

# 2024 Lenten Devotions



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## Foreword

The planet and life on it are in crisis. We have reached tipping points that, once breached, will cause irreparable damage to the Earth and all the life that it sustains. For us as the church and as Christians, it is imperative that we work towards resolving this crisis that we face and draw on faith resources to be able to do it.

These seven Lenten devotions are an attempt to draw the attention of our churches to the climate crisis we are facing and call the faithful into solidarity with the planet and its most vulnerable people. This work is a part of the Decade for Climate Justice of the World Communion of Reformed Churches and our commitment to the flourishing of all of life.

Written by theologians and pastors from Africa, Asia, Europe, and North and South America, these devotions represent a global perspective and intentional voices of Indigenous people. The theological visions represented in these devotions articulate the variety of theological thinking in the Reformed Communion and draw from our long history of work on ecological justice.

I would particularly like to thank my colleague Philip Vinod Peacock under whose leadership these devotions came together, and Damon Mkandiwire, Jenne Jessica Pieter, Jessica Hetherington, Minwoo Oh, Muanpuii Hmar, Nienke Pruiksma, and Dario Barolin for contributing to this work.

Setri Nyomi, Interim General Secretary



## Introduction

Lent is traditionally viewed as a time of renunciation, a time when Christians, in preparation for Holy Week and Easter, volunteer to either fast or renounce, at least for a time, something that they would have otherwise indulged themselves in. Like many rituals, this can be read in different ways. One of the many implications of a time of renunciation, like Lent, is that it shows that there are limits to life. It indicates to us that humans are not people of insatiable wants, and that not everything is up for consumption.

We are in the midst of a planetary crisis caused by the underlying belief that there are unlimited resources for humans to consume and that the planet Earth and all that it holds are intended for human consumption. Yet the Christian tradition and Lent in particular calls us to remember that there are limits to human consumption.

In other Christian traditions, Lent is seen as a time of preparation; therefore, we begin Lent by reflecting on Jesus' time of fasting in the wilderness. In the Biblical understanding, the wilderness plays an important role. Many Biblical characters start their ministry with a time in the wilderness, it is a place of preparation and the locus from where commitment to ministry begins. In 2023 the World Communion of Reformed Churches launched its Decade for Climate Justice. As part of its programmatic vision, it seeks to engage with its member churches and to offer theological, liturgical, and spiritual resources to combat our climate injustice.

These devotions are the public launch of this initiative and is a call to our churches to prepare themselves and recognize that our planet is not for sale, it is not for unlimited consumption, everything cannot be turned into profit.

We encourage our member churches, congregations, and individual Christians to use these devotions and prepare themselves for Earth care and climate justice during this period of Lent.

## **Reconciliation with Creation: A Lenten Journey towards Climate Justice**

By Damon Mkandiwire

### **Opening Prayer**

Eternal Creator, as we journey through this season of Lent, draw our hearts and minds toward the cries of our wounded planet. Help us recognize our role in this world, not as dominators but as part of Your magnificent creation in which we sustain each other through mutuality and respect. Grant us the grace to repent for the ways we have neglected and exploited the Earth and inspire in us a commitment to justice and renewal. Amen.

### **Litany for the Earth**

For the beauty and wonder of the Earth and sky,  
*We give thanks, O Lord.*

For the oceans vast and the life they contain,  
*We give thanks, O Lord.*

For the mountains majestic and the valleys deep,  
*We give thanks, O Lord.*

For our failure to honour and cherish this gift,  
*Forgive us, O Lord.*

For prioritizing profit over sustainability,  
*Forgive us, O Lord.*

For turning a blind eye to the cries of the Earth,  
*Forgive us, O Lord.*

### **Scripture Readings: Genesis 2:15, Romans 8:19-22**

### **Reflection on Climate Justice during Lent**

The season of Lent is traditionally a period of introspection, repentance, and deep spiritual reflection for Christians. It is a journey that takes believers from the recognition of humanity's inherent frailty on Ash Wednesday to the poignant reminder of Christ's redemptive sacrifice on Good Friday, culminating in the joy of Easter Sunday. This Lenten pilgrimage offers a unique vantage point from which to consider the pressing issue of climate justice.

The Creation narratives in the book of Genesis emphasize the inherent value and interconnectedness of all things. Humans were fashioned from the dust of the ground, reflecting our intrinsic bond to the Earth. God entrusted humans with the stewardship of this world, a responsibility that demands both reverence for creation and compassion for all living beings. In many ways, the current ecological crisis can be viewed as a direct consequence of humanity's failure to uphold this sacred trust.

As Lent encourages personal repentance and transformation, it also invites us to address the broader, collective sins that mar our world. Climate injustice, where the most vulnerable suffer for the excesses of the powerful, is a grave sin that demands both acknowledgment and action. It mirrors the



same dynamics of power and oppression that led to the crucifixion of Jesus—a marginalized, itinerant preacher who challenged the established order.

Jesus' ministry was centered around the principles of love, justice, and the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God. This Kingdom is not just a celestial promise but a call to establish justice, peace, and love here on Earth. Climate justice is deeply aligned with this call. It seeks to rectify the imbalances of power, restore the dignity of the marginalized, and heal the wounds inflicted on the Earth.

Furthermore, the Lenten journey is an annual reminder of death, resurrection, and the hope of renewal. Just as the Earth appears barren in winter, only to burst forth in life during spring, the Christian narrative is one of death followed by resurrection. This cyclical pattern resonates with the rhythm of the natural world and underscores the potential for renewal and regeneration. In the face of overwhelming environmental degradation, the message of Easter offers hope that transformation and rebirth are within reach.

In conclusion, Lent's theological underpinnings provide a profound framework for understanding and engaging with the issue of climate justice. It calls Christians not just to personal conversion but to a collective metamorphosis—a transformation that seeks to heal, restore, and reconcile both humanity and the Earth with the Creator. Embracing climate justice during Lent is not just an ecological imperative; it is a deeply spiritual one, urging us to see God in all things and to act as stewards of His wondrous creation.

## **Intercessory Prayers**

Lord, hear our prayer for the Earth, our shared home, as it groans under the weight of exploitation and neglect.

*Grant us wisdom to seek sustainable ways, O Lord.*

We pray for world leaders and policymakers; may they prioritize the planet and the well-being of its inhabitants over transient gains.

*Grant them discernment and courage, O Lord.*

For communities worldwide affected by the dire impacts of climate change, especially the marginalized and the poor.

*Provide them strength and resilience, O Lord.*

We pray for scientists, activists, and all who work tirelessly for climate justice.

*Bless their efforts and amplify their voices, O Lord.*

May our hearts be transformed this Lenten season, fostering a profound love and respect for all of creation.

*Renew our spirits and guide our actions, O Lord.*

## **Closing Prayer**

God of the universe, as we reflect and repent this Lent, let our hearts be deeply moved by the beauty and fragility of Your creation. Instil in us a renewed sense of responsibility and empower us to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with You. As we journey toward the cross and the promise of resurrection, may we also journey toward healing and hope for our planet. In Your sacred name, we pray. Amen.

*Rev. Daimon Mkandawire, Mission Secretary for Ecology and Economy, Council for World Mission: Dedicated to integrating faith with ecological and economic stewardship, he strives to inspire and lead sustainable practices within our communities. His work at the Council for World Mission encompasses advocating for responsible use of resources and promoting ecological awareness.*

# **Sharing and Nurturing Life from Eco Spirituality of *Maano and Babalu***

By Jenne Jessica Revanda Pieter

This liturgy is inspired by a traditions in Maluku, Eastern Indonesia, namely *Babalu* and *Maano*. *Babalu* and *Maano* are the traditional economic systems of the people of Central Maluku, which have solidarity values of sharing and preserving life. This Lent we are reminded that Jesus gave himself to atone for our sins. In the spirit of the value of sharing and preserving life through the *Maano* and *Babalu* traditions, we are also asked to become faithful as followers of Christ, to want to share and preserve life. In the midst of the current challenging times and in fighting for climate justice, the values in the *Maano* and *Babalu* traditions of sharing for solidarity and preserving life must be revived.

## **Ordination and Greetings**

We are gathered as brothers and sisters to celebrate Lent and remember His command to love and share.

In the name of the Father, the Lord of life,  
Jesus Christ, the redeemer of life,  
and the Holy Spirit,  
God be with you, Amen.

*And also with you.*

Seek the LORD while He may be found; call on Him as long as He is near!

## Hymn

I hear Thy welcome voice, That Calls me, Lord to Thee  
For Cleansing in Thy Precious Blood That flowed on Calvary  
I am coming, Lord, Coming now to Thee:  
Wash me, cleanse me in the blood That flowed on Calvary

## Scripture: Mathew 25:35-40

## Reflection

The story of the text is familiar to all of us, Jesus calls into his Kingdom those who have fed, clothed, visited, and gave drink to the least, and Jesus goes on to call the least ones his brothers and sisters. The story has a strong theological point to make—that Christ is found among the least ones of the earth; they are the ones who are called his brothers and sisters. While in the passage Christ is also looked at as both a shepherd as well as a king, the point that Matthew actually wants to make in this story is that those two perspectives of Jesus are only secondary to the fact that he is the brother of the least, that the very least of the earth are his siblings, are his relatives.

This brings two immediate points into our focus: the one is that the economic justice crisis is integrally linked to the ecological justice crisis. We cannot separate economic inequality and climate justice. The poor are the most vulnerable to the ravages of climate change; the poor will suffer the ravages of extreme weather, heat waves, floods, and polar vortexes, while the rich will sequester themselves into their yachts and bunkers.

But the second point is that the Earth is herself among the least, the one who is suffering. Romans 8 rightly accounts for all of creation groaning for liberation. In our present circumstances, the earth is suffering; she is wounded.

In Indigenous visions of the cosmos, there is no separation between human life and nature; humans are a part of nature, and when we account for all our relatives, nature is also accounted for in this counting. In many cultures around the world the earth is referred to as mother.

Interestingly, in the “Canticle of the Sun,” the poem that was written by Francis of Assisi, the Earth is not called mother, but she is sister. Just as Jesus calls the very least his sisters and brothers, we should also recognize that the Earth is herself ravaged and that she is our sister.

## **Hymn**

*Ubi Caritas et Amor, Ubi Caritas Deus Ibi Est*

## **Prayers of Intercession**

God, guide us into your truth and teach us about your love  
*So that we can live this Lenten week by remembering your  
pure love, which frees us from all sin. And we live with your  
love*

God, guide us into your truth and teach us about your love  
*So that we can learn from your love so that we are able to love  
others, and want to share with our neighbours*

God, guide us into your truth and teach us about your love  
*So that we can advocate together with those who are poor  
and do not have access to life on their land*

God, guide us into your truth and teach us about your love  
*So that we can help those who are victims of injustice in this  
challenging time*

God, guide us into your truth and teach us about your love  
*So that we can fight together with Indigenous people all over  
the earth to protect this nature and be willing to learn from  
them*

In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.

## **Hymn**

Lord Jesus Christ your light shines within us,  
Let not my doubts nor darkness speak to me,  
Lord Jesus Christ, your light shines within us  
Let my heart always welcome your love.

## **Closing Prayers**

God taught us about love. May Your spirit guide us to walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. We will live with God's love, so that we will be able to love others and fight for all rights to life. Amen.

*\* This devotion becomes meaningful if an action of sharing is carried out*

*Rev. Jenne Jessica Revanda Pieter, S.Si, MA, Protestant Church in the Moluccas, Indonesia: Currently serving as a lecturer at the Theology faculty and officiate as a Secretary at the graduate school of Indonesian Christian University in the Moluccas. She is active in the field of ecology and advocacy for Indigenous people in central Maluku district.*



## Help Me to Follow

By Jessica Hetherington

*This devotional is based on Jesus' lesson about building a house on rock versus sand and is meant to strengthen us in our discipleship as we seek a new path toward the cross this Lenten season.*

### Opening Prayer

God of Life,

Earth is in chaos right now:

    global heating is rising;

    species are being eliminated;

    oceans are warming and permafrost is melting;

    people are being flooded and burned out of their homes.

Ecocide is everywhere.

It feels like the Earth community in which we live  
is no longer what we once knew;  
it feels like the ground on which we stand  
is no longer solid the way we once thought it was.

But we know that when we stand on you:

    on your Word

    on your life, death, and resurrection

    on the way you showed us to live,

then the ground beneath us is, indeed, rock.

We know that when we stand in you:

in the Earth community,  
in your good creation,  
in the fullness of life itself,  
that you remind us of our interconnection  
our interdependence with and among all of life,  
and give us the strength and courage to seek Earth healing.

Help us, then, to stand on you.  
Help us to build our faith in you.  
Help us to follow you  
in our lives,  
in our actions,  
in our seeking of climate justice and Earth healing,  
so that our discipleship will be steadfast and firm.  
Amen.

### **Scripture Reading: Matthew 7:24-27**

### **Meditation**

It is not uncommon to find many global corporations offering 'eco-safe' alternatives. Whether it is biodegradable coffee pods or cups to hold your fries, ecological sustainability has become the new marketing and marketable tool. We are encouraged to be ecologically sensitive by purchasing environmentally sustainable products. The point of this is that the burden of our ecological crises is placed on the individual consumer rather than the corporations who are far greater polluters. Even further, this kind of environmental action does not consider the larger structural question. It does not discern that the environmental crises that we are living through are caused by the logic of consumerism and the continual profit-

seeking mechanisms of capitalism. This is indeed a very poor foundation on which to build a culture and society that is ecologically sensitive and sustainable.

The text from Matthew speaks to us about building wise foundations. In Palestine, during the time of Jesus, houses were built directly on the ground and did not have foundations. The stability of the house, therefore, depended directly on the ground on which it was built. Were it to be built on sand, in times of rain when the wadis filled and there was flooding, houses built on sand would be washed away. On the other hand, a house built on a rock would stand firm.

Unfortunately, our world today is built on weak foundations. Our economic systems are built on the idea that there are unlimited resources that can be plundered and that we can spew out as much pollution as we like. As a result, the land, the air, and our oceans are poisoned, bio-diversity is being destroyed, and the Earth is literally crying. The consumption of bio-degradable products is not going to save us; we must change the logic of consumerism itself.

Significantly, the passage from Matthew echoes Proverbs 14:1 which says, “the wise woman builds her house, while the foolish woman brings it down.” This is a text about wisdom. But how do we gain such wisdom that will allow us to build up and build up on firm foundations? Perhaps another text from the wisdom literature in scripture will help us. Job 12:8, the foundational verse of the Decade for Climate Justice of the World Communion of Reformed Churches says, “Speak to the earth and it will teach you.” And this is what we should be doing. Speaking to the Earth, learning from her ways in order

to be able to building on firm foundations for a sustainable future.

### **Intercessory Prayers**

Oh, gracious God  
who created and is still creating,  
we give you thanks for your good creation,  
for this Earth community in which we live, move and have our being.

We give you thanks for the particular ecosystems, the animals and plants, the ways in which the Earth in formed where we live:

*[Name the kind of climate in your community, the landforms, indigenous animals and plants. If you don't know what they are, look them up!]*

We give you thanks for the first peoples of this land *[name them]*

who have tended to this land in relationships of respect and reciprocity for generations.

We give you thanks for all those who care for this land today:

*[list the name of the Indigenous communities present and specific environmental groups and organizations]*

God, we praise you for the diversity of life on Earth,  
we praise you for granting us the gift of science,  
that teaches us about Earth and our place within it,  
and for the gift of faith, which helps us to learn what it all means.

God, we repent of the ways in which we have distorted the science  
in order to use and abuse the Earth for our benefit no matter  
the harm it causes;  
we repent of the ways in which we have distorted our  
Scripture  
to justify the evil domination and subjugation of Earth and its  
peoples.

Forgive us, O Lord. Help us to stand on rock and not on sand.

God, as we move to stand on rock, we pray for all those in  
need today:

- the rising climate and all those harmed by global  
heating;
- species at risk of losing their homes and their lives  
through extinction;
- the waters, soil, and air that have rising levels of  
pollution;
- habitats being destroyed for large-scale agriculture and  
industrialization;
- vulnerable people here and elsewhere who are the  
least responsible and the most affected by the  
ecological and climate crisis.

God, we lift up all this suffering, and those who are suffering in  
more personal ways, knowing that all is connected.

Help us to be your hands and feet in the world,  
knowing that with and through you, everything is possible.  
In the name of your son Jesus, we pray. Amen.

## **Closing Prayer**

Life-giving God,  
as we leave this time of worship today,  
may we go out into the world,  
the Earth community that you created and are creating,  
    to seek Earth healing,  
    to work for climate justice,  
    to stand on the rock of your Word,  
so that our lives may be ones of faithful action in the world.  
Amen.

*Rev. Dr. Jessica Hetherington, United Church in Canada: Jessica seeks to inspire people of faith to transform their lives and actions in response to the ecological crisis. This leads to action toward Earth healing, deepened relationships with God and nature, and renewed experiences of discipleship.*

# **Crying from the Land**

By Minwoo Oh

## **Opening prayer**

The God of Land be with you.

*And also be with you.*

God, our Creator of heaven and earth,

*We are blessed to be surrounded by the beauty of God's creation.*

We lift our prayer of gratitude as we are enchanted by earth.

*We are awed by all the animals God created.*

We lift our voices in Justice to God the Creator

*From whom all blessings flow.*

For the beauty of the earth, the mountains, and valleys,

*You are always righteous, and we give you praise.*

We recognize the seeds You have sown within us, taking root and flourishing into fruitful lives. Yet, there are times when our thoughts are distant from Your heart. You see and understand me deeply; You test my innermost feelings toward You. Guide

those whose hearts are distant, leading them back to You with loving care.

*[Pray in Silence]*

Have mercy on us, God, according to your unfailing love according to your great compassion blot out my transgression. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin (Psalm 51:1-1).

God's righteousness and goodness follow all creation all the days, and all God's inherences will live in the house of God.

**Scripture Reading: Jeremiah 12:7-13**

### **Devotion**

In our current era, we're ensnared in an ecological crisis, exacerbated by relentless military conflicts that seek to dominate land in the name of national security. The global repercussions of these conflicts are catastrophic for God's creations. Amidst this turmoil, the Bible becomes a guiding light, offering invaluable wisdom on our relationship with God, the land, and our responsibility to love the world.

The book of Jeremiah echoes a poignant lament for a devastated land, where the prophet mourns, "How long will the land lie parched and the grass in every field be withered?" (Jeremiah 12:4). Jeremiah attributes this desolation to the consequences of wickedness. As humans, as we empathize with the natural world, we start to fathom its anguish and sorrow, recognizing this desolate landscape within the broader



context of God's story. This profound expression of the land's sorrow serves as a poignant lesson on its deep lamentation.

*Oh, Lord, how can I stop crying when all life within my embarrassment is dying? Animals, birds, and humans are all dying. Why did you not protect me when an outside military-dominated to destroy me? When they came over the hill, I was terrified. Why did you back them? Why did you provoke them when you weren't able to protect me? Why did God become enraged and wield the sword? I don't comprehend summoning foreign troops simply because God's people did something wrong. It's extremely resentful.<sup>1</sup>*

The land laments, questioning why God did not safeguard it from adversaries. Through this plaintive cry, our compassionate Lord mourns profoundly for God's beloved inheritance—the Earth and its diverse inhabitants—all part of God's divine creation. As this inheritance grieves, God's sorrow deepens, lamenting humanity's indifference to the widespread desolation of the land.

God commands the removal of those who occupied and devastated the land. Yet, amidst this judgment, a glimmer of hope emerges from God's grace. God's compassion will bring them back to their own inheritance and country.

The divine invitation is to restore unity with God's inheritance, embracing all living beings. The land teaches us the absence of

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<sup>1</sup> Yani Yoo, "She Mourns": An Ecocritical Reading of Jeremiah 12, *JBTR* 49, (2021, 10), 64

'your' or 'my' sides; the Earth is one. God calls us to heed the wasteland's voice and join in its lament.

As we witness the land's suffering in the throes of human conflict, our hearts resonate with its lament. We fervently pray to become Christians brimming with hope for the land's restoration, reflecting God's boundless love that offers every being a chance for recovery. Just as God cherishes all creation, may we too embody this love and diligently work towards healing our wounded world.

### **Intercessional prayer**

We pray for transformation in these lands, once soaked in the blood and tears of innocent lives lost in conflicts. May these places be reborn into sanctuaries, playgrounds of joy for children to thrive.

Comfort those separated by distances beyond their control, unable to share in each other's lives. Let peace find its way to these lands, paving avenues for reconciliation and unity.

We humbly acknowledge that all lands belong to You. Forgive us for the bloodshed resulting from misplaced priorities in our nations, placing value on war machinery over human lives.

Lord, tend to the lands saturated by the blood spilt in wars, transforming them into beacons of peace. Console places that are exploited for the production of weapons, replacing exploitation with prosperity and growth for all living beings.

Grant us wisdom to steward the Earth responsibly, allowing life to flow harmoniously within the ecological balance. Nurture lands suffering from prolonged drought, restoring them to abundant life.

Remember the tears shed by children forced into labour and the toil of the earth itself. Heal our world so that the Earth becomes a haven, offering itself as a joyful playground for all children.

Lead us to recognize the Earth is Your inheritance, to believe all creations are interaction and to live all together in harmony.

### **Closing prayer**

May God mourn with us as the world weeps. May we all grieve together as the planet laments. Make us a people who react to the cries of the Earth. Allow those who wield the sword to have earth in their hands rather than blades. May we be as intertwined as the Earth is. May we accept God's created universe without reservation, just as the Earth accepts all species. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

*Rev. Dr. Minwoo Oh, Programme Coordinator for Gender Justice, WCRC: She is interested in militarization and empire from an eco-feminist theological perspective in the context of the Korean peninsula. Korean women;s theology for life is a developing area.*

# **The earth as holy ground: Reconciliation of human and nature**

By Lalmuanpuii Hmar

## **Opening Prayer**

Creator of all things, your glory shines forth through your creation. We praise you and celebrate your awe-inspiring work in creation that we can see all around us. Reveal more of yourself to us as we worship you. Show us the way to reconcile ourselves with nature so that our lives will reflect your loving care and concern for your creation. In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.

## **Scripture Readings**

Psalm 24:1; Acts 4:32

## **Intercessory Prayer**

God of all creation, as we work towards climate justice and care for creation, we pray for your guidance on how to best serve and preserve creation. Please help us to see our world as a common habitat, a gift to be cherished, and not to dominate and exploit the natural resources. Lord, in your mercy,

*Receive our prayer.*

We lament the uncountable losses of individuals, families, and communities and humbly come to you in prayer for all who are

affected by climate change and ecological crisis. Lord, in your mercy,

*Receive our prayer.*

We pray for those who question the status quo to bring about structural change in order to protect vulnerable people and nations from the harshest effects of the climate crisis. Lord, in your mercy,

*Receive our prayer.*

We pray for international cooperation in mitigating and finding solutions to the climate crisis. Increase our understanding of how our actions, good and bad, affect all of us and give us the wisdom to have more room for imagination, creativity, and innovation. Lord, in your mercy,

*Receive our prayer.*

Help us to discern the best way forward to utilize the blessings of the earth wisely and creatively, and to choose love and justice instead of power and wealth. Lord, in your mercy,

*Receive our prayer. Amen.*

## **Devotion**

Our selected Old Testament text, Psalm 24, is a liturgy that was used by pilgrims when they came for a religious festival at the Jerusalem Temple. The psalm begins with a hymn of praise to Yahweh as Creator and Lord of the universe. The verse,

“The earth is the LORD’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it” (Psalm 24:1) attests that God is the creator of the earth, and all things and beings on it belong to God. It identifies the “Owner” of the world and is a confessional declaration of the sovereignty of the creator God, justifying that Yahweh has complete dominion over the world.

Our other selected text from the New Testament, Acts 4:32, interestingly tells us that the early believers were of one heart and soul. Being filled with the same Spirit, no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. This means that all their possessions were at the disposal of anyone in need, a perfect display of particular concern for the poor and needy. Verse 34 of the same chapter further mentions that *there was not a needy person among them*. In Israel’s culture, the declaration that the LORD is the owner of all things is an intentional denial that anyone else is. In today’s world, this could mean the denial of the tendency of the state or corporations to absolutize ownership of the world.

There are some who, unfortunately and thoughtlessly, posit that humans are the most important creation and, therefore, meeting the needs of humans is more important than addressing environmental issues. It has been estimated that humanity has caused the loss of 83% of all wild mammals and half of plants. The constant imposition of our will on everything around us causes grave damage to ourselves and the environment. The result of not caring for our environment negatively and directly impacts humans. We put our home and ourselves at serious risk.

The fact that we are made in God's image should make us responsible to reflect God's nature of caring for the world God created. The Old Testament gave importance to the observance of the sabbath (Leviticus 25:1-7) for the land as well as for the people to let the land lie fallow and not overwork on it. Likewise, we need to ensure that we do not over-exploit the land and Earth's resources through our greed and lifestyle. This year, the observance of World Environment Day on 5 June will focus on *land restoration, desertification, and drought resilience*. Up to 40% of the Earth's land is said to be degraded, directly affecting half of the world's population and threatening roughly half of global GDP (US\$44 trillion). The number and duration of droughts have also increased, and without urgent action, over three-quarters of the world's population has been estimated to be affected by 2050. The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration ardently calls for the protection and revival of ecosystems all around the world.

Just as Jesus' mission is to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, to let the oppressed go free (Luke 4:18), so too does God's plan involve the healing and restoration of the earth. As stewards of God's creation, we must care for and restore creation. For example, buying locally and working for trade justice is an important part of caring for the Earth so that no one is forced to drain the resources of our environment. As God's community, if one part of the body suffers, all the other parts suffer with it. We must show special concern for the vulnerable so that no one remains needy.

In the creation account, God has given humans the responsibility to take care of creation (Genesis 2:15). This makes us accountable to God to sustain, protect, and care for

creation. We must manage the environment not simply for our benefit but for God's glory. A good initiative would be hosting an Environment Sunday service, devising or joining the Eco Church scheme, getting involved with the projects, and bringing our local communities closer to flourishing. In this way, we all must strive towards more significant action to reconcile with nature and raise our voices for a cleaner, greener, fairer future.

May we continue to participate in God's work of reconciling and restoring proper relationship with the creation.

### **Closing prayer**

Great Creator, with your presence and guidance, may we continue to respect and be in loving relations with all creation and follow in the way of love, justice, and peace for all, and may we reflect your loving nature of care and concern for creation in all that we do so that we will commit to creating a sustainable environment and working towards a better future for all. In the name of Christ. Amen.

*Dr. Lalmuanpuii Hmar, Presbyterian Church of India, Mizoram Synod: She presently teaches New Testament at Bishop's College, Kolkata, India.*



## **Songs of reciprocity**

By Nienke Pruiksma

### **Preparation**

*Bring in a little burning candle, a jar or jug of water and some seeds, native to your region, and a big container (or many small containers) with soil. If Lent is not a time for sowing in your context, bring slips of paper and pens instead.*

### **A gathering prayer**

As we gather today, we remember the words of St. Francis, who, in his love for God and creation, sang out his praise.

We also gather in lament that this creation is suffering and at risk.

As we gather, we gather not just with those present, but with all those who are and have been. Those we know and love, those we were blessed to know and love, but with the knowledge that our knowledge is limited. We gather with those whose lives are endangered, or who have already been snuffed out in the great extinction that we are living.

We gather with the plankton, with the creatures of the deep, we gather with the tiniest of insects, with the bees, we gather with the mosses and lichen, with the ancient trees in the forest,

and the sapling newly planted.

We gather with the sun and the stars in the firmament,  
the wind and rain,  
the rivers, sea and oceans.  
We gather with the empty wells,  
and the rising waters.

We gather with our feet on the earth,  
with our hands in the soil,  
with our fists in the air in protest and anger,  
with our hands joined in solidarity,  
with our hands folded in prayer,  
with our hands in the air in celebration.

We gather with our hearts full of love and hope,  
but also with anger, concern, desperation or worry,  
with our minds distracted by the complexities of our lives,  
yet seeking your presence.

Come Holy Spirit, be with us now in this moment of gathering  
and always.  
Bind us together in community, in commitment, in  
engagement,  
to life in fullness for all creation.  
Amen.

### **A litany**

For all those who perished in the struggle for climate justice  
*God have mercy*

For all those on the brink of extinction  
*God have mercy*

For all the water too polluted to give and sustain life  
*God have mercy*

For the earth broken by mining and intensive farming  
*God have mercy*

For all those who put their bodies and lives at risk for your  
creation  
*God have mercy*

For the animals that have lost their habitat  
*God have mercy*

For the oceans rising and gulf streams slowing down  
*God have mercy*

For lands arid or exhausted  
*God have mercy*

For ancient forests diminished and unable sustain their  
complex ecology  
*God have mercy*

For people who despair, feel paralyzed, or are in denial  
*God have mercy*

For islands and atolls that threaten to disappear  
*God have mercy*

[Please, add concerns specific to your context to the litany.]

God, Creator, have mercy,  
Christ, Redeemer, have mercy,  
God, Sustainer, have mercy.  
Amen.

### **Suggestions for (Scripture) Readings**

- Genesis 2:4b-15; Psalm 104 or 148; John 12:22-24
- St. Francis' "Canticle of the Sun"
- If the book is available to you, you could look into reading a section from *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer (such as the story about the herbalist and the guidelines in the chapter named "The honorable harvest").
- You could also connect to traditional narratives or Indigenous peoples' cosmovision that emphasize reciprocity (not just between humans) in your context.

### **Meditation**

In the second creation narrative—which in biblical studies is considered the older creation narrative—the earth and waters already exist before God creates a human being. God does not create from nothing, but adds to what already exists. The human receives the gift of life through God's breath. The living, breathing human being is then put in a garden with plants, animals, and a human partner in order for them to till it and keep it. What does tilling and keeping mean to us? Does it mean that it is ours to do with? Or does it mean to serve and to maintain the earth, like we are called to maintain God's

commandments? The Hebrew verbs used—*abad* and *samar*—suggest the latter.

In *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Robin Vall Kimmerer narrates how in Indigenous worldviews human beings often are considered the younger siblings in creation (p. 346-347). As such our duty is to learn from our elders the plants. She writes: “Plants were here first and have had a long time to figure things out. They live above and below ground and hold the earth in place. Plants know how to make food from light and water. Not only do they feed themselves, but they make enough to sustain the lives of all the rest of us. Plants are providers for the rest of the community and exemplify the virtue of generosity, always offering food. What if Western scientists saw plants as their teachers rather than their subjects? What if they told stories with that lens?”

She goes on to say that many Indigenous peoples share an understanding that every creature has received gifts or abilities. The question is: How do we respond to the gift we have been given? What and how do we give back? How do we live in reciprocity with all that is?

In my context of white Europeaness, plants and animals rank solidly below human beings. We have lost any sense that their thriving and ours are connected. The notion of learning from plants, sitting with the wisdom of plants, is thoroughly disorienting. If we’d really stop to consider it, it would be like pulling out the foundation stone to our carefully built tower of Babel. So, we mostly don’t. We keep relying on the idea/pipe dream of technological solutions. Or we deny and ignore the floods that are already washing over us, literally and

figuratively. But is this meant by tilling the earth and keeping it, when we reap what is not ours? When others—be they human, animal, plant or the Earth’s resources—are exhausted and pay the price and we take away the future of next generations? Is that serving and maintaining the Earth and God’s commandments?

But what if we sit with the wisdom of plants? What if we learn from their gifts, emulate them as far as we as humans can, and give back? What if we dare to grow and give back? Not in splendid isolation at the top of creation, but as part of the whole, in order to sustain the whole.

It is not coincidental that a seed in fertile earth is a Christological metaphor. It is the sacrifice of the seed of Good Friday, the waiting and insecurity of Holy Saturday and the joy and relief that life grows, renews, and multiplies of Easter. It is in the breaking and sharing of life-sustaining food for the body and the soul that we celebrate. In reciprocal learning with plants, it is also a prophetic metaphor. The seeds we plant may be seeds of disruption, of transformation, of resistance, of hope, of unlearning and new learning, despair and/or tears. But in the planting, we act, we grow, we resist, transform, nourish, and reciprocate the gift of life, sharing resurrection.

### **As we plant, we pray—planting seeds, planting intercessions**

In my region of the northern hemisphere, Lent is the time for sowing, for waiting for new life to come forth from the earth. Light is returning to wake us up, calling us forth into the world. Rain mostly is not lacking—although climate change is making periods of rain and lack of rain more pronounced. If Lent is not

a time to plant in your context, can it be a time to sow, to grow in the dark, to break forth, to break through and away? To grow and to nourish, as we have learnt from our siblings the plants?

The community is invited to plant a seed in the soil provided. If it is not wise to plant at this time in the year for your region, people could write a word on a slip of paper that they then “plant.” If your community is open to it, you could ask people to offer intercessions as they plant. They could share what they have written down the word they would like to plant in a reciprocal act.

God, we give thanks for the gifts you have given us:  
The stories we share, the bread we break,  
the seeds they plant in us,  
seeds that we nourish, that grow and nourish us,  
that nourish your creation.  
As we plant, we pray:

*Creator God, hear our prayer*

God, we ask that the plants teach us:  
To live in reciprocity with all of creation,  
to break through seemingly unbreakable structures,  
to bring beauty and life in the most unlikely of places.  
As we plant, we pray:

*Creator God, hear our prayer*

God, sustain us in our efforts to only take what we need,  
to recognize you in our siblings in creation,

to not harm our siblings as we take for our sustenance,  
and to be grateful for what was given—  
so that we may give and sustain life.  
As we plant, we pray:

*Creator God, hear our prayer*

[Community intercessions.]

God, our parent, you who birthed and sustains all creation,  
As we plant, we pray to you the prayer Jesus taught us

Our Father...

### **A blessing of water and light**

As we go from here, we ask God for a blessing,  
so that we may be both blessed and a blessing.

May God bless you with gentle waters on your soil (*pour water  
on soil with the seeds*)

May God bless you with warming light (*place the candle on top  
of the wet soil*)

May God bless you and keep you so you maybe water and light  
for others

May God bless you with stories that nourish, that question  
And may God bless you as you give back, resist and transform  
Amen.

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### **The earth cannot support us**



By Darío Barolin

## **Opening Prayer**

Your vocal chords vibrated, O God,  
and your creation was set in motion.  
In millions of years  
Your enunciated words were gestated  
and it was the good, the beautiful, the just.

In your immensity and love  
You opened a space for your creatures.  
We rejoice and rejoice in colors and sounds  
in textures, tastes, and smells that you have given us.

I inhale the life you have given me,  
my vocal cords vibrate,  
my heart fills with gratitude:  
Hallelujah!  
Praise be to You, God of life.

## **Song**

*Ayúdanos (Horacio Vivares):* see end of meditation.

## **The earth cannot bear us**

*"...so that the land could not support both of them living together; for their possessions were so great that they could not live together..."* (Genesis 13:6)

In the framework of the life story of Abraham and Sarah, in Genesis chapter 16 we find the story where Abram decides to separate from his nephew Lot.

Together they had experienced the departure from their ancient land called by the divine promise (12:1-3). In that wandering together they experienced famine and a new wandering, this time to Egypt (12:10-20). Certainly the worst part of that sojourn in Egypt was borne by Saray.

Then, back in the land of the Negev and with the growth of their livestock, conflicts begin to arise among the shepherds due to the scarcity of pasture. So, Abram realizes that the land cannot support them together (13:6). It is a situation that will not improve by itself. On the contrary, doing nothing means continuing to aggravate the problem. It is necessary to do something, the option that Abram finds is to take different directions, to look for other places to graze (13:9)

Our situation as humanity is immensely different from that one. However, there is a common situation that we must face. We, like Abram, know that the earth cannot support us.

The crossing of planetary boundaries is bringing us closer to situations of no return. In 2009, three limits had been crossed (integrity of the biosphere, biochemical flows, and climate change). In 2015, land-system change was added. In 2023, two more were added: incorporation of novel entities and freshwater use.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries.html>

The crossing of each of these limits places humanity and many other species at serious risk of survival. So we can imagine what horizon we are looking at when six of the nine planetary boundaries have been violently breached.

The option we have is not that of Abram and Lot to look for more land to continue growing. Well, there are indeed those who do believe that the option is an interplanetary humanity.<sup>3</sup> But most of humanity will not have tickets for that journey.

The option that appears on the horizon is another one. There is no possibility of looking for other places. The alternative, possibly the only one, is to change the deep roots that are making the earth an unsustainable and intolerable place for human life, because of its injustice and perversity.

Our challenge is infinitely greater than that faced by Abram and Lot. However, Abram's words have a very strong resonance with our situation: "the earth cannot bear us," it does not support us anymore.

So we must think about transforming the system of production, consumption, and values that is propitiated and applied in this phase of humanity. The combination of extractivist production models based exclusively on profit, unlimited consumption as an indicator of well-being, and an understanding of the rest of God's creation as something subservient to human interest are a trinity of death. This

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.spacex.com/humanspaceflight/mars/>

critical situation demands a radical paradigm shift that includes these three dimensions.

We need to revalue production systems that incorporate not only sustainability but also the regeneration of ecosystems. We need a culture of consumption that does not endorse waste and sumptuousness but rather rejoices in what is sufficient, where there is room for the basic needs of all and less room for the squandering by a handful. Particularly relevant for the Christian faith is to remember (re-pass through the heart) the love of God and neighbor (Matthew 22:36-40) as the fundamental basis of its theology. A theology that remembers that no one who does not love his/her sister/brother who sees cannot love God, whom he/she does not see (1 John 4:20). The same can be said of the rest of God's creation, whoever does not love what God has created cannot claim to love his creator.

Doing nothing is not an option. To let things take their course is to aggravate the current critical situation. There is still time. The option will be to assume our place in creation, our limits, and from there encourage ourselves to walk in the profound simplicity of evangelical faith.

### **Prayer of intercession**

O God, you sent prophets,  
you spoke to us in dreams,  
you became incarnate in Jesus Christ  
to reveal your ways.  
Still today you send us  
your Holy Spirit to persevere.

We do not listen to your prophets,  
nor your word in Jesus Christ.  
We have made ourselves gods of your creation  
and we have puffed ourselves up with excessive pride,  
we have made riches our praise,  
of our sisters and brothers an obstacle.

May your Spirit blow again!  
Reorientate our steps,  
make us rediscover your creation,  
the joy of sufficiency,  
the joy of sharing.

May your Word be incarnated in us!  
The goodness of community,  
the joy of serving.  
May the pleasure of loving and caring  
unite us to all your creatures,  
for your glory, O God.

### **Final Blessing**

May your feet walk steadfast in righteousness,  
may your hands be outstretched in compassion,  
may your heart beat with joy,  
may your tears comfort sorrows,  
may your lips utter love.  
And until we meet again  
may God, one and triune, delight you in God's justice,  
nourishing you with God's joy,  
and may you never lack the hope

to begin again.

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# Ayúdanos (Horacio Vivares)

Horacio Vivares, Argentina

*Moderato*

Los cie - los cuen - tan la glo - ria de Dios y el fir - ma - men - to la  
 The heav - ens tell of your cre - a - tive glo - ry. The fir - ma - ment of the

o - bra de sus ma - nos. Un di - a e - mi - te pa - la - bra o - tro di - a y  
 sky de - clares your sto - ry, and day to day is your know - ledge still speak - ing, and

u - na - no - che a o - tra no - che de - cla - ra sa - bi - du - rí - a.  
 night to night the dark is teach - ing your wis - dom to those still seek - ing,

La lu - na y las es - tre - llas que for - mas - te y to - da la glo - ria  
 You craft - ed all your works with care and beau - ty, the moon and the stars, the

de tu cre - a - ción. Pu - sis - te al hu - ma - no por so - bre tus o - bras,  
 gal - ax - ies of light; and you call peo - ple to tend your cre - a - tion.

¡Oh Se - ñor cuán gran - de es tu nom - bre en to - da la tie - rra!  
 All the earth pro - claims to - geth - er, "Oh God, your name be ex - alt - ed."

A - yú - da - nos a sos - te - ner la ar - mo - ní - a de tu crea - ción y a cui -  
 So help us, Cre - a - tor of all, in sus - tain - ing the world you made, and in

The WCRC's Decade for Climate Justice will see the Communion increase awareness of the necessity of action on climate justice, promote blue/green churches among WCRC members, drive the ecumenical movement to note the interconnections between ecology and economy, promote solidarity with vulnerable communities that are adversely impacted by climate injustice, and emphasize a spiritual and practical awareness of living simply and in voluntary poverty that are grounded in the ideas of degrowth.

Learn more: [wrc.ch/justice/ecological](http://wrc.ch/justice/ecological)



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