



The Vine

September 2016

Becoming a community through which God's healing and hope can flow to the world

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Worshiping in the Season of Creation

For the first time, Worship Committee is testing the "Season of Creation" as a short worship series focusing on different aspects of God's creative work. This year's weekly foci are: Oceans (Sep 4), Flora & Fauna (Sep 11), Storm (Sep 18), and Cosmos (Sep 25). This essay is a short introduction to the Season of Creation movement and its prophetic challenge.

Some years ago a group of Bible scholars grew frustrated with the way today's Christian readers of the Bible neglect the non-human parts of creation. They joined together to create the Earth Bible Team, with the express goal of listening for the range of voices emanating from God's creation. Sometimes those voices ring out loud and clear through biblical texts; other times the texts seem to silence them. If this sounds familiar, that's because it is. The Earth Bible Project takes its cue from feminist theologians who work to hear the voices of women – ignored or silenced – in the Bible's stories, and from liberation theologians who listen through the noise of history's winners to hear the cries of the poor and oppressed.

What they found, and continue to find, was a prophetic thread running through Scripture that lifts up the concerns of the non-human parts of creation and challenges humanity's claim to totalitarian oversight of the earth. In the same way that feminist concerns topple the false claim that males make history, earth-centered Bible study de-centers humans from the creation story – we are not a mere stage for the drama of human history. All the parts of earth's ecosystem have intrinsic worth, reflecting and embodying the beauty and wisdom of their creator.

Earth's creatures praise their Creator (see Psalm 104) and groan in pain when they suffer (Romans 8:19-22). Jesus remarks that even stones could sing if called upon (Luke 19:14). The Prophets depict Earth raising her voice in resistance to the effects of human hubris, which usually expresses itself in over-extraction of resources leading to socio-ecological devastation. Against the abuse of power in 8th Century BCE Israel, the prophet Hosea cries out:

Therefore the land mourns,
and all who live in it languish;
together with the wild animals
and the birds of the air,
even the fish of the sea are perishing (Hosea 4:3).

This is not hyperbole or poetic metaphor; archaeological research suggests that Hosea's people had mined the soil until it had nothing left to give. Poor people suffered, and so did the flora and fauna. There may be no greater lesson for the powerful countries and multinationals of today: the ancient prophets, who predicted their societies' demise, knew the interconnection between people justice and planet justice.





In a foundational work for Christian theologians of the environment, *The Paradise of God: Renewing Religion in an Ecological Age*, Duke University professor Norman Wirzba argues for the recovery of the virtue of humility through ecological rediscovery, a sense of interdependence shared with all the creatures and systems of the earth. We live because the soil microbes live. Like Job confronted with the vastness of divine wisdom embodied throughout the whole cosmos (see Job 38-41), humanity must rediscover its proper place in it all.

Is there a place for Christian worship in helping to realize this goal? The psalmist thinks so:

Praise the LORD
Praise the LORD from the skies;
Praise God, sun and moon;
Praise God, all you shining stars!
Praise the LORD from Earth,
You see monsters and all deeps,
Fire and hail, snow and frost,
Stormy wind fulfilling God's command!
Mountains and all hills,
Trees and all cedars!
Wild animals and all cattle,
Creeping things and flying birds!
(Excerpts from Psalm 148)

Finding in this liturgical statement of praise an opportunity to re-discover our dependence upon the rest of creation, the Earth Bible Project and others launched a worship movement called "The Season of Creation." Their hope is an annual season (usually four weeks in September) for churches around the world. The traditional worship calendar is marked by two holy seasons: Advent/Christmas tells the story of the embodiment of God in humanity (incarnation), and Lent/Easter tells the story of God's embodiment in suffering and new life. Creation introduces a third season to tell the story of God's embodiment in the whole cosmos. We wrestle with language to describe this: the Spirit's presence in and through and around and among us; the Wisdom of God expressed through earth's diversity; earth as the "body of God"; and so on. (Gerard Manley Hopkins may have come closest when he wrote the line, "The world is charged with the grandeur of God.")

At a time when ecological humility is a rarity, I am excited for this worshiping opportunity to shape ourselves around the story of God's whole creation. It is a de-centering experience, reminding us of the vast complexity of earth, and confronting us – we who own land and live by eating the bodies of other living creatures – with the bare reality: "The earth is the LORD's and everything in it" (Psalm 24:1).

The dogwood tree (given by FMC) was planted by Country Arbors at the home of Janet Guthrie (retired FMC pastor) and husband, Mark Jaeger, on August 16. It was wonderful that Sarah Lubienski (council chair) could be present to place the beautiful plaque and celebrate with them. Pastors Deb and Michael (and daughter Eliza) were also there to join in the fun.





FMC women friends!

Here is information on two upcoming opportunities that may be of interest to you:

1. **Women’s retreat at Camp Friedenswald** is just around the corner, **Sept. 16-18, 2016**. We had such a great showing and time last year and are hoping to enjoy the Peaceful Woods once again with FMC friends. Friedenswald is steward of over 350 acres of wildlife and protected land and an amazing environmental treasure of our Central District Conference. Here is the link for more info and to register: <https://friedenswald.org/retreats/#womens-retreat>

The theme is “**Gather Around the Table: Nourishing Body and Soul**” led by two dynamic women. Katie Kuntz-Wineland is a seminarian/yoga practitioner/drummer/cheesemaker J and Beth Kuntz-Wineland is a plant-based chef/holistic health expert. Katie and Beth are married, both graduates of Bluffton University, and live and work in Ohio. Here is the flyer (and attached):<https://friedenswald.org/content/uploads/2015/11/Retreat-Info-Flier.-Final.pdf>

The cost is \$150 for the weekend, arriving Friday evening after dinner through Sunday Brunch. Kajsa and I are happy to help coordinate carpools. FYI, Camp is about 3.5-4 hours from FMC, and camp is on EST time, so the carpools usually leave early afternoon (though sometimes there is a car that wants to leave earlier or later

than that.)

Women ages 18-25 can register and attend for FREE!

Plan to go? Please register on the camp site. You can indicate lodging and roommate preferences. Please also let Kajsa Herrstrom (kajsa.herrstrom@gmail.com) or Janet (liechtymartens@comcast.net) know if you are going or interested, and any carpool preferences, so we can share carpool info with you and help riders and drivers find each other.

Any questions? Concerns about the cost? Please email or talk to Janet Liechty, FMC’s Liaison to Camp Friedenswald.

Thanks and see you in the Peaceful Woods!

P.S. Here were some pictures from last year – if you are trying to decide whether to go or not, please ask anyone who went last year about their experience <https://goo.gl/photos/iUty8xzedKPPPRV9>

2. November 4-6 at National Conference Center (Leesburg, VA) – Women Doing Theology Conference.

Theme: I’ve Got the Power!

All Mennonite women and women interested in Anabaptism are welcome to attend. Early registration deadline: August 31.

Anyone interested in being part of a spiritual direction small group this fall, please contact Pastor Deb. These groups of 4 to 6 people meet approximately twice a month for about two hours for nine to twelve months. We spend time in silence and in sharing how we see God at work through Scripture and in our lives. It can be helpful for discernment, for becoming more aware of God in your life, and for sharing more deeply with a few people. Meeting time is arranged by the group. If you would like to know more, see Pastor Deb.



NEW IN THE LIBRARY

Children's:

The Extraordinary Voyage of Kamome: a tsunami boat comes home, by Lori Dengler and Amya Miller

Adult:

Positive Time Out: over 50 ways to avoid power struggles in the home & classroom, by Jane Nelson

Positive Discipline, by Jane Nelson

Positive Discipline for Teenagers, by Jane Nelson

The Hope-Filled Parent: meditations for foster & adoptive parents of children who have been harmed, by Michael Trout (DVD)

Overplayed: A parent's guide to sanity in the world of youth sports, by David King & Margot Starbuck.

A Common Word, eds Miroslav Volk, Ghazi bin Muhammad, & Melissa Yarrington.

Is God a Christian? by R. Kirby Godsey.

Dear First Menno Friends,

14 months ago John was diagnosed with a brain tumor. If we were to buy up the local stock of thank-you notes, it wouldn't be enough to acknowledge all the kindnesses you have offered during this time. Food, transportation, cards, calls prayers, visits, errand running, and your listening ears, just to name a few gifts you've offered. We've felt supported and loved. And very thankful for this church, which knows how to be a light in dark times.

Rosalee and John Otto

Wanted - Home Magazine July/August/September 2016. If you have an unwanted copy, Marcia Nelson is looking for one.

August 25, 2016 - Wonderful evening at CIMIC with visiting faculty from Lebanon. The faculty and folks from FMC and CIMIC shared food, fellowship, and stories about the friendship between FMC and CIMIC.

