



Midway Christian Church  
Lenten Devotional  
2016

# Thank You

The Worship Team and the Green Chalice Team would like to thank everyone who contributed to this Lenten Devotional. The idea for the project started out as part of a paper for one of Heather's DMin classes but grew into a powerful spiritual tool for all of us to use during our Lenten journey.

One of the things that was usually heard in response to the request of writing a devotional was "I'm not a writer," to which Heather would respond, "Yes, but you are a person of faith and that is all that is needed for this project."

Thank you once again to all who shared their faith stories with us. Thank you once again to all who shared their experiences of creation with us. Thank you once again to all who opened their hearts and their minds to the life-transforming power of the Spirit of God. Thank you once again to all who had the courage to take the risk and put their feelings, their thoughts, their hopes for God's creation down on paper.

May these writings inspire us to continue becoming the people God calls us and created us to be.



## **Why Season of Creation for Lent?**

In the hymn, "God of the Sparrow, God of the Whale", the very first line reminds us that our God is not just the God of people. Our God is the God of all creation. Our God is the God of small and large creatures, the God of air, sea and land. Our God is the God of the rainbow covenant. In Genesis 9, 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: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, 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. 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."

Unfortunately, as co-workers of God in creation, humankind has not remembered our part of this covenant. We have used and abused the resources of the Earth. We have ignored the cries of pain and sorrow that fill the air, water, and land of God's creation. Now is the time for us to make a plea to God to help us save the earth, not only for ourselves but for those who are yet to come. Now is the time to envision all of humankind joining with God in a united effort to renew the face of the Earth.

It is our hope that during Lent, we will be "challenged to re-orient our relationship with creation. While the challenge may have been provoked by the current ecological crisis and a growing awareness of our place in the web of creation, the origins of our re-orientation lie deep in our Christian tradition, especially our biblical heritage. We are challenged to return to our biblical roots to rediscover our intimate connections with creation. We return to see ourselves again as part of the very Earth from which we are made." ([www.seasonofcreation.com](http://www.seasonofcreation.com))

## **Day 1: The Canticle of the Sun**

Most High, all powerful, good Lord, Yours are the praises, the glory, the honor, and all blessing. To You alone, Most High, do they belong, and no man is worthy to mention Your name.

Be praised, my Lord, through all your creatures, especially through my lord Brother Sun, who brings the day; and you give light through him. And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendor! Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars, in heaven you formed them clear and precious and beautiful.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind, and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather through which You give sustenance to Your creatures.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water, which is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire, through whom you light the night and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Mother Earth, who sustains us and governs us and who produces varied fruits with colored flowers and herbs.

Praised be You, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love, and bear infirmity and tribulation. Blessed are those who endure in peace for by You, Most High, they shall be crowned.

Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death, from whom no living man can escape. Woe to those who die in mortal sin. Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will, for the second death shall do them no harm.

Praise and bless my Lord, and give Him thanks and serve Him with great humility.

**Reflection:**

"In "Canticle of the Sun," Saint Francis of Assisi praises God for some of the wonders of the material world. Francis believed that everything in the natural world was a gift from God and, as such, deserved to be appreciated and valued. Because of this, Francis refers to the sun, wind, air, and fire as his brothers, and to the moon, stars, earth, water, and death as his sisters." (<http://www.loyolapress.com/canticle-of-the-sun-saint-francis-of-assisi.htm>)

This will be our main text throughout Lent. Each Sunday we will let the elements of creation be our guide. We will meet through our stories of faith and invite them to share with us why it is so important that we reconnect to all of God's creation.

**Prayer:**

Spirit of Christ, you breathe life in abundance in desert places where we often see only barrenness and waste lands. As you were lifted up for the life of the world, lift us up as caretakers of those places where life is hidden, vulnerable and precious in your eyes. Amen.

**Action:**

Instead of using paper or plastic bags when shopping this week, begin using cloth bags- they are an easy way to reduce the amount of paper and plastic in our landfills!



## **Day 2: The Rainbow and God's Covenant**

**Scripture:** Genesis 9: 12-17

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: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, 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. 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." 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: (by Beth Thompson)**

God created a covenant (relationship) with us and that relationship is a give and take. He wants us to turn to him and trust him. The covenant is with ALL people and ALL living things, now and future generations.

He created the flood because people were not in relationship with him. They were not living as the people he created them to be. God longs for a relationship with his people, meaning All his people. He wants us to care for his creation and others. We can trust God, he has made us a promise. A promise that He will always be there for us and with us. He has promised that even in the dark times, he is with us. He wants us to be in a covenant with Him. It's a two way street. If we trust Him, have faith in Him and Hope in Him and treat all living things with love, kindness and gentleness, he will make our lives fruitful. Fruitful to me does not mean blessed with good fortune but blessed with peace, goodness, kindness and a gentleness

in knowing that He is always with us. He wants a relationship and he reminds us with the rainbow that he is always with us, before the storms, during the storms and after the storms.

"I am in and with ALL things." Meaning he created us all in his image and is inside us. It's up to us to develop this relationship with Him and allow him into the depths of our soul to become the people he created us to be. Have faith in me, develop a relationship with me. My promise to you is steadfast, unconditional love. I will always be with you providing comfort and shalom. Even when clouds of darkness move into your life. If you allow me into the depths of your heart, you will see I will be with you, I will give you the strength, courage, and wisdom to see the light amongst the clouds.

It is a promise, for you and ALL living creatures that my love and presence is never ending. I'm always with you.

The rainbow is a reminder that he is the light in the darkness. If we trust in him he will get us through the storm.

### **Prayer:**

We confess that we do not always keep you in the center of our lives. And sometimes our relationship is one sided. We often times want from you but don't give to you. We sometimes only want a relationship with you when it's convenient for us. Forgive us Lord, stir within us your spirit and enter the depths of our souls that we may be the person(s) you have created us to be. Lift our heads to see the rainbow which reminds us you are with us before the storm, during the storm and after the storm, comforting us with your steadfast love every step of the way. Amen

### **Action:**

Buy rechargeable batteries. Recycle the ones you must dispose.



### **Day 3: All Creation Sings!**

**Scripture:** Isaiah 44:23 New Century Version (NCV)

Skies, sing for joy because the LORD did great things! Earth, shout for joy, even in your deepest parts! Sing, you mountains, with thanks to God. Sing, too, you trees in the forest! The LORD saved the people of Jacob! He showed his glory when he saved Israel.

#### **Reflection: (by Susan Shelton)**

Why should I sing for joy? Why should I shout and give thanks to God? There is so much sadness around me: illness, death, war, poverty, hunger. What about birth? Life? Family? Friends? Health? Eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord? This verse tells us exactly why we all should sing and shout. God has done great things. He has created all that is – the skies, the earth, mountains, trees, everything that lives and moves. He is instructing every part of creation to sing and shout for joy and to praise him for all He has done. Yet, God has done more than create all that is. He has saved His people through the sending of His only Son. God has redeemed His people. So, may we all join with all creation in praising our Creator and our Redeemer. Let us join in chorus and sing to the Almighty, the King of creation. Make His praise glorious.

#### **Prayer:**

Father, we come into your presence with praise and thanksgiving. We join with all creation shouting with joy, proclaiming your righteousness. You have blessed your people with the beauty of your magnificent creation all around us. You sent your Son to redeem your children. Instead of praising and thanking you for your gifts, we take them for granted. Forgive us. Draw us back into chorus with all creation to make Your praise glorious. Amen



## Action:

Take a walk among God's creation and praise Him for the beauty of the earth. Use these words from the hymn "All Creatures of our God and King" as inspiration:

### All creatures of our God and King

Lift up your voice and with us sing,  
Alleluia! Alleluia!  
Thou burning sun with golden beam,  
Thou silver moon with softer gleam!

#### Refrain

O praise Him! O praise Him!  
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Thou rushing wind that art so strong  
Ye clouds that sail in Heaven along,  
O praise Him! Alleluia!  
Thou rising moon, in praise rejoice,  
Ye lights of evening, find a voice!

#### Refrain

Thou flowing water, pure and clear,  
Make music for thy Lord to hear,  
O praise Him! Alleluia!  
Thou fire so masterful and bright,  
That givest man both warmth and light.

#### Refrain

Dear mother earth, who day by day  
Unfolds blessings on our way,  
O praise Him! Alleluia!  
The flowers and fruits that in thee  
grow,  
Let them His glory also show.

#### Refrain

And all ye men of tender heart,  
Forgiving others, take your part,  
O sing ye! Alleluia!  
Ye who long pain and sorrow bear,  
Praise God and on Him cast your care!

#### Refrain

And thou most kind and gentle  
Death,  
Waiting to hush our latest  
breath,  
O praise Him! Alleluia!  
Thou leadest home the child of  
God,  
And Christ our Lord the way hath  
trod.

#### Refrain

Let all things their Creator bless,  
And worship Him in humbleness,  
O praise Him! Alleluia!  
Praise, praise the Father, praise  
the Son,  
And praise the Spirit, Three in  
One!

#### Refrain



## **Day 4: God Always Gives More Than Enough**

### **Scripture: Matthew 7: 9-11**

Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

*This reflection and prayer was taken from "Called to Life, Called to Love" by Henri Nouwen.*

### **Reflection:**

God is a God of abundance, not a God of scarcity. Jesus reveals to us God's abundance when he offers so much bread to the people that there were twelve large baskets with leftover scraps, and when he makes his disciples catch so many fish that their boat nearly sinks. God doesn't give us just enough. God gives us more than enough; more bread and fish than we can eat, more love than we dared to ask for.

God is a generous giver, but we can only see and enjoy God's generosity when we love God with all our heart, minds and strength. As long as we say, "I will love you, God, but first show me your generosity," we will remain distant from God and unable to experience what God truly wants to give us, which is life - and life in abundance.

### **Prayer:**

Lord, help me to love you with all my heart, mind and strength, so that I can receive all the bounty of your love. Amen.

**Action:**

Think about eco-landscaping, using native plants in your garden. Depending on where you are in the country, maybe a rock garden with some cactus would be better, or a lawn of prairie grasses. For more information look online at: <http://www.ecolandscaping.org/>



## Day 5: Sabbath for the Land

**Scripture:** Leviticus 25: 1-24

The LORD spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying: Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: When you enter the land that I am giving you, the land shall observe a Sabbath for the LORD. Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather in their yield; but in the seventh year there shall be a Sabbath of complete rest for the land, a Sabbath for the LORD: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. You shall not reap the after growth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your unpruned vine: it shall be a year of complete rest for the land. You may eat what the land yields during its Sabbath—you, your male and female slaves, your hired and your bound laborers who live with you; for your livestock also, and for the wild animals in your land all its yield shall be for food.

You shall count off seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the period of seven weeks of years gives forty-nine years. Then you shall have the trumpet sounded loud; on the tenth day of the seventh month—on the day of atonement—you shall have the trumpet sounded throughout all your land. And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family. That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you: you shall not sow, or reap the after growth, or harvest the unpruned vines. For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you: you shall eat only what the field itself produces.

In this year of jubilee you shall return, every one of you, to your property. When you make a sale to your neighbor or buy from your neighbor, you shall not cheat one another. When you buy from your neighbor, you shall pay only for the number of years since the jubilee; the seller shall charge you only for the remaining crop years. If the years are more, you shall increase the price, and if the years are fewer, you shall diminish the price; for it is a certain number of harvests that are being sold to you. You shall not cheat one another, but you shall fear your God; for I am the LORD your God.

You shall observe my statutes and faithfully keep my ordinances, so that you may live on the land securely. The land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and live on it securely. "Should

we sow or gather in our crop?" I will order my blessing for you in the sixth year, so that it will yield a crop for three years. When you sow in the eighth year, you will be eating from the old crop; until the ninth year, when its produce comes in, you shall eat the old. The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants. Throughout the land that you hold, you shall provide for the redemption of the land.

### **Reflection: (by Jack Morgan)**

I have always wondered about this Bible passage. It seems to be a great idea, similar to the ways of our native Indians—the earth belongs to its maker, we cannot own it, but God allows us to use it for our needs. We must care for it so it will continue to serve us, and not be used up by our use. I have never heard a sermon on this Scripture. Typical of humans, we conveniently ignore what seems hard to do or not according to our ideas. It is certainly clear and specific and not in need of interpretation, other than how do you get people to do this? I wonder if anyone ever gave it a try. Jubilee seems like a great idea, bringing everyone back to where he started and gathering the clans together no matter where life has scattered them. And no cheating—that's a refreshing idea.

Since this is part of the Jewish sacred writings, and since many Jewish people of the time after the arrival in the promised land spent their lives studying the scriptures and interpreting them at great length, writing books on every aspect, even to the number of steps one could take without violating the Sabbath for instance. But as far as I know, not a word of the Sabbath of the land. Typical of humans to ignore the hard part while professing to live by every word of God.

### **Prayer:**

God whose voice I hear in the winds and whose breath gives life to all the world: hear me. I am one of your many children. I need your strength and wisdom. Let me walk in beauty. Make my hands respect what you have made. Make me wise, so that I may know the things you have taught your people, the lessons you have hidden in every leaf and rock. Amen.

### **Action:**

Pick up a piece of trash and throw it in the nearest garbage can. If it can be recycled, find a recycling bin to put in it.

## **Day 6: Creation Awaits its Release!**

**Scripture:** Romans 8: 18-25

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

### **Reflection: (by Wilda Caudle)**

Paul writes that his sufferings here on earth are not worth comparing with the glory of Heaven that will be revealed to us when Jesus Christ returns. The present text sets forth how Creation was subjected to the toil of frustration by Adam's rebellion in the Garden of Eden. This was not God's will but a result of Adam's rebellion against God's command to not eat of the Tree of Life. Creation awaits its release from the bondage to decay and is illustrated as a land of parched withered grass where birds and animals perish because those who live there are wicked and its people cry out "He will not see what happens to us".

Present day Creation isn't much different from Creation in the subject text. Creation is subjected to the toils of famine, drought, floods, earthquakes, and tsunamis. Its animals and birds are facing extinction due to mankind's greed. Natural

resources of clean water, clean air, wood, coal, and, oil are in limited supply due to mankind's failure to harvest only according to his basic need. Many people have hardened their hearts against God and often wonder "what is going to become of me now"? So, what is the difference between the time of our text and present day? The main difference is hope. We as Christians have hope for tomorrow in salvation which affords us eternal life after our earthly death. We received this gift upon our acceptance of Christ as our personal Lord and Savior. The Holy Spirit is our companion guide as we eagerly await our journey to Heaven with Christ and all of the saints who have gone on before us. What is God calling us to do?

First, we are to share the message of salvation with others. How do we do this? Well, start by loving those around you right where you are. Get to know your neighbors. Have a conversation with your neighbor, a real conversation. Share a meal with him, her, them. Mow the lawn of the elderly lady down the street. Invite the single mom and her child over for pizza and board games. Attend the soccer game of the little boy next door - you might be the only person who attends his games. Once you get to know them then you can begin the conversation about Christ. They are already watching how you live.

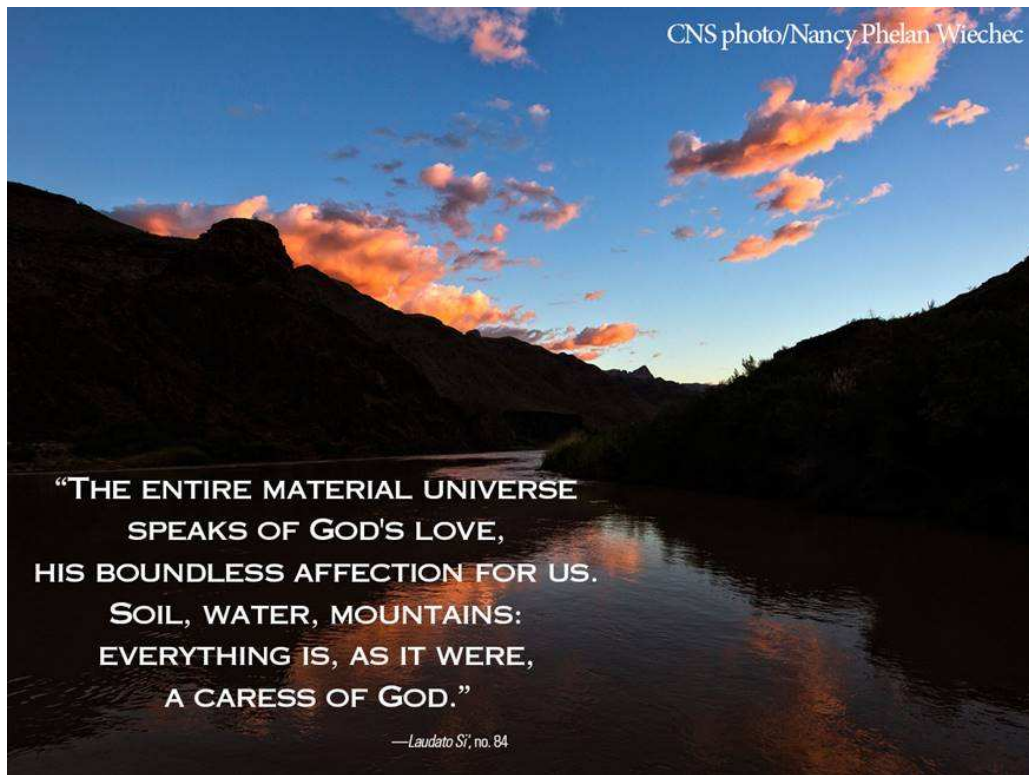
Second, we are to be good stewards of Creation. Be a voice for the protection of Creation - take a stand in your community, at the state, and even national level. Participate in recycling programs, take steps to protect green space, support local farmers markets, take steps to combat noise/light pollution, and/or participate in a community extension group to help educate others regarding protecting the environment.

### **Prayer:**

God of the mountains, God of the wilderness, all creation is yours. All creatures long to be brought into your holy presence. Through Jesus you promised to make your people the means of blessing. May we also share in that holy calling, as caretakers for all creation. Amen.

**Action:**

Make your own multi-purpose cleaning solution. Mix 2 Tbsp. baking soda with 1 pint warm water. Add into a spray bottle with a splash of vinegar to cut grease.





## Day 7: Wings Like Eagles

**Scripture:** Isaiah 40: 28-31

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. 29 He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

**Reflection: (by Phil Burchell)**

Sometimes we forget how small we are in comparison to creation, believing we are the center. We also forget that our God is the creator of all the earth and everything in the universe. We were created with God's own breath and God continues to create each day of the seasons.

How can we show gratitude? We only need to remember what he has done in our own lives. Attempting to make this world a just and forgiving place, where everyone is treated with respect and dignity.

We've also been given the responsibility to care for God's creation. This task is one that requires us to feed, clothe, and provide shelter to the needy. Also taking steps to protect the waters that sustain all life. Thus reducing the amount of pollution we create.

These tasks may seem impossible but God will give us the strength when we grow weary and lift us up when we feel defeated. Thanks be to God!

**Prayer:**

Heavenly God, the morning stars sing together, the heavens rejoice, the earth is glad and the people of earth chant to you a new song. Joy pervading all the earth comes from you. You biddest the sun to beam over the smiling earth and you light up our hearts with gladness. Whenever our souls rejoice may we learn to feel kinship with all your natural servants and grow aware of your gentle grace flowing within us. Admit us into your presence in times of joy, O heavenly God. We seek you that our joy may be hallowed with you, that our happiness may be deepened, that we may join the chorus of the universe, lands and oceans, the stars and infinite space in joyous adoration. Amen.

**Action:**

Bring into your home or office a small plant to add to your table or bookshelf. You can also ask for a cutting from someone else's houseplant. "Plant people" love to share. Just snip off a section of the plant with several leaves on it, making your cut near the main branch of the plant so there is plenty of stem on the cutting. Put the cutting on your windowsill in a jar of water. Once some good long roots grow, it'll be ready to plant. Then you can plant the cutting in a small pot, using potting soil or dirt from your yard.



## **Day 8: Wisdom in God's Creation**

**Scripture:** Proverbs 3:19-20

By wisdom the Lord founded the earth; by understanding He established the heavens. By His knowledge the deep fountains of the earth burst forth, and the clouds poured down rain.

### **Reflection: (by Lisa Savage)**

Wisdom and understanding work together, in unison. To me, wisdom is possession of Truth. Wisdom does not and cannot change. However, it is possible to know, or have, wisdom and not do anything with it. Understanding is knowing what to do with the wisdom you possess. Understanding will put action behind your wisdom and create results. These verses are telling us how God formed the earth and the heavens. His wisdom knew the truth, His understanding put His plan into effect. Then He took action based on what He knew and understood.

When we hear wisdom, understand it by faith, accept its meaning and take action with what we possess, that is when wisdom is activated and our lives begin to change based on eternal truth.

God is more simple than many of us make Him out to be. The earth was formed, the heavens established, a permanent watering system installed, both from above and below. I'm so grateful for our wise and understanding God, who founded the earth and made the heavens, providing us with all that we need.

Actions I take to become more centered in Creation...

Being an avid gardener/farmer I never feel closer to God than when I'm walking or working in my garden. I like to pray as I stand at its threshold and invite God to join me in my work. I ask Him to teach me through his creation all that He'd like me to

know and understand. He shows me so much when I get quiet and allow him to speak. The eyes of my heart are opened and I'm able to glean so much from the seeds that I sow, or the birds who visit and even the weeds that I pull! I've learned that God is so eager to give us wisdom when we ask. He most often takes my breath away when I am able to understand His Truth. His word is organic. Its alive, just like the things that grow in my garden, or, like my soil is alive with microorganisms that I cannot see. While I can't physically see Him, I sense His presence and feel He is pleased to join me and teach me and feed me.

### **Prayer:**

Center and source of all good, nothing that exists escapes the embrace of your love. Help us to value each and every creature as you value them. By your life-giving Spirit, empower us with the wisdom and courage to sustain in being all that belongs within your great web of life. Amen.

### **Action:**

Find your local farmer's market. Buy fruits, vegetables and breads from local producers to support your local economy and remove the energy wasted in transporting food products long distances. To find a market



near you, look on the web at Farmer's Market Online: [www.farmersmarketonline.com](http://www.farmersmarketonline.com). Or to find a local food cooperative, in any of the 50 states use the US Food Co-op directory [www.purefood.org/coopindex.htm](http://www.purefood.org/coopindex.htm)

## **Day 9: His Work is Done in Faithfulness**

**Scripture:** Psalm 33: 4-9

For the word of the LORD is upright, and all his work is done in faithfulness. He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD. By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth.

He gathered the waters of the sea as in a bottle; he put the deeps in storehouses. Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him. For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.

**Reflection: (by Carole Munson)**

Tossed away at the end of a lane next to the highway a red patterned upholstered arm chair rests. Months have passed with wind, rain, finally snow falling on this rejected item with not even the scavengers taking claim. Farther up the road for months a lone yellow Lab was seen purposefully, carefully traveling along the white line of the highway. I no longer see the dog, but the bright patterned chair remains. Lent has come again with the same forty days leading to the finality of Holy Week. Where do we see ourselves in this season? Lost, neglected, feeling faded and discarded, tossed away, or are we lying in wait to be claimed? I miss the surprise of that dog's purposeful gait leading it onward. Where? That chair is a blight left by man with disregard for God's creation. Even the weeds of spring are His and deserve more respect.

**Prayer:**

Help us keep our feet on a path of respect during this "Season of Creation" while we reflect on the treasure that can so easily be lost without our careful attention and action. Amen.

**Action:**

Don't forget to take out the garbage. Separate carefully with proper disposal, but best of all recycle respectfully.

## Day 10: Live Each Day to Its Fullest

**Scripture:** Matthew 6: 25-33

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

*The following prayer was contributed by Gertrude Johnson to the 1975 Midway Christian Church Lenten Devotional. Its words still hold true today.*

**Prayer:** Live Each Day to the Fullest                      By. S. H. Payer

Live each day to the fullest. Get the most from each hour, each day, and each age of your life. Then you can look forward with confidence, and back without regrets. Be yourself-but be your best self. Dare to be different and to follow your own star. And don't be afraid to be happy. Enjoy what is beautiful. Love with all your heart and soul. Believe that those you love, love you. Learn to forgive yourself for your faults, for this is the first step in learning to forgive others. Listen to those whom the world

may consider uninteresting, for each person has in himself, something of worth. Disregard what the world owes you, and concentrate on what you owe the world. Forget what you have done for your friends, and remember what they have done for you. No matter how troublesome the cares of life may seem to you at times, this is still a beautiful world...and you are at home in it, as a child is at home in his father's house. When you are faced with a decision act as wisely as possible—then forget about it. The moment of absolute certainty never arrives... Act as if everything depended upon you, and pray as if everything depended upon God.

**Action:**

Reduce the amount of processed foods that you eat. Try to cook from scratch, paying attention to the foods you eat, where they come from and how they taste. It takes more time to cook from scratch but it is healthier, better for the environment and immensely more fun. (Also look to limit heavily packaged foods.)



## **Day 11: Created in the Image of God**

**Scripture:** Genesis 1: 24-2:4

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. Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." 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. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation. These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.



## Reflection: (by Karen Murphy)

If we are created in God's image and told to subdue and hold dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air and every living thing that moves on the earth, how should we perform these duties? What does this mean?

Those words : "subdue and hold dominion." Difficult words to comprehend.

I cannot accept that God intended us to drive species of animals to extinction, destroy the rainforest, strip mine the tops off of the mountains, or factory farm cows, pigs and chickens in inhumane ways.

I prefer to think of the definitions of these words in the following way. I like to think of subdue as to quiet, to soothe and calm, rather than to defeat or enslave. I like to think of 'holding dominion' as a benign rule. A ruler that is more like a caretaker than a dictator.

We should be gentle caretakers of the fish, birds, animals, creeping things (yes, even spiders) and the plants of the earth.

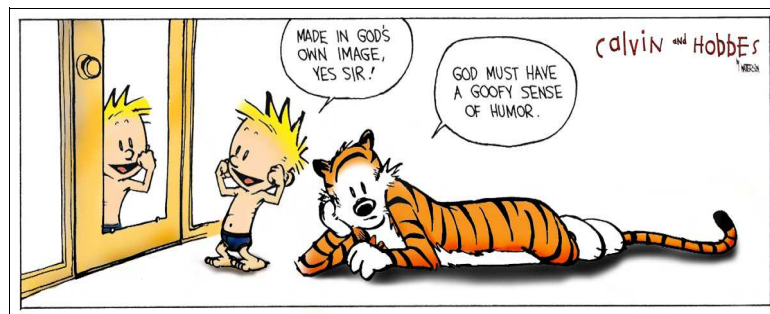
God has blessed us and given us these incredible responsibilities. I pray that we are up to the task.

## Prayer:

Sovereign of the universe, in their infinite variety and beauty all creatures do indeed belong to you, and you need nothing from us. Yet in your love you share all your creation with us, for our being, for our sustenance, and for our delight. Through the faith of Jesus deepen our gratitude for your unfathomable mercy. Amen

## Action:

Climb up to a high place and look out and see the view.



## **Day 12: Praise the Lord!**

### **Scripture:** Psalm 148

Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise him in the heights! Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his host! Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars! Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens! Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he commanded and they were created. He established them forever and ever; he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed. Praise the LORD from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling his command! Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars! Wild animals and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds! Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth! Young men and women alike, old and young together! Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his glory is above earth and heaven. He has raised up a horn for his people, praise for all his faithful, for the people of Israel who are close to him. Praise the LORD!

### **Reflection: (by Emily DeMoor)**

Psalm 148, which begins with praise and ends with praise, lifts us out of ourselves and into the song of Creation above us, around us, and under our feet. The Psalm is one of gratitude, from beginning to end, inviting us to join Creation in praising the Creator. When reading this Psalm, the recurring words "Praise the Lord!" jump out as an instruction. They do not read as a command, but rather as a natural, expressive response that comes from deep within all of creation; a statement of what is, at all times, occurring. And, as we read or listen to the words of the Psalm, we may feel praise welling up

within ourselves, as the Spirit of God within us meets the Spirit of God outside of us in one blessed song of Creation, for the Psalms were meant to be sung, or even shouted, as in Psalm 47:1. We are invited to join the chorus of Creation, knowing that we are not separate from, but a part of the web of life, the Body of Christ, for, as astrophysicist Brian Swimme suggests, matter is bio-spiritual. All of Creation reveals and revels in the Creator. The Gaia hypothesis, postulated by scientists James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis in the early 1970s, provides insight into Psalm 148 as it depicts Earth as functioning as a single organism that maintains homeostasis, and thus the conditions necessary for the survival of life. Even without contemporary scientific understandings in place, medieval mystic St. Hildegard of Bingen intuited the organic unity of Creation as she painted her mandalas of "The Cosmic Egg," "All Beings Celebrate Creation," and "Cultivating the Cosmic Tree."

Astronauts who have seen Earth from space marvel at its beauty and majesty and come to new realizations about what it means to live in harmony within Creation; to understand the words of the late Rev. Thomas Berry, who taught that Earth is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects; to visually come to terms with the narrow fragile and endangered band of atmosphere



surrounding the planet, which keeps us alive and protects us from the harsh conditions of space. (For more on this watch <http://www.collective-evolution.com/2013/10/07/strange-things-are-happening-to-astronauts-returning-from-space/> from 7:09 – 10:00.) Everything is at stake. Will the song of praise in our tiny place in the vast universe be silenced through our ignorant and abusive actions toward Creation?

The structure of Psalm 148 also serves as a word of instruction as the psalmist first looks up and out into the highest heavens, the realm of angels, and then to the landforms and creatures that live in the waters and soil of Earth. Humans come last, not first, in this song of praise. They are not separate from nor above Creation.

In this Psalm there is yet another instruction – “Let them praise the name of the Lord.” The word “let” is key here. According to the writings of Deep Ecologists, every created thing has an intrinsic right to exist and to fulfill its destiny according to its own nature and purpose. The psalmist conveys that the inherent nature of all of Creation is to give praise, in its many and varied voices. In his *Summa Theologica*, St. Thomas Aquinas wrote:

[God] brought things into being in order that His goodness might be communicated to creatures, and be represented by them; and because His goodness could not be adequately represented by one creature alone, He produced many and diverse creatures, that what was wanting to one in the representation of the divine goodness might be supplied by another. ...and hence the whole universe together participates the divine goodness more perfectly, and represents it better than any single creature whatever.  
(<http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1047.htm>)

This theology can be seen as an argument for biodiversity. For, according to Thomas Berry, to eliminate species is to eliminate modes of divine presence. Our inner world is shaped by our outer world, thus to diminish the grandeur of the natural world is to diminish the grandeur of our souls. Berry explains, “if the outer world is diminished in its grandeur, then the emotional,

imaginative, intellectual, and spiritual life of the human is diminished or extinguished" (1999, p. 200). He elaborates:

Without the soaring birds, the great forests, the sounds and coloration of the insects, the free-flowing streams, the flowering fields, the sight of the clouds by day and the stars at night, we become impoverished in all that makes us human. (p. 200)

To destroy the flora, fauna and life systems of the planet through climate change is to desecrate the holy and destroy our own lives on every level. It is to dampen and perhaps eventually silence the glorious song of Creation.

In praise there is gratitude, and thus Psalm 148 is a hymn of thanksgiving and appreciation as well as an affirmation of the communion of all of Creation. Every line rings with gratitude and celebration! For, He has raised up a horn for his people, Praise for all his faithful, For the people of Israel who are close to him. (Psalm 148:14).

Every aspect of creation, including "fire and hail, snow and frost" (148:8), give praise according to their distinctive nature, expressive powers, and God-given attributes.

The following lyrics by songwriter Peter Mayer's might be heard as a present day continuation of Psalm 148 in its expression of gratitude and appreciation:

This morning, outside I stood and saw a little red-winged bird, shining like a burning bush, singing like a scripture verse. It made me want to bow my head. I remember when church let out how things have changed since then -- everything is holy now. It used to be a world half-there; heaven's second rate hand-me-down. But I walk it with a reverent air, cause everything is holy now.  
(I invite you to listen to the entire song at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KiypaURysz4>.)

When contemplating this Psalm, the image of the repentant Mary Magdalene, wiping the feet of Jesus with her hair, comes to mind, and I wish that I could wipe clean my own sins, as well as the oil spills, pollution, toxic waste, and the collective sins of humanity that threaten the livelihood of Creation. In the case of climate change, we cannot go backwards in time and prevent it, but we can repent, ask for forgiveness, and take actions that will reduce our future impact on the planet.

Reference:

Berry, T. (1999). *The great work, our way into the future*. New York: Bell Tower.

### **Prayer:**

O Creator, Source of Life, Fire of Love, I am sorry for the times that I have contributed to the silencing of Creation's song of praise through my ignorance and abuse of Creation. I am sorry for my complicity in the destruction of your land, water, flora, fauna, and life systems, even as I try to extricate myself from the systemic abuse of the natural world. I have not always been mindful of the gift of your presence in nature nor honored and celebrated diversity in all its myriad and wondrous forms. I have not always been mindful of how my actions contribute to climate change nor how carbon footprint affects others, especially the poor, throughout the world; how I live my life at the expense of others and the planet. I have not done enough to change my own life and the structures and systems of society that continue to oppress others and Creation. I have sat idly by, feeling overwhelmed and hopeless, while reading about the poisoned waters of Flint, Michigan, the natural gas leak in California, the continued effects of the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, and the many environmental disasters throughout the world. I have sometimes grown jaded in my view and subdued in my own life song of praise. Show me where and how my knowledge, gifts and skills

can be best used on behalf of your sacred Creation. And give me the wisdom and strength to keep my own inner fire burning gently, your way. Amen.

**Action:**

Calculate our carbon footprint: <http://www3.epa.gov/carbon-footprint-calculator/> or <http://coolclimate.berkeley.edu/calculator> (there are many other websites as well)

Discover who is under our carbon footprint.



## **Day 13: Choosing Wisely**

**Scripture:** Isaiah 24: 3-5; 11b-13a; 19-20

The earth shall be utterly laid waste and utterly despoiled; for the LORD has spoken this word. The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes 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. All joy has reached its eventide; the gladness of the earth is banished. Desolation is left in the city, the gates are battered into ruins. For thus it shall be on the earth and among the nations, The earth is utterly broken, the earth is torn asunder, the earth is violently shaken. The earth staggers like a drunkard, it sways like a hut; its transgression lies heavy upon it, and it falls, and will not rise again.

### **Reflection: (by Janet Mullins)**

Genesis describes the creation of the Earth, our home for the human experience. With more than 7 billion people sharing the planet with all of God's creation, there has never been a more critical time to consider our responsibilities as caretakers of the Earth. The prospect of the Earth lying polluted "under its inhabitants" makes clear the role we must play in creation care.

On a daily basis, there is no greater evidence of the Creator than an appreciation of nature around us. Appreciation, compassion, and gratitude regarding the natural world can feed our spiritual growth and serve as a reminder of our Creator.

As people of faith, we must uphold the covenant to care for the Earth, and do it daily. The choices we make about food, housing, transportation, and other everyday aspects of living impact creation. We must choose wisely. It is our responsibility.



### **Prayer:**

Good God, Creator of the world, draw us into prayer and celebration as we gather to remember the gifts of your earth and the stewardship you have entrusted to us as tillers and tenders in your image.

We know that in the gathering of the people, power is present among us; your Holy Spirit stirs and moves and gives us courage to remember that all good gifts come first from you.

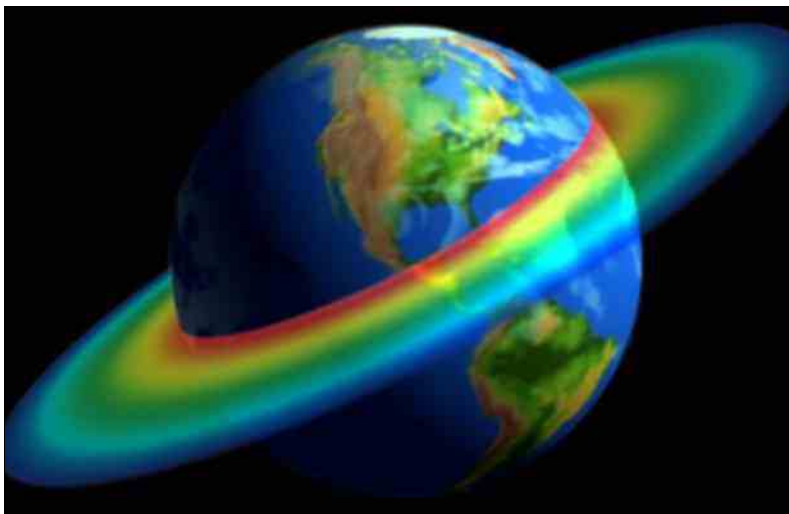
We praise you for this creation in the words of the Psalmist, sung by our ancestors in faith for generations: "God speaks: the heavens are made; God breathes: the stars shine. God bottles the waters of the sea and stores them in the deep. All earth, be astounded, stand in awe of God." Keep us faithful to this gathering in faith and "bless this vine your right hand has planted." Now and forever, Amen.

### **Action:**

Join with other individuals and organizations in **acting** on behalf of a sustainable future:

WorldWatch Institute: <http://www.worldwatch.org/>

Union of Concerned Scientists Action Center: <http://www.ucsusa.org/action-center#.VqogBblrLIU>



## **Day 14: I am the Vine**

### **Scripture:**

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."

### **Reflection: (by John Batts)**

People spend so much time and energy focusing on aspects of their lives that do not matter in the grand scheme of things. Sometimes we may spend time focusing on what to fix for dinner or arguing over what to watch on television. Meanwhile, with all of these other distractions, we do not spend enough time focusing on our spiritual lives.

Once we know what is truly important in our lives, spiritually, emotionally and physically, then we can prune away those things that do not matter. God will bless our work for the important issues that remain. This does not mean that we will get everything that we want or desire. But when we work to show compassion and love to all of the world, our efforts will be rewarded.

**Prayer:**

Dear God,

May you direct us to remove those objects, people and ideas from our lives that stand in our way from serving your creation. The world needs cultivation and care. We realize we are to act as the caretakers of this earth that you gave us. As we do your work in this world, may you bless our labor that helps grow and nurture others. Guide us to avoid those actions which hurt our environment and strengthen us to heal your creation. Amen.

**Action:**

Take 15 minutes of your day to evaluate what can be pruned from your life to become closer to God. It could be de-cluttering a space in your home to make a sacred space or free a few minutes more in your day to meditate and/or prayer to make your life more spiritually fruitful!



## **Day 15: Heaven on Earth**

**Scripture:** Isaiah 11: 6-9

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

**Reflection: (by Sandy Gruzesky)**

This is Heaven on Earth! But how can this be? The actions of all of the creatures in this scripture are opposed to their very nature. Those creatures, whose very nature compels them to subdue and consume others have no desire to do so! Those creatures, that on this earth, have an immediate fear and flight response have no fear! The behaviors of all the creatures in this scripture are opposed to the very nature of how they were created to be... except for the child. The very nature of this innocent soul is not to subdue, nor flee in fear, but to be open to the realm of possibilities life has to offer and to live in the beauty of it. The little child's life experience has not yet exposed him or her to dominance and fear, so the child is not poisoned by those influences.

Can we be open to the possibility that, despite our life experiences, that God's presence in our lives can eliminate our perceived need to dominate others, human or nonhuman? Can we trust God enough to listen to God's guidance regarding when to be a dominant influence on a situation and when to refrain? Can we accept the strength of God's presence to eliminate our fears and free us to live joyfully and childlike in the beauty of God's creation?

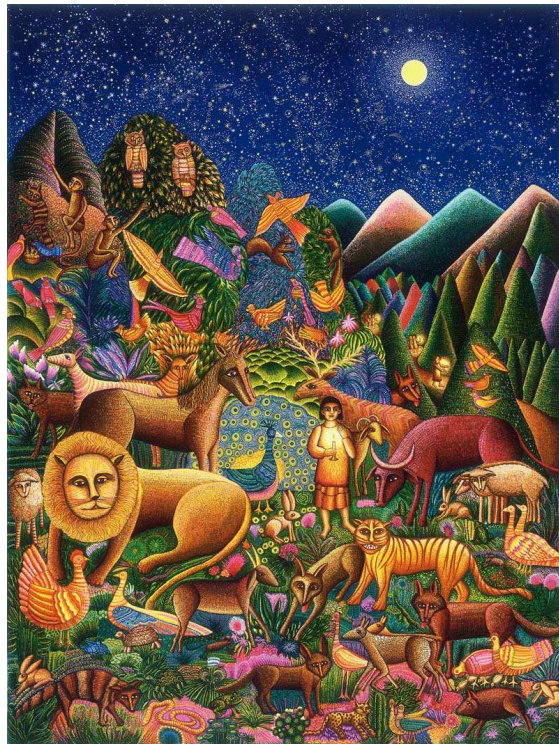
**Prayer:**

God of all creatures, we submit to you our lives, that you may eliminate our unhealthy desires and fears, and make us whole in ways we didn't even know we needed to be made whole. We ask that you help us to know and understand ourselves better, and through that understanding, seek harmony and wholeness with all creation. Thank you for Isaiah's inspiring vision of Heaven on Earth. Amen.

**Action:**

In this scripture, the diets of predators were radically altered to eliminate dominance and fear, and to bring harmony to all creation. Consider and pray about your own food choices. Are your food choices primarily based on desire? habits? health? convenience? time? Now consider how your food choices might be fostering harmony with God's creation or contributing to discord in God's creation.

Educate yourself about the environmental impacts of your food choices. There are many articles on the internet to consider. One you may want to start with is by the National Academy of Sciences, *Livestock Production and the Global Environment: Consume Less or Produce More?* Another is by National Geographic: *How Will We Feed a Planet of Nine Billion People?*



## **Day 16: Growing a Garden**

**Scripture:** Genesis 2: 15-20

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die." Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner." So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner.

**Reflection: (by Ouita Michel)**

God put Man in the Garden of Eden not to sleep in it but to till it—to work it- to grow a garden there. What is gardening? Gardening is farming, and gardening is work! It means being up early in the coolness of the morning, breaking ground, crumbling big clods of earth, placing the tiny little seeds where they can grow. It means watering, and weeding, pruning and picking. Your arms can get itchy and scratchy and hands get dirty and cracked. Your back hurts, and the back of your neck can get sunburned. It's physical! The Garden of Eden I imagine was beautiful and full to bursting. This kind of overflowing abundance requires a lot of work. Man was told by God to till it and keep it. Keep it clean, and safe, nurture it.

Every animal and bird is made from the earth to be Man's helper, to be named by man, to offer him aid in keeping the garden and to protect him against loneliness. The naming of all the animals reminds me that God has named us, and calls us his own. In a

reflection of that divine naming, God lets Man name all the animals and birds. This naming implies an echo of our relationship with God. Just as God has extended us everlasting love and grace, mercy and peace, so we should grant that protection to our divine partners and helpers in the Garden of Eden. We should stand by them, protect them, and be in relationship with them. There is no mention of using them or exploiting them, but revering God's creatures named by us.

If our earth is the Garden of Eden, its creatures and pure majesty are beyond what we are able to comprehend, even after thousands and thousands of years of wondering, and documenting, studying and observing. We only know that we are somehow taken to the center of ourselves when we are in nature, plunging our hands into a flower pot, walking by a creek or in a field or picking a tomato in the backyard. We are then connected to the divine processes of nature that God created and not to the flawed strategies and constructs of ourselves. Nature reflects back a perfection of balance and design that we try and try to emulate but cannot recreate. We are here to protect and nurture it, to connect with it, to be at peace in the natural process of things.

### **Prayer:**

Spirit of the wilderness, you inspire understanding and restore right relationships between all earth's creatures. We humans presume to dominate all creation by the very powers you have given us to serve it, and so unleash the power of death in its midst. Help us to trust unfaithfully in your Word, Jesus, so that all things might be reconciled in him and all creation might rejoice in your unfaithful love. Amen.

### **Action:**

Plan a trip to the zoo or local aquarium. See the varied species of animals. Celebrate the diversity of God's creation.

## **Day 17: Ask the Animals**

**Scripture:** Job 12:7-10 (NRSV)

"But ask the animals, and they will teach you; the birds of the air, and they will tell you; ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this? In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being.

### **Reflection: (by Adele Dickerson)**

As I write this Lenten Devotional reflection, I hear birds singing and see cattle eating hay at the farm in Missouri. Soon there will be another beautiful sunset reflected in the pond. The fields are resting now, awaiting the longer days when the sunshine will stimulate the process of photosynthesis, and with the nourishment of the rich black soil, the grasses will begin the growth cycle again.

This scripture, Job 12:7-10, emphasizes the interrelationship and interdependence among God, animals, plants, the earth and us. It instructs us to invite and be open to the messages we can receive from the earth as we "ask the animals...", "ask the plants..." and then to listen and respond as they "teach", "tell" and "declare" to us. The scripture also states the interrelationship among God and all living things. Just as humans and air-breathing animals depend on plants to provide oxygen through the process of photosynthesis, and we return carbon dioxide to the plants through our respiratory systems, God can breathe life to our being if we open ourselves to God's presence. Nature speaks to us in powerful ways through its beauty and amazing intricacy. Whether we observe animals peacefully grazing in pastures; watch flocks of geese migrating or enjoy the variety of birds at our birdfeeders; see golden fields of wheat or tiny snowdrops blooming in our gardens; listen to the rhythm of the ocean waves and think of the



myriad of species living in it, we are in awe of this great earth.

In being responsible stewards of Creation, we must educate ourselves and others about other ways Nature speaks to us; in scientific information which documents pollution of air, water and land; through destruction of habitat by mining or clear cutting forests; death of pollinators such as bees and butterflies by pesticides; effects of consumerism and "conspicuous consumption" in our culture; and changes in the global climate.

*"Because of us, thousands of species will no longer give Glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us. We have no such right." Pope Francis  
"Laudato Si"*

As people of faith, let us experience the beauty and wonder of God's Creation with gratitude and recognize our responsibility for care of Creation through our personal choices and actions, education of ourselves and others and greater understanding of the interrelationships among God, us and all Creation.

### **Prayer:**

God, we give thanks for this great Earth, "our Common Home," its amazing beauty, the intricacy of interdependence of life and the gifts it gives to us. We pray for guidance as we listen for ways we can learn from Nature to appreciate, preserve and protect this amazing world. Help us to make choices in our lives which will make a difference in the quality of our environment for this Creation. Amen.

### **Actions:**

Plant nectar producing flowers for pollinators such as bees and butterflies.



## **Day 18: The Work of God's Fingers**

### **Scripture:** Psalm 8

O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

### **Reflection: (by Shirley Eckels)**

In reading Psalm 8, we are instructed to care for all the earth and everyone in it the way God takes care of us. It is amazing to think that human beings have been made a little lower than God. It is with gratitude that we celebrate that God cares for us and that God is mindful of us as mortals. As we look at the stars in the sky and the beauty of creation all around us, we are constantly reminded that God is all powerful. We stand in awe as we experience God's glory above the heavens, yet we know God knows each of his children and cares for us all.

### **Prayer:**

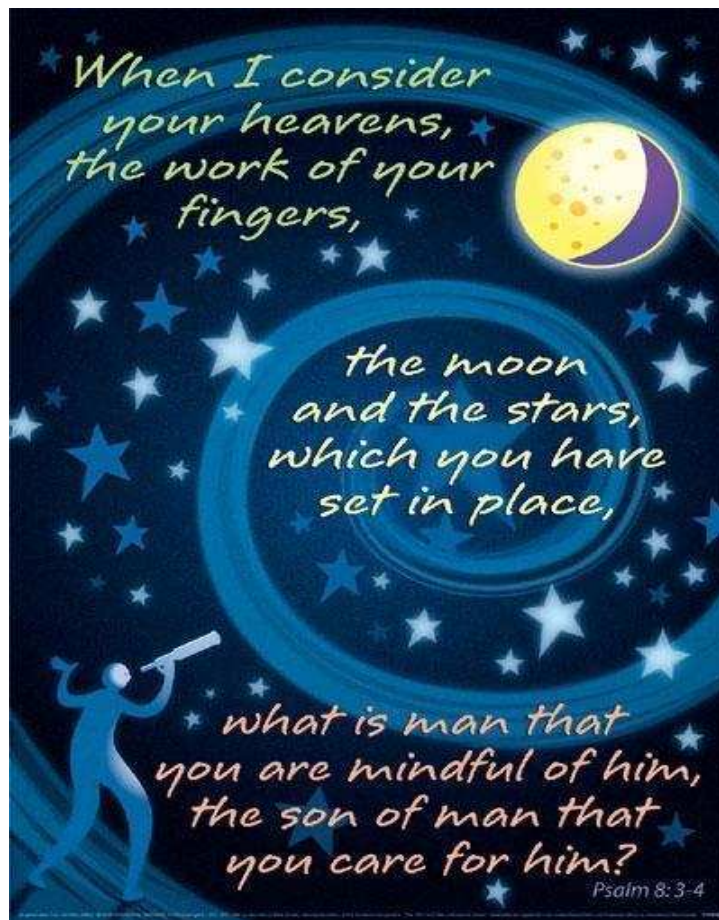
God as we gaze upon your glory, we are reminded of your care for us. We bring before you the worries of our world. There is so much

brokenness and hurting in our world., even right here in our country. We hear of the conflicts within the government. We hear of the conflicts with ISIS. We know that all around the world people need to be fed, clothed and visited. Our hearts are worried and overwhelmed.

Remind us once again of your care and love. Support our work at building your Kingdom here on earth. Give us the strength and the courage to try and meet the needs of your people. Amen.

**Action:**

Support God's care of the earth by working in or starting a rain garden.



## **Day 19: Enough Light to Take the Next Step**

**Scripture:** Psalm 46: 1-3

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

*This reflection was taken from "Called to Life, Called to Love" by Henri Nouwen.*

### **Reflection:**

Often we want to be able to see into future. We say, "How will next year be for me? Where will I be five or ten years from now?" There are no answers to these questions. Mostly we have just enough light to see the next step: what we have to do in the coming hour or the following day. The art of living is to enjoy what we can see and not complain about what remains in the dark. When we are able to take the next step with the trust that we will have enough light for the step that follows, we can walk through life with joy and be surprised at how far we go. Let's rejoice in the little light we carry and not ask for the great beam that would take all the shadows away. Instead of seeking too many answers about your future, resolve today to embrace the present and thank God for what you have.

### **Prayer:**

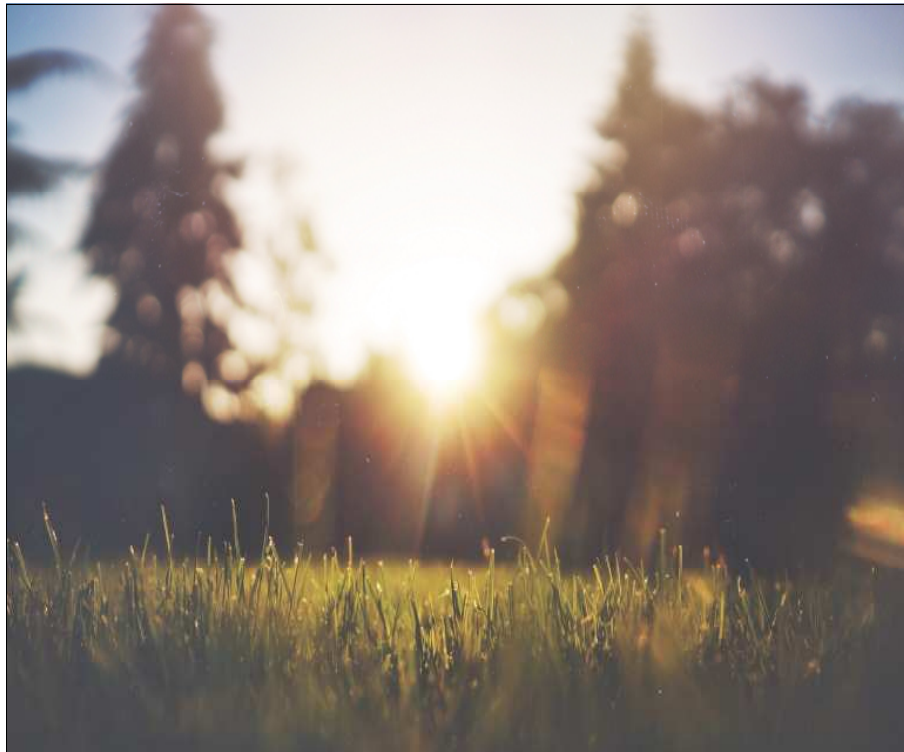
God of returning light, God who refills the seas, the earth in this season is infused with the brilliance of light held in water: the shimmer of moon on ice, the icy glitter of stars, sun glistening on snow. So infuse us with your Spirit that we may reveal

your light to all in need. Amen.

**Action:**

Visit the UK Arboretum for their **“Glories of the Garden Art Exhibit.”** It is their annual juried art exhibit to celebrate the world of nature found in The Arboretum and beyond. Water colors, charcoal, photographs, oils, quilts, sculptures, woodworking or any other type of artwork, inspired by nature.

**February 8-March 6, M-F 8:30a-4:00p**



## **Day 20: Mine Eyes Unto the Hills**

### **Scripture:** Psalm 121

I lift up my eyes to the hills—from where will my help come?  
My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade at your right hand.  
The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.

The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.

The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore.

### **Reflection: (by Helen Rentch)**

What came to mind first as I read these words were a couple of hymns which I loved from childhood and associate with 'nature': "For the Beauty of the Earth" & "God Who Touches Earth with Beauty"...

Interestingly, both of those hymns focus on the singer... the first being a praise, the 2nd being a petition for making ourselves worthy... That says to me the first issue is to deal with ourselves... our lives, our bodies, our personality... the instrument whereby we can accomplish something meaningful... what we have historically called a 'temple'.... which we must care for.

The other traditional reference which I have associated with nature is the Psalm 121 which begins: I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from which cometh my help.... and Psalm 23, which ends with the phrase: "and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

I never paid much attention to that phrase but in thinking about it with reference to care of God's creation, I started thinking of "dwelling in the house of the Lord" as being an expression of how

we carry ourselves in the world... the personal environment which we create around ourselves, our demeanor, our space,... that we dwell with a spirit of confidence and calm and gentleness and love.... but also with firmness...the attributes referred to in the hymn: glad and free, upright, pure, strong and sure...

Here I remember the hymn which is newer but which I also love, which says Lord make me a Sanctuary...

So how do we dwell in God's House?

First by recognizing, the earth itself is in crisis due to human behavior. Nature has been set out of balance. This is largely due to the lifestyle which we have adopted as a culture... a culture which craves endless material accumulation without attention to the consequences of how we acquire these - without regard to the effect on the natural environment. Most of us are very far removed from the 'point of production' of the many natural resources which go into making up our lifestyle and so we can plead ignorance. But younger generations are calling our attention to these things and requiring that we become informed.

Second, by recognizing the impact of this material culture is falling very hard on the poor and undeveloped peoples of the world... Their lives are being destroyed and we have an obligation to respond to the crisis which our lifestyle has created. To again become informed and empathetic.

### **Prayer:**

Faithful, covenanting God, we would join in the joyful song of heaven and earth; we would praise you as the mountains do, for the steadfast love with which you keep and comfort your people along the ways and in the pastures of their journey home to you. Help us to so trust your provision of our lives, that we might be free from the fearful and anxious habits of consumption which threaten to exhaust the resources of your Earth.

### **Action:**

Rethink your transportation! Take a walk or ride a bike!

## **Day 21: The Heavens are Telling of God's Glory**

**Scripture:** Psalm 19: 1-6

The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a strong man runs its course with joy. Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them; and nothing is hid from its heat.

**Reflection: (by Lily Savage)**

As people of God, we are called to care and supply the earth with love and faith. We can do this by asking the world's people if they believe that creation is in God's hands. I'm grateful that we humans get to share God's creation along with the birds, plants, fish and animals. As I look at the world around me, I am reminded that love comes from destruction. May this serve as a reminder that we are to love everyone and everything endlessly.

**Prayer:**

God of sun and rain, You shape all your creatures for mutual care, such that none can stand alone. Let no idols of wealth or status keep us from sharing in the beloved community that your wide embrace creates in Jesus Christ, the prince of peace. Amen.

**Action:**

Reflect on the power of God's creation. What forces of nature are the most awesome to you? How do these forces make life on Earth better?



## **Day 22: What is the Greatest Commandment?**

**Scripture:** Matthew 22: 35-39

And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

### **Reflection: (by Phil Dare)**

How often we come to the Table with a narrow focus upon the ancient litany about the night Jesus was betrayed, claiming the Eucharist as the very center of our worship experience. But these simple words, "Take, Eat" should open worshippers to much more than the communion elements. Because we partake "in remembrance" of the living presence of Jesus and the God who created us all, it should be a time when we also reaffirm our commitment to the teachings of Jesus to love God and our fellow human beings as he did. In so doing we then affirm our oneness with all of Creation.

The Loaf and the Cup which were part of ancient feasts celebrating the bounty of the earth, the simple gifts of grain and the fruit of the vine, bring us into communion with the Christ who sought to remind the people to open their hearts, souls, and minds to God the Creator who calls us to live in love and harmony with one another and with all of the Creation.

One person has written "the pain of the Table reminds me of the pain of the world. " The suffering of Christ should also waken us to the pain of God for all our ugly deeds to one another and to all of His creation. We cannot destroy the earth and still profess love for God and others who depend upon the earth for sustenance, as well as future generations. Communion should be just that, a time

to remember our connectedness to all of Creation and the One who calls us to be loving brothers and sisters.

### **Prayer:**

Gracious God, it is with humility that we bow before you confessing that too often we have left your Table only to return to a lifestyle of materialism and self-giving actions. May we be more conscious of our call to show our love and thanksgiving to you by embracing our covenant with you to care for one another and our Home in a way that shows that we do live by the teachings of Christ in whose name we pray. Amen.

### **Action:**

Go meatless for one meal this week. Going meatless once a week may reduce your risk of chronic preventable conditions like cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and obesity. And going meatless once a week can also help reduce our carbon footprint and save precious resources like fossil fuels and fresh water. For recipes, go to <http://www.meatlessmonday.com/>



## **Day 23: Nurture God's Creation**

**Scripture:** Psalm 65: 5-13

By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance, O God of our salvation; you are the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas. By your strength you established the mountains; you are girded with might. You silence the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples. Those who live at earth's farthest bounds are awed by your signs; you make the gateways of the morning and the evening shout for joy. You visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; you provide the people with grain, for so you have prepared it. You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth. You crown the year with your bounty; your wagon tracks overflow with richness. The pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy, the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout and sing together for joy.

**Reflection: (by Willa Michel)**

We need to not take advantage of God's creation. We need to care for and nurture it. We need to make sure nothing bad happens to it. When you take care of God's creation, he will tell you his word. God is there for us and guides us through all the animals and their behavior. God is present as he keeps us safe and he holds our life in his hands. When God tells us to love thy neighbor, he not only means humans but plants and animals as well.

**Prayer:**

Spirit of God, you infuse all creation with manifold and astounding meanings and purposes. We often see only

what benefits humankind, and are blind to the full riches of your creation. Lift our vision to see more clearly the love you have for all life. Amen.

**Action:**

Replace a Lightbulb. If one million homes replaced four of their traditional incandescent bulbs with Energy-Star approved compact fluorescent bulbs (the ones that look like soft-serve ice cream cones), 900,000 tons of greenhouse gasses would be eliminated, and people would save approximately \$30 to \$50 dollars in electricity over the life of the bulb for each bulb they replace.



## **Day 24: The Vineyard**

### **Scripture: Leviticus 19: 9-10**

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the LORD your God.

### **Reflection: (by Sue Roberts)**

Most of us are not farmers and we don't have vineyards. But we do live, literally, on the land. We may not actually go out with scythes or combines and "reap the harvest" ourselves, but we do indirectly live off the land. Even those of us who do plant and tend gardens, or work in the community garden here in Midway, and even those of us who frequent the local farmers' markets, also probably enjoy the harvest indirectly. The earth's bounty comes to us several steps removed: via the labor of armies of distant workers, logistics chains that stretch across the country and sometimes the world, appearing in neat packages on the shelves at Kroger's or at the Corner Grocery.

We could, then take these couple of verses from Leviticus as a prompt to think about what kind of relationship God is instructing us to have with the land. We could consider what kinds of agriculture we do and support through our grocery purchases. Is it the kind that goes to the edges of all the fields and strips the vineyards bare? Or is it more in tune with the needs of the land, of God's creation?

However, I don't really think that this is the main point of this message. God, it seems to me, is more interested here in human-human relationships than human-land relationships. The subject

matter is not how to be better farmers or food consumers; it is how to be more aware and caring neighbors. God is telling us, I think, that we don't need "it all". Even what we do have, should be shared. We should live in ways that do not suck up all the resources in our communities, our county, our world.

One puzzle I am left with is that the instructions in these verses do not include enacting a radical program of land reform. In other words, these verses could have said that the land ("your land") is to be taken from you and divided up - so that the "poor and alien" can plant their own food and reap their own harvest. I would have thought that this could have been a solution! But, no. We can't deflect this by saying the problem can only truly be solved by some future revolution where access to resources is shared among the earth's inhabitants more fairly. And, in a way, this makes these instructions more real. We do not live in a world, or even a town, where everyone has the resources they need to live healthy lives. We *do* live in a world where some have more, way more, than others. So, in the end, here we have God looking us right in the eye, as it were, and saying: don't be greedy. You don't need everything; just take what you need. In the way you live, leave enough for others.

### **Prayer:**

Sovereign over all things, we acknowledge this universe was made for good, yet we tremble when vast systems shift and crumble despite our efforts to control them. Forgive our vain attempts to turn your gracious order to our profit and victory. Guide us in the ways of peace and reconciliation that we may enter into your unending and joyful reign. Amen.

### **Action:**

Kill Phantom Power. Even when most household appliances are turned off, their standby modes continue to suck power that

wastes electricity and increases your electric bill. The worst offenders are cell phone chargers, where only 5% of the power they draw is used to charge your phone, while the other 95% is wasted when left plugged in. What to do? Unplug your cell phone charger when you aren't using it, and plug all of your big appliances (especially TV's and home entertainment equipment) into an easy-to-reach power strip that you can turn off when you aren't using them.



## **Day 25: Growing in the Virtue of Patience**

**Scripture:** James 5: 7-8

Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.

*This reflection and prayer was taken from "Wisdom from St. Francis of Assisi" by John V. Kruse.*

### **Reflection:**

Where there is patience and humility, there is neither anger nor disturbance...Let them [the brothers] pay attention to what they must desire above all else: to have the Spirit of the Lord and Its holy activity, to pray always to Him with a pure heart, to have humility and patience in persecution and infirmity...

### **Prayer:**

Lord of all longing, in our society of instant gratification, patience is not a cultivated virtue. Remind me that I do not need to immediately have all things I long for and all the answers to my questions. In the waiting, we often learn much about ourselves, come to greater awareness of what is truly important in life, and gain a better appreciation for the things we must await. Amen.

### **Action:**

When someone or some circumstance causes you to wait today,



slow down and view that person or circumstance as a holy moment. Is it really that important that you immediately have what you want? What do you learn about yourself as you wait? What do you notice around you when you slow down to wait?

# WE ARE NATURE



Close-up of a small leaf

Blood vessels of a human heart

River network of the Amazon

## Day 26: Broken Soil

**Scripture:** Deuteronomy 4: 8-9

And what other great nation has statutes and ordinances as just as this entire law that I am setting before you today? But take care and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children's children.

*This reflection and prayer was taken from "Renewed for Life" by Henri Nouwen.*

### **Reflection:**

The seeds of national and international peace are already mysteriously sown in the soil of our own pain and in the suffering of the poor. And I am convinced that we can truly trust these seeds like the mustard seeds of the gospel that grow and produce large shrubs in which many birds of the air can find a place to rest.

As long as we imagine and live as if there is no peace in sight, and that it all depends on us to make it come about, we are on the road to self-destruction. But when we trust that the God of love has already given the peace we are searching for, we will see this peace breaking through the broken soil of our human condition and we will be able to let it grow fast and even heal the economic and political maladies of our time. When we have this trust in our hearts, we will be able to hear the words: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:9).

**Prayer:**

Lord, how I need your grace to set aside even a few minutes for genuine silence. But with your help, I will not give up my search for genuine solitude.

**Action:**

Invest locally. Shop at a local store. Use your local bank. Also, if you are investing or are interesting in investing, consider socially responsible investments. With this priority, you can use your mutual funds and other stock investments to support companies that align with your own ethical values, rather than companies that are doing opposite your ethical and environmental commitments. This can also move towards the movement in corporations to taking seriously social issues in their organizations. For more information look online at the Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility [www.iccr.org](http://www.iccr.org), or at [www.socialfunds.com](http://www.socialfunds.com)

