



JOURNEY INWARD *to* JOURNEY OUTWARD

The Journey Outward, Week 1: NOTICING CREATION

Summary

We challenge the belief that humanity is over creation. Instead, we encourage an understanding of humanity as part of creation. This understanding changes our relationship with the rest of the created world. It adds to the urgency to love and heal creation. Noticing creation is an important first step in revisioning our relationship with the rest of God's world.

Introduction

As we begin the outward journey, we begin with creation. Everything we are, and everything we do, is connected to the rest of the created world.

Humans are damaging the world, that's undeniable. We are hurting *it*, but we are also hurting *us*. In fact, there is no difference between "it" and "us." We are part of creation. We are also being damaged, and we are also yearning to be healed. But how?

The question "how can we heal" begs us to consider how we got here. The session will start by reading the Genesis creation stories, with Pope Francis as a guide. This will ground us in our Biblical tradition. We will also look at one dominant worldview, dualism, that plays into our current crisis.

Next, we will read a few excerpts about the urgency of this moment and the clarion call to attend to our relationship with creation in new ways. We will wonder together how to be in a different kind of relationship with creation, and what that might look like.

Finally, we'll end with a simple faith practice - noticing - that help us move into a loving relationship with the rest of creation.

Why noticing? In the inward journey, we emphasized the importance of "noticing." Noticing is a first step in being present to God here and now. As author Sarah Bessey puts it:

*Noticing can also be a form of prayer and of praise and even of worship again,
our conversation with God to say, yes, I see the sanctuaries and altars and invitations of
this place, these people, this moment, and I won't miss it.*

-Sarah Bessey, February 22, 2022, sarahbessey.substack.com/p/catch-our-breath

Introductions

- Name, Connection to Westwood.
- What is your favorite place in nature?

As a group, make two lists:

- A list of actions words that describe ways people relate to creation (farming, hiking, mining, eating, clothing...)
- A list of adverbs and adjectives that describe HOW to do those things (respectfully, lovingly, sustainably, recklessly etc).

Discussion based on the readings.

1) How did we get here?

- a. There are two different versions of the creation story in Genesis 1 and 2. Each of them describe relationships between God, people and the rest of creation. Read the Genesis texts and then Pope Francis's interpretation. Discuss the differences between "Dominion" and "Tilling and Keeping." What challenges you? What enlivens you?
- b. Challenging our worldview. Native theologian Randy Woodley challenges the Western worldview of dualism. Make sure everyone knows what he means by dualism, then what he thinks is wrong with it. Finally, discuss his question: "What difference would it make if we viewed all of life as a whole?"

2) The crisis, the dream.

- a. Before you discuss any more readings, take a few minutes together to share some of the symptoms of a hurting creation. (To get you started: increased wildfires, droughts, loss of biodiversity, etc....)
- b. Next, take a minute of silence and ask yourself: when you hear about the dire situation of the health of the planet, what do you feel? (Stick with feelings here). Share if you'd like.
- c. In the article "A Healthy Church Needs a Healthy Planet," Diana Butler Bass says that while a lot of religious leaders are wringing their hands about the future of Christianity, the more important question is "what is the future of humankind?" React to her assertion that "the future of Christianity has become 'what must Christians do to serve all of creation?'"



- d. Read Isaiah 65:25. Sallie McFague uses Isaiah's vision to encourage us to dream too. Take a few minutes and on your own, write down your vision for "the world we want, the world we ache for." Share with one or two people.

3. Listening and Loving

- a. Randy Woodley talks about "listening to creation." And Victoria Loorz encourages us to fall in love with creation. Discuss why they say listening and falling in love with creation is so important.
- b. Loorz quotes Wendell Berry, saying that people "defend what they love." Where have you seen that to be true?

For a faith practice this week, pick one part of creation you want to love. It could be a tree, or a rock, or a horizon, or the face of your dog. Share now what your "thing" is going to be. Spend at least five minutes every day intentionally noticing it. What does it look like, smell like, taste like? What is it saying to you? What is it connected to? What happens to you as you spend time with it? Come back to the same thing every day.

Closing

- Make sure everyone knows where and when you will meet next week.
- Close with this prayer by Larry Peacock, repeated 4 times.

May I be at peace.

May my heart always be open.

May I awaken to the Divine Light within and all around me.

May I be healed. May I be a source of healing.

The next time through the prayer, pray it for someone dear to you.

The third time through, pray it for something of great concern to you in the world.

And lastly, pray it over yourself once more.



Week 1: Noticing Creation - Scripture

Genesis 1:27a,28-31a

So God created humankind in his image...

²⁸ God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.' ²⁹ God said, 'See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. ³⁰ And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.' And it was so. ³¹ God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.

Genesis 2:15

¹⁵ The LORD God took the human and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.

Isaiah 65:17, 20-25

¹⁷ For I am about to create new heavens
and a new earth;

the former things shall not be remembered
or come to mind.

²⁰ No more shall there be in it
an infant that lives but a few days,
or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;
for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth,
and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.

²¹ They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

²² They shall not build and another inhabit;
they shall not plant and another eat;
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

²³ They shall not labour in vain,
or bear children for calamity;¹
for they shall be offspring blessed by the LORD—
and their descendants as well.

²⁴ Before they call I will answer,
while they are yet speaking I will hear.

²⁵ The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,
the lion shall eat straw like the ox;
but the serpent—its food shall be dust!

They shall not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain,
says the LORD.



Week 1: Noticing Creation - Readings

Laudato Si, by Pope Francis

“We are not God. The earth was here before us and it has been given to us. This allows us to respond to the charge that Judaeo-Christian thinking, on the basis of the Genesis account which grants man ‘dominion’ over the earth (cf. Gen 1:28), has encouraged the unbridled exploitation of nature by painting him as domineering and destructive by nature...

“... we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God’s image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures. The biblical texts are to be read in their context . . .” (LS 67)

[Pope Francis goes on to cite Genesis 2:15]

“‘Tilling’ refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while ‘keeping’ means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature. Each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations.” (LS 67)

<https://laudatosimovement.org/news/10-myths-about-caring-for-creation>

Whole Reality, by Randy Woodley

You will find something greater in woods than in books. Trees and stones will teach you that which you can never learn from masters. — Saint Bernard de Clairvaux

We’ve all heard the term “rose-colored glasses,” which means seeing the world as less harsh than it really is. These colored glasses are handed down from generation to generation. Western worldviews hold in common one particular tint—namely, the foundational influence of Platonic dualism, named after the philosopher Plato and handed down from the Greeks. This dualism places more importance on abstract areas of life like our spirit, our soul, or our mind and less importance on physical areas like the Earth or our bodies. You may have heard the saying that someone is so heavenly minded that they’re no earthly good. The problem with dualistic thinking is that it separates areas into two, as if reality is no longer whole.



Believe it or not, a whole host of other problems—such as hierarchy, overcategorizing, individualism, patriarchy, racism, religious intolerance, greed, and thinking that says humanity is over nature—flow from dualism. The influence of dualism empowers all these other concerns. Maybe the best way to combat a bad worldview is to present a better one. Maybe it's enough to know that the Western worldview has been awfully destructive over the last few millennia. And now it is dragging down the whole planet to the point of us all wondering if we will survive the future. On the other hand, Indigenous worldviews understand all of life as both physical and spiritual, together and inseparable.

What difference would it make if we viewed all of life as a whole? What if we understood the Earth itself as our primary spiritual teacher? Then nothing would be without spirit in our understanding. Everything would be understood as related. All life would be sacred. If this were the case, might we be living in a different world today? We have all been influenced by the sterile and often lifeless Western worldview, thinking certain things are objects, without life or spirit. We all are guilty of understanding certain species in nature as being less important than another—especially less important than us! We have classified and condemned some animals as varmints and some plants as weeds, and yet each has an important role to play in the world. Our worldviews can be changed if we really work on them. What processes or experiences can you use to challenge your own Western worldview and begin to view life as a whole?

Woodley, Randy. *Becoming Rooted* (pp. 127-128). Broadleaf Books.

The Future of Christianity, by Diana Butler Bass

Historian and writer Diana Butler Bass reflects on a church on Tangier Island [an island in the Chesapeake Bay that is disappearing due to sea-level rise] and the implications of its future in this time of climate crisis:

As I have ruminated on Tangier Island, I realize that far too many religious leaders are asking the wrong question. The future of Christianity matters little if there are no human beings, whether we extinct ourselves through war or environmental disaster. We can fix our denominations, bring new members to church, write the best theologies ever—and none of it will matter one whit if we are all dead. The question—“What is the future of Christianity?”—must be held in relation to other questions. Right now, the most significant of those questions is: “*What is the future of humankind?*”

That is the existential question of our time. All other questions pale by comparison and distract us from hearing the voices of God, the earth, and other creatures with the kind of rigor and compassion necessary for the living of these particular days. To me, the question about the future of Christianity has become: “What must Christians do to serve all creation when the island itself is in danger of sinking?”

Diana Butler Bass, “The Future of Faith as the Way of Salvation,” *Oneing* 7, no. 2, *The Future of Christianity* (Fall 2019): 51. Available in print and PDF download.

A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming, by Sallie McFague

The world we want, that we ache for, is a world where children get to grow up and live to old age, where people have food and houses and enjoyable work, where animals and plants and human beings live together on the earth in harmony, where none “shall hurt or destroy” [Isaiah 65:25]. This is our dream, our deepest desire, the image we cannot let go of. This vision of the good life makes us unwilling to settle for the unjust, unsustainable, and indeed cruel and horrendous world we have. . . .

Isaiah’s hymn to a new creation and Jesus’ parables of the reign of God touch this deepest desire in each of us for a different, better world. It would be a world in which human dignity and the integrity of creation are central, a world in which the intrinsic value of all human beings and of the creation itself is recognized and appreciated. . . . Do we have any hope for a different, better world? Given the situation we face at the beginning of the twenty-first century of war, violence, AIDS, capitalist greed, and now the specter of global warming, it seems absurd to even bother with such a question. And yet we read in the Isaiah passage [65:17–25] that in the midst of painting this wonderful picture of life beyond our wildest dreams, God says, “Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear.” “*While they are yet speaking*” —we have only to ask for God to answer! But we must ask with our whole being; a better world must become our deepest desire. And this means, of course, we must *work at it*; we must give our whole selves to it.

[2] Sallie McFague, *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008), 144.

Nature Speaking, by Randy Woodley

Just ask the animals, and they will teach you. Ask the birds of the sky, and they will tell you. Speak to the earth and it will instruct you. Let the fish in the sea speak to you. - Job 12:7-8

My ancestral DNA apparently gave me an inclination toward single-mindedness. When my mind is set on one thing, I am rarely distracted. On one occasion, after I had spoken to a crowd, a woman came up to me afterward and apologized profusely that her young child had crawled around the lectern and at my feet during my presentation. I hadn’t even noticed. My wife has learned that if she doesn’t pull my attention from whatever I am currently doing or even thinking about, her words simply become background noise. Edith often hears the same refrain from me: “Honey, what were you saying?”

Nature is always speaking, but we are not often listening. I don’t expect my wife to remain silent just because I am in deep thought. It’s up to me to listen to her—to acknowledge her and to pay attention to what she is telling me. Would you ask your loved ones not to make their needs known? To keep silent instead of holding a conversation? We are in a relationship with the Earth and with all of Earth’s creatures. We must amplify the



Earth's voice. We must protect it by recognizing the Earth's rights. Unfortunately, we have waited until this late hour to realize the sacredness of this relationship. Let's not delay until it is too late. Talk to animals and then be taught by them. Talk to and listen to birds. Talk to the Earth and other parts of creation and expect to be taught from them. Listen to fish attest to the truth. And recognize Creator's hand in all creation. Support and volunteer for a nonprofit that works to preserve and amplify the Earth's voice.

from Becoming Rooted: One Hundred Day of Reconnecting with Sacred Earth by Randy Woodley

Church of the Wild: How Nature Invites Us into the Sacred, by Victoria Loorz

You can "love the earth" by taking care of it: by getting involved with advocacy campaigns to remove dams and protect forests, by living simply and adding nutrients to the soil, by limiting fossil fuels and eating local foods. And I hope we all do. All of us need to make significant changes that may feel at first, like sacrifices yet in the end are only surrender of privileges that were never ours in the first place.

But falling in love with Earth? That's different. First of all, it's a bit of a misnomer. You don't fall in love with Earth; she's too big. You are allured to pay attention and enter into conversation with a particular being, a particular place. And then, through fidelity and time and a thousand small acts of kindness and reciprocal giving and receiving, you fall in love. Through that particular, deepening relationship, a portal is opened and your heart is expanded to love the whole.

To quote farmer and poet Wendell Berry, "People exploit what they have merely concluded to be of value, but they defend what they love. To defend what we love we need a particularizing language, for we love what we particularly know."

Going deeper: This interview with Dr. Randy Woodley connects his work on the Harmony Way, as lived out by many indigenous cultures around the world, as connected to the Hebraic Way of Shalom. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTtRgDujntc&t=23>

