



Columbia, Missouri
The Worship of God • October 17, 2021



The Scripture
Romans 8:18-28

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

The Message
“Jesus, for Real: While We’re Here”
Terry Overfelt



We have already shared this morning of the energy and enthusiasm for the vision of the Priority Action Plan team #3: To become a Green Chalice Congregation and grow our ecological stewardship.



The plans are spinning for us to have greater affiliation, access, and accountability within our church, community, and denomination.

With the General Assembly of the Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ) vote in 2017, the resolution was passed calling Disciples congregations, organizations, and individuals to address climate change in a wide variety of ways with the end goal to become climate positive by 2035. There, nested in the additional objectives of this resolution was this one: *“Rest in God’s good creation and invite others to delight in nature.”*

This morning let’s look at today’s Scripture and apply it to this specific piece of the greater Disciple proclamation.

God’s good creation calls us to delight in nature, honoring the sacred relationship with God, nature, and humankind.

Today’s Scripture from Paul is bold, imaginative, and poetic. It speaks of the entire created universe sharing the redemption or liberation of God to eclipse her sufferings. It calls for **the earth** to be set free from its bondage to decay and join in the glory of the children of God.

Then come the directions. Six times we hear for humanity and creation, to HOPE and five times it cries for the partnering with Spirit. Hope for that which we cannot see while we wait for the liberating of the earth and humankind. All the while we will have the help of the interceding Spirit to discern the will of God, our love, and call to good purpose.

The metaphor Paul uses is that creation and God’s children are groaning inwardly in labor pains, while we wait in hope for what is yet unseen and wait with patience! The Holy Spirit, who intercedes for both to God, uses sighs too deep for words.

I'm particularly sensitive to the birthing language of today's Scripture as we await the arrival of Hannah and Clint's first child, now overdue by three days. My thanks to Mark who sweetly remained on standby for the *delivery* of today's message as we all pray with God's good intentions for a beautiful birth. Amen!

What a fantastic Scripture to consider today as we hold the ethos of ecology up through the lens of Spirit. Continuing our priority action plan series of seeing Jesus, for real, "While We're Here," we can see God's Spirit in all of creation. (Romans is Paul's most-popularly-accessed letter.)

John 3:16 is also popularly known. "*For God so loved the world,*" and many of us know that it then goes into the sending of Jesus that "*whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.*" The verse is quickly filled with Jesus arriving for the sake of humanity and that is the greatest miracle of a birth that humankind has ever received.

Listen to the opening again: "*God so loved the world,*" and press pause, right there...to consider how much God so loved **the world!** Loved it enough to take on the fragility of humanity to come and save the whole of creation.

Maybe God was coming to delight in the earth in the flesh, too, and to liberate the spirit "*In the blue corn moon, the grinning bobcat, and the hidden pine trails of the forest and taste the sun sweet berries. To affirm that every rock, tree, and creature, has a life, has a spirit, has a name,* (*"Colors of the Wind"* from Disney's *Pocahontas*.) Maybe God wanted to stand under the sycamore and feel the connection, "*For the beauty of the earth*" ... that God imagined in the beginning.

"*In the beginning,*" Genesis 1, here again, God started with something other than humans.

Maybe God's first goal and imagining for amazing creation was the earth and its power to be called according to God's purpose. Maybe after creating the gazillion facets of beauty, and seed, and canopy, then, God said, "This is good, so good!" and wanted to share it with some creation more in God's very image.

When beholding created beauty, often our instinct is to turn to see if anyone else is seeing this? Taking this in, and mutually delighted by how awesomely we must bow in the sighting of miraculous beauty, God.

Romans 1:20: "*For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities, eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made...*"

Jesus for real, drew our attention to nature revealing the character of God:

Do the birds worry about food?

How about those adorned lilies?

About that tree planted by the water...

What about that wandering lamb?

Seas and the sands both roll to meet- each other.

The sands, which was one of Jesus' favorite places to get close to nature...he skipped his baptism party and went for 40 days to the solitude of the desert. He was there to gain clarity, listening in the solitude for sacred Presence, rebuking the triple-dog-dares of the tempter. Jesus, likely digging his heels into the sand.

This summer, we went to the beach with the Hinrichs clan, and it was our granddaughters,' Sloane and Thea, first time to see it. It was the impetus for the trip planned by their parents. We drove to the beautiful shores of Lake Michigan so the girls could experience the beach. Three-year-old Sloane's reaction was such a surprise. She flattened out on her belly and began to crawl and claw her way through it, all the way to the water. Then when we would clean her off; she would lay down and crab crawl back through. There was no rinsing the child. Not sure this is a metaphor of anything other than delighting in something brand new. Loving the scratching of the warm grains. It was something she had never Ok, and we had to go away, intentionally to find it. She was making up her own fun. Toes, Nose, Stick! Change direction!



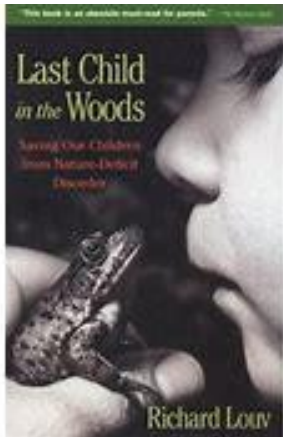
When she saw other kids getting buried in the sand, we had her up to her neck in no time. Will she remember this? Her body will. Even if she doesn't, for that time, she was experiencing a deliberate exposure to something new in nature that delighted her!

While the Lake Michigan sand is native to the area, that lake's shore is maintained by serious human effort. *Serious human effort is rallying with passion around the call to care for the earth and protect the quality of life for humanity and all the created world.* There are informed, intentional, and sacred moves we are called to make. We are positioned like never before to measure, repair, maintain, and sustain our planet for future generations.

Ours is the first generation of people to understand and quantify the truth that we may be irrevocably damaging the earth in such ways that the future support for human development may be threatened. We are also aware that natural occurrences also contribute to threats and extinctions like climate change and changes in sea levels. Not

all losses are human dereliction, but some are, and losses are measurable, and we need to ask ourselves, in the name of God who so loved, what can we do *“While We are Here?”*

Do you have a place you go? Do you have a memory as a child or created one as an adult where you experienced a spiritual response, a **sigh** too deep for words? Have you longed for or known how deliberate time in nature can embrace and reset you both physically and spiritually?



Richard Louv would call this a place of amazement... *Last Child in the Woods – Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*, by Richard Louv, has important reflections on the power of nature. It is described as, *“Important and original...As Louv so eloquently and urgently shows, our mothers were right when they told us, day after day, ‘Go out and play.’”*

The book admonishes. “A wake-up call for parents, educators, and anyone who cares about children and the future of our society. This book is bound to get children off the couch and away from the screen, to re-ignite their innate sense of curiosity and awe.

One of the children interviewed by the author said, *“I like to play indoors better ‘cause that’s where all the electrical outlets are.”*

“Nature inspires creativity in a child by demanding visualization and the full use of the senses. Given a chance, a child will bring the confusion of the world to the woods, wash it in the creek and turn it over to see what lives on the unseen side of that confusion. Nature can frighten a child too, and this fright serves a purpose. In nature, a child finds freedom, fantasy, and privacy; a place distant from the adult world, a separate peace,” (Louv p. 7).

The earth wraps us and teaches us. It calms and distracts us. It opens unstructured, un-officiated, rule-less, times to press *play* and press *pause*. It makes our minds able to *be* those little circling dots that come onto our computer screens when it is thinking. Nature makes room for exploration, imagination, curiosity, respect, and creation. It gives and grows Spirit.

Many of the greatest inventive minds point to their love and relationship with nature. Benjamin Franklin, who *electrified* us with his kite flying skills, also loved the outdoors. As a young boy, he spontaneously launched his future Gulf Stream discoveries when

he tried to swim and fly a kite at the same time- and quickly found himself on the other side of the pond. (Louv p.71)

When the pandemic came, many of us were driven outside. Broadway's use of grounds was salvific for our gathering. When two of our senses were often threatened with COVID, we began to appreciate all five. When we lay our heads down to rest at night, a portion of our prayer could be how we applied them in thanksgiving to our created world. We heard the birdsong, saw the trees wave, smelled the morning air, tasted the fruits of the garden, and felt the touch of the grasses.

We will add our sixth sense, Spirit – of being receptive to the prompting of the Holy Spirit...for the sake of seeing and savoring the goodness. We will remember and retain these gifts of the terribly trying season.

Shifting our lens to prioritize the earth *God so loves*, may seem an overwhelming and sadly, polarizing task.

Clarissa Pinkola Estes, an amazing author and mystic, offers this encouragement, *“Ours is not the task of fixing the Entire world at once, but of stretching out to mend the part of the world that is within our reach.”*

And we add: *While We Are Here!*

As Christians, who receive our Christ because first, God so loved (the world). We can look and so *love* the world too. We are **response-able**. This week's Action Plan for Green Chalice continues the good work Broadway has already undertaken in the many conservations, appreciation, and preservation efforts we currently do from our garden to our trash cans. We will commit to doing more. We are **response-able**.

With Green Chalice and the 2017 Denomination resolution, we are **response-able**. In the ways we have already begun in reverence, to honor and partner with nature and the call us to sacredly guard and delight in what was humankind's description called, Dominion. We are **response-able**. Because the life of our planet first and therefore our lives depend on it. To the children born today and for their next 100 years, we are **response-able**.

Oh God, you have made us responsible, and with hope and the Spirit's intercession, we will be **response-able!**

Just consider how heightening of our senses to experience the Spirit in nature will draw us close to God in thought and gratitude.

On the last day Hannah was scheduled for work last week, she was greeted by a messenger on her car. A hawk was waiting on her driver's door. The presence of the hawk in totemic **spirit** means: To soar high above with keen vision to see the big picture. To stay focused and not let emotions cloud your heart. To know that the hawk calls in your spirit guides and the angels. She just didn't want it to peck her.



What an awesome gift from nature to her, whether sacredly sent or humanly realized.

Creation is groaning in labor pains, to reveal the glory of the children of God. God so loves the world.

(Sighs), too deep for words.

Benediction from Job 12:7-10

But ask the animals, and they will teach you; the birds of the air, and they will tell you; ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In God's hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being.

Go now to know to peace and beauty in the Kin-dom!



Song of Focus Stewards of Earth

WORDS AND MUSIC BY ED VARNUM

Refrain:

The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof,
the earth below and the air up above,
vegetation and creatures of land and of sea
all placed into care of you and of me.

1. In the beginning the Almighty God said, "Let there be light!"
Setting in motion the rhythm of time:
the day and the night.

Then came the garden, plants, vegetation,
and creatures vital and strong:
whales in the ocean and birds in the air
singing nature's song.

Refrain

2. And the Creator said, "It is all good!
Still one creature I must see:
a co-creator to nurture my garden.
God created you and me!
Stewards of earth, caring and tending,
to nourish, replenish and mend.
The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it,
but it's ours to tend.

Refrain

BROAD HEARTS BROAD MINDS BROAD REACH