result, both because it was a fun exercise and because it illustrates how the distance between artist and those who appreciate and interpret the art is wonderfully reduced when art is made in the midst of community.

Adding to the feeling of being submerged in our colorful microcosm is the fact that our borrowed space is exceedingly small. Everything about the little room where we gather is intimate. Thus, each lovingly created piece surrounds the community. They are not just gazed upon, but leaned on, touched, moved, carried, and embraced. When I (Brittany) asked Pastor Chad to describe the process of rubbing to life the image of Jesus on the cross, he reached right out and tenderly brushed his thumb against the piece, reenacting this simple and patient act of creation. Although this cross hangs on the wall throughout the week, for Sunday worship it is stationed on a wooden stand, making Jesus' face, with its expression of peaceful nonviolent resistance, eye level for many of us. As one or the other pastor leads the community in our dialogue-style, discussion-based "sermon," we will typically reach right out and touch Jesus for emphasis. On Good Friday, this same piece is carried by members of the community down busy streets, back alleys, and parks as we enact an urban stations of the cross. It is a piece of art that is not only observed and admired but also carried and touched and invited among the people. The murals, though they are permanent fixtures, serve similar functions in worship. During the invitation to the communion table I will gesture toward the feeding of the five thousand, using the image to compare this sacramental meal to both Jesus' feeding in the wilderness as well as our own embodied practice of carrying sandwiches and soup onto the streets in our own food deserts. During a moment of prayer Pastor Chad will ask the community to gaze and reflect upon the image of Jesus in conversation with the woman, inviting us to our own intimate interactions with Christ.

Framing each mural, and the rest of the room, are our prayer flags, tenderly pieced together with pictures from the community, donated fabric scraps, glue, and every manifestation of adornment imaginable. These flags began as a way to remember our dead, honoring the lives of those lost to the church. It morphed into the practice of also honoring and praying for our living saints. Some have pieced together their own flags, choosing fabrics and colors that capture their personality; others have created flags for their friends. The ongoing project honors not only the person depicted but also the creative ability of each flag's artist. During our daily hour of intentional prayer, one can glance up and see the faces of friends, remembering to lift them up. These flags are a constant reminder of our cloud of witnesses, billowing just a bit every time a door opens and closes as another saint enters the room for worship.

Art is important to this community. It is a gift of grace that manifests as actions of creation, rebellion, mindfulness, and prayerfulness. Art is something that we do. Art is also part of who we are as a community. It's created and re-created, touched and painted and glued. It's referenced and pondered. Reflected and pronounced. It's prayed over, prayed with, and played with. Like God who became flesh, we try to embody our faith, not with doctrines or creeds, but by what we create. At Mercy it is difficult to sit in a pew and observe or listen disconnectedly. From the moment you are welcomed in the door you are submerged in the beauty of what is being created and renewed in this place: coffee and stew, murals and flags, friendships and hearts and lives. This submersion can be a colorful, noisy assault to your senses, so much so that when you head back out onto those busy Atlanta streets, you may find yourself a sopping mess, drenched in grace and the Holy Spirit.

Note

1. James Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Ossining, NY: Orbis Books, 2011).

Living into the Liturgy, Worshiping into the Work: An Interview with Allen Brimer

Mark Zaineddin and Allen Brimer

Nestled in the heart of once industrial Durham, North Carolina, in a rapidly gentrifying neighborhood, one finds Farm Church, one of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s 1001 worshiping communities. Farm Church is a congregation that meets on an urban farm and leverages resources of the farm to address food insecurity in the local community.

Farm Church has no church edifice, no tall steeple, no dedicated pulpit, and no fixed pews with cushions. Rather, on any given Sunday, one finds a diverse group of men, women, and children participating in worship—first in the urban garden, and then in the building of SEEDS, a nonprofit that "develops the capacity of young people to respect life, the earth, and each other through growing, cooking, and sharing food."[1]

Some of Farm Church's congregants are deeply committed mainline Christians who have been regularly attending one church or another all of their lives; others are seekers—seekers who are spiritually yearning but institutionally suspicious. For the former, it may be a Christian theology and ethic that has led them to Farm Church; for the latter, it may have been simply the opportunity to work in an urban garden and to help alleviate food needs. And, yet, as historian, pastor, and eco-theologian Paul Santmire has witnessed elsewhere and has noted, these seekers or suspicious ones surprisingly soon come to learn that "the Christian faith has something profound to say about nature and human life in nature."[2]

A common denominator of all worshipers at Farm Church is that they seek to walk in the way of Jesus—loving God with all their hearts, minds, souls, and strength and loving their neighbors as (well as) themselves. While doing this, the Farm Church community is also ever mindful of the inherent connection between God, God's people, and God's earthly creation. When they worship (and work) in the garden as well as at the table, these foundational tenets are further realized and reinforced.

Indeed, at Farm Church, worshipers continually encounter God both in the garden and in the Word. They consciously strive to be the beloved community, helping to usher in God's kingdom at a particular place and time through the growing and then giving away of produce. And they know themselves to be interdependent with all creation, not lords over it.

With this in mind, a number of questions arise regarding the intersection between worship, work, and nature; faith, practice, and place at Farm Church:

- What insights might a newly created Christian community, whose mission is to alleviate food insecurity through the fruits of its urban farm, offer with respect to worship and to the "greening" of a liturgy?
- How might Farm Church's mission and values come to shape parts of its Sunday service?
- Conversely, how might its worship affect its work?
- Furthermore, might there be ways that Farm Church can help other churches think creatively with respect to a connection between worship, work, and nature?

Farm Church's pastor, Rev. Allen Brimer, graciously sat with me and answered these questions and others.

—Mark Zaineddin

Reverend Allen Brimer is pastor at Farm Church, a worshiping community in Durham, North Carolina. With experience growing fruits and vegetables and working with large and small animals, he brings not only theological and pastoral leadership to the church but also the agricultural know-how to its vision. Prior to saying "yes" to Farm Church, Allen served as the pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Somerset, Kentucky. Mark Zaineddin resides and works in Raleigh, North Carolina. Prior to relocating there, he served as a chaplain and associate at Ghost Ranch, a Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) education and retreat center in Abiquiu, New Mexico.

CTW: What does worship on a farm look like at Farm Church and how does that affect liturgy?
AB: *Liturgy* means "public work" or more poetically, "the work of the people." The opportunity to take that literally in a farming context is irresistible. So, the first hour of worship at Farm Church is spent in the gardens: weeding, planting, watering, and harvesting. This hour of worship is often spent on bended knee nurturing life, caring for the bodies that will eventually be sacrificed and given freely to nourish other bodies. Every harvest is collected and taken to Christ's table as an offering of sacrifice and hope that all may be fed. The produce is then blessed and taken to local pantries that will distribute the produce that day to those who would not have access to fresh, locally-grown produce otherwise.

Entry into the garden as an act of worship is to enter a sanctuary—a refuge where the toxicity of daily life (and agricultural chemicals) is held at bay. All are invited to choose their own spiritual adventure based on their own assessment of what their soul needs that day. We try not to assume that one size fits all, or that what fit last week is what will fit this week. For those seeking to remember that "unless you become like a little child you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven," there are multigenerational tasks. For those longing to feel connected and nourished by the company of others, there are tasks for teams. For those longing to release frustrations and tension from the week, there is heavy labor to be done. For those who are starved for silence, there are tasks in quiet corners. The garden sanctuary is a cornucopia of metaphor, symbol, and ritual where the Word is made flesh on every row, and the faithful get grit under their fingernails and find what they need.

The second hour of worship at Farm Church (yes, there is a second, continuous hour) is spent in singing and praying, hearing the Word of God proclaimed, and approaching the table every week to be fed in remembrance of the One whose ministry of feeding we are called to continue. Again, worshipers are invited to choose their own adventure in worship: to approach the table and receive the Eucharist; to find themselves at the prayer wall writing their prayers on ribbons and tying them to the chicken wire panel; and to both give an offering and take an offering, a slip of paper with a recommended (and often challenging) spiritual practice for the week. Joys and concerns are shared; the peace is passed; the Spirit is felt; and produce is blessed.

CTW: How does Farm Church celebrate the Eucharist?
AB: Farm Church believes in the transformation of thinking through lived practice. So for example, Farm Church has a potluck every new moon. The potluck is integrated into the liturgy for the Lord's Supper in worship that day. At each table, bread and cup are passed from person to person with the traditional words of offering: "The body of Christ for you; the blood of Christ for you." In conjunction, the Great Thanksgiving invites each individual to look at their plates, at the bread, at the cup and to pause, to see the meal, and to name every item in their meal that was once alive: a green bean, a potato, the breast of a chicken, the wheat in the bread, the grapes in the juice; and to name every item that was derived from another life: milk, cheese, an egg. They are also invited to imagine briefly each of these lives growing in their own place. Then the worshipers are invited to consider how many human lives have been in contact with each item in the meal: seed harvesters, farmers, equipment operators, produce handlers, millers, truck drivers, grocers, and so forth. Finally, they are invited to consider the billions of bacteria per tablespoon of soil where each vegetable grew, where each animal grazed; to think of the nutrients that the vegetables and animals drew up into their bodies from the soil and have delivered to these plates for our benefit, growth and health through the sacrifice of their bodies—the celery body, the lettuce body, the chicken body . . . broken for us.

Too often, many of us chew, but few of us eat. The practice of coming to the table and remembering that my body is the beneficiary of the sacrifice of many other living bodies is transformative, humbling, and evokes profound gratitude. To be at the table in worship of our God in Jesus Christ and to remember that I am a member of the great web of life and am profoundly dependent upon God's

providence at the extraordinary and incalculable cost of sacrificed lives, both vegetable and animal, brings every meal to the forefront as Eucharist—the thanksgiving. The transition to our profound dependence upon God's grace and mercy at the extraordinary and incalculable cost of the cross is now an easy move to make.

Often when the words of institution are said at Farm Church, we, admittedly, embellish Jesus' words a bit and say, "This is my body broken for you . . . *every time you have a meal . . . (*or, *every time you break bread together)* . . . do this in remembrance of me." It is a way to encourage folks into a sacramental consciousness throughout the week during what would otherwise be the mundane routine of daily meals. It is a way to transform believers' thinking through lived practice. We find faith, Christ, food, and eating to be all bound up together, and we believe that is what Jesus himself encouraged at the Last Supper.

CTW: How does Farm Church celebrate the liturgical seasons? How does it educate those seekers who have come to Farm Church without knowledge of such?

AB: Many of the folks who attend Farm Church are not necessarily accustomed to the traditional liturgy or liturgical seasons. So it is a great opportunity to claim those seasons and provide creative imaginations for their application in our collective life together in the context of a farm.

For example, in the agrarian calendar, Thanksgiving largely marks the end of the harvest season. The beginning of Advent, therefore, coincides with the beginning of an agrarian season of slowing down and resting. There is always something to do on the farm, but December begins a deceleration of activity. Meanwhile, our culture is actively encouraging us to accelerate for a month of holiday mania! At Farm Church, the agrarian context gives us an opportunity to encourage our folks to breathe, reflect, slow down with the waning light as we move toward the longest night of the year (winter solstice). It is a season of hope in God's promised future to be sure, but it is also a season of gratitude, reflection, renewal, and joy for all the ways that God has already been incarnate in our midst.

The other liturgical seasons offer particular agrarian applications as well. At Christmas, it is well known that the birth of the Son comes on the third day after the birth of the sun—the winter solstice, which marks the beginning of the days of increasing light. For agriculture, this is the birth of a new agricultural year. For agrarian Christians, Christmas is both a celebration of Christ's incarnation and eschatological return, which is bound up in the embodiment of Christ's mission at our church in a new season of growing food, and the eternal return of a new agricultural cycle. We can also talk about agrarian applications for the light of Epiphany, the disciplined recommitment of Lent, the explosive abundance of Easter, the arrival of the Spirit and the first harvest at Pentecost. The creative possibilities are abundant and potent for spiritual nurture, and the folks at Farm Church who are finding ways to get in touch with agrarian cycles while living in an urban context are simultaneously being formed and reformed by the liturgical seasons as well.

CTW: What are some innovative ways that Farm Church has used its "green" liturgy?

AB: One of the fun ideas we have tried was Pickle Church. We even changed our name for the day to Pickle Church. We hired a chef to come and lead a day of worship centered around pickling vegetables. Everyone brought vegetables to share. The chef led a knife skills workshop and taught us both how to sharpen kitchen knives and how to use knives properly—a dull knife is a dangerous knife (which will preach)! Adults and children spent the morning slicing and mixing vegetables, stuffing them into jars, and pouring hot brine over them. The liturgy of the day, that is, the work of the people, was structured to encounter God through a community working to prepare and preserve food. Pickling vegetables raises a question of faith: If you can see the wonder of God in a cucumber, can you not see the wonder of God in your neighbor as well? Everyone learned new skills and had a wonderful day and took home great food that will last. The event attracted many visitors and new friends to church. We have repeated similar kinds of events like Butter Church, and soon we are going to have Pancake Church. It is really all in fun and a great way to maintain levity in worship. But it also goes to show that the liturgy can take many forms if it is treated faithfully as the work of the people.

CTW: What is the practical impact of Farm Church's liturgy on its mission?

AB: When everyone on an average week at Farm Church works in the garden for one hour,

approximately fifty labor hours of ministry have occurred. That is the equivalent of one and a quarter full-time employees continuing Christ's mission of feeding, concentrated into one hour on a Sunday. What if your congregation has 80 or 160 or 480 people worshiping on a Sunday? Think of the equivalent of full-time employees your church would have working for free on the mission Christ has called your church to in your community! Imagine how that hour of active worship would transform your church's mission. Think of how that hour of active mission would transform your church's worship. There is a time to worship in pews, sitting together, standing and rising, and reciting the prayers printed in the bulletin. There is also a time to worship together in the context of sweat, grit, and comradery. Imagine if every church in your community did this! The Church of Jesus Christ would indeed change the world!

CTW: Why do you think Farm Church (its mission, worship, liturgy) works?

AB: Farm Church has embraced the assumption that people are seeking (at least) two fundamental things. First, people are longing for community—a place where they belong, feel known, understood, valued, where they are cared for in all seasons of life, and where they have the opportunity to return the favor. Second, people, especially millennials, want to be part of and want to give generously to an organization that furthers their values and can show the fruits of that work. When you can get both at the same time, that's a winner. As clergy, the fun and easy part is to call attention to all the ways that the gospel is brought into relief by a community doing extraordinary liturgy! Jesus says, "The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few." We are finding at Farm Church that the harvest is indeed plentiful, and the Spirit is providing new laborers every week.

CTW: Many churches have garden projects. What recommendations do you give those churches?

AB: First, good for you! Many small, rural churches may not have much, but they have land! Garden projects can be profound, transformational community builders. So, go for it!

With that said, I have seen a lot of defunct church gardens. A small group gets all revved up in March and starts a great garden, and by July and August it is knee deep in weeds because one by one each member of the small group moved on to other priorities. Why? Because it was not essential to the church or to them. The key, I think, is "form follows function." Many churches start all manner of programs for all kinds of reasons. But, having served numerous churches, my experience is that those programs may have wonderful form but tend not to last or have any impact because they do not have a defined function in the mission of that church that has enthusiastic buy-in from the congregation.

Our elevator speech is "Farm Church is a congregation that meets on a farm and leverages the resources of the farm to address food insecurity." Pretty much everyone at Farm Church can say that by heart, which is a powerful tool for evangelism! I have not been in many churches where there is an elevator speech that everyone in the church can recite by heart. Our mission is clear. We grow food and give it away. That is the *function* God gave us. The *form* that takes is worship and liturgy in a garden.

I would encourage any church that has a gardening program or is contemplating a garden to figure out what its function is before the first spade is lifted and get serious buy-in from the church family. The best way to do that is to have a simple, easy, memorable statement that ties the people's work (liturgy) in the garden to the mission of Jesus at that church with clear, tangible, measurable outcomes. Remember, people want to be a part of something that furthers their values and can show the fruits to prove it. Gardens are great ways to do both of those things, but the gardens have to have a clear and meaningful function in the congregation and the community. Once that is in place, find every way possible to integrate the garden into every aspect of what the church does, including and especially corporate worship. The more the garden is involved in the life of the whole church, the more effective a ministry it will be.

Notes

1. For more information on SEEDS, please visit its website at www.seedsnc.org.
2. H. Paul Santmire, *Ritualizing Nature: Renewing Christian Liturgy in a Time of Crisis* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2008), 7.

In Communion with the Trees

Andrew Taylor-Troutman

1. The Sound Behind All Other Sounds

I was ordained at New Dublin Presbyterian Church, a congregation located in a rural part of the Appalachian Mountains of Virginia. The church was chartered in 1769 and named because the original settlers came from the "old" Dublin, the city in Ireland.

Now I have been called to serve a church known as Chapel in the Pines. It is aptly named, a wooden sanctuary which was constructed in 2011 amid a woodland of evergreens. While sheltered by trees, this congregation is located near the heart of North Carolina's university and health care systems, as well as a hub of technological innovation known as the Research Triangle Park.

For all the differences between these contexts for ministry, members of both congregations refer to their worship space with a peaceful sigh. The light is different out here. The air seems fresher. Holier, too. There's a sweet, sweet spirit in the air, and your blood pressure lowers as you arrive and glimpse the trees bearing witness against the backdrop of sky. Several congregants have wondered if those trees are in fact singing.

From both pulpits I have told a story from long ago when a rabbi proposed the hypothetical question: What is the sound behind all other sounds? In other words, what would be heard if all the noises in the world were silenced? The first rabbi spoke, "The sound behind all other sounds is praise of the Holy One sung by the souls of every living thing." A second teacher responded, "No, the sound behind all other sounds is the crunching by larger things on smaller things."

The food chain is undeniable. What about this idea that all of creation sings to God? Is that a misty-eyed dream from a far-flung mythic past? A tree hugger's position? Or, do even the steely realists among us still want to believe that the chickadees and cardinals belt hymns from the longleaf pines?

What if the stately oak is both pulpit and preacher?

2. The Trees Preach

The farmer-poet Wendell Berry admits he is a "bad-weather churchgoer," meaning he will only darken the sanctuary doors if storm clouds threaten outside. Berry prefers to retreat to the woods where he can "sit and look at light-filled leaves." While I regularly lead an indoor worship gathering, I sing with Francis of Assisi in all kinds of weather: "Let all things their Creator bless / And worship God in humbleness."

In the recent hurricanes, I feared for the pines surrounding our church, as well as for our buildings themselves. High winds could snap their slender trunks like a row of toothpicks in an appetizer tray. Or so I thought. The pines weathered the winds, bending but not breaking. That'll preach. But so will the oak that toppled in the churchyard of New Dublin. A child of seven years counted 221 rings in the trunk, then said to me, "I bet that tree knew a lot about a lot."

Peter Wohlleben's *The Hidden Life of Trees* convincingly demonstrates how trees, once thought to be pitted against each other in survival of the fittest, actually cooperate through interlocking root systems. Symbiotic fungi help trees "talk" by exchanging information about invasive predators! Such eye-opening science confirms the impulse of Reformed theology to praise the Creator from whom all blessings flow. To quote preacher Frederick Buechner, "The story of any one of us is in some measure the story of us all."[1] Trees have a story of light and leaf, rest and growth, punctuated by song

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and shade, recorded in rings, and written over the seasons. And stories of life are the best prayers.

Perhaps a tree's most poignant sermon is to remind us of our place in the chorus of all creatures of our God and King so that we might create harmony, not discord.

3. The Earth Weeps

I interact with churchgoers in all kinds of weather. Come rain or shine, most of these people are likewise committed to numerous other activities. I ask one such parishioner, "How are you doing?"

"I'm *busy*."

"Busy" is the new "Fine." Perhaps one motivation for our busyness is so we won't have to think beyond our daily planners. As Wendell Berry writes in his introduction to *This Day: Collected and New Sabbath Poems:*

> For anybody conscious of the history of the collision between the living world and the purposes of mechanistic humans, and of the marks and scars almost everywhere of that collision, heartbreak comes easy and rest comes hard.[2]

How are we doing as a culture, a nation, a community of believers? We are not fine. We are busy sinning.

Augustine regarded "sin" as a perversion of the good, which is particularly apt when describing our relationship to God's created order. I believe that we must incorporate repentance into the public confession of our sins. While serving Chapel in the Pines, I rewrote the hymn "For the Beauty of the Earth" as a confession:

> For misuse of all the earth,
> For pollution of the skies;
> For the will we learn from birth,
> teaching us to love our lies.
> Lord of all, to thee we plead,
> Save us from our wanton greed.
>
> For extinction every hour,
> Of a species, plant, or flower;
> For oil spills, forests cleared,
> heating of our atmosphere.
> Lord of all, to thee we plead,
> Save us from our wanton greed.

Wanton means "malevolent, malicious, or cruel"; I do have such definitions in mind as I look around the world. We can look to the book of Ruth to find examples of migration forced by famine. But there are more refugees now than ever before in human history. Clearly, as in Syria and the Democratic Republic of Congo, hundreds of thousands are fleeing the wanton violence. But the Arab Spring, which led to the Syrian uprising and subsequent civil war, was sparked by the failure of crops in the excessive heat. In Central and South America, food resources have been devastated by droughts on the one hand and excess rainfall on the other. As such "global weirding" weather patterns have meant the loss of viable ways of living, many have turned toward criminal activity, including kidnapping and extortion. As I write, the fate of so-called migrant caravans to the border of Mexico and the United States is a topic of division and derision. There is a bright line to be drawn between climate change and political instability, a sinful connection between mistreatment of the earth and our fellow human creatures. The earth weeps.

Wantonness originally referred to "willfulness." We humans have a remarkable capacity to justify even our depraved actions. Such willfulness relates to understanding sin as perversion of the good. I served in a part of the Appalachian Mountains known, either affectionally or pejoratively, as Coal Country. While the scientific evidence demonstrating the cataclysmic harm of burning fossil fuels is indisputable, public opinion has by no means reached a consensus. The argument for job creation is a willful excuse to justify environmental degradation. *In light of our wanton greed*, heartbreak comes easy and rest comes hard.

Hear more from Wendell Berry: "Death is our illusion, / our wish to belong only / to ourselves, which is our freedom / to kill one another."[3] "Freedom" is typically considered to be positive, yet John Calvin was wary of even our virtues becoming a stumbling block, for a human being is a factory producing idols. Echoing Augustine, Calvin taught the proper ordering of affections, meaning even our holy ambitions must fall under the great commandments to love God and love one another.

One such holy ambition is found in the opening chapter of Genesis, as God commands humankind to "have dominion" over creation. This language is drawn from the ancient world of monarchies whereby a ruler was seen as a divinely appointed

regent to protect the population as well as the environment. *The story of any one of us is in some measure the story of us all.* Psalm 8 imagines that God has made humankind a little lower than angels and charged them with dominion over living things in order that human leadership would allow the entire living world to flourish.

Ambition can become unholy, even death dealing, as we read later in Genesis about the blood of victims crying out from the ground. A tree cautions us to grow where we are planted, carefully subordinating desires for power, convenience, and gain as we rightly elevate commitments to peace, justice and love. To live rightly as creatures in God's creation, we humans must find a balance.

Other writers have joined Wendell Berry in prophesying with the pen that our busyness is a symptom of cultural malaise. In his memoir *Cabin Fever: A Suburban Father's Search for the Wild*, Tom Montgomery Fate seeks the antidote as a *deliberate* life, by which he means "balanced," noting that the *libra*- root of "deliberate" evokes the two-pan scale of justice.[4] Fate encountered such a scale in a tiny French village. A farmer balanced a weight in one silver pan and Fate's selection of garlic in the other: the standard, or known weight, against the unknown. Though the bulb of garlic was too heavy, the farmer gave the food anyway—"balancing the scale with his generosity," as this writer so beautifully put it. That'll preach, too.

4. Treetop Experiences

As a pastor, I seek "deliberate" and balanced ways a congregation might become part of larger, societal solutions for better stewardship of God's gift of creation. I think the tipping of the scales for environmental justice will be a matter of motivation, and for many Christians, such desire is rooted in worship. You may sing a new song in creation among rocks and trees, skies and seas; on Sunday morning, we gather around pulpit, font, and table.

When I began serving New Dublin Presbyterian Church, the congregation celebrated Holy Communion quarterly. The breaking of the bread and pouring of the cup were reserved for "special times," I was told. I remember one congregant, a faithful and wise woman, who told me that she would prefer that everyone receive communion only once a year!

The church contracted with a young man to trim the dead branches in our oak trees. I was there when he pulled into the gravel parking lot outside our sanctuary in a truck emblazoned with the words Extreme Tree Service. A recent college graduate, Josh had begun his own business by combining his degree in biology with his love of climbing. Exiting his truck, he proceeded to unload not only a chainsaw, but also ropes, cables, belays, harnesses and hooks. Donning his helmet, Josh looked up at an oak towering over our cemetery. And he actually lifted his voice in jubilation, "That's a career tree! I would climb it *every* day . . . for free!"

There are many arguments for celebrating communion "at least once a week for the assembly of Christians" as John Calvin wrote.[5] At New Dublin, I appealed to our "career trees," those stately oaks and regal maples, whose leaves goldened before gracing the ground in a carpet of blessing, whose bare branches rattled in the winter wind, and whose green canopy rang with the birdsong in spring. These trees preach. In contemplating a tree, every time is special and sacred, instructive and inspirational. Is not the same true of the act which our Lord asked us to do in remembrance of him?

Out of my hope that celebrating communion frequently can motivate a church to become better stewards of God's earth, I asked a seminary professor, Paul Galbreath, for guidance. He emphasized that, in terms of our celebration of the Lord's Supper, we need to make the link between the elements at the Lord's Table much clearer to the creation: "Packaged grape juice and crackers/wafers/bits of bread veil their connection with grain and grape." Amen!

At Chapel in the Pines, we have received Holy Communion by intinction, then processed outside, walking underneath our pines to a small clearing in the woods and our Ebenezer. This collection of stones was gathered from the breaking of the ground for the sanctuary and serves as an abiding connection to the church's past, a tangible reminder of how far we have come. I have pronounced the benediction there, then invited congregants to walk a half-mile nature trail that circles the sanctuary. Along the way, one may pause every couple hundred feet to reflect upon a plaque bearing a psalm or passage from a prophet—either biblical or Wendell Berry: "To sit and look at light-filled leaves / May let us see, or seem to see, / Far backward as through clearer eyes."[6]

You have heard of mountaintop experiences. I imagine treetop experiences as more frequent moments of spiritual depth and clarity. It is about

being deliberate and generous. And you don't have to travel as far. Think of Zacchaeus, that wee little man in the sycamore, and how the Lord he wanted to see. We, too, are searching and as we come to the Lord's Table for the gifts of God for the people of God, we call to mind Isaiah's image of the trees clapping their hands in joy (Isa. 55:12). Maybe we start to clap ourselves! And there is John the Revelator's vision of the tree of life with God's children of every race and creed and nation gathered in peace at table for the heavenly banquet feast (Rev. 22:2). Maybe we reach out to someone new. As we leave our Ebenezer, remembering how far we have come with God, we consider Abraham, waiting underneath those ancient oak trees for a traveler to find grace in his eyes. According to Scripture, to sit and look at light-filled leaves may lead to an encounter with the Living God (Gen. 18:1–8).

5. And All the Earth Shall Sing

Paul Galbreath maintains we should "lead from the table," building upon Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann's idea that confession of sin should bring about "reorientation" to our experiences in the world through the lens of God's costly grace, the gift which beckons our glad obedience and joyful willfulness in response.[7] If we are deliberately generous in our celebration of the sacraments, these holy mysteries can grow our spiritual awareness to experience God's good creation through new senses—new songs among the timbered choirs.

This fall, Chapel in the Pines felled a few dozen pines in order to make a new parking lot. The front loader made short work of the toppling; then chainsaws whined for just a few afternoons. Though these were not two-hundred-year-old career trees and though I am grateful for a growing church, these pines fell with a thud in my chest. A few Sundays afterwards, my six-year-old son stood on the pile of woodchips. And he burst into song, some gibberish, or some unknown tongue of joy. Hearing him, I saw with new eyes the first wild grasses curving in the breeze, like they were green bass clefs, and I found myself swaying in rhythm with the remaining pines overhead.

A shoot will spring up from the stump, we read in Isaiah; and, in the wild song of our hearts, we might still believe that life shall be renewed. For, as I have learned from tall trees, small children, and other sentient beings far surpassing my own wisdom, the sound behind all other sounds is indeed praise.

Notes

1. Frederick Buechner, *The Sacred Journey: A Memoir of Early Days* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1991), 6.
2. Wendell Berry, *This Day: Collected and New Sabbath Poems* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2014), xxiii.
3. Wendell Berry, *Given: Poems* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2006), 125.
4. Tom Montgomery Fate, *Cabin Fever: A Suburban Father's Search for the Wild* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011).
5. John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, vol. IV (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), XVII, 46.
6. Wendell Berry, *A Timbered Choir: The Sabbath Poems, 1979–1997* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 1999), 8.
7. See Paul Galbreath, *Leading from the Table* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008).

Remembering Chip: Tributes to Charles "Chip" Andrus (1967–2018)

Paul Galbreath, David Gambrell, Cláudio Carvalhaes, Marney Ault Wasserman, Ron Rienstra, Tom Trinidad, Charles Wiley, Jorge Sayago-Gonzalez, Sheldon W. Sorge, John S. McClure, J. Bradley Wigger

Chip Andrus loved life, loved music, loved brewing beer, loved liturgy.
Not always in that order.

Charles "Chip" Andrus was born in Dayton, Ohio, on April 3, 1967, and grew up in Prescott, Arkansas. He received a bachelor of music degree from Oklahoma State University, and the master of divinity and doctor of ministry degrees from Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. For four years he served as an associate for worship in the Office of Theology and Worship as part of the staff of the General Assembly for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Subsequently, he served as pastor of congregations: first, for four years in Arkansas and then for seven years at the South Salem Presbyterian Church in Salem, New York. On September 9, 2018, he died of cancer, leaving behind his wife of twenty-seven years, Linda, and their daughter, Danielle.

Chip was an accomplished musician who seamlessly wove together sacred and secular music into a doxological tapestry. He brought the spirit of the liturgy with him when he played in local bars where he often served as an unofficial chaplain to the customers and the staff. He also continued to travel extensively to conferences, assemblies, and church gatherings, providing musical, liturgical, and theological leadership to congregations, pastors, and lay leaders.

As a member of the academy, Chip participated in the Exploring Contemporary and Alternative Worship seminar. In his service to both the church and the academy, Chip embodied the power, beauty, and spirit of the liturgy for the worshiping assembly and in his own life. He had the unique gift of inviting people from all walks of life to see themselves in light of the claims of the gospel on every aspect of their lives. His creative ability was particularly striking in the ways in which he engaged, challenged, and deepened those who longed for contemporary expressions of worship by showing them rich and diverse ways in which communal prayers, music, and action can be more fully embodied.

Chip always said, "It's all good." But for those of us who knew him, it's not quite as good without him here.

Rest in peace, beloved child of God.

Memorial remarks to the North American Academy of Liturgy
January 3, 2019, Denver, Colorado
by Paul Galbreath
Professor of Theology
Union Presbyterian Seminary
Charlotte, North Carolina

The sun, setting over deep water . . . or is it rising? Bright bands of light circling out above the horizon. Radiant reflections rippling across the darkness below. Each time I see it, the striking image that begins the Daily Prayer section in the 2018 *Book of Common Worship* stirs up my gratitude for Chip Andrus.

Chip and I spent a few days in April 2017 reviewing the final drafts of the liturgies for daily prayer, and in that brief time he poured out more wisdom and insight than those pages could contain.

Charles "Chip" Andrus served the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as a pastor, a musician, and from 2002 to 2006, as associate for worship for the PC(USA). He died this past September at the age of fifty-one, just a few months after leading music for the 223rd General Assembly. A number of his colleagues and friends have shared their remembrances of Chip with *Call to Worship*.

He had a clear and compelling vision of the practice of prayer—one of total immersion in baptismal life, a pattern of dying and rising with Christ. For him, every word and action of the liturgy was saturated with meaning, welling up with mystery.

Chip was deep and radiant. The strange circles surrounding him became communities of grace. His influence will ripple out for generations to come. Even as evening falls, I give thanks for the light of the risen Lord in him.

David Gambrell
Associate for Worship of the Office of Theology and Worship
Presbyterian Mission Agency
Louisville, Kentucky

I met Chip at an art and worship gathering Paul Galbreath put together in Indiana. I remember clearly how, during those days, I felt Chip carried something else in his heart; he had an expanded soul, a light that shone in powerful ways. I have always felt welcomed, blessed, and at ease near him. One of the best worship classes I've ever seen anyone teach was when Chip came to lead a class in my Intro to Worship course. His expansiveness, his knowledge, his dynamics, his generosity, and his bright light were such that he made a classroom turn into an event. All of my students couldn't stop talking about it. He knew and practiced a worship knowledge that was beyond our hermetic thinking. He made us see that Reformed worship is much more than we could ever imagine. With his loss, we lost part of ourselves, but we also gained an expansive memory of who we can become—and that memory will continue to shine brightly in our path and in the world.

Cláudio Carvalhaes
Associate Professor of Worship
Union Theological Seminary
New York, New York

Guitar-strumming, hippie-looking, beer-drinking, and definitely fun-loving, Chip Andrus was perhaps an unlikely candidate for the ministry of Word and Sacrament. He was an even more unlikely advocate for the deep liturgical patterns of the ancient Christian church—patterns like the catechumenate and weekly Eucharist and daily morning and evening prayer. But Chip Andrus was all of that, and more.

Between 2003 and 2006, I served with Chip on the PC(USA)'s Sacraments Study Group. This was a group of fifteen pastors and theologians from across the country and across the church gathered to make new sense of the integral sacramental relationship between Baptism and Eucharist in a time of challenges coming from both the progressive and evangelical wings of the PC(USA).

I remember singing Evening Prayer for one of the first times with the Sacraments Study Group—Chip was the leader that evening—and thinking, how odd it is that this guitar-playing, rock-band dude loves psalmody and Gregorian chant! How odd and how wonderful! As I soon discovered, Chip loved music of every genre, from rock and jazz to hymnody and gospel, and his passion for congregational song was infectious.

I remember another liturgy of thanksgiving for Baptism that we celebrated one hot summer night at the water park in downtown Louisville near the Ohio River. Dozens of neighborhood children, along with their families and pets, were out cooling off in the fountains and playing in the water. So, we joined them—singing "Wade in the Water," if I remember right, to Chip's guitar and praying our gratitude to God for such regenerating gifts as water and Spirit. I remember walking back to the hotel that evening with my skirts soaked and my heart light!

I remember a night at a restaurant in Louisville with Chip and a couple of others from the study group, and finding in him a kind ear and a gentle companion. It was that evening I got a glimpse of the relationship between Chip and his wife, Linda. Men who talk about their wives when they are away from home are a special breed. I know, because my husband is one of them. So was Chip. No matter where he was or who he was with, it was always clear that Linda was a huge part of his world, his conversation, his life, and his love.

I remember Chip's passion for the sacraments, both on the Theology and Worship staff in Louisville and as a pastor, and his willingness to lead from out

front in drawing the church towards a more frequent, more joyful, and more richly experienced Lord's Supper. He was an unapologetic advocate for weekly communion, patiently teaching congregations how to recognize their own hunger for the gifts of table and font and showing them how to meet the risen Lord in bread, wine, and water.

From some years later, I remember Chip as a pastoral colleague, when he was in Arkansas and I was in Tucson, and a parishioner moved from my congregation to his. Chip welcomed Ron with open arms, appreciated his gifts, and supported him well. In the Tucson congregation, Ron had been part of a newcomer companioning ministry, and Chip made room for some of those ideas in his own ministry. A few years later, when I published my book about that Companions ministry, the encouragement I got from Chip for the book and the model it proposes to the church was enormous, and I'll never forget the unabashedly positive book review he wrote for the *Outlook* on my behalf.

It seems a lot of years ago that we gathered in Louisville and Dallas and Atlanta for those marathon three-day Sacraments Study Group meetings rich with prayer, song, and sacraments, and heady with theological and liturgical conversation. Each one of us contributed what we had to offer, and the whole became so much greater than the sum of its parts, so that I always came away from those gatherings feeling fed, energized, and hopeful. Another member of the group, Paul Galbreath, tells the story best of the moment when we decided not to answer the *Book of Order* questions that had convened us, but instead to invite the church to enlarge its own sacramental practice and see where the Spirit would lead. Chip's voice was one of the strongest ones supporting that kind of radical trust and openness to the Holy Spirit. And it has been truly satisfying to watch as the church has, in fact, taken up that invitation, and the Spirit has been at work in such ventures as *Invitation to Christ: Font and Table*; a leaner, cleaner Directory for Worship; *Glory to God*; and the newly revised *Book of Common Worship*. Seeds were sown that are still bearing fruit. Thanks be to God!

Here in these few words, and on the pages of the liturgical journal he so thoroughly supported, I want to publicly acknowledge and thank Chip Andrus for being a remarkable colleague in ministry. He was a person of deep spirit, clear vision, childlike trust, mischievous adventure, quiet courage, and persistent hope—a colleague with whom it was an honor to serve, whom it was always a joy to know, and whom I count myself privileged to have been able to call a friend.

Marney Ault Wasserman
Teaching Elder, Honorably Retired
Santa Fe, New Mexico

One of the things I loved most about Chip was the way he sought to break down the barriers between Sunday morning worship and every-day worship. I remember once feeling both embarrassed and elated when he greeted me liturgically—at the airport of all places, arms wide open, shouting from twenty yards away: "Brother Ron! The peace of Christ be with you!" I remember how his musical preface to the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving became the song I sang to my family, calling them from all corners of the house to dinner: "Come, come, come, come to the Table/ Come, come, come, there's room for everyone!" I remember how his humility and hospitality enabled him to reconcile strong political convictions with Christ-like love: "Aw shucks, you can be stupid and still love Jesus!" Chip believed that every moment and every person was a sacramental window to God's grace, and he lived that way. We are a richer gospel community because of his life.

Ron Rienstra
Professor of Preaching and Worship Arts
Western Theological Seminary
Holland, Michigan

You could listen to Chip's James Taylor/Allman-Brothers-influenced music with its lyrics about tomatoes, rivers, and fried chicken and say, "Well, his sacramental theology has found its way into his lyrics." But you'd be off. Chip wasn't just a sacramental theologian who wrote about the presence of God in caves and canoes. He experienced God in sunshine and eggplants and porches and road trips. His music and his theology both reflected the fact that

for Chip, the truth of reality—whether we bless ourselves with belief in it or not—is that God is truly present and active in every moment and aspect of life. I am grateful and humbled that besides all my study in six languages through twenty centuries of Christian theology, in addition to all my prayers and study of other religions, I have Chip's testimony of God's immanence and delight in every mundane moment of my life. He was truly a living letter of the Word of God.

Tom Trinidad
Faith Presbyterian Church
Colorado Springs, Colorado

The people who have shaped the liturgical renewal movement in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) have been a mixture of academics and practitioners, but almost all of them with a terminal degree, a credential that gives them a place at the table. That Chip Andrus first took a place at that table, even an authoritative place at that table, before earning his doctor of ministry degree bears witness to two things. First, Chip knew his stuff. He had read the same books, written about the same topics, and spent a lot of time in conversation with the same people. He didn't take a back seat because he didn't have a Ph.D. And second, Chip's authority came in large part because of his relentless commitment to embody his theological and liturgical commitments in deep and profound ways. It is his embodiment of academic and ecclesial commitments that will have the most enduring legacy.

Charles Wiley
Director of Major Gifts
Columbia Theological Seminary
Decatur, Georgia

There are people who have an innate gift to spark the joy of life in others, people whose contagious energy brings to us an opportunity to tune into the beauty of creation, relationships, and spirituality. These are people that invite us to see and experience the sacred in the most ordinary aspects of life. Our beloved Chip Andrus was one of these people.

I remember the first time I met Chip when I was in my early twenties. I was a young man looking for direction with a strong desire to pursue my dream and respond to a very deep sense of calling. Chip embodied everything I wanted to be. He was a musician, a theologian, and a lover of life. Little did I know that a brief opportunity to meet him would turn into a beautiful gift that lasted almost twenty years. Chip became not just a friend but a true mentor. Chip and his family allowed me in as part of their family, a gift I will never take for granted. Chip celebrated the joy in life. He had a passion for mystery and a thirst for the knowledge of God, and how this mystery we call God is present in all people and in all creation.

Chip loved nature and allowed himself to listen to the wisdom of God through nature. Chip was also an amazing musician and singer-songwriter. I will never forget the times we spent together singing and "jamming." He taught me new music and always offered simple ways to go about learning it. I will also never forget the cold fall evenings sitting on his back porch or around a fire pit; the music and conversation that filled those nights will forever fill my heart.

Whether a hymn, an old African American spiritual, a Grateful Dead song, a Bob Marley tune, or one of his original songs, there was always room to explore the presence of something deeper through music with Chip. These gifts in him were things that resonated with me and things I am grateful for having the opportunity to learn alongside of him. The lessons learned and tools gained have served as a compass in my own journey. I am grateful that through the expression of God, manifested in the life of our beloved Chip, a young man in search of guidance and wisdom was able to find an example to follow and the courage to pursue his dreams and calling. I know I am one among the many people who have been moved, inspired, and transformed by Chip's zest for life and candid spirit. Beyond remembering his theological knowledge, depth, and training, Chip offered a kind disposition and a spirit of *agape* love. One of the things I am most grateful for is his affirming in me my thirst to recognize the divine in all things—in joy, in the shadows, in certainty, in doubt, in song, in life. For all of these things are part of God's unconditional grace and faithful love.

There is no doubt that we grieve Chip's early departure from us, for we all long to hear one more song. But what a gift to have known a person who deeply changed our understanding of worship as an intrinsic part of our spirituality and life through his contributions and witness. For this, and for so many things, I will forever be grateful. The words that continue to echo in my heart, and in the hearts of many, are his constant affirmation of love, faithfulness and grace: "It's all good!" I love you, dear brother. I am thankful for your life, for I know you rest in the eternal light of God's love.

Jorge Sayago-Gonzalez
School Chaplain
St. Stephen's Episcopal Day School
Coconut Grove, Florida

My first memory of Chip is seeing him lead what was called the Alternative Worship Service at the Second Presbyterian Church of Louisville, a five o'clock P.M. gathering that featured music and liturgy that differed significantly from the church's eleven o'clock A.M. service. Chip led the music, guitar in hand, and showed a great knack for getting the people to sing (and not just listen to) old and new songs alike, including some that he had written. The music may have been new, but the liturgy was crafted around the ancient ecumenical *ordo*. What stood out most was the rich celebration of the Lord's Table. A table large enough to seat everyone present was decked as a banquet with many styles of bread, along with fruit, and the service of the Table was woven seamlessly into a shared meal. I felt like I had stepped back into an ancient Christian worship gathering as described in early Christian literature by Justin Martyr and Hippolytus.

Not long thereafter, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) was searching for an associate for worship for its national offices. Though he had not yet earned the ordinarily required doctoral degree, Chip landed the position, evincing deep engagement with the breadth of ecumenical liturgical heritage. He was an enigma, a liturgical traditionalist who expressed himself musically on the cutting edge of contemporary blues/rock. He moved into the office next to mine and immediately decorated it with woven hangings and lava lamps. One didn't need to read name plates to know which office was his.

We began playing music together, something that became part of our core identity—Chip on guitar, me on keyboards. Together we framed a new initiative for the church that we called "Emerging Worship," gathering liturgical leaders to think about new paradigms for worship that were authentic to the tradition yet fully appropriate to the culture in which the worshiping community was embedded. In Chip's words, "Emerging Worship refers to any practice of worship that is expressive, faithful to tradition, and attentive to local context." We were seeking language that transcended the false dichotomy of "traditional" versus "contemporary" worship that prevailed in the so-called "worship wars" that raged across the church. And so, in 2002–2003 we convened a group of first-rate liturgical scholars, theologians, and musicians to explore ways we could better articulate and engage the liturgical opportunities and challenges facing the church in our place and time.

For many, the most indelible memory of Chip is of him leading plenary sessions in song and prayer at the PC(USA)'s General Assemblies. He had this wonderful capacity to combine homespun humor and a talent for rallying participation with liturgical savvy to lift people enmeshed in the throes of ecclesiastical decision-making to remember why they were there and whom they served. He led the assembly at the outset of most of its deliberative sessions, helping bathe its work in prayer, praise, and self-offering to God. I was privileged to accompany Chip on the piano during most of these sessions, from 2001 through 2018. Most poignantly, Chip led the 223rd General Assembly in this way just a few short months before succumbing to the cancer that had invaded his body years earlier, lain dormant for a long while, and returned with a vengeance. Chip's body had withered with the cancer and its treatments, to the point that sometimes he could not maintain his grip on his guitar pick, yet his voice and spirit remained as strong as ever. As we parted, he told me, "See you in two years," at the next Assembly. His faith stayed strong to the end. I never heard him indulge in an ounce of self-pity.

One of Chip's signature sayings was, "It's all good." Typically, he pulled that out when things were anything *but* good, reminding us in contemporary language of what Julian of Norwich stated so eloquently hundreds of years earlier, "All shall be

well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well." For Chip, these weren't mere words but bedrock truth. Nowhere did he live that truth more compellingly than at the 2018 General Assembly.

Chip was a rock and roll musician from beginning to end. Through seminary training that led eventually into doctoral work, he became a liturgical theologian of the first order, something of a rarity among Presbyterians. He was a dear friend to many, always with kind words that edified, even when they were decidedly salty. After his stint as associate for worship in the national offices, Chip returned to his first love, parish ministry, where he continued to serve God until his baptism was made complete.

Musicians sometimes refer to each other in terms of their "clock"—the reliability of their sense of timing. Chip had a superb musical clock, virtually metronomic in its reliability. He rarely played things slowly, but whether fast or slow, his music stayed strictly on tempo.

Chip had another clock that was equally dependable, his "liturgical clock." He carried an exquisite sense of timing into worship leadership. Mastery of the art of the liturgical segue is critically important for good worship leadership, and Chip handled it so deftly that worship always felt seamless when he was at the helm. Chip connected the songs, prayers, litanies, readings, and proclamation into a beautifully ordered whole.

Presbyterians like to style themselves as masters of doing things "decently and in good order" in the church. Often they construe that primarily in terms of polity and discipline. For Chip, good order was expressed consummately in worship. Like the apostle Paul, Chip understood that "decently and in good order" was meant to undergird a permission-giving liturgical ethos: "All things should be done decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40). Our first response to expressions of "emerging worship" might well take its cue from Chip, "It's all good." Yet we don't just leave it there. When disciplined into good order, "all things" become "better things."

Sheldon W. Sorge
General Minister
Presbytery of Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

> Cold water washing me down
> Wash away these sins that I've been carrying around
> Cold water washing me down
> And I'll walk outa here a new man.
>
> —"Full Moon River" on the album *The Place We're At*

If ever there was a life "liturgically lived" it was the life of Chip Andrus. I recall the joy on his face when he finished reading Alexander Schmemann's *For the Life of the World* for a liturgy class I taught in 1997 at Louisville Presbyterian Seminary. He seized on Schmemann's rejection of the dualism imposed on us all in the concept of "secularism" and Schmemman's unabashed liturgical affirmation of the church as "the sacrament of the world" through which everything is proclaimed good in and through Christ (an idea similar to Chip's notorious "It's all good"). This idea made immediate sense to Chip. Through the eyes of his faith, secular and sacred divisions all seemed arbitrary and life-denying. Christ was risen for the life *of the world*, and that included the natural world of rivers and gardens Chip loved to inhabit as well as the world of eggheaded academics like myself, the world of pastors or church leaders, or the world of church-alienated barflies.

I used to joke with Chip that he was "the liturgical monster I created." The truth, of course, was that I knew little about what a life liturgically lived was like (beyond theories of such) until I met Chip. The books I gave him to read simply wrapped bits and pieces of language around what he was already living out. For Chip, rivers were already all about getting one's sins "washed down." And home-brewed beer, like communion wine, was a promise of "what is yet to come."

Probably the first experience I had of Chip utterly disregarding the sacred-secular dichotomy occurred at the memorial of a student who died suddenly at the seminary. The memorial service was lovely, traditional, and liturgically stately until Chip grabbed a guitar and walked up and down the aisle of the sanctuary singing our friend's favorite "secular" song "The Joker." You know the lyrics: "I'm a picker, I'm a grinner, I'm a lover, I'm a sinner, I play my music in the sun. . . ." Those who knew our departed friend got it—the song held his life up before us and before God in all of its joy, foibles, and longing. Another such memory involved playing for several years in Chip's band

Soul Highway. We played often at one of the favorite college bars on Bardstown Road in Louisville, and Chip would surround the band with tea lights, creating a worship-like environment. Sandwiched between college rock songs would be his worship songs, or "This Little Light of Mine," or other songs that hang suspended between so-called sacred and secular music. There was no plan or program for this; it was just Chip being his inimitable self. Music was all of one piece for him. If it was written well and brought before God the lives of those in his care (his audience/congregation), it was "all good" and part of the world Christ has already redeemed.

Life lived liturgically is life lived "before God." In my experiences with Chip, his life and the lives of those who spent time with him were never *not* before God. Whether you asked for it or not, you were swept up into liturgical existence when you were with Chip. Such existence had an eternal quality to it. If Chip is correct, and I believe he is, in Christ we are always in God's presence. In the "place we're at" right now, and in all of the places we're at, wherever and whenever they may be. So be it.

John S. McClure
Charles G. Finney Professor of Preaching
and Worship
Vanderbilt Divinity School
Nashville, Tennessee

> It's been a pleasure now, years and years,
> To carry the water down the mountainside . . .

These lines from Chip open his song "Soul Highway," written from the perspective of a river in the Arkansas Ozarks he loved to canoe. So connected to this particular waterway he was, Chip could move back and forth from the river's perspective to his own.

> Carry me away,
> Floatin' along the Mulberry . . .

He and I played in several bands together, one of which was named Soul Highway in honor of the song and water. Typically after a gig we'd unload the sound system and instruments, make a fire in his or my backyard (it didn't matter whose since we lived only a few houses from each other), and unwind with a home brew (it didn't matter whose, since we usually brewed together). Inevitably our conversation would steer toward the Ozarks and the Mulberry and a modest cabin to which Chip returned whenever he could get a week away. Inevitably he would tell a story about canoeing or river buddies or a rainstorm or a hike or music he wrote on the front porch of a friend's house. Inevitably this led to a debate between us. We made a ritual of it even. Every time he would talk of the river, he'd end with, "That is one thin place," provoking our debate.

"Why is it thin?" I'd ask, playfully, knowing full well his answer.

"Because the layer between the divine and our world there is thin," he'd say, "if it exists at all. You know, like communion." Everything good and powerful, sacred and loving, was like the Eucharist for Chip. On that point we agreed. Communion was not our debate. "You know," he'd add, "it's so beautiful." And he would go on about the trees in the spring; "So many shades of green," he'd say, quoting one of his many songs about the area. Then he'd describe caves and waterfalls he had discovered, and exploring the mountains, then mushroom hunting—where to find the chanterelles and morels—and the best swimming hole in the heat of the summer where you had to be careful because the tarantulas liked to sun on the rocks there too.

"Thin?" I'd question again.

"Yeah, *thin*."

"Sounds like a *thick* place to me." And we'd laugh.

"Want another brew?" he'd ask.

"I'll get 'em," I'd say, completing the ritual.

Thin or thick, nobody was more connected to place than Chip. He even titled his last album *The Place We're At*. The name came from a story about his Arkansas friend Lloyd who came by Chip's cabin one day and asked, "So where's the place we're going, or is this the place we're at?" Chip loved the line. He knew the grammar was off, but it spoke to a specific moment at a particular place. Not floating around in some abstract space. Not passing through some generic notion of time.

> Nightfall's comin' and there ain't no moon on
> the rise,
> Better eddy on the left when Turner Bend's
> in sight.

Whether some places are more holy than others, I cannot say (isn't God omnipresent?). But as Abraham Heschel once pointed out, "Even those who believe that God is everywhere set aside a place for a sanctuary. For the sacred to be sensed at all moments everywhere, it must also at this moment be somewhere." The Mulberry River, Turner Bend on the river, a spot in the bend where you better eddy on the left. These were the somewheres, thin places thick with friendships, with beauty, with love. These were the particular places that let him sense the sacred in Louisville and New York and the hundreds of places where he played music or led worship or taught workshops to open eyes to meeting the divine.

It's here I want to stay,
Floatin' along the soul highway . . .

As anyone who was around him long knows, Chip was a fierce advocate for weekly communion, and if there were a Reformed way of pulling off daily Eucharist, he would have gone for that too. He had historical and liturgical rationales for this advocacy, but I am sure something more ran beneath those reasons. For Chip, taking bread and wine was a *sometime* to go along with a *someplace*, a sanctified moment in a holy place so that we could sense the sacred at all moments everywhere.

Runnin' from east to west, downhill on a
snaky path,
Carryin' memories that'll never die.

I go by Chip's house every day. He and his wife, Linda, moved from Louisville over a decade ago, and I have missed them ever since, even more now. I always look down the driveway, hoping to see a fire going in the backyard. Of course, there never is one, and I feel the world has become a little thinner.

Sounds of the water that carry me . . .

I can still hear Chip telling me as we felt some sprinkles around the fire, "Rain is baptism." In that sacramental brain of his, water is baptism and baptism is water—the Mulberry River, the Ohio, the swimming hole with spiders, a rainstorm, waterfalls, Turner Bend, and the key to a good home brew.

"Water is baptism thick with life," I tell him in my imagination, continuing our debate.

And he reminds me, "Baptism is completed in death."

On this we agree, the waters of baptism, the soul highway, begins and ends with the love of God.

And it's here that I'm gonna stay,
Wash me down the soul highway.

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Columns

On Liturgy: Don't Mess with Texas

Mary Beth Anton

Following seminary I moved to West Texas to serve on the staff of a large Presbyterian church. Driving from my home state of California I noticed numerous signs along the roadway which read "Don't mess with Texas," an effort by the state Department of Transportation to reduce the amount of litter along its roads. The slogan reminds me of others from my childhood such as "Give a hoot! Don't pollute" and "Only you can prevent forest fires." Woodsy Owl and Smokey the Bear helped our grade school teachers and scout leaders educate us about caring for creation.

Another striking image from childhood is that of a Native American man canoeing down an increasingly polluted river. The television advertisement ends with the man watching cars pass on a busy freeway, a tear rolling down his cheek as he observes a passenger throwing trash from a car window. A voice says, "Some people have a deep abiding respect for the natural beauty of this country. Some people don't. People start pollution, they can stop it." I remember feeling outrage and committing myself to always throwing my trash where it belongs.

My parents were not environmentalists, but they were children of the Great Depression. They taught us to turn off lights when we left a room, to clean our plates, to never waste anything, and to care for our home and possessions. They also took us on many road trips to national parks, teaching us to appreciate the beauty of the natural world. We saved our newspapers for the school paper drive. Because I was an avid Girl Scout I learned much about creation care from our troop activities, which included hiking, backpacking, and canoeing trips in the wilderness of Southern California.

What I do not recall is ever hearing a theology of creation and its stewardship at church. We were taught the importance of sharing the gospel, missionary work abroad, and living an exemplary Christian life, but nothing about the mission to care for creation. The first time I heard this concept in a faith context was my first summer working at a church camp in our local mountains. Taking care of and protecting the environment were staples in our weekly camp curriculum: *God is the creator of the world. The beauty and wonder of the world around us points to our Creator. True discipleship encompasses good stewardship of God's universe.* We actively taught these lessons through hiking, swimming in the lake, stargazing, and talking around the campfire. I can only hope that the lessons of camp were instilled in the hearts and minds of our campers as they were in my own.

The *Book of Common Worship* includes a section of resources for services focused on creation and ecology under the heading of Mission in the World.[1] I appreciate their inclusion under *mission*, effectively reminding us that care of creation is central to faithful discipleship. Two of the services included in the section address the care of creation and the blessing of the animals. They are suggested for use on Earth Day and St. Francis's Day. But what about the rest of the year?

For thirty years I have planned and led worship in West Texas, a geographical region not known for its leadership in creation care and ecology. As a worship planner, I may intentionally include care

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of creation in the weekly Sunday service. A rubric before the Offering section in the *Book of Common Worship* is helpful:

> Christian life is an offering of one's self to God. . . . As those who have been claimed and set free by his grace, we respond with gratitude, offering him our lives, our spiritual gifts, and our material goods. *Every service of worship* shall include an opportunity to respond to Christ's call to discipleship through self-offering. *The gifts we offer express our stewardship of creation*, demonstrate our care for one another, support the ministries of the church, and provide for the needs of the poor.[2]

A call for the offering might include words that remind us of our responsibility as God's stewards in the world. Such language alters our posture before our Creator:

> The earth belongs to God and everything in it.
> We own nothing; rather we are stewards of Gods gifts.
> In response to God's mercy and grace, let us present ourselves,
> our time, our treasure, our resources—
> our very lives to God's service.

The prayer of dedication might include language that reminds us of our call as we go forth from worship:

> . . . send us now into the world to daily care
> for one another, the poor,
> all who are in need, and for your creation.

Another possibility is a sermon series using texts that celebrate God's creation and our stewardship.[3] The orders of service might include creation psalms and hymns celebrating the goodness of creation. Every person should have the opportunity to proclaim with the psalmist:

> Praise the LORD from the earth,
> you sea monsters and all deeps;
> fire and hail, snow and fog,
> tempestuous wind, doing God's will;
> mountains and all hills,
> fruit trees and all cedars;
> wild beasts and all cattle,
> creeping things and flying birds;
> sovereigns of the earth and all peoples. . . .
> Let them praise the name of the LORD,
> whose name only is exalted,
> whose splendor is over earth and heaven.
> (Psalm 148:7–13)[4]

And every child and adult should have the opportunity to commit to memory:

> All things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small,
> all things wise and wonderful, the Lord God made them all.[5]

The opportunities in Sunday worship for celebrating the beauty of creation as well as encouraging its stewardship are many and varied. And beyond worship the educational and mission possibilities for creation care are endless. If we are intentional in our worship and mission, the children in our congregations will grow up practicing one of the marks of true Christian discipleship: care of God's world.

Notes

1. *Book of Common Worship* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2018), 559–590.
2. Ibid., 118, emphasis added.
3. See *Book of Common Worship*, p. 580 for suggested texts.
4. *Book of Common Worship*, 1076.
5. *Glory to God*, 20; *Presbyterian Hymnal*, 267.

On Preaching: Preaching Good News in the Face of Global Crisis

David E. Lower

In his final sermon at Fourth Presbyterian in Chicago, Elam Davies shared a memory about a spectacular evening's sunset—both what he saw and what came to be revealed. Dr. and Mrs. Davies had driven to the top of a local Welsh landmark to catch what they knew would be a marvelous display of the sky's horizon. As they waited from their car for the colorful view to unfold, an old rusted car pulled alongside theirs, and an elderly couple got out. They opened the rear door of the car where their grown son, incapable of sitting up on his own, was lying down. They slid their son's legs toward the door of the car and held him up. Then just as the sky reached peak magnificence, the elderly parents lifted their son's chin and held it so that he, too, could behold the spectacular setting of earth's light. The earth can inspire our cherishing of it, but we can also be led and prompted to see the world again, and rediscover our relationship to all that is.

While the earth can inspire on its own, the scriptural witness—like those revelatory parents driving an old car—can help us see and rediscover our relationship to all that is. The foundation upon which the Bible and the Christian faith stand is creation—the notion that God is the agent of everything that has form and energy and life. As claimed in the Bible's original words of Genesis, all that is marvelous and good is the expression of God.[1] Humanity is cast as a culmination in the divine ecosystem, with the capacity to behold and reflect the divine care and honor that is woven into the interdependent world. The scriptural frame would have us see ourselves as the earth's stewards, not its governors or its consumers. God wills for the earth and humanity to flourish, which happens by our maintaining right relationship with God and all else God has made.[2] This is the reality which the Bible lifts our chin to see.

Scriptural witness helps us behold the earth and our humble role as part of it, but also helps focus our attention on the consequences of our misuse. The prophets make clear that we pollute at least as easily as we maintain.[3] The Scripture's claims about our ability to destroy are becoming increasingly evident in the world we are wounding. Those coastal sunsets are now bearing the marks of human wastefulness, in the form of air pollution, plastic seas, and algae blooms. The earth of our inspiring and our connectedness cries out for redemption, made audible by the prophetic voice that reaches compellingly into our own disturbing reality.

On the subject of the environment, though, the prophetic voice may also be the most familiar. Much of the secular earth care conversation is already set to prophetic mode, bearing ominous readings and predictions about trends like "global weirding" that evoke fear and guilt, as caricatured in the satirical headline "Scientists Agree—We're Cooked!" Auden Schendler and Andrew P. Jones capture the challenge posed by the prophetic voice well, "So how do we engage in a possibly—but not probably—winnable struggle within a rigged system against great odds, the ultimate results of which we'll never see? Forget success, how do we even get out of bed in the morning?"[4] When facing the clear prophetic call of the environment upon our lives, it appears it is hard for us to get out of bed and into action, which causes me to wonder if we need a different kind of leading and prompting to meet the challenges of our day.

I suspect that the collective environmental conversation and discernment is saturated with the prophetic and would benefit from more pastoral preaching. How do we pastor to Christians in this day and age when we are so prone to neglect and willingly party to systems that are ravaging

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the earth? I have begun to explore a variety of possibilities in my own preaching life, by (1) preaching of the earth as part of it, with humility and reverence; (2) confessing my own sins of neglect and participation in the earth's harmful systems of consumption; and (3) examining the causes of my own life's neglectfulness, including preoccupations and busyness, but also my voracious appetite for convenience. By exemplifying the environmentalist's dilemma, it seems, we can share responsibility and the burden of failure.

But even more powerfully, Christian preaching can stand on the gospel truth it knows best—that we are broken, but by grace still free and redeemable. Perhaps the most pastoral contribution our preaching can make is to name the powers and possibilities of God's generous mercy for our environmental future. Our abuse and neglect of the earth are grave, but this is when the gospel of forgiveness can do its marvelous work. If we are forgiven, what are we forgiven from, and what are we forgiven for? Schendler and Jones, who know the challenge all too well, preach in secular language resembling the gospel, "There's good news: We're perfect for the job. If the human species specializes in one thing, it's taking on the impossible."[5] These environmental preachers go on to explain that humans have long known insurmountable challenges and met them, like the Black Death and world wars, through continuous and unrelenting practice that eventually changes cultural norms. I accept that Christian preachers like me can offer not just the conviction but also the encouragement of the gospel, for the sake of the change God yearns for from us.

The church I serve is an ideologically and politically mixed congregation whose environmental efforts have begun to inspire and capture the attention of the community. The Saint Luke's Green Team has reduced the church's environmental footprint through a climate control system, LED bulbs, and recycling in every room. They have led the city in efforts to recycle cans through our marvelously named "Bring Your Cans to Church" campaign and hosting the city's electronics recycling efforts. But perhaps the most efficacious leadership the Green Team provides is through a weekly "Green Tip of the Week" that everyone can do at home.[6] In a politically charged age, our congregation has found a way to unite around environmentalism by staying inspired by Scripture, which reminds us that we are free to do a new thing and that every positive change matters to God. I am grateful to be led by these people of faith to behold and take part in the natural world. They have also prompted me to remember the gospel, that God sees us not for what we have already done but for what we might yet do. That good news will preach in this day and age.

Notes

1. Genesis 1:1–2:4a.
2. "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 . . . and it shall be to the Lord for a memorial, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off" (Isa. 55:12–13).
3. "The earth dries up and withers, . . . The heavens languish together with the earth. The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant" (Isa. 24:4–5). "Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, but you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pasture? When you drink of clear water, must you foul the rest with your feet?" (Ezek. 34:18).
4. Auden Schendler and Andrew P. Jones, "Stopping Climate Change Is Hopeless. Let's Do It," *New York Times*, October 6, 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/10/06/opinion/sunday/climate-change-global-warming.html?fbclid=IwAR2kMBQzclHuanVJWZBrX-x5qoqm4InUxzDY1nG5KTCKjLQ0fKiyZWQJ1XU.
5. Ibid.
6. Saint Luke's Presbyterian Church Green Team's Tip of the Week for 11/1/18: "Here's an easy way to care for the precious resources we are given. A full freezer doesn't have to work as hard to chill empty space—other frozen items help with that. If your freezer isn't full, fill old jugs with water and freeze them (plus you can use the frozen jugs in a cooler instead of buying ice)."

On Music: And It Was Very Good

Peter Ncanywa

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Then God said, "Let there be light" to create daytime and nighttime. The next day God spoke all of vegetation into existence. Thereafter, God created seasons and markers of time. Then God created creatures of the seas, creatures of the sky, followed by creatures of the land. And then God saw that it was good. It was good before humankind.

The Holy Bible starts out by telling us how well the Creator ordered the world. From the very first creations, it was all good. The day and nighttime were good; the heavens and the earth were good; the earth's vegetation was good; the sun, moon, and stars were good; and the aquatic life, birds, and land animals were good, too. I can't help but wonder why, after humankind was created, the Bible doesn't say it was good. Did God not think the addition of humans was a good thing?

We were last to make an appearance on this earth. It was good before us. Was there an inkling in the back of God's mind that we would not be good for the rest of creation—much like one might notice behavior in some child and think, "This one is going to be trouble very soon"? And if there was an inkling, I wonder if God still thinks so. Can we change God's mind?

I believe that the answer lies in the verses that follow after the creation of humankind:

> God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so (Gen. 1:29–30).

It is difficult to think about providence without acknowledging the strong ties it has to social justice. God has given us dominion over all "the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Gen. 1:28). From this very moment, we see the pattern of behavior that Jesus echoes throughout his life: the care of the downtrodden and vulnerable. A pattern that was demonstrated when God created all of life before us—when God had protected, provided for, and fed everything over which God had given us dominion. A pattern that puts the weak first. A pattern that Jesus uses throughout his ministry to shows us the great compassion and love God has for all of creation.

In the first column I was privileged enough to share in *Call to Worship* (vol. 51, no. 3), I stated that we believe what we sing and that we are what we believe. Our hymnal, *Glory to God*, imitates the Bible through the arrangement of hymns and songs in the "overarching theme" of "God's powerful acts of creation, redemption, and final transformation."[1] As John 1:1 states, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. And the Word was God." The first thirteen hymns are of the triune God. The following forty-six hymns are about creation and providence. A whopping forty-six! Then the following hymns and songs focus on the complicated relationship between God and us.

How then do we care for creation, which is clearly so important to God, and by extension, to us? God has given us dominion over the earth and all of life on it. And as responsible leaders know, heavy is the head that wears the crown. We have been given a great responsibility. In the introduction to his book *Caring for Creation: An Ecumenical Approach to the Environmental Crisis*, Max Oelschlaeger shares a confrontation with Pulitzer Prize-winning

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nature poet and environmentalist Gary Snyder. An attendee at Snyder's workshop wondered how he could justify jetting around all over the place and questioned whether he noticed that his actions have consequences. Snyder answered by saying that "we're all part of the problem. I'm not the answer. Or the final destination. Maybe I'm a signpost. For the earth to survive, we'll have to find a route together."[2] Just like hunger is not a problem only for the hungry, it is everyone's problem. Just like war is not only a problem limited to the war-torn countries, it is everyone's problem. Just like homelessness is not only a problem for the homeless, it is everyone's problem. Caring for our environment is not only limited to environmentalists; it is everyone's responsibility.

When I was growing up, my mother used to say, "*yomntu iphathwa kakuhle*." You treat someone else's belongings with respect. She would go even further and state that one treats them with even greater care than one's own belongings. I was reminded of her words when someone from a well-known local opera company came knocking at our church door to ask if the company could borrow costumes. They were producing the operetta *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. Naturally, I was hesitant. This woman was a stranger, and here she was asking to borrow the church's property for six weeks. So, I went upstairs with her, opened the costume closet, and let her take what she needed. Naturally, I took all of her contact information before she left. I waited. The five-week mark approached. Six weeks. Not a word. I finally heard from our church secretary that the items we had lent had been returned. Washed and mended. Returned in better condition than in which they had been taken.

When everything and everyone was taken care of, then "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good" (Gen. 1:31a).

Notes

1. Presbyterian Committee on Congregational Song, "Appendix 1: Theological Vision Statement," *Glory to God* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2013), 926.
2. Max Oelschlaeger, *Caring for Creation: An Ecumenical Approach to the Environmental Crisis* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 3.

John Stuart

On the Arts: In the Flesh—Liturgical Materiality

Sally Ann McKinsey Sisk

In 1991, Los Angeles-based artist Lynn Aldrich installed a thirty-five-foot line of plain white bread slices, forty-five loaves in total, across the floor of the then-abandoned Chapman Market Bakery. This display of waste was a statement about abundance and scarcity, suggesting the immense problem of homelessness and food insecurity in Los Angeles. The work, called *Bread Line*,[1] utilized a particular abandoned space to suggest the role of that space in systems of class disparity and poverty and to wonder about the nature of abandonment. Leaving so much food to waste is tragic and poignant. The specifics of the work drew attention to a concrete issue through real material.

Some of Aldrich's other work uses common materials evocative of our current global environmental crisis, like garden hoses, pipes, and gutters. In *Breaker*,[2] a large bunch of garden hoses bend to evoke the form of a tidal wave, suggesting the impact of over-irrigation and landscaping on oceans and water systems. William Dyrness writes this of Aldrich's work, and I quote it here because he says it so well:

> Art, at its best, is an expression of agency and advocacy; it is meant to provoke and not only to please. Lynn Aldrich's work illustrates this point well. She takes common elements from everyday life and subtly uncovers the remnants of meaning that inevitably animate these objects. . . . When these objects are placed together carefully, when they are allowed their own voice, they can speak of human (and even divine) meaning.[3]

Aldrich and other contemporary artists working with specific, evocative materials in this way have wisdom to offer liturgists and practical theologians in contemporary church communities. The new *Book of Common Worship* outlines beautiful, relevant prayers and services for use when thinking about God's creation and our role in caring for it. Much of this liturgy recognizes that we are *in the flesh* with all of creation and with Christ. We hear this in the words of the Great Thanksgiving as part of the new Service for the Care of Creation:[4]

> You are holy, God of majesty,
> and blessed is Jesus Christ, your Word
> made flesh.
> Christ is the Word that brought order
> to chaos. . . .
> Christ is the Light that overcame darkness. . . .
> Christ is the Water that quenches our
> thirst. . . .
> Christ is the Bread that rises from the
> earth. . . .
> Christ is the Vine that connects all
> creation. . . .
> Christ is the Life that death could not
> destroy. . . .

If we take *the Word made flesh* seriously, we recognize that our actions, materials, and worship space form us as much as our words do. Our materials, not just our words, affirm what we believe about God's incarnation: God became material and action, a body with us. We experience cleansing at the font and ingestion at the table, affirming God's embodiment and our own. When we plan and lead worship through this lens, the cups we drink from will be as important as the words of institution.

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Our materials matter, and our actions impact God's material world. Plastic communion cups may be convenient, but they are just one example of the chasm that has formed between our words and our materials for worship, a distance that denies our theology of incarnation and sacrament. How have our material ethics and aesthetics been left behind in our quest for all the right words?

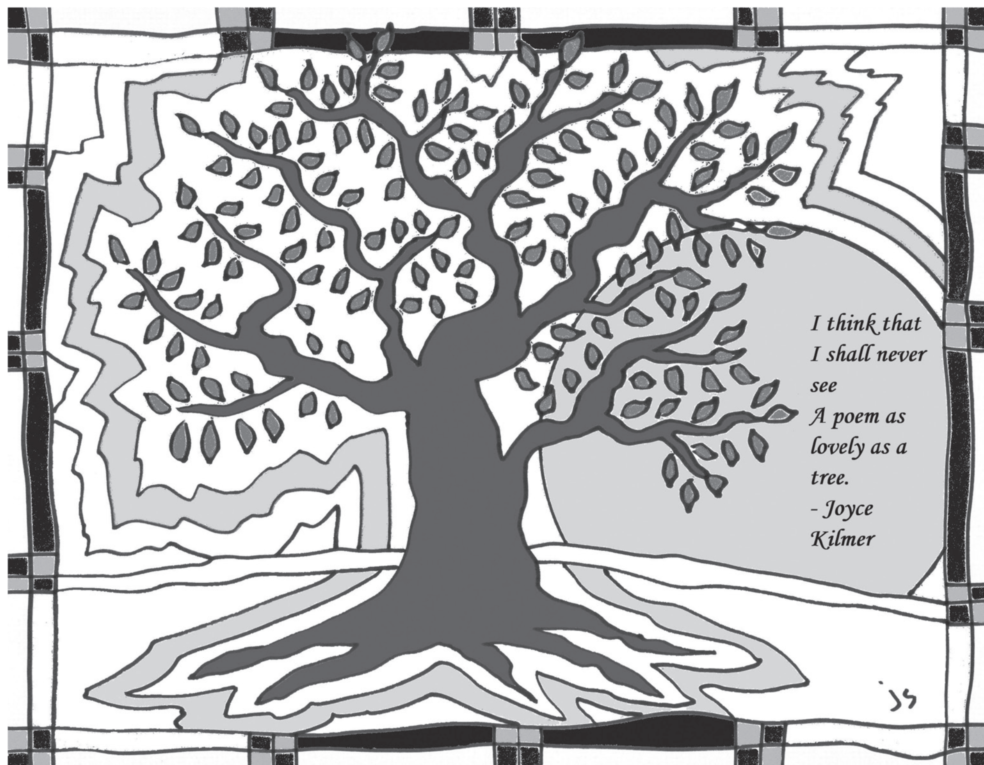
Aldrich's *Bread Line* uses waste as a vehicle for social critique, and while her material is wasted bread, her message makes me wonder where the leftover bread from our communion tables goes each week. Do the children consume it mischievously after the postlude? Is it taken to homebound or hospitalized members of the congregation? Given to the birds or to passersby outside? Thrown in the trash? How we use our leftover bread, among other actions related to worship, strikes me as deeply important in our liturgical practice.

We can expand this conversation to all the materials of worship, materials we already use and materials we have yet to discover as holy and healing. What new materials may be helpful as we seek to make our way in increasingly fragile ecosystems and uncover meaning in our embodied lives? As those washed with water and marked with oil, what materials evoke our challenges and God's call for us in the world? And how can the materials we use usher us deeper and deeper into the wounds of the earth, to seek healing in the most vulnerable places from the highest levels of power in the land?

I have few answers to these big questions. When it comes to "greening" the liturgy, small changes can feel futile in the face of massive, systemic ecological devastation and the powers of greed that insist on hoarding limited resources and abusing marginalized and impoverished communities. Our community organizing and advocacy work may be more important than our attempts to do away with our individual plastic communion cups. But as contemporary artists teach us, the right materials can lift us to greater awareness of the sacramental nature of life itself, a web of intangible mysteries embodied in tangible, sacred elements. The right materials can work as metaphors, signs, and symbols that propel us to honestly uncover what we may rather ignore, receive grace, and be reformed according to the Word, in response to what we have seen, heard, felt, smelled, and tasted.

Notes

1. Lynn Aldrich, *Bread Line*, 1991.
2. Aldrich, *Breaker*, permanent collection, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1999.
3. William Dyrness, *Visual Faith: Art, Theology, and Worship in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 124.
4. *Book of Common Worship* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 566–567.



John Stuart

Ideas

"The Earth Prays in Trees"

Text: Andrew Taylor-Troutman
Music: Rob Passow

Gently ♩ = 66

In li-ving toward the light, a tree's a learn - ed sage; the
Wind - shak-en as by sobs, boughs weep in joy and grief; a
"Be still and know" is writ, so list - en for a word of
And heav-en come on earth, we pray and con - stant sing; a

5

stri-ving for the sky, the hope of growth in age.
fall to make all new, a leav-ing as re - lief.
grace as close as dirt, and heav-en come on earth.
chap - el in the pines, as faith-ful ev - er - greens.

Refrain

The

9

earth laughs in flow-ers, I be-lieve we pray with trees; I be-lieve we pray with trees.

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"God, You Made Your Good Creation"

Text: Carolyn Winfrey Gillette

BEACH SPRING 8.7.8.7.D

God, you made your good creation and you hold it in your care—
From each starry constellation to each forest under-layer.
Tiny creatures, mountain splendor, rivers, lakes and ocean floors—
You are loving, kind and tender in your care for what is yours.

Yet, O God, the earth is crying, times are changing, storms are strong.
Now the coral reefs are dying, floods are raging, droughts are long.
Though the circumstances differ, when the earth is in distress,
See! The poor are first to suffer from our greed and selfishness.

God, you love this world we live in, so you sent your only Son.
"Here on earth as in your heaven," God, we pray, "Your will be done."
By your Spirit, may we listen to the earth and to the poor;
May we care for all you've given till creation is restored.

Biblical References: Genesis 1–2; Psalm 8, 24, 104; Romans 8:19–23; 1 John 3:17; John 3:16; Matthew 6:10; Revelation 21:5

This hymn was inspired by "Laudato Si' ("Praise Be to You"): On Care for Our Common Home," 2015 Encyclical Letter of Pope Francis.

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A Musical Setting of the First Answer of the Heidelberg Catechism

Text: Buz Wilcoxon

Tune: O Waly Waly, Gift of Love, or other LM tune

With a single spoken voice introduction asking the question (perhaps following a musical introduction)

Spoken: What is your only comfort, in life and in death?

Sung:

1) That I belong—in life and death,
Soul, body, all—not to myself
But to my faithful Savior, Christ,
Who with his blood has paid my price;

2) That from my sin Christ sets me free,
Released from evil's tyranny,
Protected, saved, and held within
The love of God, whose will shall win.

3) Thus, in my heart I am assured
Eternal life is made secure,
And I may heed the Spirit's call
To live for Christ, to give my all.

Original Text

Question 1: What is your only comfort, in life and in death?

Answer 1: That I belong—body and soul, in life and in death—not to myself but to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ, who at the cost of his own blood has fully paid for all my sins and has completely freed me from the dominion of the devil; that he protects me so well that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, that everything must fit his purpose for my salvation. Therefore, by his Holy Spirit, he also assures me of eternal life, and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

Book Reviews

Pray, Praise, and Give Thanks: A Collection of Litanies, Laments, and Thanksgivings at Font and Table

Gail Ramshaw (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2017, with CD-ROM)

Reviewed by Kimberly Clayton

Most of us know just enough about liturgy to be dangerous, or silly, or overly enamored with our own creative writing skills. This may be especially true for Presbyterians, Lutherans, Methodists, Episcopalians, and united Protestant communities where we have freedom to construct our own litanies and prayers for use in communal worship. It is particularly, though not exclusively, for us that Gail Ramshaw has written *Pray, Praise, and Give Thanks: A Collection of Litanies, Laments, and Thanksgivings at Font and Table*. I have placed my copy within easy reach. Scholar, teacher, and faithful worshiper, Gail Ramshaw intersperses liturgical insights, prayer templates, and rubrics amid an array of litanies and prayers that can be used without amendment. We may learn to write better liturgy by studying and using hers.

As one serving a church celebrating the Eucharist weekly, I am grateful for the recent revision of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s *Book of Common Worship* with additional Great Prayers of Thanksgiving. Ramshaw's book provides the gift of twenty fresh "thanksgivings at the table." Ten will see you through the liturgical year; the other ten offer unexpected pathways toward communion: prayers "after" Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, Catherine of Sienna, Julian of Norwich, and Martin Luther, an earth eucharistic prayer, one in a time of communal lament, and one "variable," inviting you to "fill in the blanks." Her brief introduction to "thanksgiving at the font" provides this evocative image: "We praise God for the gift of baptismal water that washes us into life in the community of the triune God" (p. 28). A few sentences later she offers this bit of church history, inviting us to see oceans and rivers and the backyard creek differently: "For centuries, theologians have taught that when Jesus was baptized, all the waters of the earth were consecrated" (p. 28). Such liturgical insights are offered throughout, like pieces of bread broken from a larger loaf. Because water is as dangerous and unwanted as it is a blessing and needful, Ramshaw's prayer of thanksgiving adapts to the weather conditions, addressing flood or drought. Her litany "Thanksgiving at the Font with Children" is so simple yet profound I had one of those head-smacking, "Why didn't I think of that?" moments.

Years ago in a doctor of ministry class, Walter Brueggemann chastised those of us from traditions that constantly confess our sin. He observed that it is very hard to be a human being, so sometimes we should bring that fact before God as lament. This book offers stunning examples. Along with expected laments concerned with social injustice and environmental degradation is a litany lamenting "the grip of melancholy," and another on "the dread of mortality." The lament expressed before God is unadorned: "We fear to die unprepared, and we dread the end of self" (p. 26). Each lament moves finally toward courage—"Hear these words, and receive their power"—then describes the triune God who has come to rescue and save us.

Ramshaw's litanies and prayers are grounded in Scripture. Beseeching God to save us, we recall that God saved Cain from revenge, Hagar from thirst, Naaman from disease, and Miriam from leprosy. Lamenting the weight of guilt, we sit beside David and cry out, "My sin is my fault, my fault, my own most grievous fault" (p. 27). Standing at the water's edge, we picture Jesus in the Jordan, calming the Sea of Galilee, drinking from Jacob's well, healing beside Bethesda's pool, and washing the disciples' feet. Ramshaw shows us how the response of the people does not require a printed bulletin, but becomes an effusive echo: what one speaks, the

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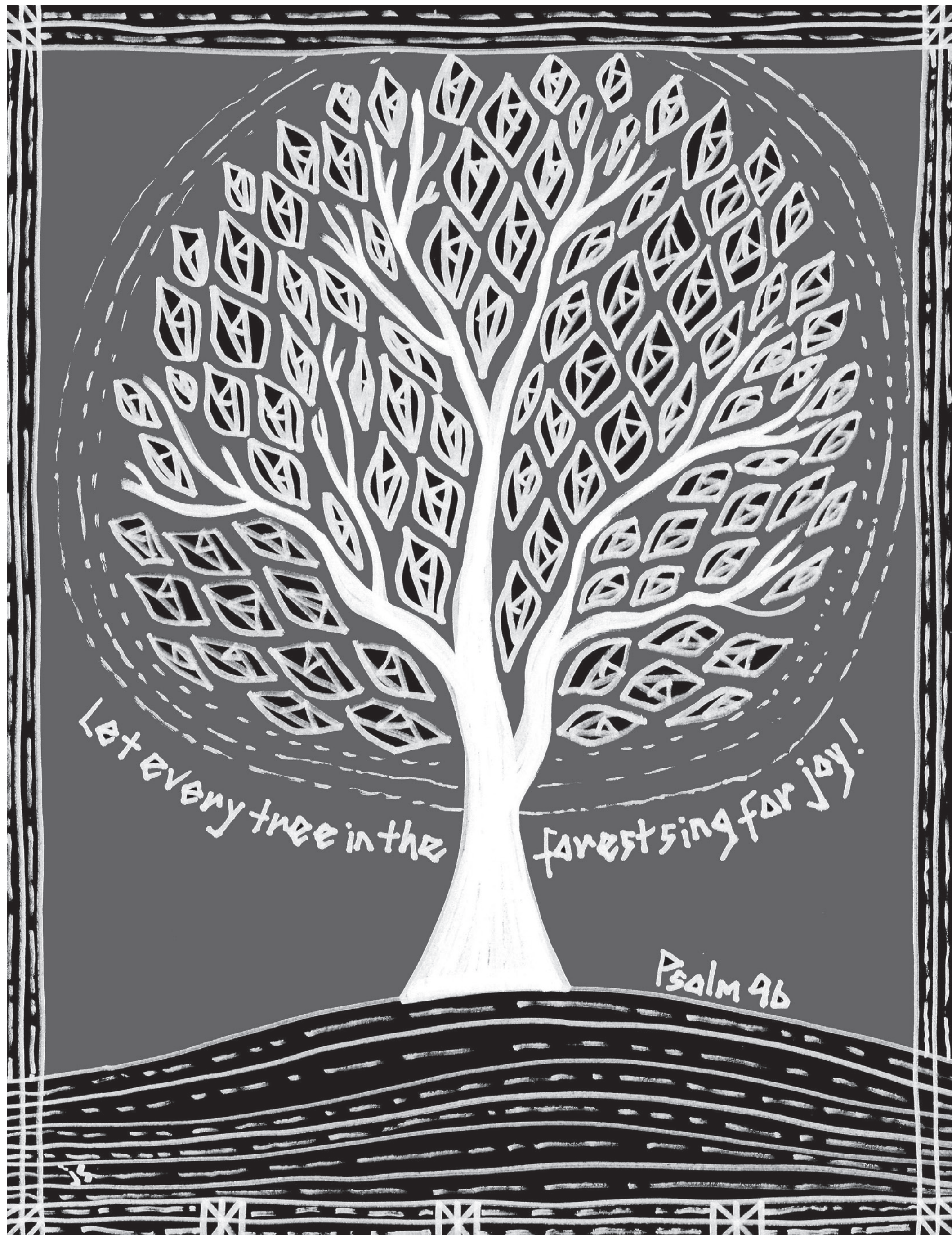
rest of us can declare in affirmation. The breadth of skin tones, nations, religions, and Christian denominations are celebrated. Fresh, creative, clever language for God is employed, but never suggests that we have fully described, much less captured God's fullness:

Holy God, Holy One, Holy Three!
Before all that is, you were God.
    Outside all we know, you are God.
        After all is finished, you will be God.
Archangels sound the trumpet,
    Angels teach us their song,
        Saints pull us into your presence (p. 54).

Gail Ramshaw's book does just that—pulls us into God's presence which is, after all, liturgy's true purpose.



John Stuart

Saving Images: The Presence of the Bible in Christian Liturgy

Gordon W. Lathrop (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017)

Reviewed by David Batchelder

If you have an interest in the relationship between the Bible and Christian worship, do yourself a favor and pick up a copy of *Saving Images: The Presence of the Bible in Christian Liturgy* by Gordon Lathrop. It will nourish your mind as well as your soul. It is not necessary that you be familiar with Lathrop's previous works on liturgical theology. This book can be appreciated on its own terms while also serving as an introduction to Lathrop's earlier works.

As a liturgical scholar with a Ph.D. in the New Testament, Lathrop is eminently qualified to provide this "study of the relationship between Bible and liturgy" (p. ix). Lathrop presents the subject as "two complex realities—Bible and liturgy—seen side by side, each in its own integrity, but the two always also in their necessary interrelationships" (p. x). What distinguishes Lathrop's approach is his focus on images. "Believing that verbal images and communal imagination matter to both biblical and liturgical meaning," he writes, "I focus here on biblical images as they recur within various biblical writings and within Christian liturgical use" (p. x).

I consider this book of 211 pages (including bibliography and index) equal parts illumination, inspiration, and interpretation. Readers will deepen their understanding of both Scripture and liturgy, and find their pastoral tasks of preaching and teaching enlivened. Indeed, one cannot read Lathrop and approach the homiletical task the same way again.

The book is divided into three sections. Part I "discusses the scriptures in their canonical order as these scriptures are used in Christian worship, working thus from Bible to liturgy" (p. 24). Part II works in the opposite direction, working from the liturgy to the Bible. "Moving through the widely followed order of a Christian Sunday service, [the book] inquires how that order reflects the scriptures" (p. 24). Finally, in Part III, Lathrop explores what he means by the language of "saving images" with specific proposals for local church reform and renewal.

Readers familiar with Lathrop's trilogy (*Holy Things, Holy People,* and *Holy Ground*) and his arguments for a common pattern (or *ordo*) shaping Christian worship across time and tradition, will benefit from Lathrop's most recent engagement with the questions being posed by others (Paul Bradshaw, for example). The effect is to listen in on an important conversation as recent liturgical scholarship continues to shine new light on the origins of the liturgy, often resulting in the revision of once-held assumptions. Lathrop is mindful of scholarship's tendency to read modern biases back into the historical record. Thus, readers will appreciate how Lathrop himself has continued to nuance and reframe his own arguments since *Holy Things* was first published in 1993. On this matter, Lathrop proposes "that a better way to read the ecumenical *ordo* could be 'gathering leading to sending, because of word next to meal,' while each part of this pattern is itself also made up of a variety of texts and events juxtaposed" (p. 109). Then, he writes, "we read the *ordo* best when we read it as a way we are given the biblical images, side by side, as they are reinterpreting us and our world: juxtaposed, like the intertextuality we have found as the method of the Bible itself" (p. 109).

It is the reform of the church in liturgy and life that Lathrop is aiming for and that is enabled by the "critique" and "promise" of "saving images." In this

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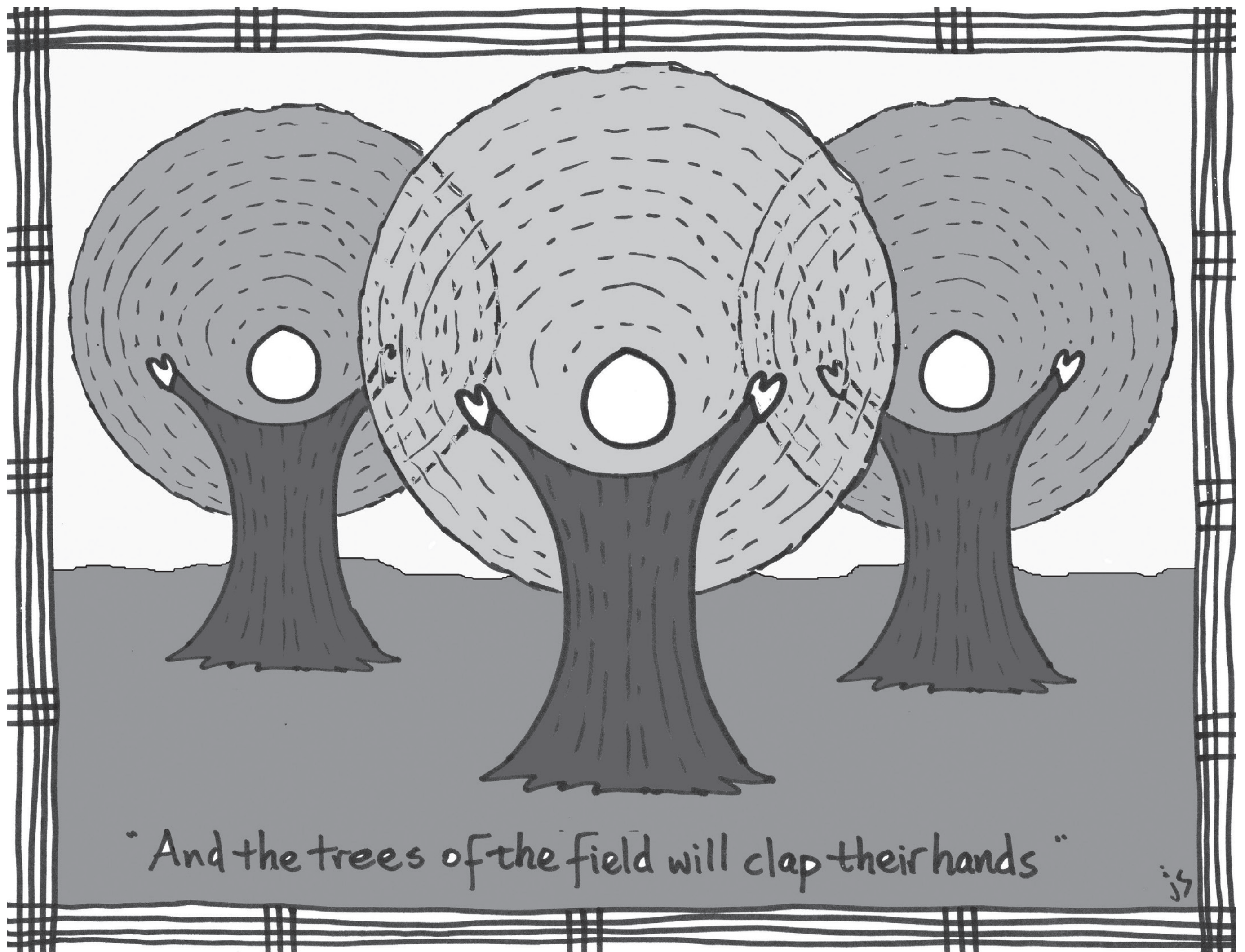
regard, the book offers a deep spirituality for any wanting to better understand the meaning behind what is done in worship. It is full of insight to enrich the practice of pastoral ministry. I foresee that it will be consulted frequently by pastors wanting language to teach faith communities about the *why* behind the *what* of the Sunday service. The reverse will also be true. This book will equip pastors wanting to teach their communities the Bible, and how to use the liturgy to do so. Writes Lathrop, "Indeed, I think that the best way to begin to understand Christian liturgy is to see that it has been made up of a fabric of interwoven, mutually reinterpreting, mostly biblical, always engaging, almost always metaphoric, saved and saving, verbal and enacted and then sometimes visual *images*" (p. 85).

After publication of Lathrop's *Holy Things*, a colleague said to me, "The book sings." I say, *this* book sings as well. For me, it is part liturgical theology, part liturgical catechesis, and part mystagogy, that ancient and sorely needed practice of leading others into the mystery of the Divine encounter in the liturgy.



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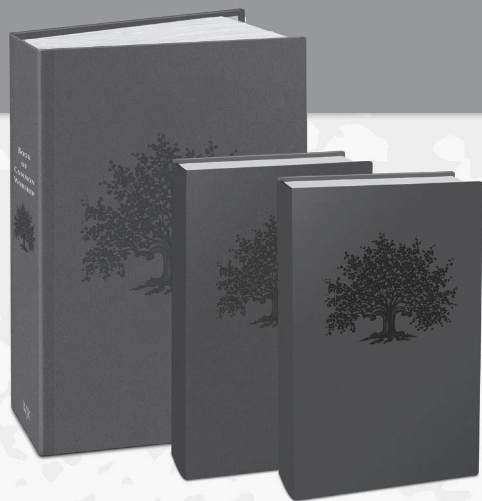

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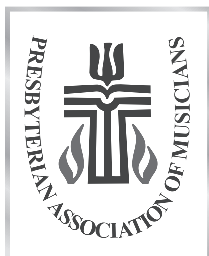

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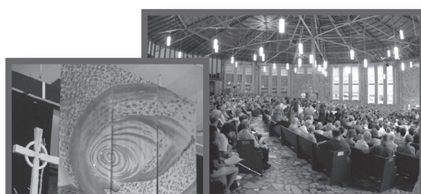

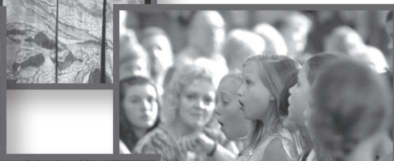

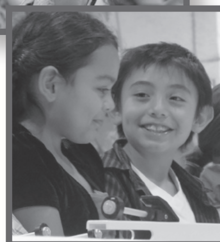

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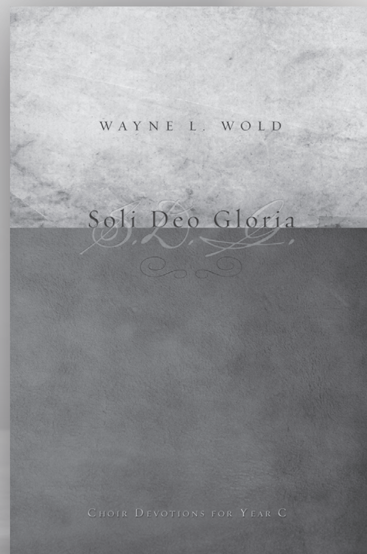

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