

## Christ in Creation

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Third Sunday of Easter - April 23, 2023

Texts: Genesis 1:1-25; Colossians 1:15-20; John 1:1-4

Genesis 1:1-25 (adapted)

In the beginning when God began creating the heavens and the earth, 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. Then God said, 'Let there be light.' And there was light. And God saw that the light was good.

God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. And God said, 'Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.' And it was so. God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

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. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

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. 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.

And there was evening and there was morning, the third day. 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, to give light upon the earth.' And it was so. God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good.

And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day. 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.' 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.

God blessed them, saying, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.' And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day. 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. 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.

Colossians 1:15-20

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.

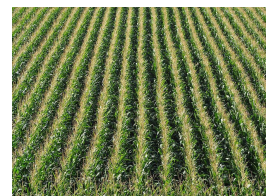
John 1:1-4

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.



Though I confess I left my hometown at the earliest possible opportunity, I'll always be grateful for my childhood in Pipestone. Mostly it was a typical small town in deep farm country. But hidden among the endless cornfields was the smallest Indian reservation ever created: one square mile, reserved to the Ihanktowon or Yankton Sioux for quarrying the sacred red rock for their peace pipes. Later the tiny island of native land was illegally occupied by squatters, bisected by a railroad, and carved up to house an Indian school modeled on the infamous Carlyle School. Still, a tiny portion of the virgin prairie was preserved. When the land became a national monument, little signs popped up here and there to identify plants and their native usage. What looked like untamed wilderness was actually a cornucopia of blessing: every growing thing had a purpose—and a soul.

Years later in college, I learned that a monoculture like a cornfield—or a green suburban lawn—is the most unsustainable ecosystem possible, requiring an endless infusion of pesticides, herbicides, and human labor to maintain. In other words, we have worked darn hard to destroy in a few years the land the original inhabitants tended for millenia. Every child can tell the difference between the enchantment of wild diversity and the infinite boredom of cornrows. Not that I have anything against corn, *per se*. Corn, too, has a place in the whole. And, after all, we got it from Indigenous people. It's just if corn is all you've got, you've got a problem.



Years later still, in seminary and beyond, I discovered a theological reason for the magic of the natural world: the complex dance of woods and prairies, rivers and seas, flying, creeping, galloping, swimming beings, is itself an incarnation of the divine. Genesis 1 sings the song of God's work in creation, and how it is good, good, all very good. Colossians 1 and John 1 define



the creative work of the eternal and universal Christ. ("Christ" is not Jesus' last name; it's his title.) Where the name Jesus identifies the man who lived and died in history, the name Christ evokes the green blade rising triumphantly from barren ground. Christ is the heart of life that regenerates and evolves endlessly. The Celtic Christians understood this from the beginning. To quote a sea-faring wanderer of the 2nd century (Pelagius):

"Look at the animals roaming the forest: God's spirit dwells within them. Look at the birds flying across the sky: God's spirit dwells within them. Look at the tiny insects crawling in the grass: God's spirit dwells within them. . . . Look too at the great trees of the forest; look at the wild flowers and the grass in the fields; look even at your crops. God's spirit is present within all plants as well. The presence of God's spirit in all living things is what makes them beautiful." Jesus' command to love your neighbor as yourself means loving not only your human neighbor but all the life forms around you. 'So when our love is directed towards an animal or even a tree we are participating in the fullness of God's love.'



The tragic corollary is that when we destroy this earth, our home, we destroy God's body. And the land itself mourns. Ecologist Andi Lloyd writes, "Our lives are held, connected, one to the other and all to God: we are bound up in a beautiful, multicolored, homespun fabric, deeply interconnected and interdependent. The land's mourning speaks simultaneously of a vision of the world as it ought to be—that beautiful fabric—and the truth of the world as it is: too much injustice and too little love fraying the threads that hold us all. The fabric that connects all of creation is badly torn."<sup>1</sup> And in our hearts we know it, don't we? We crucify Christ again.



How do we stand up for the lives we destroy when so much of our daily life depends on this shattering of the natural world? Fossil fuels to power our machines, rare metals to make our electronic devices, monocultures to feed us? For some reason, pointing fingers and nagging haven't stopped the destruction. We are so accustomed to climate disasters and the human tragedy that accompanies them that we only shake our heads and wait for the next headline. Why not turn instead to gratitude? After all, the more we appreciate something, the less we want it to go away, right? Awakening to the fragile beauty of nature is like wakening to the kiss of God. Your bulletin has a marvelous activity to do with grandchildren, with friends, or all on your own:

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<sup>1</sup> Andi Lloyd, *The Land Mourns Climate Change*, quoted in Richard Rohr, Friday 4/21/23

a gratitude nature scavenger hunt. But do this any way you like, dipping into the fascinating, energizing, soothing presence of the real world, giving thanks for all of it.

As you feel the blessing of nature over you, may you develop a deep thankfulness for the gifts of each element, earth, water, fire, and air. All of them are gifts of God who loves you. May you be moved to preserve them as you would preserve the children of your own body, or the blood and breath of your own life. Your love of them is also love for Christ embodied in creation.



As we sit for a while in silence, call to mind a place you love, a tree, or meadow, or even a flower bed in your own backyard. And give thanks. After a moment of silence, we'll share a brief video meditation.

📺 [Lingering in Nature — Richard Rohr's Daily Meditations](#)

### **Prayers**

God of infinite beauty, let your love sing to us in the snowflakes and the raindrops as well as in the sunshine and opening blossoms. May gratitude fill our hearts until they overflow with love for your beautiful, fragile world.

God of peace, we have heard so much alarming news of death and destruction, catastrophes of war and weather, that sometimes we would rather just turn our heads and focus on our own creature comforts. I do this myself. Teach us to pray as though the future depends on you; teach us to work as though it depends on us.

We pray for an end to the violence in Ukraine, Yemen, Israel/Palestine, and for the new breakout of terror in Sudan, pitting brother against brother. We pray for those closer to home who are exposed to floods this spring; and we pray for those who still suffer from events that have passed out of the headlines: for earthquake victims in Turkey and Syria, and hurricane and typhoon-stricken lands.

Lead us all in the way of true gratitude for all our many blessings as we pray:

Our Mother, our Father, giver of life, Holiness of Presence; may our hearts always bow to you.

Your Realm break forth, your delight blossom among us, making this earth your heaven.

Give us each moment our life, our breath.

Free us from being judged, as we free others from our judgments.

Guide us safely past our desires and attachments, and rescue us from the power of evil.

For the world is yours; the only real power is yours;

Creation's splendor is yours, in this present moment, and in eternity. Amen.