

In all, with all, for all

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Community Presbyterian Church - Rochester, Minnesota

18th Sunday after Pentecost - September 16, 2022

Texts: Genesis 1-2, Colossians 1:15-20, John 1:1-5, 9-14

To my online friends: check out the two videos for the complete experience.

“Creation” by James Weldon Johnson (video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d2nOk-50kXE>



SCRIPTURE READING Colossians 1:15-20

Look carefully at the image of the cross: Jesus is at the center; all around him are the parts of creation he holds in a single peace, even the earth itself.

Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God

was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

Special video: Cosmic Eye <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Are9dDbW24>

GOSPEL READING John 1:1-5, 9-14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it....The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a parent's only son, full of grace and truth.



For the past few weeks, we've been delving into our relationship with creation: How we experience God through oceans, and storms, and other wild things. How we belong to the same hallelujah chorus with the animals. Today we're making ourselves at home in the entire universe. We've seen and heard four stories of creation, four pictures of creation: how it's made, how it hangs together, how it's alive. Or do they answer different questions?

For example, James Weldon Johnson's poem "Creation" - what was God's idea in creating the universe? How do you feel about that God?

The Cosmic Eye with those time lapse videos zooming from the farthest out to the deepest in a few seconds. The universe is not only expanding outward, it's expanding inward. Where's God? Which story touches you in the deepest place?

The readings from the letter to the Colossians and from John's Gospel give us a whole different Jesus than the one we usually think of: sometimes called the Universal Christ. Does it make your head spin a little when the Bible shifts from Jesus, the carpenter's son/miracle worker from Nazareth with some admittedly really really good moves, to, now he's the source of everything forever? That takes his superpower to a whole new level. Don't forget, though, there's this kernel of pain at the heart of these stories, too: harmony only happens after his getting nailed, literally, by his enemies; even showing up as the Light, he went unknown or dissed by the same people who owed him everything—their lives, their whole existence.

We've been talking about the sacred ground of the burning bush and the critical warming of our sacred, God-begotten planet. When you hold those thoughts at the same time, how do you feel?

When I ask people, "What gives you the most delight?" it's amazing how often they say, "Nature;" it gets even more votes than grandchildren. When I ask what they love best about fall, most said: the colors, the trees, the beauty. Isn't it ironic that we are destroying what we love the most—what is most life-giving? Maybe; but it's not new. We crucified Jesus, too. The Bible writers knew nothing about global warming, but they did know about the world around them: they recognized an unbreakable link between God and nature. And they saw Christ as intimately connected to all life, even things we don't usually recognize as being alive: mountains and trees, sun, moon, and stars; snow and rain and hail: in all, with all, for all.



Now we can photograph impossibly small things: the picture is a microscopic image of amino acid crystals "thought to play a key role in enabling life on Earth and its emergence."¹ And we see that life, all life, is beautiful.

¹ Photo of Amino acid crystals ((L-glutamine and beta-alanine), photo by Dr. John Hart, *The Atlantic*. Quote from Wikipedia.

We are spiritual beings wearing animal bodies. We long for a divine realm where all sad, broken things are healed. We are creatures of clay cloaked in Light. We long for our children's children to know health and happiness in a free society on a flourishing planet. We are both body and spirit. We are mind and emotion. We are ashes, we are stardust. Can we know God through science as well as prayer? I believe so. But we need to see with new eyes. We need to move differently in the world. As the Thai proverb says, "Life is short. Walk slowly."

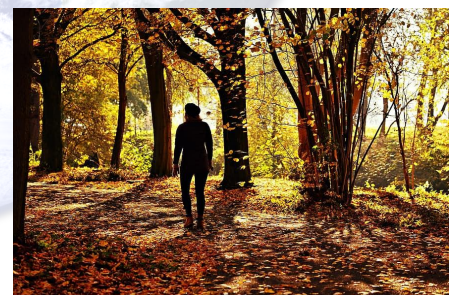


What does that mean, really? Why not try it? This afternoon, this week, try taking a Sabbath walk, not to get anywhere, just to let your soul catch up with you in a world that moves too fast. Walk slowly and silently. Let your senses lead. If your attention is caught by a leaf, a stone, a color, a birdsong, the smell of the leaves, stop there. Dally. Let the moment be what it is. Sniff, touch, look, listen. Let it whisper its secrets in your ear. Let it work its way into your heart. When you're ready, move on. When you feel like stopping, stop and pay attention. That's all. Afterward, notice what has happened to your body, your mind, even your mood.²

God created this earth; God lives and breathes and moves in every part of it, from the farthest galaxy to the smallest atom. It doesn't matter if you see it with the eyes of a scientist or through the eyes of a child. But be sensitive to its beauty. And look at it with love. You can't heal what you don't love. Yes, the world is broken and needs fixing. But rushing around oblivious to beauty doesn't fix a thing. And you cannot heal the whole world on your own, anyway. But you can help heal the part you're part of.

Close your eyes and fill yourself with beauty and, as you breathe in and out in prayer, listen to the Navajo blessing:

In beauty all day long may I walk.
Through the returning seasons, may I walk.
On the trail marked with pollen may I walk.
With dew about my feet, may I walk.
With beauty before me may I walk.
With beauty behind me may I walk.
With beauty below me may I walk.
With beauty above me may I walk.
With beauty all around may I walk.



² Adapted from Wayne Muller, *Sabbath*

COMMON PRAYER

Infinite One, throughout the ages, you have brought forth light and life.
All of the cosmos reflects your glory. Your love never ends.
You knew us before we took our first breath. You walk beside us with every step.
You invite us to receive grace upon grace.
Your Word, made flesh, shared our life on earth, revealing how faith can be made manifest.
You are healing and hope for all those in the shadow of fear.
You call us now to walk in the same way.
You are present in all that was, all that is, and all yet to come.
You are the foundation for our living and our dreaming.
Guide us through all the unexplored paths of our future.

Heart of heaven, soul of earth, in you we live and move and have our being. Hard as it is to wrap our minds around the universe within us and the universe beyond us, you are there, in everything, with everything, for everything, making it happen. Our few words of praise seem too pitiful a return, and yet, somehow, you want them—and so we offer them.

Forgive us when we blame you for the tragedies that we ourselves have brought upon this earth: the warming of the climate, the death of so many amazing and precious creatures; for our failure to protect the most vulnerable. Open our minds to see, and hear, and recognize the value of the non-human world.

We pray for all who suffer from covid, still, and other diseases; whose lives are precarious because of floods, and droughts, hunger and war. Help us find a way not just to help but to live in harmony with one another and in joyful obedience to you.

We ask especially for those close to us that you have given us as our special gift and task: for healing, presence, and consolation for all who are ill or in mourning; and for all we name in our hearts. Hear us and bless us, and teach us to pray,

Eternal Spirit, Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,
Source of all that is and that shall be, Father and Mother of us all,
Loving God, in whom is heaven:
The hallowing of your name echoes through the universe!
The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world!
Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!
Your beloved community of peace and freedom sustain our hope and come on earth.
With the bread we need for today, feed us.
In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.
In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.
From trials too great to endure, spare us.
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.
For you reign in the glory of the power that is love, now and forever. Amen.