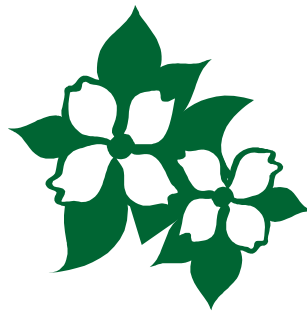


Living in Lent, Caring for Creation



Presbyterians for Restoring Creation (PRC)

Lent is a time for prayerful reflection and intentional action. It provides us with an opportunity to discern how we are called to be and to act as Christ's disciples in our time, in this place. Because we believe that Christian discipleship involves caring for all Creation, we created this resource as a way to prepare our hearts, minds, bodies, and lives this Lenten season. It includes:

- ❖ *40 Ways to Fast and Feast for God's Creation*
- ❖ *Reflections*, for personal or group devotional use, on Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, the Great Vigil of Easter, and Easter

Presbyterians for Restoring Creation (PRC) is a nationwide network that cares for God's Creation by Connecting, Equipping, and Inspiring. Join us at www.prcweb.org or call 415-451-2826.

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Thanks to our authors!

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40 Simple Ways to Fast and Feast for God's Creation

We are called both to attend to the sacredness of Creation *and* to respond to it by active participation in the protection of Creation. This list uses the metaphors of feasting and fasting to invite both these elements of caring for Creation into our Lenten observance.



1. Feast on the beauty of this day by glancing up every time you go outdoors.
2. Fast from spending money on consumer purchases.
3. Feast on the goodness of God by giving thanks for your life and your sustenance before each meal.
4. Fast from heavily processed “junk” foods.
5. Feast on God's creativity by watching with interest the uniqueness of insects or critters that cross your path today.
6. Fast from unnecessary water waste by placing a bucket in your shower to catch extra water (and then use it in the place of a toilet flush!)
7. Feast on the blessing of water by offering a prayer of thanks to God each time you wash your hands or drink from the tap.
8. Fast from extra packaging by purchasing in bulk and/or bringing your own bags to the store.
9. Feast on the blessing of community by practicing random acts of kindness to the people around you.
10. Fast from disposable coffee cups or water bottles by carrying your own.
11. Feast on accessible services by thanking the appropriate party for recycling programs (curbside, at work, in town, at businesses).
12. Fast from individual automobile use for any destination in easy walking, bicycling, or public transit distance.
13. Feast on the outdoors by taking a walk.
14. Fast from energy use by eating meals that don't require cooking.
15. Feast on the richness of God's word by reading Scripture with a lens of eco-justice.
16. Fast from eating meat, which consumes much of the world's resources.
17. Feast on foods lower on the food chain such as whole grains and vegetables.
18. Fast from purchases at national chains by shopping at local stores.
19. Feast on the light of God by having one meal by candlelight.
20. Fast from television.
21. Feast on the beauty of community by calling or visiting with a loved one.
22. Fast from extra energy use by adjusting your thermostat when you will be away for more than a few hours.
23. Feast on local agriculture by finding out the location of the closest farm stand, farmers' market, or grocery stocking local produce (and then supporting it!)
24. Fast from giving consumer products as gifts and instead give donations or subscriptions on someone's behalf to worthwhile organizations (such as giving a PRC gift membership!)

25. Feast on fair trade by purchasing fairly traded chocolates, coffees, and teas when planning for Easter baskets or brunches.
26. Fast from household chemicals by using vinegar, baking soda, soap, and hot water to clean and disinfect.
27. Feast on simple public policy advocacy opportunities by visiting the Presbyterian Legislative Action Center of the Presbyterian Washington Office at: capwiz.com/pcusa.
28. Fast from turning on—and leaving on—unnecessary lighting fixtures.
29. Feast on the blessing of plants by watering, weeding, or attending to household or outdoor plants.
30. Fast from running the dishwasher or washer/dryer when not full.
31. Feast on the companionship of animals by giving extra attention to your, or others', pets.
32. Fast from driving by combining the week's various errands and trips.
33. Feast on news, resources, ideas, and models from Presbyterians for Restoring Creation at www.prcweb.org and partner groups (linked from the web site).
34. Fast from energy and water use by taking a lukewarm shower and turning off the water while soaping up.
35. Feast on the support given to the church by Presbyterian national staff who work hard to care for God's creation. Offer prayers of thanks or send appreciative notes by email or mail to Bill Somplatsky-Jarman (Associate for Environmental Justice), Carolynn Race (Associate for Domestic Policy and Environmental Issues, Presbyterian Washington Office), staff within the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, Presbyterian Hunger Program, Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, and other related programs. To find these people, go to: www.pcusa.org/environment, www.pcusa.org/washington, www.pcusa.org/peacemaking, www.pcusa.org/hunger, www.pcusa.org/acswp.
36. Fast from unnecessary future purchases by saving and re-using envelopes, jars, paper bags, and scrap paper.
37. Feast on sun and air by line-drying clothing.
38. Fast from excess drag on your car, which decreases fuel efficiency, by unloading extra weight, keeping air pressure correct in tires, and keeping the car clean.
39. Feast on the solidness and feeling of earth by walking barefoot.
40. Fast from apocalyptic environmental thinking and despair—focus instead on the Good News that God creates, redeems, and sustains the Creation and we are called to be responsible, awe-filled caretakers alongside God.

Lenten Meditation

Robert L. Stivers

Embedding is a newly popular word taken from the U.S.-Iraqi wars. It refers to the practice of placing journalists to report on the war inside fighting units in the field. Before the word takes on the status of a cliché, perhaps we can press it into service stopping the war we are waging against the natural environment.

Think of yourself for a moment as a flower in a bed of flowers, or better yet, as a flowering weed. I like that better, given my experience of the human condition. No offense meant to weeds here. Flowering weeds, like dandelions, are still flowers, however much we reject them. And weeds give us a better analogy as to how we come to be in the flowerbed. Carried by the windy dust, their seeds come and settle in. The ground and the sun nourish them, and the skies water them. They are totally dependent on the ecological system in which they are embedded, although they do have some room to adapt to changes.

The weed gives as well as it receives. Bees gather its pollen and nectar. Some animals feast on weeds. But then the weed dies on its own, leaving its seeds in the dust to be picked up by the wind for a new generation and its withered leaves to be recycled. Yet each weed has a distinctiveness of its own. It is part of a species distinct from other species, and it is this weed, not that one.

Is there really a gardener? Probably not in the sense of the dominating God of many present-day theologies. Something mysterious besides the weeds seems to be embedded in the garden, however. A life force hangs in, over, and around the weeds. I experience a *spirit* in the fields of my life that also seems just as embedded as I am. That *spirit* sustains me as it does all living things. It calls to me.

But I do not respond very well. I *know* I should respond to the crisis brought on by global climate change. Unlike weeds, I have a limited freedom from natural necessity. I and my generation, however, have used this freedom to pull weeds, wrecking havoc on the earth's ecological systems. We are at war with the earth. Now is the time for repentance. The gardener is calling us to embed the flowers, the weeds, and even ourselves in the dust of the natural world. This Lenten season we could do no better than to hear this call and respond in a way that befits our embedded natures.

Prayer:

Gracious God, we thank you for the fullness of the earth and its natural processes. Help us to care for all that is and to protect life as if it were our own. Amen

Reflection on Ash Wednesday

James G. Speer

Ash Wednesday is the start of the season of Lent. As the Book of Common Worship tells us,
we begin this holy season by acknowledging our need for repentance, and for the mercy of forgiveness proclaimed in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The marking of ashes is tangible, visible evidence that Christians take seriously the days of Lent. The minister continues the observance of the Lenten Discipline.

We begin our journey to Easter with the sign of ashes. This ancient sign speaks of the frailty and uncertainty of human life. I invite you therefore in the name of Christ, to observe a holy lent by self-examination and penitence, by prayer and fasting, by works of love, and by reading and meditating on the Word of God.

These days we too often respond by giving up something trivial, like chocolate, smoking, or a favorite food. But Ash Wednesday should signify more than a personal reminder that might impel us to give up something up for Lent, or try and “do better” in our conduct with friends and associates.

In our consumer-oriented, market-driven society, it is very difficult to grasp that we can and must do more, especially as stewards of God’s creation, as followers of Jesus’ gospel promise that he had come that all might have life and have it more abundantly.

As we consider the sanctity of all of God’s abundant creation, poet and essayist Wendell Berry challenges us to be mindful of the way which we humans, especially since the industrial age, “...have been, and are the humans most guilty of desecrating the world and of destroying creation... It seems as though industrial humanity has brought about phase two of original sin. We are all now complicit in the murder of creation... We know how to ‘do better,’ but we don’t know how to extricate ourselves from our complicity.” Barry asks, “How could we live without degrading our soils, slaughtering our forests, polluting our streams, poisoning the air and the rain? ...How could we live without the war economy and the holocaust of the fossil fuels? ...To the offer of more abundant life we have responded with choosing the economics of extinction.”¹

So let us consider the ashen mark already placed, no, gashed, on the forehead of this fragile planet. We will see it in the change of our climate, the extinction of species, water and air pollution, toxic waste, the destruction of our forests, and the drying up of our fossil fuels.

And then, let us observe a holy Lent
By self-examination and penitence,
By prayer and fasting,
by works of love,
and by reading and meditating on the Word of God.

1. Quotations from Wendell Berry taken from the September 20th, 2005, issue of The Christian Century.

Palm Sunday Meditation

Jenny Holmes

Scripture Readings: Mark 11:1-19. Philippians 2:5-11. Psalms 118:19-16

God's creation is bound up in political and economic systems that destroy its ability to sustain both human and non-human life. We feel small against the magnitude and power of these systems, yet in Jesus' Way the "powers that be" are turned upside down by the humble and nonviolent. Jesus' "triumphal" entry into Jerusalem (Mark 11:1-11) that we remember on Palm Sunday is full of images that undermine Messianic triumphalism and militarism.

The king Jesus celebrated by peasants shouting, "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David," and waving palm branches, was unarmed and hardly in a position to conquer the established authorities. Rather than entering in a chariot, an instrument of war, he enters on a donkey. Jesus' destination is the Temple, the principle open public space and the economic and religious center of Jerusalem. He observes the activity of the Temple and returns the next day with his disciples. Then he overturns the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who sell doves (Mark 11:15-17). Educator and activist Ched Myers observes that the issue for Jesus wasn't the existence of economic activity in the Temple, but "the way in which the political economy of the cult had become oppressive to the poor." The pigeon sellers made their profit off selling the primary commodity that the poor needed to meet their cultic obligations. The moneychangers were very powerful, since all money had to be converted to pay temple dues and tithes. Jesus goes to the center of power and through symbolic action turns systems of domination upside down.

To care for God's Creation as Christ's disciples we may be called to go to the centers of power of our nation, our states and cities to speak truth to power through advocacy. Some are called to demonstrate. Putting our faith into action requires that we mindfully observe what is happening in the "Temple" and discern the leverage points of change whether we are advocating for better energy policies or protesting harmful industrial activities. Just as important, is taking time to pray as Jesus and his disciples did. We can be confident that Christ has prepared the way and will be with us every step. Let us remember where the power truly resides as we strive to be faithful to God's mission of eco-justice.

Prayer:

Dear God, Your Kingdom is both here and not yet. Open our hearts to be surprised by the in-breaking of your Reign when we least expect it and when hope seems lost. Give us the courage to follow you into the centers of power and turn upside-down those systems that oppress your people and creation. May we do so with a love and compassion that creates openings for transformation and change. "Success" in restoring creation often seems far off. Let us not forget that our responsibility is to be faithful now and encourage those who will continue on long after we are gone. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Maundy Thursday Reminds Us of God's Love for the World, the Cosmos

Nancy Corson Carter

The term **Maundy** comes from the Latin word *mandatum* (root of English *mandate*), from a verb that means to “give,” “entrust,” or “order.” The term is usually translated “commandment,” from the John 13 account of this day. According to the Fourth Gospel, as Jesus and his disciples were eating their final meal together before Jesus’ arrest, he washed the disciples’ feet. After they had finished their meal, as they walked in the night toward Gethsemane, Jesus taught his disciples a “new” commandment (which echoes the “Great Commandment” in the Synoptic gospels): “Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (34b-35).

Maundy Thursday events powerfully reassert God’s all-embracing love of the world through Jesus Christ. *World* translated from the Greek *kosmos* includes all human and non-human nature. As John (3:16-17) declares that “God so loved the world/cosmos that he gave his only Son, ...not to condemn but to save the world/cosmos through him,” so John (12: 23b-24), in the metaphor of the grain of wheat falling into the earth to die and thus bear much fruit, reminds us of Christ’s sacrificial, incarnate love for the entire creation.

Washing the disciples’ feet, Jesus modeled humility and servanthood, qualities despised in that culture as qualities of good slaves. Jesus insists, to Peter’s chagrin, that unless he allows this foot-bathing, he will not be “entirely clean,” entirely transformed to follow Jesus’ footsteps in humble, earthy service. Only in this spirit can we as disciples truly receive Jesus’ self-sacrifice and accept his resurrection as central fact of our lives.

In this spirit we can prepare for the bread and wine made sacred in the Eucharist, instituted that evening, “the night when he was betrayed.” As God’s acts of deliverance in Hebrew history were remembered by the disciples in the Passover meal, so may we be called to remember God’s new act of deliverance in Christ in communion. By our loving acts toward each other and toward all creation we are to be known.

Prayer:

Holy God, your Son did not despise any task as too menial or too dangerous to express your love. Give us grace and courage to be faithful stewards of your wondrous creation.

Good Friday and Cruciform Living

Jim Mulligan

John 19:17: "Jesus was taken ...to the Place of the Skull... where they crucified him...."

On Good Friday Jesus of Nazareth was executed, having been condemned by both the religious and political authorities. His followers scattered, death seemed to have the final word. In our Christian tradition his death is central, yet it is anything but final. From a theological viewpoint, Christians are likewise to "die to self" in order that we may be transformed into "newness of life". While today some Christians have literally died from following their Christian vision (Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King), most of us merely relinquish some small dimension of life (Big Macs) in order to pursue another (organic salads).

I have found help in understanding this dying to self from eco-feminist theologian Sallie McFague and biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann. Both see this transformation as an on-going process: "the cruciform life." They also see it as particularly difficult for us middle class and affluent Americans. McFague writes: "We cannot, in good conscience, 'love the world' [in all its splendid ecological diversity] while at the same time destroying it, and allowing our less well-off sisters and brothers to sink deeper into poverty. Hence, I believe Christian discipleship... for [us] means 'cruciform living' – an alternative notion of the abundant life, which will involve a philosophy of 'enoughness', limitations on energy use, and sacrifice for the sake of others. We do not need so much to accept Christ's sacrifice for our sins as we need to repent of a major sin – our silent complicity in the impoverishment of others and the degradation of the planet."

Brueggemann adds: "Consumerism is not simply a market strategy. It has become a demonic spiritual force among us and the theological question facing us is whether the gospel has the power to help us withstand it The market ideology wants us to believe that the world is profane – life consists of buying and selling, weighing, measuring, and trading, and then finally sinking into death and nothingness. But Jesus presents an entirely different economy, one infused with the mystery of abundance and a cruciform kind of generosity."

Prayer:

Lord, help us as we seek to follow your teaching and your example. Help us to stand with the poor and voiceless, to use less of your Earth's resources, and to work to turn our troubled nation towards justice and peace.

Reflection on the Great Vigil of Easter

David Sholin

During the annual Great Vigil of Easter we religiously anticipate embracing the renewing spirit of Eastertide. We also are reminded of the spirit of God that swept over the face of Creation that is our renewing source of life (Genesis 1 NRSV).

Through our Easter Vigil the renewing energy of the resurrection proclamation for us and in us is recognized - just as it may be recognized throughout all of this Creation in which we live and move and have our being. An example of this spirit of God's creation, renewal and restoration that very much speaks to me comes from Daniel Matt's recent translation of the meaning of the Garden of Eden story found in the Zohar.

Professor Matt's work presents us with a Garden of Eden teaching that for me significantly informs our relationship with God as Creation. "We all know that near the beginning of Genesis there's the famous story of the expulsion from the Garden of Eden. It's clear that God expels Adam and Eve from the Garden. But the Zohar asks who expelled whom? It turns out that the Zohar, in a very artistic and radical way, rereads the verse so it now means Adam expelled God from the Garden."

"I think what the Zohar means is that we're still in the garden, but we just don't realize it because we've lost touch with the spiritual dimension of life. The challenge then comes to re-establish our relationship with God, to rediscover some intimacy with the spiritual dimension of life."

In this connection the Vigil reminds me that our spiritual renewal and restoration is woven together with the ongoing physical renewal and restoration of the Creation of which we are a part. For me the wholeness of our earthly home depends on our creative responses to God's spirit in Creation. So as we reflect and meditate through the Great Vigil of Easter on the good news of Jesus, may we anticipate how we are to be meaningfully connected and involved with God's process in Restoring Creation.

Prayer:

Eternal God

We gather together in your service,
seeking your way within us.

We pray that we share your spirit in our
commitments to justice and peace through
the restoration of Creation. Amen.

Easter Sunday Meditation

Renee Rico

Mark 16:7 *“But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.”*

A while back I read a wonderful book called *Galileo's Daughter*. It is the story of Galileo Galilei, a 15th century scientist in Italy and his daughter, who, appropriately enough, took the name Sister Maria Celeste when she became a nun as a teenager. Galileo, her father, was one of the first people ever to see the stars up close, because he literally created the very first working telescope. He was able to confirm Copernicus' theory that the earth revolved around the sun, a theory that was considered heresy by the church at the time.

In our modern world we believe that what we see is the important thing, but for all that Galileo saw in 15th century in the night sky, he had no idea of the things that he couldn't see. Jeffrey Sobosan, a contemporary theologian, notes that scientists are learning that it is the things that we cannot see through the telescopes that cause some of the fundamental phenomena of our universe. The matter that we *can't see* is a lot bigger than the stuff we *can see*.

Easter is a day about what the disciples couldn't see. This was no slam-dunk for instant believing... The women at the tomb couldn't see that Jesus' life was taking a new form, one that would transform their lives forever.

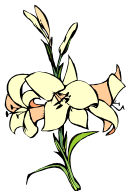
Today we can see that the story of the empty tomb is the story of death turning into new life. Jesus, in a way, is like the stars called supernovas. Supernovas are special stars that, under the pressure of intense gravity, compact to the point where they explode. So much light is produced in the explosion that, for a while, such a supernova is brighter than whole galaxies.

But, like the story of the tomb, it's what doesn't remain that is truly interesting. The original star isn't the same anymore. Under the pressure of the intense gravity, the simple elements of the universe compact further into the very elements that must exist for biological life to form: carbon, oxygen and magnesium. These supernovas scatter the planets with these precious elements, helping to spread the elements of the cosmos liberally around. Very literally, without the death of the supernova, we might not have life on earth.

Prayer:

Holy Spirit, Soul of love,
Unleash your abundance within me
until every faculty is transfused
with your healing immensity,
that I may have your vision to discern the footprints of Christ
in this twenty-first century...

Bruce Prewer



Living in Lent, Caring for Creation. Created by PRC in February 2006. If you have appreciated use of this and other PRC resources, we encourage you to give a donation to PRC.

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