

**Season of Creation**  
**Weekly Devotional Series**  
**for Mid-Fraser Cluster**



**A MIDWEEK DEVOTIONAL**

time in the Word together

## Introduction

This is a devotional booklet created by the clergy and laity of the Mid-Fraser Cluster, to help you stay connected faithfully during the Season of Creation, which starts at the beginning of September to Thanksgiving. There will be a focus passage read/preached on each Sunday, virtually, but the 2 devotions offered each week compliment that Creation Theme. The themes, in order, are: Creation in General, Land, Wilderness, Forest, Rivers/Cosmos, and Thankfulness. Each devotion offers you a scripture passage, reflection, questions for personal reflection, and a prayer for you to engage and contemplate.

May this be a sacred time for you as we continue during the struggles of social isolation in times of Covid-19. Instead of remembering our struggles and difficulties, this is meant as a tool to uplift you and remember that Creation is all around us and can be cause for appreciation, recognition, and connection to God, our Creator.

## How to Create a Sacred Space in Your Home

*Spend some time thinking about what makes a space sacred for you.*

A sacred space can help you pause, unplug, and reflect on the only work that really matters: loving the world, practicing gratitude, and being kind to yourself. Having a designated space in your home for prayer, meditation, or private reflection can be a constant reminder of how important it is to cultivate this sense of awe and wonder in your life.

It can be useful to set an intention before creating your space. What are you seeking to add to your life by setting this space apart in your home? What do you hope to do in this space? How do you honour God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit? Is it something you see yourself using everyday, or just on important holy days, anniversaries, or seasons?

Setting apart a space for rituals and meditation is an act that invites people to make mental, emotional, and energetic space for these practices, as well. A space also serves as a daily reminder to connect with yourself and with the divine.

If free space in your home is limited, get creative. Search for corners of your house that aren't being used. Add a billowy curtain or a screen to a corner that you can tuck away when the space isn't in use. Look for a closet floor, bookshelf, windowsill, or the top of a dresser that you can easily clear out. You could create a portable sacred space by filling a box with objects that are meaningful to you. A sacred space can also be as simple as your favorite chair or a pillow.



## Week of August 31 – September 6

1<sup>st</sup> Reflection on “Introduction to Creation Season” (Rev. Tracy Fairfield)

Read: John 1: 1 - 14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. <sup>4</sup> In him was life; and the life was the light of men. <sup>5</sup> And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. <sup>6</sup> There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup> The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. <sup>8</sup> He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. <sup>9</sup> That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. <sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. <sup>11</sup> He came unto his own, and his own received him not. <sup>12</sup> But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: <sup>13</sup> Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

### Reflection

The Prologue to John’s Gospel is John’s birth story of Jesus. The themes we have come to know for Christmas preaching are certainly present in how John begins his gospel. A preacher could focus on any of the themes outlined below to create a meaningful Christmas sermon. But this is our Season of Creation.

The first verse of John 1 is deceptively complex. “In the beginning” should stir up biblical resonances, particularly that what follows will have something to do with creation. The next verses (1:2-4) secure Jesus’ role as creator with God. Furthermore, God has chosen to recreate God’s very self in Jesus. God has been reborn into the world, now as God’s creating Word in the flesh. The threefold claim, “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” reveals the origin of Jesus, his relationship with God, and his identity as God.

To get at the significance of John's poetic witness to the Word, we might be well served by employing some of the questions of journalism, sometimes known as the "five W's":

- **What?** That is, what's happening? Jesus, according to John, has been a part of creation from the very beginning. What occurs now is that God's eternal Word -- God's Reason, Order, and very Being -- is coming down to earth to take on human flesh. This is the not first time God has "gotten involved" in human history, of course. God has been at work in the world through covenant, law, judges, kings, and prophets. Yet now God is getting more personally involved, as the very Word of God takes on human flesh and dwells with us in our own human form.

- **Why?** Because the world that has fallen into darkness needs light! And so, God comes prepared to struggle, light against darkness, day against night. That struggle is captured in the future perfect of John's grammatical construction, rendering verse 5: "The light shines on in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."
- **Who?** Or, better, who is affected by this? All of us, as new creation means new possibility for everyone! Even though many, including many who were close to him, did not recognize in Jesus what God was accomplishing, all those who do recognize and receive him are invited to become God's own children.
- **Where and when?** Not just in a manger long ago, but here, today, now as a Creation Story for this season! Perhaps this is why John gives such scant attention to the details of Jesus' birth. He is, ultimately more interested in our birth, our new birth as children of God. According to John, that is, Christmas is not really Jesus' birthday at all; rather, it is ours. Creation season can be a time that we celebrate our birth as children of God, the keeping of all God's promises, and the beginning of the restoration of all creation.

### Question for personal reflection

From what you have just read and considered: What is a personal implication/application for your life today?

### Prayer

Holy Creator, may your light shine in the dark corners of our lives, bringing new life and new hope. May we remember the birthing story from long ago, and see that it can birth in us new hope and new dreams every day of our lives. Help us to remember that we are indeed a child of God, made with your everlasting love and grace. Amen.



### 2<sup>nd</sup> Reflection on "Introduction to Creation Season" (Rev. Tim Bowman)

Read: Genesis 1: 1 – 25: Six Days of Creation and the Sabbath

**1** In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, <sup>2</sup> the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. <sup>3</sup> Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. <sup>4</sup> And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup> God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

<sup>6</sup> And God said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." <sup>7</sup> So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. <sup>8</sup> God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

<sup>9</sup> And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. <sup>10</sup> God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. <sup>11</sup> Then God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And it was so. <sup>12</sup> The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. <sup>13</sup> And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

<sup>14</sup> And God said, "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, <sup>15</sup> and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth." And it was so. <sup>16</sup> God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. <sup>17</sup> God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, <sup>18</sup> to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. <sup>19</sup> And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

<sup>20</sup> And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky." <sup>21</sup> So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. <sup>22</sup> God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." <sup>23</sup> And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

<sup>24</sup> And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind." And it was so. <sup>25</sup> God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

### **Reflection**

*"Let us hope it works' (Halway Sheyaamod) exclaimed God as he created the world, and this hope, which has accompanied the subsequent history of the world and mankind, has emphasized right from the outset that this history is branded with the mark of radical uncertainty."*

Like a fisher dredging up old tires and strange bewhiskered creatures from beneath the waves, I never cease to be amazed at the hidden depths of the Genesis story. I was surprised to discover that God did not create something out of nothing, as later Greek philosopher-theologians would have it, but reading closely we learn that there was already something there: when God began to create, the earth was desolate and empty, covered in darkness and deep water. Finally, the above quote alludes to a Jewish legend that the world we live in was God's twenty-seventh attempt to get it right.

### ***What does this mean?***

It means that God does not create the world, like an artisan making a watch, but works with what is already given. God enters into the barren elements already in existence and fertilizes them with life. God enters into creation; God is the divine spark of life; God is a partner in the creation that God is in and through. God's presence in the world is not as a creator in the distant past but as an ever-present reality.

God is delighted in what transpires (and why would God be delighted if the outcome was a forgone conclusion?) but God has to work with what is given and down the road the world can and does decide to go its own way in small and big ways. We are free, not because God is an incompetent and distant watchmaker but because God is a partner, not a master.

But God continues to inhabit and enliven the world, and to delight in you and me and in what we co-create.

### **Questions for personal reflection**

From what you have just read and considered: What is a personal implication/application for your life today?

### **Prayer**

"Let's hope it works," you said nervously as you rolled up your sleeves.

Are you really a baker, God, standing in a kitchen, tossing in ingredients for the love of creating and disregarding the ruins of your previous attempts?

Fill me with this adventurous spirit, God.

Invite me to roll up my sleeves, to splatter myself with flour and water and mess, to co-create my life with you and let go of the outcome.

Invite me to come away splattered with love and loss,  
with blood and teargas  
and dirt and pine sap  
and happy memories.

Help me to delight and wonder in the process,  
and to call Good  
everything which we have made.

Amen.



## **Week of September 7 – September 13**

**1<sup>st</sup> Reflection: “Land”** (Rev. Tracy Fairfield; Source: Seasons of the Spirit 2020)

**Read: Genesis 3: 14 – 19, 4: 8 – 16**

<sup>14</sup> The LORD God said to the serpent,

“Because you have done this,  
cursed are you among all animals  
and among all wild creatures;  
upon your belly you shall go,  
and dust you shall eat  
all the days of your life.

<sup>15</sup> I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and hers;  
he will strike your head,  
and you will strike his heel.”

<sup>16</sup> To the woman he said,

“I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing;  
in pain you shall bring forth children,  
yet your desire shall be for your husband,  
and he shall rule over you.”

<sup>17</sup> And to the man<sup>[a]</sup> he said,

“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife,  
and have eaten of the tree  
about which I commanded you,  
‘You shall not eat of it,’

cursed is the ground because of you;  
in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life;

<sup>18</sup> thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;  
and you shall eat the plants of the field.

<sup>19</sup> By the sweat of your face  
you shall eat bread  
until you return to the ground,  
for out of it you were taken;  
you are dust,  
and to dust you shall return.”

Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let us go out to the field.” And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him. <sup>9</sup> Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” He said, “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?” <sup>10</sup> And the LORD said, “What

have you done? Listen; your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground! <sup>11</sup> And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. <sup>12</sup> When you till the ground, it will no longer yield to you its strength; you will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth." <sup>13</sup> Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is greater than I can bear! <sup>14</sup> Today you have driven me away from the soil, and I shall be hidden from your face; I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and anyone who meets me may kill me." <sup>15</sup> Then the LORD said to him, "Not so! Whoever kills Cain will suffer a sevenfold vengeance." And the LORD put a mark on Cain, so that no one who came upon him would kill him. <sup>16</sup> Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD, and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

### **Reflection**

The story of the Bible begins with the story of the land. Adam and Eve find that their confused actions over the tree of knowledge of good and evil have transformed their relationship with the very earth they walk. The land no longer brings forth food to Adam easily. One chapter later, Cain, Adam and Eve's son, kills their son Abel. There the land comes forth as witness, crying to God of Abels' blood in the ground. Just as the first humans have a relationship with God and the other creatures, they also have a relationship with the earth, their mother. Adam's very name means "earth-creature" in Hebrew. The first humans learn something we know well today, in the era of climate change – the land is affected by what we do. It responds to what we do.

What does all this talk of land as character, as a mother and a witness, mean for us today, in the era of species extinction and climate crisis? The land surely feels and witnesses what we do, in waste dumps and on fields of war, in the rainforests that we cut down and the wetlands that we drain. The land surely knows that some bear much more suffering than others.

### **Questions for personal reflection**

What does the mercy of the land look like today?

What would a truly just and repaired relationship look like with the land?

What does healing with the land mean for us today, and teach us as we learn the gift of healing the world?

### **Prayer**

Creator God, we come before you today as creatures of the land you created. Earth, our home, cares for us and witnesses our actions, as you do. We pray to be grounded and guided as people who are earthly and joyful, practicing our oneness with the earth. Amen.





## **2<sup>nd</sup> Reflection: “Land”** (Rev. Tracy Fairfield)

**Read: Matthew 12: 38 – 40** The Sign of Jonah

<sup>38</sup> Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to him, “Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.” <sup>39</sup> But he answered them, “An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. <sup>40</sup> For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so for three days and three nights the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth.

### **Reflection**

This passage reinforces the same lesson of Earth as God’s home, speaking of Jesus himself being housed for three days and nights in the earth before being resurrected. In this, the land holds both the memory of our transgressions and the grace of forgiveness. In this double role – as witness and as merciful mother – the earth teaches us that helping does always remove scars, but is a process of growing in love and comfort. WE are reminded that our relationship with the land holds all the pain of the world, but also teaches us how to go on, how to continue growing – how to heal.

I am reminded of our First Nations people and how the transgressions we’ve been a part of take seven generations of healing so that hurts can be undone, and new relationships forged, and trust regained. The First Nations people knew how best to live off the land, but “we” as settlers came from abroad, took their land, and then, to make matters worse, imposed Residential Schools, making our religion THE way they were to be, to “beat the Indian out of them”. This was a painful experience for First Nations children and their elders, and although we try to reconcile today, it is hoped that we never forget our past so that we can learn and never repeat it. The intention at the time may have been well intended, and the teachers may have done what they were “told” to do, or what they thought was right, but at some point, we learned we were wrong. We need to give back the land to the First Nations people. We need to heal our relationships. We need to help them secure potable water. We need to help them live on our shared land with resources that lead to health and well-being, instead of pain, suffering, addiction, and homelessness. It is our time to use the land for transformative action, and see the Holy Creator at work in our interactions in positive ways.

### **Questions for personal reflection**

What parts of your life need forgiveness from God? Big or small? Can you cry out to God and name your short comings in any area of your life?

How can you learn more about our relations with our First Nations people and our history with them, and how to move forward?

How do you live off the land? Do you garden? Do you shop at farmer’s markets, supporting local foods; or super markets supporting larger chains/countries?

## **Prayer**

O beautiful Gaia, creator of all the earth, help us to heal your broken world, and be the disciples you call us to be. Help us to look for positive relationships, to seek justice and love kindness and walk humbly with you day by day. Amen.



## **Week of September 14 – 20**

**1<sup>st</sup> Reflection: “Wilderness”** (Rev. Michael Collison)

**Read: Psalm 18: 6 – 19**

<sup>8</sup> Lament like a virgin dressed in sackcloth  
for the husband of her youth.

<sup>9</sup> The grain offering and the drink offering are cut off  
from the house of the LORD.

The priests mourn,  
the ministers of the LORD.

<sup>10</sup> The fields are devastated,  
the ground mourns;  
for the grain is destroyed,  
the wine dries up,  
the oil fails.

<sup>17</sup> The seed shrivels under the clods,  
the storehouses are desolate;  
the granaries are ruined  
because the grain has failed.

<sup>18</sup> How the animals groan!  
The herds of cattle wander about  
because there is no pasture for them;  
even the flocks of sheep are dazed.

<sup>19</sup> To you, O LORD, I cry.

For fire has devoured  
the pastures of the wilderness,  
and flames have burned  
all the trees of the field.

<sup>20</sup> Even the wild animals cry to you  
because the watercourses are dried up,  
and fire has devoured  
the pastures of the wilderness.

## Reflection

### *Prologue*

This is a long Psalm, 50 verses, only 78, 89 and 119 are longer. The heading is long too, which is actually an original part of the Psalm: *“For the director of music. Of David the servant of the Lord. He sang this song when the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul. He said:”*

You might be surprised to know that almost exactly the same words are in 2 Samuel 22 including the intro: *“David sang to the Lord the words of this song when the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul.”* There is a bit of ambivalence about King Saul in this passage, he is not counted as a specific enemy but is a special case, *“from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul.”* - even though Saul was trying to kill him! You could read about these historical events in 1 Samuel 18 - 24 and ch. 26 in order to see how this psalm is true to David’s experience at the time.

Basically, this Psalm is about King David’s recognition of God’s care and deliverance and how the wilderness demonstrates God’s care. Verses 1 - 30 speak about God’s personal deliverance when Saul was trying to kill him and verses 31 - 50 about God’s national care for the people of Israel during David’s reign.

The metaphors used to provide God’s protection were drawn from David’s life experience as a shepherd boy in the mountains of southern Palestine and later as a young man escaping danger as a fugitive for 20 years. David says in vs. 1 “I love you, Lord, my strength.” He wasn’t bitter about God apparent absence in his life for long periods, saying ‘well, it’s about time you delivered me.’ Instead he was grateful that the years of trouble had done something good and necessary in his life. So, he uses the metaphors of wilderness and nature to describe God’s care and protection. In verse 2 God is like a solid rock, a fortress, and deliverer. He is like a big cliff in which he could shelter from the storms, like a battle shield for protection, like a horn of an ox depicting the animal’s strength.

He pictures himself being strangled by the cords of death coiled around him. He felt as if he was being drowned by the torrents of water or like an animal being trapped in a hunter’s snare.

So, in his great distress what could he do? Maybe the more telling question is: What could you do? This is where we zero in on verses 6 - 19 where the wilderness is describes in concrete poetic terms how God is willing to come to the aid of those, who in their great distress call on him, as David did.

It is interesting in vs. 6 that the David in his distress called to the Lord for help, he says ‘from his temple he heard my voice.’ This was long before the building of Solomon’s temple, but the tabernacle was a model of the later temple. The important point is, God heard his voice. David says: “My cry came before him, into his ears.” This set the Lord God into action. You may think

your prayers are a small thing, but God, the great I AM, (Hebrew, Yahweh) is involved, and God cares for you more than you think.

In graphic retrospect these verses powerfully describe the way God comes to help those who call on him. He is the great God of creation, not mute to our cries. The image depicts the grandeur, grace and triumphant victory of the Lord. The elements are servants of God. The earth trembled and quaked, the mountains shook depicting the indignation of God and personal intervention and deliverance. Smoke rose from his nostrils, consuming fire erupting from his mouth depicts a volcano as the wrath of a just God against those who oppress his people. God's parting the heavens to come down depicts his coming to help those in need.

The Lord thundered from heaven (vs. 13). According to David God moved heaven, earth, sea and sky to bring deliverance. When David described help coming to him through earthquakes, thunderstorms, and lightning, he clearly used poetic images from the way God delivered Israel from Egypt, at Mount Sinai. (Read exodus 14). Significantly, we might say that David could only really see this once his deliverance was accomplished. In the midst of his trial David had many reasons and occasions to wonder where the delivering hand of God was. God's deliverance is always seen most clearly looking back; looking forward it is often only seen by faith. It was retrospective.

The OT often speaks of God's power revealed in nature's forces. (see Ps. 29; 77: 16 - 19; 104), but particularly at Mt. Sinai in the days of Moses. (Ex. 19: 16 - 25). When the law was given a volcanic eruption and storm seemed to give evidence of God's presence and power. The people of later generations often looked back to reflect on the revelation of God in nature as sign of the Lord's faithfulness and protection. That's what Jewish and Christian believers do today. The testament of creation is compelling and convincing.

When we pray, we should remember that we are calling the one who is creator and Lord of the universe. We should be filled with faith as we gaze upon the awesome power of a storm, lightning and volcano. But we also need to remember these are not the only ways God's majesty is made known to us. The still small voice' ( 1 Kings 19: 11 - 18). David discovered the Lord "reached down from on high and took hold of him and drew him out of the deep waters. He rescued me from my powerful enemy." The Lord was his support, "he brought me out into a spacious place, David declared. Trust that the Lord will do the same for you.

### **Why do you need this Psalm 18?**

- When the cords of death and depression choke you.
- When the snares of confusion confound you.
- When the torrents of self-destruction overwhelm you.

## Prayer

Gracious God, teach me to be humble and bring my eyes low when arrogant. Gracious one, turn my darkness into light. Lord, drew me out of the deep waters of despair. Lord, be my rock, my safe place, and my deliverer and lead me into a spacious place and may my faith mature as I see how your creation depicts your glory and grace in my life. Amen.



## **2<sup>nd</sup> Reflection: "Wilderness"** (Rev. Michael Collison)

**Read: Matthew 3: 13 – 4: 2** Jesus' Baptism and Wilderness Testing

<sup>13</sup> Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. <sup>14</sup> John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" <sup>15</sup> But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. <sup>16</sup> And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. <sup>17</sup> And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

**4** Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. <sup>2</sup> He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished.

## Reflection

Mr. Forester (not his real name) wanted to be baptized. I was the minister in my first posting in a two-point charge in Northern Ontario. He was a dedicated member of our church community and he came from a large Christian Brethren family. (see Plymouth Brethren) But Mr. Forester had never been baptized. He asked me "I'd like to be baptized' it's the right time for me, and it's time to be obedient to the teaching of the Lord.' Oh sure, I said, we'll do it this Sunday at Church. He steadfastly resisted, not in the United Church, not enough water! So, we found a Baptist church with a big tank! So, there we were sloshing around in the tube. Mr. Forester was joyous. He said that he should have obeyed the Lord's command much sooner, and he regretted waiting so long.

I felt like John the Baptist, Okay, well sort of! John the Baptist initially refused to baptize Jesus. Look at Matthew 3: 14: "John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me? Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it's proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented." Of course, the issue was not just baptism, it was obedience to the Lord.

Several years before, as a university student in Waterloo, Ontario I boarded with a lady, Maria, who attended a Mennonite Brethren church. She often would try to persuade me to be baptized by full immersion. I resisted, and I had a reason. I always treasured my infant baptism and still have my certificate. The minister had been a missionary in Korea in the 1930s and 40s.

Rev. MacMullin became a great friend of my parents and was a deeply spiritual and articulate theologian. But Maria did understand that obedience to the Lord was vital in the Christian's life. Her story is one of great perseverance amidst persecution. She grew up in a pious family in Southern Russia, experienced the Russian revolution, gave up her faith and became a teacher of atheism in the Soviet school system.

Then WW II came, the family of course was of German heritage. Her Father was drafted into the Red Army. She never saw him again until she was reunited with him in 1973. She had written for several years a weekly letter to President Leonid Brezhnev, who finally relented and released him from detention in Kazakhstan. Like many ethnic Germans, Maria fled with the German army across war torn Russia. She showed me a picture of her in a beer hall with SS officers. Sometimes you have to do what you have to do to survive. She rededicated her life to Christ and became involved in refugee re-settlement in war torn Austria.

Here's what we must face: Jesus obeyed the Father in everything. His submission took Him from the height of popularity to abandonment. It took Him from public adoration to solitary suffering. It took Him to Pilate's judgment hall, the terrible road to Calvary, and death.

When Jesus came up out of the water, like Israel coming through the water of the Red Sea, being given the Law confirming their status as God's sons and daughters. Jesus coming up from the water received God's wind, God's breath, God's Spirit in a new way declaring him to be God's Son - Israel - in - person. The dove symbolizes a new way of being. The Spirit will judge judgement itself, creating new way of making peace. Jesus will take God's judgment upon himself therefore making an end of it.

For those of us who in repentance and faith follow Jesus through baptism we will hear the Lord's voice, but the Lord will not always play the music we expect. As we learn to put away our own plans and submit to his, we may be granted moments of greater vision and glimpses of a greater reality. In the middle of this reality we will find our loving Father, affirming us as his children, equipping us by his Spirit so that our lives can be made ready for use.

We should not be surprised that after this great moment of clarity and vision, when Jesus sensed God's call and love that "Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry." (4: 1 - 2). The dry dusty Judean desert, with its oppressive heat, and red stone is called a wildland in Hebrew, Yeshimon as it dropped to the Dead Sea. It's a place of intense and stark beauty and grandeur, and a place to contemplate and draw spiritual strength. In the midst of this, the demonic whispering voice tests Jesus. It says forget your true vocation to be truly human, to be God's person and to be a servant to the world and its people. Forget your heavenly Father. Just worship me and I'll give you power, greatness like nothing you could ever dream about.

Jesus sees the trap. He answers with God's word, trust God completely. One writer says: "The flesh may scream for satisfaction, the devil himself may offer undreamed-of power; but Israel's

loving God, the one Jesus knew as Father, offered the reality of what it means to be human, to be a true Israelite, to be Messiah.” (‘Mathew for everyone’ N. T. Wright, p. 25)

The 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness parallels Israel’s forty years wandering in the wilderness of Sinai before entering the promised land. (Deut. 8: 2). Jesus’ wilderness wandering comes before he paves the way for humanity to enter the messianic age. The 40 days also reminds us of Moses’ time on Mt. Sinai (Ex. 34: 28) where he fasted and received the 10 commandments for the Lord. Jesus is the new Moses who brings to fulfillment the law. There is also a deeper parallel in the temptation story: Adam and Eve tempted in the Edenic Garden. Jesus is pictured as undoing the age-old effects of human rebellion against God. When Jesus rejected the way of the tempter, he was embracing the way of the cross.

The enticing whispers in the beautiful wilderness were designed to lead him away from his vocation to which his baptism committed him, the path of servanthood that would lead to suffering and death. Those temptations were specifically meant to stop him from redeeming Israel and the world.

Our temptations we all face every day and at critical moments of decision are profoundly different than Jesus faced, but they have exactly the same focus. They are not just to entice us to commit some sins, so we can say “the Devil made me do it!” No, it’s much more serious, they are trying to distract us, and turn us away from the path of servanthood. God has a glorious vocation for each of us. The enemy wants to get us off the track, and turn back to the old ways.

What do we do? We follow Jesus wilderness example. When you are in the wilderness, and you will be, store up scripture in your heart and learn how to use it. Keep your eyes on the Lord Jesus and trust him for everything in your life. Remember he has a mission for you, to bring God’s light into the world, and say no to the voices that call you back to the dark side.

### **Questions for personal reflection**

- When you hear the word wilderness, what does it mean to you?
- When have you encountered or experienced wilderness?
- What does it mean that Jesus went into the wilderness? How can we emulate Jesus’ journey and the lessons he learned there?

**Prayer:** “But Jesus often withdrew to the wilderness for prayer.” Luke 5: 16

A psalm of David. When he was in the Desert of Judah - Psalm 63

You, God, are my God,  
earnestly I seek you;  
I thirst for you,  
my whole being longs for you,  
in a dry and parched land  
where there is no water.

I have seen you in the sanctuary  
and beheld your power and your glory.  
Because your love is better than life,  
my lips will glorify you.  
I will praise you as long as I live,  
and in your name I will lift up my hands.

On my bed I remember you;  
I think of you through the watches of the night.  
Because you are my help,  
I sing in the shadow of your wings.  
I cling to you;  
your right hand upholds me.



## **Week of September 21 – 27**

**1<sup>st</sup> Reflection: "Forest"** (Rev. Bill Booth)

**Read: John 3: 1 – 16** Nicodemus Visits Jesus

**3** Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. **2** He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." **3** Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." **4** Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" **5** Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. **6** What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. **7** Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.'<sup>**8**</sup> The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." **9** Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" **10** Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

**11** "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. **12** If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? **13** No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. **14** And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, **15** that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

**16** "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.



## **Reflection**

This passage ends with the well known verse from John 3:16 which is often used to promote the idea of individual salvation. Perhaps this interpretation is exclusively valid if the verse is removed from its context. But the next verse reminds us that the “son” did not come to condemn but to save the World. The other point of clarity it isn’t about saving the “world” but saving all of Creation. The Greek word is Cosmos. The whole Creation is saved.

We are amid a time when both individual saving and worldwide saving is needed. Indeed, we can celebrate when an individual recovers from Covid-19 but what we yearn for is a salvation for the whole of Creation. Nicodemus comes to Jesus in the dark, seeking answers and clarity and Jesus gives him puzzles. It seems the scholar didn’t want change and salvation but a tidy answer. You must be from God but ...” There is always a but. Jesus interrupts before he can finish. What was Nicodemus going ask? Why do you not follow the rules? Why are you with us rather than these peasants? Jesus speaks metaphorically about rebirth, born of wind and spirit, and Nicodemus is stuck in the concrete. Rebirth, how can this be? Is he really saying, “I don’t need to improve or change!” Yet his change is part of the whole, just as a change in each of us is part of saving the whole of the Creation today.

In these dark times we come to the Holy One with our questions and the deepest answers are a call to change and become renewed.

## **Questions for personal reflection**

What in your life could you change that would help save the world?

Can you allow your heart to believe God’s promise to save the whole of Creation?

## **Prayer**

Holy One, I know you are within all and will save all but I yearn for simple answers. Help me to trust You in the dark times that I might find the light for me and for the world. In Jesus name, Amen.



## **2<sup>nd</sup> Reflection: "Forest"** (David Smith)

### **Read: Psalm 139: 13 – 16**

<sup>13</sup> For it was you who formed my inward parts;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.  
<sup>14</sup> I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.  
Wonderful are your works;  
that I know very well.  
<sup>15</sup> My frame was not hidden from you,  
when I was being made in secret,  
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.  
<sup>16</sup> Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.  
In your book were written  
all the days that were formed for me,  
when none of them as yet existed.

### **Reflection**

In this Psalm an ancient poet expresses awe and wonder at the gift of life itself, but delves deeper into the gift by acknowledging the intimate relationship possible with the Creator God. It is a relationship initiated and sustained by God! The author opens heart and soul in praise and adoration, "...for I am fearfully and wonderfully made," (vs 14) and humbly requests, "...search me, O God, and know my heart..." (vs 23) in complete devotion.

While visiting with friends of the same vintage (80+ yrs) a few days ago, someone mentioned the fact that we are a truly blessed generation. In her book, Grateful, Diana Butler-Bass quotes verse 14 noting that "There exists a unique beauty and dignity at the core of each one of us...." Surely, when we can quiet the noise of our busyness and the stress of our cares, we are open to viewing that beauty and dignity in "all our relations"! For, as another poet has said, "The world is charged with the grandeur of God!" (Gerard Manley Hopkins)

I find these verses, indeed the entire Psalm, to be a positive word of encouragement in these difficult times. Covid-19 limits our ability to enjoy close friendships, let alone community, but we can take the time, find the means and the focus, and celebrate the gift of life.

### **Questions for personal reflection**

1. Do you find these verses comforting? Encouraging?
2. How have you experienced the "grandeur" of God?
3. How do you celebrate the gift of life?

### **Prayer**

God, our Maker, in whom we live, and move, and have our being, we would echo the Psalmist. We receive your many blessings with recognition and delight; or we wander dissatisfied and forgetful. Open our hearts and minds to all your gifts of life And make us ready, with praise, to welcome every plain blessing. Amen.



### **3rd reflection: "Forest" (BONUS!) (Kate Jordan)**

**Psalm 139:13-16** repeated

#### **Reflection:**

On one of my morning walks, I passed a man with a camera pointed at.....what was his camera focussed on? The hydrangea blooms were decaying. The bush itself was far from beautiful. What on earth was so photo worthy? As I walked by, the light shifted. And then I saw what had claimed this man's attention. A spider web hung suspended between a bush and a tree. In the centre, a colourful spider waited. I wonder what the camera finally captured. Will the photo reflect how wonderfully made is the world in which we live? Will the picture remind those who see it, of God, the knitter, who not only knit us together in our mother's womb, but who has knit together all of creation. For creation is knit together; each piece dependent on the others.

Imagine that you have stepped into a forest. The trees are releasing chemicals that will restore you, body and soul. For the Japanese, this is forest bathing. Roots grip the soil, preventing erosion. Simultaneously, they share nutrients with neighbouring trees. Leaves rustle overhead. Nuts and seeds lie scattered underfoot. Plant life surrounds you...on the forest floor, and scaling the trunks of the trees. In this forest, animals find all that is required for sustenance. Life is abundant. Remove one element in the forest, and everything will change. Remove the trees from the earth, and our planet will have just 11 years of oxygen left for us all to share. One tree falls in the forest. Its trunk provides habitat....and feeds the soil. Sunlight streams into the space left by the tree. A young tree, waiting for the light, shoots upward. All is connected. How fearfully and wonderfully made is this world, and every part of it.

#### **Question to reflect on:**

Recall a time when the wonders of creation, including, perhaps, the wonders of your own body, filled you with awe. How has that affected your being?

#### **Prayer:**

Are you a knitter, God? Are you carefully choosing colours, textures, pattern – working all of it into an intricate whole? Your unending work of creation astounds us. A simple walk along forest paths reveals abundance and mystery, flashes of colour and music and deep shadowed spaces. Forests: earth's lungs; place of restoration; of fear; of discovery. Wonderful are your works, knitting God. With grateful hearts we say thank you for knitting us into this, your creation. Amen.



## **Week of September 28 – October 4**

**1<sup>st</sup> Reflection: “Rivers, Humanity, Cosmos”** (Rev. Bill Booth)

**Read: Matthew 28: 1 – 10**

**28** After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. <sup>2</sup> And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. <sup>3</sup> His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. <sup>4</sup> For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. <sup>5</sup> But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. <sup>6</sup> He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. <sup>7</sup> Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’ This is my message for you.” <sup>8</sup> So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. <sup>9</sup> Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. <sup>10</sup> Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

### **Reflection**

Rivers are a critical part of the balance of Creation. Humanity has had long relationships with rivers. They are our transportation routes and the source of food and water. Rivers are symbols of God’s involvement with Humanity in many religions. I have a small bottle of water from the River Jordan on my desk. The River Jordan is an important symbol in the story of the people of Israel and therefore in all three Abrahamic Religions. The Ganges is considered sacred by the Hindu Faith. Rivers have been critical in the development of the human world. The Thames, the Nile, the Mississippi, the Amazon to name a few and for BC it has been the Mighty Fraser. Rivers are the arteries of the Garden of Earth and civilization.

Yet all this human attention has brought harm to the Rivers; we have poured our human waste into the rivers, our chemicals, and fertilizers. We have dredged the channels, diked the natural flow, drained the water and with dams we have created lakes. The rivers of God’s Creation are hurting.

Fortunately, this is not the end of the story. Reading the above story, we need to be reminded that we are a Resurrection people. Resurrection is a powerful concept that should remind us to have hope in all situations. Jesus dies and the disciples despair and rivers dry up. But the stone rolls away and Christ rises to new life and the rains come to fill the rivers again. As Resurrection people we are called to hope for renewal of life. All rivers are redeemable.

### **Questions for personal reflection**

Can you remember a time on a river in a canoe, a boat or maybe in blow up tube?

Was it exciting? Peaceful?

What needs hope in your life? What needs to be resurrected into something new?

## **Prayer**

Resurrecting God, come to me with your Holy Spirit to remind me that there is still hope. Help me to have hope for rivers, hope for humanity, hope for my life. Rise up in my heart. Amen



## **2<sup>nd</sup> Reflection: "Rivers, Humanity, Cosmos"**

**Read: Genesis 8: 20 – 22; 9: 12 – 17** (Rev. Bill Booth)

Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. <sup>21</sup> And when the LORD smelled the pleasing odor, the LORD said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.

<sup>22</sup> As long as the earth endures,  
seedtime and harvest, cold and heat,  
summer and winter, day and night,  
shall not cease."

<sup>12</sup> God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: <sup>13</sup> I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. <sup>14</sup> When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, <sup>15</sup> I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. <sup>16</sup> When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." <sup>17</sup> God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth."

## **Reflection**

God promises and we respond. The Covenant of the Rainbow is not something Humanity earns but a gift from God. It is a promise to Creation, Humanity and every living creation on the Earth. God promises to never again destroy the Earth. "I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done." The rainbow in the sky is offered as sign of that promise.

We all know the impact of Humanity on Creation. This year there has been multiple heat records broken. In August the temperature in Death Valley reached 54.4 C (130F). Remember the wildfires in Australia in January and Hurricanes of recent years. We all know the many, many signs and issues of Climate Change. God may have promised to not destroy Creation, but Humanity has neglected to follow God's lead.

The most effective parenting technique is the one we don't directly control. We model our values to our children and grandchildren. Children observe and absorb our values. God promised in the Rainbow Covenant to not destroy. Humanity should live out this covenant promise as well. We are called to protect and save Creation.

**Questions for personal reflection**

What do you lament that has been lost within Creation in your lifetime?

What do you feel called to do help God fulfill the Rainbow covenant?

What are two things you do now, or you could do to help protect Creation?

**Prayer**

Dear God, You made a covenant with all living things and You included me in the promise. Thank you for the wonder of your Creation. Help me to find ways to protect the gift of this garden home you placed in our care. Amen.



## Week of October 5 – 11

1<sup>st</sup> Reflection: “Thanksgiving and Gratitude” (Penny Bartel)

Read: 1 Corinthians 13: 1 – 13

**13** If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup> And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup> If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

<sup>4</sup> Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant <sup>5</sup> or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; <sup>6</sup> it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. <sup>7</sup> It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

<sup>8</sup> Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. <sup>9</sup> For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; <sup>10</sup> but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. <sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. <sup>12</sup> For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. <sup>13</sup> And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

### Reflection

This passage is familiar to many of us. It is often used by Christians as a declaration of love and unity, included in church weddings all over the western world. However, unlike wedding vows, Paul does not introduce this passage to affirm something that already exists in the Corinthian Church. The passage seems to be presented as a way to introduce into the church an ethic that is necessary if they are to survive as a church community. The early church needed to learn to love their differences, to love in action, to build a community of positive relationships.

I personally don't find it hard to love the diversity in my society, to give and give and give as an expression of my love of others. Where I struggle is opening myself to receiving and in loving myself. **“If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.”** If I cannot receive the gifts from others, not loving myself, then I am doing them a disservice. I am also doing myself a disservice as I am not taking care of myself, opening myself to burn out, and generally not showing myself the love that I need in order to continue giving to others. Only when I pay careful attention to my own physical emotional, mental, and spiritual needs can I be, and remain, a joyful giver.

At this season of thanksgiving, it is important that thankfulness and gratitude are rooted in love – love for others, but also of self. We don't boast about our love of self, but we must exercise and model that form of love and gratitude so that others can see how grateful we are and how

we can live out our daily call of grateful, dedicated disciples that Paul preaches about. May you see in your life things to be grateful for, people to love, and then in return, love yourself.

### **Questions for personal reflection**

What are your spiritual gifts that you give to others?

How have you experienced love that:

- a. Always protects?
- b. Always trusts?
- c. Always hopes?
- d. Always perseveres?

### **Prayer**

Fill me Holy Spirit. Let every gift and all love be expressed in me. Help me to receive the gifts of others that I may continue to give to others. Thank you for all the gifts I have and received. Amen.



### **2<sup>nd</sup> Reflection: "Thanksgiving and Gratitude"** (Rev. Tracy Fairfield)

**Read: John 10: 10** I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

### **Song of Faith excerpt:**

Finding ourselves in a world of beauty and mystery,  
of living things, diverse and interdependent,  
of complex patterns of growth and evolution,  
of subatomic particles and cosmic swirls,  
we sing of God the Creator,  
the Maker and Source of all that is.

Each part of creation reveals unique aspects of God the Creator,  
who is both in creation and beyond it.

All parts of creation, animate and inanimate, are related.

All creation is good.

We sing of the Creator,  
who made humans to live and move  
and have their being in God.

In and with God,  
we can direct our lives toward right relationship  
with each other and with God.

We can discover our place as one strand in the web of life.

We can grow in wisdom and compassion.

We can recognize all people as kin.

We can accept our mortality and finitude, not as a curse,  
but as a challenge to make our lives and choices matter.



## **Reflection**

One of the things that I have come to appreciate most in life is that it is neither always “good” nor always “bad”. Sometimes, we may catch ourselves thinking of what life would be like if things were “simpler” for us. Occasionally, while being caught up in the moment, we may even wished severe hardships on others. Yet, thankfully, life is not pure happiness or pure sorrow for anyone. There is a certain duality in all our lives.

But at the same time, one could argue that all of life’s experiences are “good”; by taking all that we are handed and learning from it, we can find something positive in everything. It is because of this that I am hesitant to place life into two broad categories. All of life can be positive, and we can be grateful.

While taking all of life’s highs and lows and using them as learning experiences, there can be a new philosophy, one I find that life has new meaning for me, especially lately. These times of Covid-19 have been trying times. As we try to work together as a cluster to offer meaningful worship, and while I try to stay connected and supportive with my colleagues, we all feel the heavy burden on our shoulders of looking after our tired, lonely, isolated flocks. We can’t even gather easily as clergy to have our monthly lunch to chat over our trials and tribulations. “Zoom” just isn’t a good medium to truly “feel” and “express” our heartfelt emotions that pull us down, or even raise us up. However, I am still grateful that there is some way to be connected. From these chats we can move from unease and guilt and move towards a new understanding of “being” during these unprecedented times – times that we are unsure of when they will end.

This passage from “The Song of Faith” is about God the Creator who touches on how all things are related and how we should give our thanks to the Creator for all the opportunities presented to us. Our actions impact not only ourselves, but others as well. These “good” and “bad” experiences shape who we really are. And for that I am truly thankful.

## **Questions for personal reflection**

Think of times in which something negative happened and look for as many positives as you can from this experience.

## **Prayer**

Creator God, we give you thanks for the times we are able to think and talk about what is good in life. We give you thanks that we are part of you and one another. Help us grow in understanding of what you would have us do. Amen.



## REVERIE

The canopy's hues invoke the Muse  
with its many shades of green;  
As I silently praise these treasured days,  
that place me within this scene.  
It's like an open door to the forest's lore  
amid countless sights to explore.  
I look above and acknowledge the love  
that created this forest floor!

It's only a bush with rocks and dead logs  
And beetles and bugs, and soft muddy bogs.  
It's just an old wood that's long past its time,  
So what's all this fuss and emotional rhyme?

This forest breathes life into all it surrounds:  
It's flora and fauna, it's stones and it's grounds.  
And if you but listen to the breeze in the leaves  
you'll hear life's deep whisper  
and deep breaths you will breathe.  
'Cause the forest enables all life that we see,  
including the lives lived by you and me.  
So open your heart, let your mind be free  
to sojourn awhile, here,  
in Reverie.

By David Smith

