

**UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST CONGREGATIONAL  
Wallace, Idaho**

Alice M.C. Ling, Pastor

Earth Day

April 26, 2020

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Welcome once again to our cyber worship as the United Church of Christ Congregational in Wallace. Ben and I have moved a few miles down the road from our house so that we can come to you this morning from N-Sid-Sen, a Camp and Retreat Center of the Pacific Northwest Conference of the United Church of Christ. It's a place where so many of you have spent time, where for generations faith has been explored and adventures begun. The camp is closed for now because of the coronavirus, but Mark Boyd, the managing director, also invites people to come and enjoy the trails and grounds; please keep a safe distance from others and don't go into the buildings, but even now this place is ours to cherish. When I began to think about a worship time focused on Earth Day and the gifts of our marvelous creation, N-Sid-Sen seemed like the perfect place for us to gather. So welcome to camp even as you are welcomed to the United Church of Christ Congregational in Wallace. Who we are as a church is not confined to a building, and where we gather for worship, especially these days, is not nearly as important as the fact that we gather. And that God promises to be among us, knitting us together as one, into the Body of Christ.

Once again, I am sending along a PDF of the words for this service, and invite you to join me in the responsive and unison readings as well as the songs. Let us worship God.

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

In the midst of darkness & chaos...

**God imagined.**

In the fury and darkness...

**God imagined a world filled with trees, and blue skies and fluffy white clouds.**

In the meadow, God stood and...

**imagined foxes, bluebirds, and slithering snakes.**

In a world of rainstorms and wildlife and cattle and grasses blowing in the breeze...

**God imagined humanity. God imagined the continuum from man to woman.**

In a world teeming with billions of people...

**God imagined me.**

God imagined you and God imagined me. We are created in the image of God.

**God imagined us all. God loves each of us.**

Let us worship with the same imagination as the creating One!

**Amen.**

(Tim Graves, LiturgyBits)

**SONG "For the Beauty of the Earth"**

For the beauty of the earth, For the glory of the skies,  
For the love which from our birth Over and around us lies;  
Lord of all, to Thee we raise This our hymn of grateful praise.

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:  
Lord of all, to Thee we raise This our hymn of grateful praise.

For the joy of human love, Brother, sister, parent, child;  
Friends on earth and friends above; For all gentle thoughts and mild:  
Lord of all, to Thee we raise This our hymn of grateful praise.

OPENING PRAYER (in unison)

**O God, We thank you for this earth, our home; for the wide sky and the blessed sun, for the ocean and streams, for the towering hills and the whispering wind, for the trees and green grass.**

**We thank you for our senses by which we hear the songs of birds, and see the splendor of fields of golden wheat, and taste autumn's fruit, rejoice in the feel of snow, and smell the breath of spring flowers.**

**Grant us a heart opened wide to all this beauty; and save us from being so blind that we pass unseeing when even the common thorn bush is aflame with your glory.**

**For each new dawn is filled with infinite possibilities for new beginnings and new discoveries. Life is constantly changing and renewing itself.**

**In this new day of new beginnings with God, all things are possible. We are restored and renewed in a joyous awakening to the wonder that our lives are and, yet, can be. Amen.**

(written by Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918))

READING Psalm 104: 10-15, 24

You make springs gush forth in the valleys;  
they flow between the hills,  
giving drink to every wild animal;  
the wild asses quench their thirst.  
By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation;  
they sing among the branches.  
From your lofty abode you water the mountains;  
the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.

You cause the grass to grow for the cattle,  
and plants for people to use,  
to bring forth food from the earth,  
and wine to gladden the human heart,  
oil to make the face shine,  
and bread to strengthen the human heart.

O Lord, how manifold are your works!  
In wisdom you have made them all;  
the earth is full of your creatures.

SERMON

Fifty years is a long time, but sadly, it's recent enough for my memory. They tell me that on the first Earth Day fifty years ago, an estimated 20 million Americans took to the streets to communicate their love of this planet and their concerns about its future. I don't remember that, but I suspect it was about the time we took to the mile and a half stretch of road between our farm and the village, carrying garbage bags and wearing gloves. At least in Vermont, we called it Green Up Day, and for several springs, we gathered up the litter and leftovers from winter, and played a small part in restoring the beauty around us. I still pick up litter when we walk, and work hard at recycling, but it's fair to say that

I've done a lot more loving on this planet than I have protecting it over the years. Either way, with a focus in either direction, Earth Day tends to get my attention most years.

I've been blessed to live in a lot of beautiful places. I started out in a place where maple trees provided the topping for our pancakes and the annual ecstasy of sugar on snow, as well as the breathtaking display of reds and oranges every fall. Our town had a spring fed lake that was crystal clear and shockingly cold. Always. A friend and mentor introduced me to hiking, backpacking and the mountains where all of that took place. Living in northern Maine featured Mt. Katahdin, Acadia National Park and acres upon acres of potato fields. Minnesota showed me the bluffs of the Mississippi River, rich, black soil for growing corn and soybeans, and the power and majesty of Lake Superior. And moving here has gifted me with opportunities to learn that great blue herons nest in the tops of tall trees, to offer welcome to moose who love the branches and fruit of our pear trees, to examine the frantic activity of ant hills and delight in the pollen-producing purple balls displayed on ponderosa pines about this time of year. I'm tempted to go on, but I trust you have your own list of scenic views and wildlife antics that take your breath away and make you smile. The wonder and intricacy of this planet is full to overflowing with an abundance of marvelous things, and I suspect we could talk forever of all we've seen and celebrated, to say nothing of the endless list of places and wonders we still hope to explore before we're done.

Seeing and appreciating the gifts of creation is a wonderful thing, as is expressing our gratitude and delight to the God who is responsible for all of it. But it seems to me that it is also important for us to reflect on our role in relation to it. From the very start, scripture has planted us in the midst of the splendor and abundance of creation and assigned us responsibilities. In Genesis 1, we read about the five days that God spent creating order out of chaos, separating light from dark, the earth from the skies, the water from the land, and then filling it with trees and geraniums, salmon and eagles, bats and coral reefs. The story goes that on the sixth day, God created man and woman and gave them dominion over all of it. There's a lot of ways to understand that word, but the study that I've done says that more than just putting us in charge, the Creator made us stewards of the earth: responsible for the health and wellbeing of the creation, as well as privileged to enjoy it's fruits and produce. Stewards aren't owners, but the ones given the responsibility for taking care of someone else's property. In Genesis 2, starting in the middle of verse 4, there's a second creation story, and there God assigns the humans the work of tilling the ground and tending the garden. The people had trouble sticking to those assigned roles long, and before chapter 3 was even finished, they'd been driven out of the garden. By the time we get to chapter 6, we read that a pandemic of violence has overtaken the world, and God is furious, at which point Noah is tapped and given the task of once again caring for the creation: God called Noah to build an ark to house God's creatures, gather food to feed them and keep them alive with him, so that they all may abound on the earth.

Gardeners and stewards, protectors and providers. There's more woven throughout the Bible, but those are wonderful images that set the stage and give us clear direction as a starting place for how God envisions us living with this precious and amazing gift of creation. And tragically, there's no shortage of reports and studies, if not casual observations and experiences, that make it clear we have not honored our assignment. Whether you look at the oceans filling up with plastics or watch fiery blazes consume California redwoods and Amazon rainforests, look at pictures of starving polar bears scavenging on shrinking ice caps or consider the increase of super storms and unprecedented drought, the evidence is strong and overwhelming that the planet is in trouble. This lake which Ben and I are privileged to look at every day, and most of us cherish for it's host of recreational opportunities struggles actively with the consequences of agricultural run off, the leftovers of decades of mining that the rivers have washed in and now serious over development. Pick your place and the focus of your concern for God's creation, but it's clear that the clock is ticking and pressure is mounting. While some challenge the science and

others argue the priority of business and civilization over environmental protectionism, far more of us shrug our shoulders and turn our backs, convinced the problem is too big for us and beyond our ability to influence.

Ironically, in recent months as our entire world has quarantined and isolated to protect ourselves from the pandemic of COVID19, it appears we have given the planet a tremendous gift. Have you seen the pictures of the skyline that is emerging in Wuhan, China, in Los Angeles, in Seattle? The ways in which the Himalayas are again visible in India? Bird song can be heard in New York City. Coyotes have been seen playing on the Golden Gate Bridge and lions have been sprawled on South African highways. As we've sheltered in place, we're offered the planet a chance to breathe, for which it appears to be immensely grateful. But as we move forward and beyond this time, I think we have to confront the questions of where we go from here. Do we resume business as usual, or do we learn from this time and do what we can to move forward on a different foot: working to honor all of the life around us, to value the needs of the fish and the honey bees alongside the well being of our families and communities, to protect the panda bears and eagles as well as our jobs and our health. We can't afford to prioritize one over and against the other; we have to find a way forward that is a both/and, that honors each and all. God will help us find that path if we will ask and listen, search and respond to what we find.

I want to share with you a piece I discovered the other day in a post Dena put on Facebook. It was a video presentation that included her daughter and granddaughter, and was produced by Wondercamp, which is a Seattle-based film production company. The script to the video is a letter to humanity from Planet Earth:

“Dear Humanity. Hello...It's me, Planet Earth... right under your feet. I'm blades of grass between your toes, and the old tree in your backyard. I set the sky ablaze in a symphony of color. I know you miss the rivers and the oceans and the forests. That you miss going on road trips. My rain on your face replenishing your soul... And those cute mountain tops. They're gorgeous, aren't they? I miss you, too. I really love you. All of you. I'm writing to tell you that I see you. I know times are hard. You might be feeling anxious, scared. Fear, doubt, pressure. So helpless. Some of you have already lost, or are in fear for someone that you love. It's okay to still be crying... I'm here to remind you to keep going...

“Dear Humanity, Remember who you are. You are a force in nature, my love. You are pure energy. Be true to yourself, take care of each other... Slow down and look around at the many lessons I have to share. Pay attention to my rhythms. What do you see?... Are you listening? Do you see the ebb and flow of it all? Like the salmon swimming upstream, remind yourself, we're growing from this. And my skies show you just how much you can become. I want you to take a deep breath. Slow down, soak in my sun. And think of everything those rays are touching right now. Do you see how the wild fire helps the forest thrive? Perfect for regrowth. Learning that you are all connected. I am still here with you through the hopelessness.

“Dear humans, we must not forget all the beauty that is around us. Keep your daydreams of road tripping to the Southwest, hammocking in the Rocky Mountains. Remember the blue, clear skies over Los Angeles. Open that window... I need you now more than ever. Consider how you effect me. Let's be real. You're killing me. Normal wasn't working. We can't go back to normal. We must look past the current storm clouds. Use this as a catalyst for mass change. We must stay united in the fight against climate change. To fight for my health. Fight for me. Go save the ocean. Save all the animals. Pick up your trash. Stop offshore drilling... Love on me, as I have on you.... If you're reading this, there's still hope. The hope is you. You can link arms and save me. There is beauty left to save and it is your job to save it.

“Dear humanity, Hang in there. Everything's going to be okay.... I'll be with you through this. There is still hope... Go play in it. Hug your friends and laugh. Spread joy wherever you go...Oh, my sweet humans. I hope you know that I'm proud of you. Because you are adaptive and resilient. Humanity, you too will overcome. Yours truly, The one and only, Planet Earth...” (Pattie Gonia and Wondercamp)

#### PRAYER REQUESTS

Pray that they lift the stupid lockdown so people can go back to work to support their families and get back to normal life

Prayers for the CDC and governors who make recommendations about next steps, for wisdom about people's health and the economy and how to care for both

For a family Christi knows: the mother is going through a divorce and her 11-year old daughter is angry with her mother; prayers for both of them and the wider family who is offering support

John Thielman, prayers for continued improvement with his balance and fear of falling again.

#### PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Creating God, we marvel at the bounty and beauty of the world you have made: the majesty of mountains and fluttering antics of hummingbirds, the strength of elephants and the fragility of a flower petal, the searing heat of the desert and the frigid cold of blizzards, the immensity of sequoias and the microscopic wonder of a single cell. We marvel that ice cream and cheese, steak and milk can all begin in the same creature, and that that creature began in you. Open our eyes to the beauty and wonder of your creation. Slow us enough to see and comprehend the miracle of all you have made. And teach us how to honor the assignment you have given us, the need to care and protect, to honor and preserve, to nurture and cherish the gift of your heart and the work of your hand.

We continue to pray for ourselves and for our world in these days of pandemic. Number counts are beginning to slow their climb, and for that we give thanks as we feel ourselves begin to breathe again, but we also know people continue to suffer and die cut off from their families, that medical personnel continue to work and serve and put themselves in harms' way, that workers in stores and meat plants, truck drivers and custodians remain vulnerable, and we continue to ask for your healing and protection for all who are at risk. We give thanks for all those who search for a vaccine and ways to treat this virus, and ask you to lead them along the paths that will bear fruit and provide the tools we crave. And we pray for the debate that rages between and among us: the impatience to get back to work and the caution to not move too soon, to find ways to protect both the financially and medically vulnerable. Grant us your wisdom, O God, that we might not pit one need against another, but with your help discover new and creative ways to care for one another. By your grace, help us to use this time to knit us together as one people, not to dig deeper trenches to divide and alienate us from one another.

Our needs are many, and our prayers are far reaching. You know well the joys and gratuities that we bring before you (*pause*) as well as the needs and hurts (*pause*). Hear us. Guide and bless us. Heal and hold us. Wrap us in your wisdom and enfold us in your embrace. And hear us as we pray together the prayer that Jesus taught: Our Father...

#### PRAYER OF OUR SAVIOR (debts)

#### OFFERING

The Conference owns this camp and is able to offer it to us to use and enjoy in part because of a gift of land that was given years ago by the Ford family. It is located in one of the parts of north Idaho that broadcasts most spectacularly the wonder and majesty of God's gifts of creation, gifts given to us to use and enjoy, but also to protect and nurture. I think about my own life and the home that Ben and I share,

and everywhere I look I see gifts that have been given to me and to us by others, gifts of quilts and pottery, a coffee table and rocking chair, drawings on the refrigerator and pictures on the walls, the ability to make bread and appreciate the value of a home grown tomato. When any of us stop to notice and appreciate the abundance of gifts that make our lives what they are today, I encourage us to also ponder the question of what gifts we are giving. What are the ways in which we are sharing what we have and who we are with others? How are we enriching other's lives in the things that we do, the skills we teach, the values we encourage, the time we share? What will those who come after us carry with them as a gift from us, a reminder of our lives and of our love?

SONG    *“All Things Bright and Beautiful”*

Refrain: All things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small,  
All things wise and wonderful, our dear God made them all.

Each little flower that opens, each little bird that sings,  
God made their glowing colors, and made their tiny wings.

The purple-headed mountain, the river running by,  
The sunset and the morning that brightens up the sky.

The cold wind in the winter, the pleasant summer sun,  
The ripe fruits in the garden, God made them every one.

BENEDICTION

Go in peace, my friends. Celebrate the wonders of creation, and know that in all of the seasons of our lives, God is with us. Listen to the songs of the waves and the hymns of the trees. Touch the earth with love and respect. May God bless us and hold us gently as we seek to do God's work in the world. Our worship has ended. Our service begins. Amen.

(Frances A. Bogle, *Before the Amen*)