

New Scotland Presbyterian Church
Worship for the Season of Creation – Forest Sunday
and World Communion Sunday
(video link at <https://www.newscotlandpc.com/>)
October 4, 2020
The Rev. Holly S. Cameron

Prelude

Ryan Dwyer

“O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing”

Introduction

Welcome to worship at New Scotland Presbyterian Church.

One announcement before worship. We have our fall chicken and rib BBQ coming up this Thursday, October 8. The dinner is take-out only, and you can come pick up your dinner here at the church from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. that day. Dinners are \$14 and you can reserve your dinner by going to our website, www.newscotlandpc.com and filling out the form there, you can even pre-pay there, if you like. If you would rather avoid the computer, place your order by calling the church office, 518-439-6454, and we will call you back to confirm your order.

If you can volunteer to work the event, please be in touch with John Griffin, who is co-ordinating, so he knows there are enough volunteers.

We also have flyers that can be posted around town or given to your neighbors, just stop and pick them up from the table in the church lobby.

As we prepare for worship, I'd like to note that this is the last of four weeks celebrating the Season of Creation. This week we celebrate Forest Sunday.

The flowers on the pulpit are given to the glory of God by the Dwyers. Thank you!

Today is also World Communion Sunday, where Christians around the world gather at the Lord's table to remember we are sisters and brothers in Christ. So we will be celebrating communion today, and you are invited to gather elements to participate. Jesus sat at a dinner table with his friends, and used elements common to them: bread and wine. You are invited to use elements that are common to your table – bread or cracker or chip; and juice or wine or other drink, even water will do. You might set these on a special cloth and include a candle or flower or something to welcome guests to a meal. You may add a photo of someone you love. Take a moment to gather those elements now.

Call to Worship

We gather in the name of the triune God: our Creator, the fountain of life; our Christ, the pulse of life; and the Spirit, the breath of life. Our God is holy, and the whole earth is filled with God's presence.

Hymn

“How Great Thou Art” verses 1,2,4 #467 in the Presbyterian Hymnal

Choir

Opening Prayer

God of all glory, reveal yourself to us as we gather for worship, and show us your presence in all creation, vibrating in the land, shining in the rivers, pulsating in the wilderness, quivering in the forests. Help us to appreciate the wonders you have made: sturdy evergreens and vibrant maples, shimmering ferns and glistening moss, dogwoods and oaks; and all the fauna of the forest: tree frogs and owls, moths and bats, deer and lizards, songbirds and butterflies. O Great Creator, we thank you for the wonders of this world and the gift of the forest. We ask forgiveness for the ways we have mistreated your Earth, when we have been willing to destroy the life you created so that we can get more money, which we created. Forgive us when we have ignored the sounds of the forest and snuffed them out by the sounds of chainsaws and bulldozers. Forgive us, O God, when we live only for ourselves and apart from you. Help us to care for our earthly home, to stand in solidarity with the mysteries of forest and forest creatures. Make us trustworthy caretakers of your garden planet. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Words of Assurance

Sisters and Brothers in Christ: the promise of scripture is that mercy and love surround us always. Our Creator cherishes us, heals us, and offers us the grace we need for new beginnings. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Old Testament Lesson Genesis 2:4b-22

¹⁸ In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, ⁵ when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; ⁶ but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground— ⁷ then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. ⁸ And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. ⁹ Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁰ A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches. ¹¹ The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; ¹² and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. ¹³ The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Cush. ¹⁴ The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.”

¹⁸ Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.” ¹⁹ So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would

call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. ²¹ So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. ²² And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.

Kids' Time

For those unable to see the video, the children's sermon is about how God made the trees and all the wonderful things that trees provide. Now it's time to see the photos that remind us of God's love and hope and joy. {photos.}

Keep sending us your photos so we can share them in the coming weeks!

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for the wonderful world you made, especially for trees that are beautiful to look at, that give us fruit to eat, that provide a home for animals, and for the amazing way trees make oxygen for us to live. Help us to notice your presence in all creation and help us to take care of the world you made for us. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Gospel Lesson John 3:1-16

⁹ Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ² He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." ³ Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." ⁴ Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" ⁵ Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶ What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' ⁸ The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." ⁹ Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" ¹⁰ Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹ "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹² If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴ And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. ¹⁶ "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

Sermon

Today is our last Sunday in the Season of Creation this year, Forest Sunday. We heard the story from Genesis 2, the second account of creation. Biblical scholars believe this creation story was written before the story in chapter one. If so, it tells us the very oldest ideas about trees and the purpose of human beings.

In this story, the world starts as just a lump of soil with a little stream – no rains, no plants, no animals, no people. Then God takes some of the earth, forms a creature, and gives it breath to bring it to life. The word that is translated as “breath” can also mean “wind” or “spirit.” So this first human is made of earth and air, or Earth and Spirit. That is where we come from.

Then God makes the first thing this human needs to survive – God plants a garden and makes trees. Trees for beauty, and trees for food, and then two special trees in the middle: the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It’s interesting to try to picture this, because it may seem like a contradiction. I think of gardens as open spaces, away from trees, with vegetable planted in long rows – I remember the cotton fields of Alabama where I grew up, the corn fields of Indiana where we traveled every year, the wheat fields of Kansas where my dad lives, the vineyards of the Finger Lakes here in New York – they are all big, open spaces. Even the backyard gardens in my family were planted to get full sun. No one left trees in the middle. I think of trees as separate from gardens, growing in orchards or forests.

But, this week I read about something called a “forest garden,” which actually has a long history. Anthropologists studying early communities in the tropics first assumed those people got most of their food from small plots of beans or grain, everything else looked like untamed jungle. But, after more study, the scientists came to understand virtually all the plants were useful in some way. The tall trees were timber, firewood, and nitrogen fixers, providing food for other plants. The shorter trees provided mangoes, avocados, and other fruits and nuts. Under the trees were shrubs, which also provided food, fiber, and wood. There were herbs filled with medicinal, edible, and ornamental plants. Underground were roots and tubers. There were also plants for ground cover and climbing vines. Robert Hart, a 20th century English farmer, discovered that maintaining a large farm with separate plots for livestock, orchards, and vegetable beds were more than one person could maintain. He learned about forest gardens, and when he adapted his land, with these seven layers of intertwining plant life, he found it largely looked after itself and needed little intervention from the farmer.

So, maybe the garden God built for the first human was, in fact, a forest garden, with all kinds of trees and plants together. God created the garden so the human would have food, and God says the purpose of the human is to “till and keep” the garden. The Hebrew word is *avad*, which literally means to “serve.” It is the word used to describe the relationship of servants to their masters, subjects to their king, and people to their God. So, really, God tells the human to “serve and preserve” the garden, this source of life. We might understand this command as God telling us to care for the trees of the forest, the trees of the orchard, the other layers of plant life, as well as the insects, birds, and other wildlife which the first human was privileged to name.

Since, the story tells us, we are born of the same soil, we are family. This means taking care of earth and plants and animals is not something added on to the life of faith. It is the purpose God gave us: to serve and preserve everything God brought out of the soil.

Our church recognizes this command through the Presbyterian Mission Agency, which offers peacemaking and environmental programs. One opportunity is to become a certified Earth Care Congregation, something our church started this year.

They have also offered, in pre-pandemic days, travel seminars to learn about natural resources that are being used by first-world corporations and the links to conflict, poverty, and environmental and human rights abuses.

A pastor from downstate wrote about being part of a Presbyterian delegation to Guatemala in 2017. I think I resonated with his experience because I got to visit our sister presbytery in Guatemala back in 2002 when I was the upcoming moderator. One of the striking features of Guatemala is the steep mountains, and how so much of the mountainsides are terraced for farming. Looking across the valleys, it was hard for me to imagine working on those sharp slopes day after day, how exhausting it must be always walking on an angle, climbing up and down the rows for hours.

The name “Guatemala” means “place of many trees,” and its land and mountains were once covered with dense forests, but corporate production of sugar, palm oil, and beef have resulted in rapid deforestation, pushing poor and indigenous people off their land, moving them deeper into the forest where they cut down more trees to rebuild subsistence farms. Cutting down the trees results in more mudslides, which destroys lives and washes away the very soil needed for living. When communities have protested to keep the chemical mining and industrial farming corporations from destroying their land and water, citizens have been threatened, beaten, gassed, arrested, and even shot. According to Global Witness, an international NGO, “This tide of violence is driven by an intensifying fight for land and natural resources, as mining, logging, hydro-electric and agricultural companies trample on people and the environment in their pursuit of profit.”

Biblical scholar Ched Myers has written that “forest preservation is a life and death struggle between communities who are reliant upon the forests and who value them spiritually, and the powerful interests who pillage old growth forests for economic and political gain, destroying treasured commonwealth. This is, it turns out, one of the oldest struggles in human history.”

The prophet Zechariah, for example, cries out for the trees that were being destroyed by the greed of ancient empires that cut down ancient forests in order to clear land for export crops like olives, displacing people and enriching royal families who traded these goods for extravagant silks, gold, and other items of luxury. The prophet says:

Open your doors, O Lebanon, so that fire may devour your cedars!
Wail, O Cypress, for the cedar has fallen, for the glorious trees are ruined!
Wail, oaks of Bashan, for the thick forest has been felled! (Zech. 11:1-3)

The prophet Jeremiah also warned Israel that nearby forests were in danger. He says:

The destroyers, with all their weapons,
will cut down your choicest cedars
and cast them into the fire. (Jer. 22:6)

God’s prophets remind us that the God-given purpose for humanity is to serve and preserve what God has made. Corporations have taken license to destroy land and water and trees, but there are individuals and organizations that work on planting trees, to re-forest, to re-create what God made. They understand there is value in the trees beyond their selling price.

Forests have been called the lungs of the planet. They remove carbon dioxide from the air, and produce oxygen for us to breathe. They capture and purify rainwater. Tropical forests contain at least half of the species on Earth. The psalm for today is from Psalm 139 where the writer says, to God, “I will praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are your works.” The world God has made is a marvel. It is not separate from us, it is our source, the thing from which we were made. Just as we praise God for what God has done, all of creation is in praise. Isaiah says “break forth into singing...O forest and every tree in it!” (44:23).

Even our gospel lesson today refers to God’s creation. In this most-well-known verse, John 3:16, it says, “God so loved the world” – not just humanity. The Greek word is *kosmos*. We still use that word. We know the cosmos is more than just humanity. It is the earth and all the life on earth; it is the stars and planets; it is everything that God has made. God so loved the cosmos, that God sent his only Son to remind us of God’s love and God’s commandments, so that we may live as God intended us to live.

As we worship this Forest Sunday, we give praise for all God has made. We remember the purpose God gave us to tend and keep the forest garden God made for us. And, on this World Communion Sunday, we remember our sisters and brothers around the world, gathering in the north and south, the east and west, around Christ’s table of love and hope, to be renewed for the journey, of serving and preserving all members of our family – everything that God made for us.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Song

“Remember Me”

Choir

Pastoral Prayer

O God, we come to you always with prayers of thanks for the blessings we recognize. We thank you that Jesus knows our most difficult situations and that our cries to you are never ignored.

O God, while we give your praise, we also cry out for the struggles of our times. We look around and see the planet you created is vulnerable; we remember the words of scripture that your creation sighs and groans, and we wonder what we can do to save it and to save us. The pain of this troubled world sometimes makes it hard for us to believe that justice is possible and that love will prevail. So we cry out to you all of our fears and our hurts, and we pray on behalf of all people who are in pain, who are suffering, who are struggling. On this day, we especially remember those who were devastated by the limo crash in Schoharie two years ago. We pray for your comfort to be with those who live with the pain of that loss. We pray for all first responders who run towards tragedy in order to help others.

And we pray for ourselves, for those moments when we feel alone and weak, when our efforts for change seem never to be enough. We pray in the spirit of St. Francis: that we may be disciples of your shalom—your wholeness, your healing, your peace. In places of hatred, help us to bring love. Where there is pain, help us to work for healing. Where there is discord, help us to work for harmony. Where there is despair, help us to work for hope. Where there is loneliness, help us to build community. Through our living, may cries of lament give way to songs of joy.

Connect us, O God, one to another, so that we feel the support and safety of being part of one loving family that you have created.

We pray in Jesus' name. And we say the prayer he taught us:

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Communion

Today we celebrate the Lord's Supper with elements that we have at our tables. We invite the Lord to all our tables, and he becomes our host. He invites everyone to take part in this meal, so all are welcome. Friends, this is the joyful feast of the people of God! People will come from east and west, and from north and south to sit at the Lord's table.

The Great Thanksgiving

Let us lift our hearts to the Lord, and offer our thanks and praise. Let us pray.

O God, Creator and ruler of the universe, at your word the earth was made and spun on its course among the planets. Your Spirit brought order out of chaos and breathed life into your creatures.

When we were unfaithful to you, you kept faith with us. You made covenant to be our God, and sent prophets to call us back to your way. Then in the fullness of time, you chose to be born a human being, to become a part of Earth, to teach us and heal our brokenness, to suffer, die, and rise from death to redeem humankind, renew creation, and reconcile all who are born of Earth and Spirit.

Your presence is the living pulse in all things, filling land, sea, and air, filling every element and place, filling the grain and fruit we share this day.

Therefore, we praise you with angels and archangels; with the ancient voices of the forest, the high voices from the sky, the deep voices from the sea, the whole company of creation; and with all the faithful of every time and place, saying:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

Gracious God, pour out your Holy Spirit upon us and upon your gifts, that the bread we break and the cup we bless may be the communion of the body and blood of Christ. By your Spirit make us one with Christ that we may be one with all who share this feast, united in ministry in every place. As this bread is Christ's body for us, send us out to be the body of Christ in the world.

In union with your church in heaven and on earth, we pray, O God, that you will fulfill your eternal purpose in us and in all the cosmos. Keep us faithful in your service until Christ comes in the joy of your eternal realm.

Through Christ, with Christ, in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory, praise, and honor are yours, almighty God, now and forever. Amen.

Breaking the Bread

{Break your bread as these words are said.}

The Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, sat with his friends at a dinner table. He took bread, blessed it, and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take and eat. This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

{Pour your drink into a cup, or, if already in a cup, lift the cup as these words are said.}

In the same way Jesus took the cup, saying: This cup is the new covenant sealed in my blood, which is poured out for you, and for many, for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this in remembrance of me.

{Lift up the bread and cup.}

Friends, the Body of Christ is broken for the life of the world. These are the gifts of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

Take; eat and drink the bread of heaven and the cup of new life.

Prayer After Communion

Gracious God, you have made us one with all your people in heaven and on earth. You have fed us with the bread of life, and renewed us for your service. Help us who have shared Christ's body and received his cup, to be his faithful disciples, so that our daily living may be part of the life of your kingdom, and our love be your love, reaching out as agents of healing for the life of your cosmos; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Hymn

Choir

"Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee" #464 in the Presbyterian Hymnal

Offering

The psalmist says "The world belongs to God; the earth and all its people." Through God's love, we have gifts to share. So let us return to God the offerings of our life as a sign of our desire to follow in God's way, to fulfill God's purpose, to care for all the life God created.

We give thanks for our many gifts. Churches depend on the generosity of members and friends to support their ministries. If you are able to mail in an offering, or give online at <https://www.newscotlandpc.com/>, we are grateful. If all you can do is offer prayers for the church, we love you for that gift. Whether it's money, time, attention, a phone call, a text, an e-mail, a smile, a decoration in your window or yard – there are so many ways we can reach out to others and know we are not alone. We are blessed to be able to connect to one another and to love one another. Thank you for your generous giving!

Song of Praise

Ryan Dwyer

These are probably the most-sung lines in the last 300 years, so here are both the traditional words, and another variation:

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God above, you heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God for all that love has done;
Creator, Christ, and Spirit, One.

Announcements

- 1) We have a chicken & rib bbq coming up this Thursday, October 8, take-out only. Orders are now being taken on our website www.newscotlandpc.com or by phoning the church office, 518-439-6454
- 2) I also want to remind you one last time about the fund raiser our Administrator, Kat, is doing. We have all seen the devastating pictures of the wildfires in California and the Pacific Northwest. Kat came to us from that area, and she is selling her artwork as a fundraiser. The proceeds are for the United Way in Oregon. You can see the computer links for her fundraiser in our daily e-mail, or you can send a donation directly to:

United Way of the Mid-Willamette Valley
455 Bliler Ave NE
Salem OR 97301

- 3) Presbyterian Disaster Assistance also helps areas in crisis, and has set up accounts to help recovery from recent hurricanes, fires, and the pandemic. You can donate online at <https://pda.pcusa.org/> or send a check to Presbyterian Church (USA) with the account code noted on your check. The code for Hurricane Sally is DR000169; for current wildfires DR000165, for Hurricane Laura DR000194, for Iowa derecho DR000015, for COVID-19 is DR000148:

Presbyterian Church (USA)
PO Box 643700
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Benediction and Blessing

Christ calls us to be his disciples, to serve him with love and compassion, to serve Earth by caring for creation, honoring the forests that God planted to provide homes, and food, and breath for all living things.

And may the God of hope, who is above all and through all and in all, fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, you may abound in hope, both this day and always. Amen.

Choral Benediction

Choir

You shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace,
and the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you.
There'll be shouts of joy and the trees of the field shall clap, shall clap their hands.
And the trees of the field shall clap their hands,
and the trees of the field shall clap their hands,
and the trees of the field shall clap their hands,
and you'll go out with joy.

Postlude

Ryan Dwyer

"O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing"