

New Scotland Presbyterian Church  
Worship for the Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
(video link at <https://www.newscotlandpc.com/>)  
September 13, 2020  
The Rev. Holly S. Cameron

Prelude

Ryan Dwyer

“Go Down, Moses”

Introduction

*Welcome to worship at New Scotland Presbyterian Church. We are celebrating the Season of Creation for the next four weeks.*

*Today is the second and last Sunday of our joint worship services, and we are so glad to welcome our friends from Delmar Presbyterian Church to our worship today.*

Call to Worship

We are each stamped in the image of God. The diversity of human beings proclaims the richness of the Divine. Come together for worship, so that, in many voices, one God is proclaimed; with many hands, one mission is accomplished; and with many hearts one Love is displayed to the world.

Hymn

Choir

“Praise, My Soul, the God of Heaven” #479 in the Presbyterian Hymnal

Opening Prayer

God of all glory, on the first day of the week, you began creation, bringing light out of darkness. On the first day of the week, you began your new creation, raising Jesus out of the darkness of death. On this Lord’s Day grant that we, the people you create by earth and water and Spirit, may be joined with all your works in praising you. Forgive us, O God, when we live only for ourselves and apart from you. Help us to see when we have turned away from neighbors; when we have refused to bear the burdens of others; when we have ignored the pain of the earth; when we have passed by the hungry, the poor, and the oppressed. Open our eyes. Open our hearts. And free us from our self-centered ways, so that we may choose to do your will in your world. We pray in Jesus’ name. 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.

Psalm 139:1-12

<sup>1</sup> O LORD, you have searched me and known me.

<sup>2</sup> You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
you discern my thoughts from far away.

<sup>3</sup> You search out my path and my lying down,  
and are acquainted with all my ways.

<sup>4</sup> Even before a word is on my tongue,  
O LORD, you know it completely.  
<sup>5</sup> You hem me in, behind and before,  
and lay your hand upon me.  
<sup>6</sup> Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
it is so high that I cannot attain it.  
<sup>7</sup> Where can I go from your spirit?  
Or where can I flee from your presence?  
<sup>8</sup> If I ascend to heaven, you are there;  
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.  
<sup>9</sup> If I take the wings of the morning  
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,  
<sup>10</sup> even there your hand shall lead me,  
and your right hand shall hold me fast.  
<sup>11</sup> If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,  
and the light around me become night,"  
<sup>12</sup> even the darkness is not dark to you;  
the night is as bright as the day,  
for darkness is as light to you.

### Kids' Time

*For those unable to see the video, the children's sermon is about how God made human beings from the earth, and how we are held in God's hands. 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 world you made and for the land that grows plants, and made us human. We are glad to know you love us, and we pray that we may feel your hands holding us, and supporting us, and guiding us, so that we will be able to live the lives you have planned for us. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

### Song

"Red Sea Road"

Choir

### Old Testament Lesson Genesis 3:14-19; 4:8-16

<sup>14</sup> The LORD God said to the serpent,  
"Because you have done this,  
cursed are you among all animals  
and among all wild creatures;  
upon your belly you shall go,  
and dust you shall eat  
all the days of your life.  
<sup>15</sup> I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and hers;  
he will strike your head,  
and you will strike his heel."  
<sup>16</sup> To the woman he said,

“I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing;  
in pain you shall bring forth children,  
yet your desire shall be for your husband,  
and he shall rule over you.”

<sup>17</sup> And to the man he said,  
“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife,  
and have eaten of the tree  
about which I commanded you,  
‘You shall not eat of it,’  
cursed is the ground because of you;  
in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life;  
<sup>18</sup> thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;  
and you shall eat the plants of the field.  
<sup>19</sup> By the sweat of your face  
you shall eat bread  
until you return to the ground,  
for out of it you were taken;  
you are dust,  
and to dust you shall return.”

**4** <sup>8</sup> Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let us go out to the field.” And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him. <sup>9</sup> Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” He said, “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?” <sup>10</sup> And the LORD said, “What have you done? Listen; your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground! <sup>11</sup> And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. <sup>12</sup> When you till the ground, it will no longer yield to you its strength; you will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.” <sup>13</sup> Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is greater than I can bear! <sup>14</sup> Today you have driven me away from the soil, and I shall be hidden from your face; I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and anyone who meets me may kill me.” <sup>15</sup> Then the LORD said to him, “Not so! Whoever kills Cain will suffer a sevenfold vengeance.” And the LORD put a mark on Cain, so that no one who came upon him would kill him. <sup>16</sup> Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD, and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

### Sermon

This is our third year of worshiping with the texts for the Season of Creation. In 1989, the Orthodox Church proclaimed September 1 as a day to pray for the environment; and in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, the World Council of Churches designated September 1 through October 4 as the Season of Creation. Today is designated as “Land Sunday,” and we heard the verses from Genesis about how human beings became severed from the land.

If we go back to chapter 2, we remember how God intended for mortals to be the caretakers of the earth. In verse 7, God takes the dust of the earth to form the first human, and God breathes God’s own breath into the creature to bring him to life. Then God planted a garden with every good and delightful thing, and put the man there to tend, to till, to guard and keep it. That was God’s original plan.

Then, we know, a snake came along and disrupted everything. The snake told the humans if they ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, then they would be like God. And what human can resist being like God? We always want to know more, to have more, to do more. We want to feel that we are in control of our own destinies. So Adam and Eve eat the fruit, and their eyes are opened, and they are not even able to tell God the truth. Instead of confessing what they have done and apologizing, Adam says, "Eve made me do it!" And Eve says, "the snake made me do it!" And so we heard the verses about how God punishes each of them, which are all about breaking connections, including the ground that Adam had been asked to care for.

Then Adam and Eve are cast out of the garden, and we heard the story of their sons. Cain and Abel also have a broken relationship that results in Abel's death, and Cain moving out even further, until he builds the first city.

Those of us who grew up in cities can understand how far removed that life can be from tending and caring for the land. Modern cities are built on bricks and pavement and concrete so thick, you can go for days and weeks without ever stepping foot on the land God created. As Ched Meyers observes, many modern people have been socialized to value the earth around us as a private possession, a commodity, something to be used for economic gain. This is in stark contrast to the Bible, which never thinks of land as "real estate." Rather, the earth is described as our source, our "mother," if you will, since we are made from a handful of dirt. The earth is also described as our sustainer, in providing every good thing to eat in the garden (Genesis 2:9).

It seems that as human beings got further and further away from the Garden, and began to build cities, we became more and more enamored with our own skills. Meyers says that the world as God created it was "beneficent and bountiful, in no need of human genius to improve or control it." Human beings were "embedded in a living biosphere," and had "a divine appointment as caretaker." The relationship was so close that "whatever the man called each living being, that was its name" (Gen 2:19ff).

But it seems when we left the Garden, we had a "change in consciousness that propelled the rise of civilization." When God got done creating at the end of each day, God looked at what had been done and pronounced it good. As human beings moved further from the land, it seems we took on the attitude, as Meyers says, that creation may be "'good,' but not good enough." And so, we have taken the land and used the land and built on the land in ways that ultimately cut us off from the land itself. Theologian Paul Tillich said, "the modern way to flee from God is to rush ahead ... to conquer more and more space in every direction."

What would be like, if instead of trying to conquer more land, we actually looked at the land God created?

The writer Annie Dillard tells us that

In the top inch of forest soil, biologists found an average of 1,356 living creatures in each square foot ... including 865 mites, 265 springtails, 22 millipedes, 29 adult beetles and various numbers of 12 other forms of life... . Had an estimate also been made of the microscopic population, it might have ranged up to two billion bacteria and many millions of fungi, protozoa, and algae—in a mere *teaspoonful* of soil.

Harvard entomologist E. O. Wilson notes:

The very soils of the world are created by organisms. Plant roots shatter rocks to form much of the grit and pebbles of the basic substrate. But soils are much more than fragmented rock. They are complete ecosystems with vast arrays of plants, tiny animals, fungi, and microorganisms assembled in delicate balance, circulating nutrients in the form of solutions and tiny particles. A healthy soil literally breathes and moves.

Psalm 150 says, "Let everything that breathes, praise the Lord." The Rev. John Paarlberg says that means "the very soils beneath our feet are, in their own way, choirs of creatures singing their insect hymns, microbial chants, and fungal anthems in praise to the God who made them. And how dependent, how absolutely dependent we are upon these creatures! They could live very well without us, but we would perish without them!"

The author Gary Paulsen says it this way:

Everything we are, all that we can ever be, all the Einsteins and babies and love and hate, all the joy and sadness ... and wanting and liking and disliking, all the soft summer breezes on cheeks and first snowflakes, all the Van Goghs and Rembrandts and Mozarts and Mahlers and Thomas Jeffersons and Lincolns and Ghandis and Jesus Christs, all the Cleopatras and ... riches and achievements and progress, all of that, every single ... thing that we are or ever will be is dependent on six inches of topsoil and the fact that the rain comes when it's needed and does not come when it's not needed; everything, every ... single ... *thing* comes with that ....

As we get closer to the land, we also remember that God blesses it; the prophet Joel says, "Do not fear, O soil; be glad and rejoice, for the LORD has done great things!" (Joel 2:21)

If God loves the land that God has made, how can we resist reconnecting with it? Can we look again at the ways we take the land for granted – covering it up with concrete and garbage dumps, blasting it open to extract gas and oil, cutting down the rainforests and draining the wetlands, killing all the life that is teeming within it? Can we be inspired by God's original charge to us – to tend and till, to guard and keep?

Environmentalist Wendell Berry says:

The question that must be addressed, is not how to care for the planet but how to care for each of the planet's millions of human and natural neighborhoods, each of its millions of small pieces and parcels of land, each one of which is in some precious way different from all the others.

We need to care for our particular piece of land in order to begin to care about all land.

God created everything, and named all of it good. God delights in all of creation. On this Land Sunday, let us be reconnected to our Mother, Earth, and filled with the delight of our Creator for the land God has given us.

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

### Pastoral Prayer

Holy God, you have created all peoples, and brought us to life with your breath. We pray that your wisdom, revealed in all your works, will inspire us to live in right relation with our Mother Earth, all her creatures, and the whole human family. May the harmony of creation be a model for our relationships with our neighbors near and far, teaching us that we are not self-sufficient, but thrive through a constant exchange of energy and elements, love and language, in the great web of life.

O God who bore the pain of the cross, we hear the cries of creation and of our brothers and sisters. Extend the balm of your healing power, we pray. Wherever there has been hatred, oppression, or exploitation, bring your truth, reconciliation, and respectful co-existence.

In this week we remember in a special way all those who suffered the devastating loss from 9/11. We pray for those who continue to miss loved ones, and for those whose are suffering the ill health of the recovery work they did. As we remember our past, we find it easy to carry grudges, to nurse past hurts, and to cling to our role as judge over others. In your mercy you revealed Jesus to us, and we heard him say to the powers that would have destroyed him, "Father forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." We pray that you will help us grow in faithfulness that we may be agents of your forgiving grace.

Hear our prayers for restoration, that we may be closer to you; that we may be freed: from addictions and consumption, from lost purposes and loneliness, from domestic violence and global aggression, from economic and racial injustice, from worship of idols like body image, or success, or money, or time.

We pray that your presence will be with those who are suffering in other ways this day: we pray for those in prison, those who face addictions, those who are hungry and thirsty, those who are sick or without adequate shelter. We pray for all those who are in the midst of grief and mourning. And we pray for all who are facing the aftermath of storms and fires.

Finally, O God, in this time of a new school year, we pray for teachers, and parents, and students. Make them wise and patient as they navigate through these difficult times. Keep them safe and give them joy in their learning.

Help us always to pray and act in ways that are in harmony with your divine wisdom, and to use our talents and resources to serve the good of all.

And hear us as we pray together the Lord's Prayer....

### 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.

### Hymn

Choir

"Help Us Accept Each Other" #358 in the Presbyterian Hymnal

### Offering

The psalmist says "The world belongs to God; the earth and all its people." Let us return to God the offerings of our life and the gifts of the earth.

*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.

Announcement

As we come to end of our service, I'd like to say thank you again to Delmar Presbyterian for joining us for worship today. I look forward to more shared services in the future.

Benediction and Blessing

Christ calls us to be his disciples, to serve him with love and compassion, to serve Earth by caring for creation, and nurturing the land that God has made alive so that we and all our kin may live.

May the God who is above all and through all and in all fill you with the knowledge of God's presence in Earth, the pulsing of Christ in creation, and the movement of the Spirit through our souls.

And may the God of hope 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

May the good Lord bless and keep you, whether near or far away,  
May you find that long awaited golden day today.  
May your troubles all be small ones, and your fortunes ten times ten,  
May the good Lord bless and keep you 'til we meet again.

Postlude

Ryan Dwyer

"Go Down, Moses"