

ZION UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST OF TREMONT

April 23rd, 2023

Third Sunday of Easter

Earth Sunday and Creation Care Sunday



“Creation Care”

art by Dana Gray

“Loving Our Neighbor Means Caring for God’s Creation”

Grace Rules Weblog

<https://gracerules.wordpress.com/2013/09/18/creation/>



UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

a just world for all

April 23rd, 2023

Third Sunday of Easter

Earth Sunday and Creation Care Sunday

“We only need to open our eyes to see the gifts that abound all around us. These are the simple joys in life.”
Genevive-www.idelehearts.com

WE GATHER IN COMMUNITY

**please stand as you are able,*

Welcome and Announcements:

Prelude - *Betty Funk*

***Land Acknowledgement Statement**

On this Earth Day Sunday, as we gather today, we acknowledge that we are on the traditional lands of Indigenous peoples: Erie, Seneca, Cayuga of the Haudenosaunee (six Native American nations who are more commonly known as the Iroquois Confederacy), and Huron-Wyandot. For millennia they occupied, traversed, lived from, and cared for land and waterways in Ohio—indeed, the state’s name derives from Ohio, an ‘Onondowahgah:’ (Seneca) term meaning “beautiful river.” Today Native Americans of diverse ancestries and tribal affiliations continue to reside in Northeast Ohio, sustaining their heritages, beliefs, and practices and making contributions to the region’s life and vitality.

We remember that we share this land with other parts of God’s good creation: plants such as buckeyes, carnations, trillium, columbine, wild ginger, milkweed, butterfly weed, sea oats, blue lobelia, and goldenrods; birds like the northern cardinal, Canadian geese, wild turkeys, and mourning doves; and animals species such as the white-tailed deer, the red squirrels, the black bears, and the pine voles. May we be good neighbors.

***Call to Worship**

One: God created the world, the stars, the sky and the seas;

Many: And God saw that it was good.

One: God created all plants and life that grows on the earth and in the waters;

Many: And God declared it good.

One: God created all living creatures in the world;

Many: And God said, “It is good.”

One: We were created in the image of God;

Many: And God called us to care for the world.

One: Let us celebrate God our Creator;

Many: May we live into the image of God, and care for all of creation as God cares for us.

***Prayer of Brokenness/Confession**

Creator God, we confess that we have forgotten our created intention, to have dominion over the earth in the way you have dominion over us—to care for the earth and use its resources to sustain others. Instead, we have exploited the earth for our own gain, to the point we do not even recognize what we are doing. We fail to see how our way of life can harm others by our overuse of resources and needless waste. Forgive us. Bring us into awareness of our use and misuse of creation, and help us to restore and replant, to help provide and grow instead of waste and destroy. Call us back into our created intention, to be good stewards of all your creation. In your name we pray. Amen.

- Silent Prayer -

***Blessing/Assurance of Pardon**

One: In loving compassion, we are blessed and made whole by God.

Many: In loving compassion, we are fed and we are nourished.

One: In loving compassion, we are placed into relationships with all creation,

Many: so that God's peace and justice might reign.

One: In loving compassion, we are forgiven and wrapped
in the warm embrace of a gracious God

Many: as we go forth to live connected lives. Amen.

***Hymn - NCH 28 – For the Beauty of the Earth**

For the Beauty of the Earth

Author (st. 4): Miriam Therese Winter (1993)

Author (st. 1-3): Folliot S. Pierpoint, 1864; alt.

Stanza 4 © 1993 Medical Mission Sisters

Tune: DIX 7.7.7.7. with refrain

Composer: Conrad Kocher, 1838

Adapter: William H. Monk, 1861

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**1 For the beauty of the earth,
for the splendor of the skies,
For the love which from our birth
over and around us lies;**

Refrain:

**God of all, to You we raise
this our hymn of grateful praise.**

**2 For the wonder of each hour,
of the day and of the night,
Hill and vale and tree and flower,
sun and moon and stars of light: [Refrain]**

**3 For the joy of human love,
brother, sister, parent, child,
Friends on earth and friends above,
for all gentle thoughts and mild: [Refrain]**

**4 For the good that love inspires,
for a world where none excluded,
For a faith that never tires
and for every heart renewed. [Refrain]**

A READING OF THE WORD

First Reading: Act 2:14a, 36-41

The first reading of the Revised Common Lectionary concludes Peter's declaration on the Day of Pentecost with Acts 2:14a, 36-41. In this portion, Peter states that God made Jesus Lord and Messiah, whose crucifixion all of Jerusalem witnessed and knew about. Those gathered asked Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Using the term "brothers" indicates that they honored and recognized Peter and the disciples and were convinced by their message. Peter called upon them to repent and be baptized so they might receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Peter assured them the promise was for everyone who believed, and on that day about three thousand persons were added to the followers of Jesus.

2 14 Then Peter stood up with the Eleven and addressed the crowd: "Women and men of Judea, and all you who live in Jerusalem! Listen to what I have to say!

36 "Therefore, let the whole House of Israel know beyond any doubt that God made this Jesus—whom you crucified—both Messiah and Sovereign."

37 When they heard this, they were deeply shaken. They asked Peter and the other disciples, "What are we to do?"

38 Peter replied, "You must repent and be baptized, each one of you, in the name of Jesus the Messiah, that your sins may be forgiven; then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 It was to you and your children that the promise was made, and to all those still far off whom our God calls." 40 In support of his testimony, Peter used many other arguments and kept saying, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation!" 41 They were convinced by his arguments, and they accepted what he said and were baptized. That very day about three thousand were added to the number of those converted.

Psalm Response: Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19 (Responsively)

These verses are a song of thanksgiving for God's deliverance. The psalmist was near death, but God saved them, and they love God because God has heard their pleas. The psalmist asks what they can give back to God for all God has done for them? They can fulfill their promises and keep all their vows, call upon God's name and serve God faithfully, as their own mother served God. They know God is the one who brings liberation. The psalmist will offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, upholding their promises to God before the congregation in the temple.

116 1 I love you, God, for you have heard
my cry for mercy.

**2 You have listened to me;
I will call on you all my days.**

3 The bands of Death encircled me;
the messengers of Sheol
ambushed me,
I was overcome with trouble and sorrow.

**4 Then I called your Name, God—
“Help, O God, save me!”**

12 How can I repay you, God,
for all your goodness to me?

**13 I raise the cup of deliverance,
and call on the Name of God.**

14 I will fulfill my vows to you
in the presence of all.

**15 The death of your faithful
is precious in your sight.**

16 God, I am your faithful one—
I am faithful to you alone, the child of your fidelity.
You have freed me from my chains.

**17 I will offer you the sacrifice of praise,
and call on the Name of God.**

18 I will fulfill my vows to you
in the presence of all your people,

**19 in the courts of the house of God,
in the midst of Jerusalem.**

Alleluia!

Second Reading: 1 Peter 1:17-23

The Epistle reading continues the series in this Easter season in 1 Peter. In these verses of chapter 1, the author writes of the believers with the metaphor of exile, one the Jewish followers of Jesus certainly knew from their own scriptures and history, but one in which all the followers of Jesus could understand. They were not part of Judaism anymore and were certainly not part of the empirical

religion. They were waiting for the fulfillment of Christ's reign to come, and the author uses another metaphor of ransom, that through the blood of Jesus' sacrifice they now belong to God. They are no longer part of the old pagan ways of their parents and ancestors but are part of the beloved family of Christ. Through Jesus, they have come to trust God who gave the Only Begotten for them, and in obedience to God's love, they also love one another, for they need each other as ones set apart, ones living in a sort of exile from the world around them.

1 17 When you pray, you call on Abba God, who judges everyone impartially on the basis of their actions. Since this is so, conduct yourselves reverently during your sojourn in a foreign land. 18 Realize that you were delivered from the futile way of life your ancestors handed on to you, not by any diminishable sum of gold or silver 19 but by Christ's blood, which is beyond all price: the blood of a spotless, unblemished lamb 20 foreknown before the world's foundation and revealed for your sake in these last days. 21 It is through Christ that you are believers in God, the God who raised Christ from the dead into glory. Your faith and hope, then, are centered in God.

22 By obedience to the truth you have purified yourselves for a genuine love of your sisters and brothers. Therefore love one another constantly, from the heart. 23 Your rebirth has come not from a perishable seed but from an imperishable one—the living and enduring word of God.

Gospel Reading: Luke 24:13-35

These verses of Luke 24 contain the story of Jesus' resurrection appearance to two of Jesus' followers on the road to Emmaus. Cleopas and another unnamed follower of Jesus were perplexed because some of the women who traveled with the followers of Jesus found the tomb empty, and claimed to have received a message from angels that Christ had risen. They come across another traveler on the road to Emmaus away from Jerusalem and tell this traveler all they experienced. This traveler, in turn, explained the Scriptures to them, and how the Scriptures explained the Messiah and that these things must take place. Cleopas and the other urge the traveler to stay with them, and it was as they sat down to the table and the stranger took bread, broke it and blessed it before them that they finally recognized it was Jesus. He vanished from their sight. Cleopas and the other disciple returned to Jerusalem quickly, to share their experience of the risen Christ, who had also appeared to Simon Peter at this point, and how Jesus had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

24 13 That same day, two of the disciples were making their way to a village called Emmaus—which was about seven miles from Jerusalem

—14 discussing all that had happened as they went.

15 While they were discussing these things, Jesus approached and began to walk along with them, 16 though they were kept from recognizing Jesus, 17 who asked them, "What are you two discussing as you go your way?"

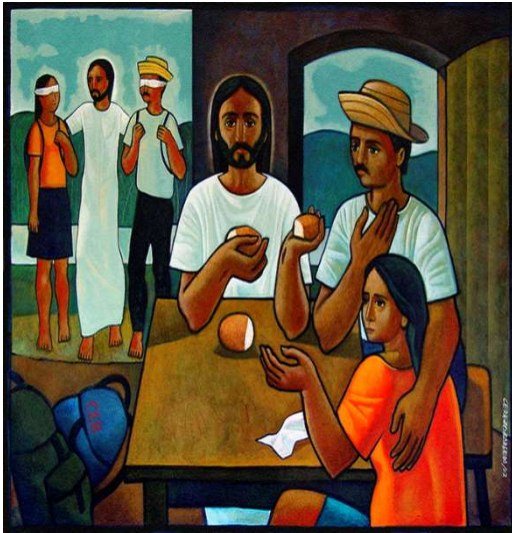
They stopped and looked sad. 18 One of them, Cleopas by name, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who doesn't know the things that have happened these past few days?"

19 Jesus said to them, "What things?" They said, "About Jesus of Nazareth, a prophet powerful in word and deed in the eyes of God and all the people—20 how our chief priests and leaders

delivered him up to be condemned to death and crucified him. 21 We were hoping that he was the One who would set Israel free. Besides all this, today—the third day since these things happened— 22 some women of our group have just brought us some astonishing news. They were at the tomb before dawn 23 and didn't find the body; they returned and informed us that they had seen a vision of angels, who declared that Jesus was alive. 24 Some of our number went to the tomb and found it to be just as the women said, but they didn't find Jesus."

25 Then Jesus said to them, "What little sense you have! How slow you are to believe all that the prophets have announced! 26 Didn't the Messiah have to undergo all this to enter into glory?"

*"Emmaus" 2002 by Maximino Cerezo Barredo
(Spanish, 1932-)*



27 Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, Jesus interpreted for them every passage of scripture which referred to the Messiah. 28 By now they were near the village they were going to, and Jesus appeared to be going further. 29 But they said eagerly, "Stay with us. It's nearly evening—the day is practically over." So the savior went in and stayed with them.

30 After sitting down with them to eat, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, then broke the bread and began to distribute it to them. 31 With that their eyes were opened and they recognized Jesus, who immediately vanished from their sight.

32 They said to one another, "Weren't our hearts burning inside us as this one talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?" 33 They got up immediately and returned to Jerusalem, where they found the Eleven and the rest of the company assembled. 34 They were greeted with, "Christ has risen! It's true! Jesus has appeared to Simon!" 35 Then the travelers recounted what had happened on the road, and how they had come to know Jesus in the breaking of the bread.

Choral Response – His Name is Wonderful

Music by Audrey Mieir, 1959
Choir: Keith Konet, Bob Bucklew and Barbara Rossington
Accompanist: Betty Funk

Reflection – "We Were Hoping" - by the Rev. Scott Rosenstein

WE RESPOND

***Prayer of Response**

Creator of the Earth, we thank you and praise you for all your wondrous works in the universe, and for this special planet we call Earth.

We know from the scriptures that everything you made is good: all light and darkness, all water and earth, everything that lives in the sea and all birds and insects that fly in the air.

Every creature on this planet you have breathed life into and given purpose. Even us, O God,

you made in your image to care for the earth and all creation as you care for us. We thank you and praise you for this sacred responsibility.

Forgive us, O God, for all the times we have taken your earth for granted. Forgive us for misusing your resources for our own material, temporary gain. Forgive us for not heeding your very first commandment to us, which was to be fruitful, to care for the earth in our fruitfulness, to have dominion over the earth the way you have dominion over us. Call us into accountability, to repair what we have broken and destroyed, to turn back to your first commandment and to love this beautiful planet you made for us, the only one that is our home.

We trust in you, our Maker and Shaper of Who We Are and of All Things to Come, our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. Amen.

***Hymn – Pilgrim Hymnal (Blue) 38 – Morning Has Broken**

Morning Has Broken

Author: Eleanor Farjeon, 1881 – 1965

Tune: BUNNESAN 5.5.8 D

Harmonizer: David Evans, 1874-1948

Gaelic traditional melody

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**1 Morning has broken like the first morning
Blackbird has spoken like the first bird
Praise for the singing, praise for the morning
Praise for them springing fresh from the Word**

**2 Sweet the rains new fall, sunlit from Heaven
Like the first dewfall on the first grass
Praise for the sweetness of the wet garden
Sprung in completeness where His feet pass**

**3 Mine is the sunlight, mine is the morning
Born of the one light, Eden saw play
Praise with elation, praise every morning
God's recreation of the new day**

***A Litany for Healing**

One: To bring new life to the land
To restore the waters
To refresh the air

Many: We join with the earth and with each other.

One: To renew the forests
To care for the plants
To protect the creatures

Many: We join with the earth and with each other.

One: To celebrate the seas

To rejoice in the sunlight
To sing the song of the stars

Many: We join with the earth and with each other.

One: To recall our destiny
To renew our spirits
To reinvigorate our bodies

Many: We join with the earth and with each other.

One: To recreate the human community
To promote justice and peace
To remember our children

Many: We join with the earth and with each other.
We join together as many and diverse expressions
of one loving mystery:
for the healing of the earth
and the renewal of all life.

(silence)

***Invitation to Share Our Tithes and Offerings**

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, we should be called children of God because of God's love for us, which is as creative as a mother and generous as a father. Let us offer our gifts in order to care for God's family in this church and throughout the world.

The Offertory - *Betty Funk*

***Presentation of Offerings - Doxology**

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God above, you heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

***Blessing of the Gifts**

Generous God,
you have blessed us with the resources
to share the good news of your love for all creation.
We dedicate these gifts and pray that they may bring healing,
wholeness, and hope to the world,
that future generations may also know
your graciousness and love.
Amen.

Choral Hymn– NCH 248 – Such Perfect Love My Shepherd Shows

Author: Henry W. Baker, 1868; alt.
Tune: DOMINUS REGIT ME 8.7.8.7.
Composer: John B. Dykes, 1858
Choir: Keith Konet, Bob Bucklew and Barbara Rossington
Accompanist and Choir Director: Betty Funk

Prayers of the People

The Lord's Prayer – using "debts" and "debtors"

Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors,
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

GOING FORTH

*Parting Hymn – NCH 4 – Joyful, Joyful, We Adore You vv. 1, 2, & 3

Joyful, Joyful, We Adore You
Author: Henry van Dyke, 1907; alt.
Tune: HYMN TO JOY 8.7.8.7.D.
Composer: Ludwig van Beethoven, 1824
Adapter and Harmonizer: Edward Hodges, 1846
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**1 Joyful, joyful, we adore you,
God of glory, God of love;
hearts unfold like flowers before you,
opening to the sun above.
Melt the clouds of sin and sadness,
drive the storms of doubt away;
giver of immortal gladness,
fill us with the light of day.**

**2 All your works with joy surround you,
earth and heaven reflect your rays,
stars and angels sing around you,
center of unbroken praise.**

Field and forest, vale and mountain,
flowery meadow, flashing sea,
chanting bird and flowing fountain,
teach us what our praise should be.

3 You are giving and forgiving,
ever blessing, ever blessed,
well-spring of the joy of living,
ocean depth of happy rest!
Loving Spirit, Father, Mother,
all who love belong to you;
teach us how to love each other,
by that love our joy renew.

***Commissioning and Benediction**

One: We rejoice in all life.
We live in all things
All things live in us

Many: We rejoice in all life.

One: We live by the sun.
We move with the stars.

Many: We rejoice in all life.

One: We eat from the earth
We drink from the rain, the rivers, the lakes, the seas.
We breathe from the air

Many: We rejoice in all life.

One: We share with the creatures.
We have strength through their gifts.

Many: We rejoice in all life.

One: We depend on the forests.
We have knowledge through their secrets.

Many: We rejoice in all life.

One: We have the privilege of seeing and understanding.
We have the responsibility of caring.
We have the joy of celebrating.
We are full of the grace of creation
We are graceful.
We are grateful.

Many: We rejoice in all life. Amen.

Postlude *Betty Funk

* * * * *

Credits

- (1) The Call to Worship and the Prayer of Brokenness/Confession are adapted from *Earth Day—Creation Care Sunday Resources* written by the Rev. Mindi Welton-Mitchell, posted April 9, 2015 on the blog, Rev-o-lution. <http://rev-o-lution.org>
- (2) The Blessing/Assurance of Pardon is adapted from *Have you anything here to eat? Sustainable Food in a Changing Climate, Worship and Congregational Life*, written by Rev. Carol Devine and Rev. Rebecca Barnes, published February 2015, Creation and Justice Ministries (formerly the National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Program), Washington D.C., www.creationjustice.org
- (3) Prayer of Response is adapted from *Worship Resources for April 23rd*, written by Rev. Mindi Welton Thomas, and posted April 14th, 2023, on her blog, *Rev-o-lution*. <http://rev-o-lution.org>. A prayer for Earth Day Weekend
- (4) *A Litany of Healing* - – attributed to *Earth Day 1990* - is from: *Interfaith Declarations and Worship Observance Resources; The North American Conference on Religion and Ecology*; 5 Thomas Circle, NW, Washington, DC, 20005, in the *Resource Interfaith Prayers, Green Faith – Interfaith Partners for the Environment*. <http://www.greenfaith.org/files/prayers-interfaith.pdf>
- (5) The Blessing of the Gifts is from *NCC Offertory Prayer*, from the *National Council of Churches [NCC] Earth Day Sunday 2002* resource packet, *Caring for Creation: Making the World Safe for Children*. <http://earthministry.org/worship/prayers/#offertory>
- (6) The Commissioning and Benediction is adapted from *A Prayer of Gratitude, The United Nations Environmental Sabbath Service, Earth Ministry*, <http://earthministrytemp.org/the-united-nations-environmental-sabbath-service/> obtained
- (7) Permission to stream music in this service obtained from One LICENSE, license#A-736636. All publishing rights reserved

Ministers, *All of Us*
Scott Rosenstein, *Pastor*
Betty Funk, *Pianist and Music Director*
Keith Konet, *Council President*
Beverly Wurm, *Administrative Assistant*



NEWS AND UPCOMING EVENTS

God is Still Speaking...

No matter who you are, or where you are on life's journey, you will find a spiritual home in this United Church of Christ congregation. WELCOME!

Tithes and Offerings - Checks and Money Orders can be made payable to: "Zion United Church of Christ" and placed in the offering basket or mailed to:

**Zion United Church of Christ
c/o Keith Konet
1039 Bridlewood Drive
Copley, OH 44321**

Questions: Contact Keith Konet at 330.604.6939

Administrative Assistant, Beverly Wurm

Beverly began a part-time position with us. She is keeping some limited Office Hours at church (2700 W.14th) /home. The days and hours are:

Monday – 9am – 1pm

Wednesday – 10am-2 pm

Thursday – 9am – 1pm

Beverly can be reached at: zionchurchtremont@gmail.com or by phone at: 216-273-7561 (church) or 216-310-6810 (mobile).

Please Remember in Prayer

- The Universal Church, its members and mission,
- The nation and all in authority, the leaders of our nation - federal, state, and local.
- For democracy and our democratic institutions and norms in the United States.
- The welfare of the world and the concerns of the local community,
- The interrelationship of Gospel values and civic engagement
- Ministries of the United Church of Christ and of Zion Church.
- The leaders of our church: local, regional, and national, including our Living Water Association UCC, Association General Minister, The Rev. Nayiri Karjian, and Association Faith in Action Minister, The Rev. Michael Howard.
- The ministers and missionaries of the world.
- Those who are refugees and immigrants.
- For children separated from their parents at detention camps along our southern border.
- For racial and religious justice and reconciliation in the United States and around the world.
- Mother Earth and the global reflection on climate disruption.
- For peace, justice, and freedom throughout the world and particularly for the peoples of Ukraine, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, and the United States.
- The people of Turkey and Syria: more than 50,000 people have died following two devastating earthquakes. Hopes of finding people alive have dimmed and experts fear the toll could rise sharply. Turkish authorities say some 13.5 million people have been affected in an area spanning roughly 280 miles from Adana in the west to Diyarbakir in the east, and 186 miles from Malatya in the north to Hatay in the south. At least 44,374 deaths have been reported in Turkey, while 5,800 951 people have died in Syria. Be with all who grieve and mourn the loss of loved ones, homes, businesses, and infrastructure. Please help the survivors to process and move through the trauma, and to rebuild their lives and communities.

- The people of California profoundly impacted by the atmospheric rivers, flooding rains and winter storms and snow. Be with all who grieve and mourn the loss of loved ones, homes, businesses, and infrastructure. Please help the survivors to process and move through the trauma, and to rebuild their lives and communities.
- Prayers for healing process for the surviving children, faculty, parents, and extended families of the Covenant School, a Christian school for pre-K through 6th grade students in Nashville, Tennessee. A mass shooting there left three students and three adults dead.
- Prayers for the healing process for the survivors and staff of Old National Bank of Louisville, Kentucky and their extended families. A mass shooting there left 5 dead and several injured including a responding police officer with critical injuries.
- According to data from the Gun Violence Archive a total of 165 mass shooting incidents have occurred in the US as of April 19th, 2023. In 2022 a total of 648 mass shootings. In 2021 a total of 693 mass shooting incident occurred across the US, in 2020 a total of 611, in 2019 a total of 417, with 337 incidents in 2018. While we pray for the families and friends of those whose lives have been taken in violent acts – and we pray for those injured in body, mind, soul, and spirit – and for their neighborhoods and communities across the United States - We know that our words and prayers are not enough. We must repent for our collective inaction and commit to tirelessly working toward meaningful gun violence prevention.
- For those affected by the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic and the omicron variant and various variant surges: for all those who are infected and/or sick, and those who are grieving, for all who are affected, all around the world, for essential workers and frontline workers...we pray for comfort, for safety, for health, and for wholeness.
- The residents and management of the San Sofia Apartments who share a campus with us.
- Those anticipating surgery, recovering from surgery, or undergoing medical procedures, tests, or treatments
- Those living in assisted living or in a nursing home
- Those who are homebound and those who are caregivers
- Those who suffer or are in any trouble, and the departed.
- Those on our church prayer list:
 - Patti Augustine and family
 - Robert O. Bucklew (*Bob Bucklew's Dad*) is at Mapleridge Senior Living Willoughby, OH.
 - Betty Funk (*our Minister of Music*) receiving care in a medical rehab unit.
 - Marian Heffernan (*neighbor to Scott and Bob; friend of Elaine – health concerns*)
 - Ken Kauffman & friends: Nim Bryant, Isadora Almaro, Joe & Janelle Reardon, Barbara Reed, Nancy Moore's sister has passed away.
 - Jocelyn Paulette and her parents, Kevin & Jacqui Konet - *prayers for recovery.*
 - Keith Konet and family
 - Marcia Leslie (*neighbor and friend – health concerns*)
 - The family and loved ones of Elaine Lukacs.
 - Linda and James Mortach (*Elaine Lukacs' sister & brother-in-law*) & Linda's daughter and James' son
 - Patricia Matheny (*prayers for her Cousin Paul Kevin McCray*) Prayers for her family at the loss of her brother Keith Matheny who grew up in the Zion Church. Also the loss of a dear friend Craig Lucas.

- Barbara Rossington (*move to a new senior housing community*) - *Prayers for Barb's cousin Robert for upcoming tests and procedures.*
- Henry Senyak (*resident community leader – cancer*)
- Debbie Webb (*Debbie has fallen a couple of times – in one fall she suffered a broken femur – and in a second recent fall, she broke a bone in her arm. She is recovering*)
- Beverly Wurm and family

Thursday, April 20, 2023

The Prophetic Power of Parable

From Michael Howard, Minister of Faith in Action, Living Water Association, Ohio NorthEast, UCC



If we are to get it right, perhaps Drag Story Hour has a lot to teach the church about the Gospel. An important mark of faithful ministry is our engagement in sacred stories and traditions. Stories open a portal for experiencing the sacred. They infuse the mundane with meaning. They have the power to forge family out of foes, engrave holiness on the hardest of human hearts, and make the profane sacred. In an important sense, our sacred stories are much like drag in that they have the power to challenge and reshape the stories we tell about the world around us.

The most prophetic task before us, as daunting as it may seem, is to be caretakers of the stories we tell. Storytelling is a sacred calling, an essential part of our participation in the healing of this world God so dearly loves. What is a good story without good storytellers? The calling to be faithful caretakers of our stories and traditions—to tell better stories—means attending to how stories affect the wellbeing of our community.

One way to see the power of story at work is through the distinction between *myth* and *parable*. In *The Dark Interval*, John Dominic Crossan, explains that a myth is a story we come to believe because it seems to settle some contradiction. Myths reconcile differences. They help make sense of the world. They tell us that the world is a certain way for good reason. They give us simplistic answers to complicated questions. Myth imposes meaning rather than discovering it.

As Crossan frames it, parable is the polar opposite of myth. Where myth provides certainty, parable raises questions. Parables point out contradictions. They are not meant to reassure us but to change us. If myths reconcile what was otherwise irreconcilable, parables pull apart pretense. Crossan explains, "The surface function of parable is to create contradiction within a given situation of complacent security." Parables are prophetic and unsettling; they challenge the fundamental principle of reconciliation by making us aware of the untruths embedded in it: "You have built a lovely home, myth assures us; but, whispers parable, you are right above an earthquake fault."

When seen from this framework, the Gospel functions as a revolutionary parable by upending our false mythologies about the world in order to unmask injustice so the healing can take place. The Gospel, as a parable, challenges us to rethink who we are, what we value, and why.

Parables contrast the world as it is with the world as it can and should be. This distinction between myth and parable can be seen played out everyday among those who work to bring social change. The prophetic power of parables offer alternatives to the oppressive mythology that holds the world hostage. When a minister wears vestments during a public protest event, or a congregation hosts a community-wide prayer vigil, we see the Gospel function as parable through their witness.

It was the prophetic power of parable at work in the ministry of the Community Church of Chesterland that was under attack recently in the days leading up to their "Drag Brunch Story Hour" on April 1. During Drag Story Hour, storytellers use drag to read books to children in libraries, schools, and bookstores. It has been an important spiritual practice in United Church of Christ congregations for decades. Events like these make space for children and families to engage with stories they perhaps already know, but in ways that celebrate difference and challenges gender norms. Where oppressive myths use shame to create conformity, Drag Story Hour use storytelling to create a community of belonging and acceptance.

If we are to be caretakers of our sacred stories, then we need parabolic storytellers. As unsettling as they may seem, parables break open the false narratives of our world so that new, redemptive narratives can be born. Stories embody the alchemical art of transmutation—revealing hidden beauty in the discarded and discarded beauty in ourselves. That is, perhaps, what makes drag queens such good storytellers. When we get it right, this is what the Gospel can do, break open our false narratives and to reveal the beauty of God in all of us.

When Was the First Earth Day? The first Earth Day took place on April 22, 1970.



Cuyahoga River Fire Nov. 3, 1952. Courtesy of Cleveland Press Collection at Cleveland State University Library

Firefighters battle a fire on Ohio's Cuyahoga River in 1952. The polluted river caught fire on several occasions between 1936 and 1969, when debris and oil had concentrated on the water's surface and ignited. A blaze in 1969 came at a time of increasing environmental awareness and symbolized years of environmental neglect. Image courtesy of Cleveland Press Collection at Cleveland State University Library.

On June 22, 1969, the Cuyahoga River on the southern shores of Lake Erie caught on fire as chemicals, oil, and other industrial materials that had oozed into the river somehow ignited. Just a few months before, on January 28, 1969, an oil rig leaked millions of gallons of oil off the coast of Santa Barbara. That same year, reports surfaced that our national symbol, the bald eagle, was rapidly declining as a species due to the chemical DDT, while around the world, whales were being hunted nearly to extinction. These and other incidents caught the attention of the national media and galvanized public awareness of the many environmental insults being hurled at the nation and the planet.

In response to the public outcry, Earth Day Founder Gaylord Nelson, who served as the Governor of Wisconsin (1958-1962) and in the U.S. Senate (1963-1981), organized a nationwide "teach-in" about environmental issues to take place on April 22, 1970. More than 2,000 colleges and universities, 10,000 public schools, and 20 million citizens participated—nearly 10 percent of the U.S. population at that time.

This outpouring of grassroots environmental activism marked the first Earth Day—a recognition of the importance of caring for the environment and accepting stewardship responsibility for the nation's resources. It also helped establish a political climate conducive to forming both the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on October 3, 1970.

We like to say that "Every day is Earth Day at NOAA." But ever since April 22, 1970, people the world over take time to recognize the importance of protecting the Earth's natural resources—be they oceanic, atmospheric, terrestrial, or biological—for future generations.

Protecting Our Planet Starts with You
Ten simple choices for a healthier planet.

PROTECTING OUR PLANET STARTS WITH YOU

BIKE MORE DRIVE LESS

reduce REUSE recycle

 Cut down on what you throw away. Follow the three "R's" to conserve natural resources and landfill space.

choose sustainable

seafood
 Learn how to make smart seafood choices at www.FishWatch.gov.

PLANT A TREE

 Trees provide food and oxygen. They help save energy, clean the air, and help combat climate change.

EDUCATE

 When you further your own education, you can help others understand the importance and value of our natural resources.

CONSERVE WATER

 The less water you use, the less runoff and wastewater that eventually end up in the ocean.

-SHOP-WISELY

 Buy less plastic and bring a reusable shopping bag.

Don't send chemicals into our waterways.

 Choose nontoxic chemicals in the home and office.

Volunteer!

 Volunteer for cleanups in your community. You can get involved in protecting your watershed too!

Long-lasting light bulbs - ARE A BRIGHT IDEA

 Energy efficient light bulbs reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Also flip the light switch off when you leave the room!

oceanservice.noaa.gov

Protecting our planet starts with you. Here are just a few of the things you can do.
 (from: "Ocean Service, National Oceanic and <https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/infographics/>)

Ten Simple Things You Can Do to Help Protect the Earth

- **Reduce, reuse, and recycle.** Cut down on what you throw away. Follow the three "R's" to conserve natural resources and landfill space.
- **Volunteer.** Volunteer for cleanups in your community. You can get involved in protecting your watershed, too.
- **Educate.** When you further your own education, you can help others understand the importance and value of our natural resources.
- **Conserve water.** The less water you use, the less runoff and wastewater that eventually end up in the ocean.
- **Choose sustainable.** Learn how to make smart seafood choices at www.fishwatch.gov.
- **Shop wisely.** Buy less plastic and bring a reusable shopping bag.
- **Use long-lasting light bulbs.** Energy efficient light bulbs reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Also flip the light switch off when you leave the room!
- **Plant a tree.** Trees provide food and oxygen. They help save energy, clean the air, and help combat climate change.
- **Don't send chemicals into our waterways.** Choose non-toxic chemicals in the home and office.
- **Bike more. Drive less.**