

Season Of Creation 2019

A Guide to reflection and prayer



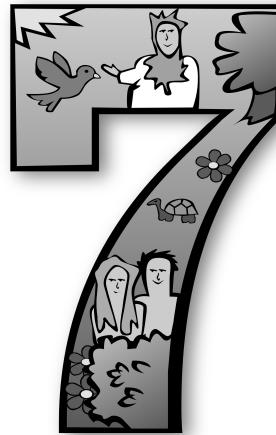
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this resource is available electronically at www.harcourtuc.ca/creation

You are invited to use this study guide as a personal resource as you move through the season of creation. In this season, Christians around the world seek to live out our caring for creation through celebration, prayer, projects and advocacy. The aspects of creation for each week are as follows

September 7-13	Ocean
September 14-20	Flora
September 21-27	Animals
September 28-Oct 4	Storm
October 5-11	Cosmos
October 12-18	Harvest
October 19-25	Sabbath



Each week will follow a similar pattern:

Saturday	reflection on the scripture passage for the next day
Sunday	worship addressing an aspect of creation
Monday	thankfulness for the gifts of that aspect of creation
Tuesday	lament for the damage we have inflicted
Wednesday	awareness of what needs to change
Thursday	courage to take healing actions
Friday	prayer based on the previous six days' reflections

We suggest you allow yourself 20-30 minutes of quiet time each day. You are encouraged to make notes to yourself each day in a journal.

For Saturday's reflection on scripture, you are invited to reflect using Lectio Divina (Latin for Divine Reading). You read the passage of scripture slowly and with pauses as you allow words or phrases to sink in. Then pause a minute or two, and read the passage again; and again. Notice what word or phrase attracts you. Then sit with it, savour it, and chew on it. Lastly, consider what significance it has for you, and make some notes to yourself.

We intend to collect prayers written during this season into a booklet that will be made available within Harcourt. If you wish to contribute a prayer or prayers you write, please place a copy in the collection box in the meeting place or email them to Marion Auger at marionauger@sympatico.ca.

Yours in Christ,
Spiritual Life Committee

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September 7-13: Ocean

Bless the Lord, O my soul.

O Lord my God, you are very great.
You are clothed with honour and majesty,
wrapped in light as with a garment.
You stretch out the heavens like a tent,
you set the beams of your chambers on the waters,
you make the clouds your chariot,
you ride on the wings of the wind,
you make the winds your messengers,
fire and flame your ministers.

You set the earth on its foundations,
so that it shall never be shaken.
You cover it with the deep as with a garment;
the waters stood above the mountains.
At your rebuke they flee;
at the sound of your thunder they take to flight.
They rose up to the mountains, ran down to the
valleys
to the place that you appointed for them.
You set a boundary that they may not pass,
so that they might not again cover the earth.
O Lord, how manifold are your works!
In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.
Yonder is the sea, great and wide,
creeping things innumerable are there,
living things both small and great.
There go the ships,
and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.
(Psalm 104: 1-9, 24-26)



Image by Peggy und Marco Lachmann-Anke from Pixabay

Commentary on the scripture

The 3000-year-old images may seem quaint, describing all of nature filled with the direct actions of God. For example, God personally feeds the sea creatures by hand; God sets boundaries within which processes happen; in return, creatures depend on God and turn to God for their nourishment.

These images may be quaint, but at their core is a deep sense of intimacy between creation and the divine. In contrast, our modern upbringing teaches us to consider the world around us as almost mechanical, the result of myriad random blind evolutionary experiments. The key question for us is this: to what degree do we face the universe in a spirit of awe and to what degree do we face it in a spirit of detached inquiry? One does not exclude the other, but detached inquiry alone does not get us to appreciate the world we live in to its fullest.

To fully appreciate the intent of this part of the Psalm, we need to remember that for the ancients the sea was a place to be feared; it represented the god of chaos, a destroyer. It was a place for mythical beasts. But the Psalm speaks differently of these fearsome sea-creatures: they too are part of God's beloved creation. There is a sense of a taming and demythologizing of other seeming powers in the ancient world: it is all a product of God's creative behaviour.

Notice too that the Psalm offers a celebration of biodiversity: abundance and diversity are expressions of and testimony to God's Wisdom. And there is something memorable about the intimacy between God and God's creatures: for creation to bear witness to God's wisdom through its diversity requires that God have a personal relationship of some sort with each of God's creatures.

We modern people can learn to focus on nature as revelation of God. Perhaps newer images are more helpful to us: God is closer to you than your next breath, God is present in the blinking in and out of existence of subatomic particles, God is present in the collapse of probability waves.

This leads us to our own relationship with nature: we are certainly not its masters, nor are we its victims. We consume and contribute as parts of nature, parts of God's manifestation in time and space. We need to learn to live in harmony and reciprocity with all of creation.



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Saturday September 7 Reflect on this week's scripture using the Lectio Divina technique on page 2.

Sunday September 8 Worship service at Harcourt: listen for similarities and differences with your own reading.

Monday September 9 Reflect on ways in which you are thankful for oceans for their role in the web of life (for example, home to earliest forms of life; generating more than half of the earth's oxygen through phytoplankton; absorbing carbon; transporting heat around the globe; hosting biodiversity). Also bring to mind times spent in or near oceans in your own life for which you are thankful.

Tuesday September 10 Reflect on ways in which you lament the damage humanity causes to oceans (for example, causing increased temperatures and acidification by raising carbon levels in the atmosphere¹; dumping plastics and other pollution; hunting and fishing species to extinction; treating the seabed as nothing more than exploitable resource). Also bring to mind ways in which you are personally complicit in this damage.

Wednesday September 11 Reflect on ways in which humanity needs to change in our treatment of the oceans (for example, in moving to a low-carbon economy; reducing and redirecting garbage; conserving life forms; changing our attitude toward ocean from infinitely exploitable natural resource to precious part of the web of life). Also bring to mind ways in which you personally need to change how you live and what political causes you support.

Thursday September 12 Reflect on what courage and perseverance humanity needs to take action to change how we deal with the oceans (for example, acknowledging that our ethical responsibility extends beyond humanity; embracing deep systemic change in our economy; seeking new forms of global policy-making). Also bring to mind the courage and perseverance you personally need to take the actions that are within your own reach.

Friday September 13 Reflect on your thoughts, feelings and journal notes from the past week and pray over them. Try writing a prayer; one format you could consider is this:

Creating God, I am thankful for these gifts of ocean:

Creating God, I lament ways in which we and I have caused damage:

Creating God, I acknowledge ways we and I need to change to heal the oceans:

Creating God, I resolve to take the actions that I can, with you as my helper.

If you wish to contribute a prayer or prayers you write, please place a copy in the collection box in the meeting place or email them to Marion Auger at marionauger@sympatico.ca. If you prefer your prayer to be anonymous, please indicate.

¹ "What matters for climate change is how much greenhouse gases we emit to the atmosphere. A lot of people have started to use keep-cups and reusable water bottles. These choices reduce waste, but are not high-impact climate actions – they have a much smaller effect compared with the big three: flying, driving and eating meat." Siobhán Pereira, The Guardian June 29, 2019

September 14-20: Flora (plants)

And God said,

“Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place,
and let the dry land appear.”

And it was so.

God called the dry land Earth,
and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas.
And God saw that it was good.

Then God said,

“Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed,
and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.”
And it was so.

The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind,
and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it.
And God saw that it was good.
(Genesis 1:9-12)



Image by Michael Drummond from Pixabay

Commentary on the scripture

This week's passage is the story of the third day of Creation in the myth recorded in Genesis 1. It is a myth in the sense that it encapsulates significant truth at the same time that it is not a literally true story, such as might have been captured as it happened by a videorecorder.

The Genesis myth appears at the beginning of our Bible but it originated much later, as a counter to the "political theology" that the Hebrews encountered during captivity in Babylon. Babylonian creation myths treated the earth as the inferior product of violent war amongst the gods. The Hebrew myth takes a starkly opposite view: the earth is the fruit of a single creator God who creates something good, out of nothing.

Today, science tells us a new story. At the singularity referred to as the Big Bang, a small, and dense mass of matter/energy rapidly expanded according to laws and constants that could produce a universe that would eventually give rise to life and consciousness. And God knew that was good.

Helium and hydrogen formed and in the death of stars also the heavier molecules such as carbon and nitrogen and the other molecules needed for the emergence of life. And God knew that was good too.

And in this small corner of the universe, on a watery planet circling a middle-sized star, life emerged and slowly evolved into more complex organisms, primitive plants, animals that swam and animals that crawled onto land. And God knew that this too was good.

The new story of science unfolds over a much longer time period than the Biblical seven days, and the mechanisms of evolution in it are very different from the direct creating activity of God described in the Bible. Where the two stories can coincide is in noticing the flow of the benevolent creative energy, which some people find a helpful metaphor for God. As well, we can recognize the pivotal role of plants in the emergence of life and the food chain that supports all animal life, including ours.



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Saturday September 14 Reflect on this week's scripture using the Lectio Divina technique on page 2.

Sunday September 15 Worship service at Harcourt: listen for similarities and differences with your own reading.

Monday September 16 Reflect on ways in which you are thankful for plants and their role in the web of life (for example, the photosynthesis that converts carbon dioxide, water and sunlight to carbohydrates that form the base of the food chain for all higher forms of life, as well as the oxygen we all breathe; the wide variety of fruits, nuts and vegetables; medicinal compounds; the way plants lend themselves to cultivation that permitted the Neolithic agricultural revolution and the emergence of human societies and cultures). Also bring to mind times in your own life when you are thankful directly for plants (for example, for fruit and vegetables plucked fresh, for shade on a sunny day or firewood on a cold one, the beauty of a flower or tree).

Tuesday September 17 Reflect on ways in which you lament the damage humanity causes to plants (for example, climate change that happens faster than plants can migrate; monocultures that destroy diversity; clear-cutting that erodes soil and spoils watersheds and whole river basins). Also bring to mind ways in which you are personally complicit in this damage.

Wednesday September 18 Reflect on ways in which humanity needs to change in our treatment of plants (for example, in moving to a low-carbon economy; preserving rainforests; maintaining plant biodiversity; adopting sustainable harvesting). Also bring to mind ways in which you personally need to change how you live and what political causes you support.

Thursday September 19 Reflect on what courage and perseverance humanity needs to take action to change how we deal with the earth's plant life (for example, acknowledging that our ethical responsibility extends beyond humanity; embracing deep systemic change in our economy; seeking new forms of global policy-making). Also bring to mind the courage and perseverance you personally need to take the actions that are within your own reach.

Friday September 20 Reflect on your thoughts, feelings and journal notes from the past week and pray over them. Try writing a prayer; one possible format is set out on page 5.

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September 21-27: Fauna (animals)

And God said,

"Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky."

So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind.

And God saw that it was good.

God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth."

And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

And God said,

"Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind."

And it was so.

God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind.

And God saw that it was good.

(Genesis 1:20-25)

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Commentary on the scripture

This week's passage is drawn from the fifth and sixth days of Creation in the myth recorded in Genesis 1. As noted last week, it is a myth in the sense that it encapsulates significant truth at the same time that it is not a literally true story, such as might have been captured as it happened by a videorecorder.

The underlying message continues to sound like a drumbeat: God spoke and it was so; and God sees that it is good. The goodness and diversity of creation continue to be emphasized, as is the intimacy with the divine.

Although the new story described in last week's Commentary has superseded Genesis in our understanding, the two stories can coincide in the benevolence of divine creating energy. Last week's Commentary provides useful context for this week's passage as well, as our attention turns from plant life to animal life.

As humans, we are curious about what we have in common with other animals. We are intrigued by communication with other species; we wonder about our family tree; and we are troubled to learn that 99% of species that have ever existed have gone extinct, according to some scientists.

Saturday September 21 Reflect on this week's scripture using the Lectio Divina technique on page 2.

Sunday September 22 Worship service at Harcourt: listen for similarities and differences with your own reading.

Monday September 23 Reflect on ways in which you are thankful for animals and their role in the web of life (for example, for top predators - other than homo sapiens - who keep ecology in delicate balance; for food animals whose short lives are led for our benefit, and dairy animals that are almost continuously pregnant; for draught animals that enabled and in some cases still enable large-scale agriculture). Also bring to mind times in your own life when you are thankful directly for animals (for example, you may have prayed in thanksgiving for the life of an animal you are about to eat, and you may appreciate the company of pets and companion animals).

Tuesday September 24 Reflect on ways in which you lament the damage humanity causes to animals (for example, the mass extinction going on now; the inhumanity of factory farming; the brutality of abattoirs; health problems that are side effects of cosmetic selective breeding). Also bring to mind ways in which you are personally complicit in this damage.

Wednesday September 25 Reflect on ways in which humanity needs to change in our treatment of animals (for example, by reducing our consumption of meat; reforming farming and abattoir practices; and addressing the side-effects of widespread pet-keeping). Also bring to mind ways in which you personally need to change how you live and what political causes you support.

Thursday September 26 Reflect on what courage and perseverance humanity needs to take action to change how we deal with the earth's animal life (for example, acknowledging that our ethical responsibility extends beyond humanity; embracing deep systemic change in our economy; seeking new forms of global policy-making). Also bring to mind the courage and perseverance you personally need to take the actions that are within your own reach.

Friday September 27 Reflect on your thoughts, feelings and journal notes from the past week and pray over them. Try writing a prayer; one possible format is set out on page 5.

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September 28-October 4: Storm

One day Jesus got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side of the lake.” So they put out, and while they were sailing he fell asleep. A windstorm swept down on the lake, and the boat was filling with water, and they were in danger.

They went to him and woke him up, shouting, “Master, Master, we are perishing!” And he woke up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they ceased, and there was a calm.

He said to them, “Where is your faith?” They were afraid and amazed, and said to one another, “Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?”
(Luke 8:22-25)

Commentary on the scripture

This week's passage is sometimes referred to as ‘the stilling of the storm’. It is helpful to remember that in ancient folklore natural phenomena such as the wind and raging sea are the work of spirits or demons. It is as if, under pressure, the disciples regain their belief in malevolent spirits and revert back to a more primitive superstition. We see a similar reversion today where people under duress try to strike a deal with God ('just cure me from this illness and I will be good').

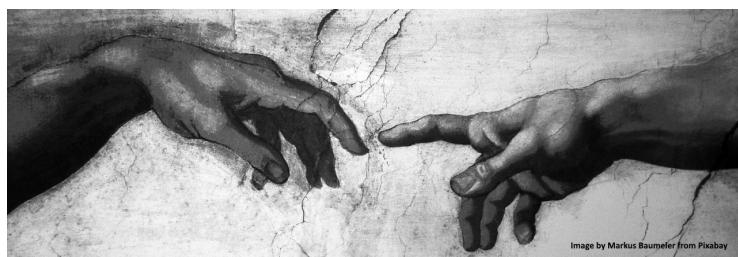
It could well be that people hearing this gospel story at the time would recognize that the disciples are afraid of supernatural spirits. Those hearers would be interested to learn what Jesus has to say about handling such fear, because it is familiar to them from stormy situations in their own lives.

And Jesus's response is first of all a short question, “where is your faith?”, which might be more accessibly translated today as “where is your trust?” It is easy to trust God when your life is going well; it is when life is stormy that your trust is put to the test.

Jesus's calming of the waves sounds unlikely to us today. It is a kind of miraculous demonstration that beggars belief, even though the first-century audience may have believed it literally.

Today, we might understand the tale differently. We notice that after Jesus reassures the disciples with his presence, the wind and waves no longer seem so threatening. This is the trust that enables us to say “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me.”

This different understanding may awaken us to the fact that there may be a blessing hidden within a storm. It may stir things up and strengthen our faith, or it may hold an early warning of worse to come if we do not mend our ways. It is not easy to see God's hand at work in stormy situations, yet that might be what we are called to do.



Saturday September 28 Reflect on this week's scripture using the Lectio Divina technique on page 2.

Sunday September 29 Worship service at Harcourt: listen for similarities and differences with your own reading.

Monday September 30 Reflect on ways in which you are thankful for storms and their role in the web of life (for example, clearing away failing growth; giving something new an opportunity to emerge in the space vacated; giving you an opportunity to exercise your trust in God). Also bring to mind times in your own life when you are thankful for storms (for example, by clearing the air so a relationship can be repaired, helping you to let go of what no longer serves you).

Tuesday October 1 Reflect on ways in which you lament the storms that we humans cause for each other and for creation (for example, the suffering caused by fire, flood and other extreme weather events triggered by climate change; our failure to provide adequate help to those who feel the effects of such events; unjust distribution of resources; and more broadly our hardness of heart toward people suffering the effects of addiction, ill-health, personal loss and all other such 'storms' in their lives). Also bring to mind ways in which you are personally complicit in this damage.

Wednesday October 2 Reflect on ways in which humanity needs to change in our treatment of storms (for example, by acting to stop and reverse climate change; by financing infrastructure and relief programs to deal with its effects; by becoming a more compassionate society). Also bring to mind ways in which you personally need to change how you live and what political causes you support.

Thursday October 3 Reflect on what courage and perseverance humanity needs to take action to change how we deal with storms (for example, embracing deep systemic change in our economy; seeking new forms of global policy-making; treating everyone as our neighbour). Also bring to mind the courage and perseverance you personally need to take the actions that are within your own reach.

Friday October 4 Reflect on your thoughts, feelings and journal notes from the past week and pray over them. Try writing a prayer; one possible format is set out on page 5.

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October 5-October 11: Cosmos

Praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord from the heavens;
 praise him in the heights!
Praise him, all his angels;
 praise him, all his host!
Praise him, sun and moon;
 praise him, all you shining stars!
Praise him, you highest heavens,
 and you waters above the heavens!

Let them praise the name of the Lord,
 for he commanded and they were created.

He established them forever and ever;
 he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.

Praise the Lord from the earth,
 you sea monsters and all deeps,
fire and hail, snow and frost,
 stormy wind fulfilling his command!
Mountains and all hills,
 fruit trees and all cedars!
Wild animals and all cattle,
 creeping things and flying birds!
Kings of the earth and all peoples,
 princes and all rulers of the earth!
Young men and women alike,
 old and young together!

Let them praise the name of the Lord,
 for his name alone is exalted;
his glory is above earth and heaven.
He has raised up a horn for his people,
 praise for all his faithful,
 for the people of Israel who are close to him.

Praise the Lord!
(Psalm 148)



Commentary on the scripture

This Psalm calls on the whole Creation to praise the Lord. God is pictured as being outside Creation, receiving praise from both heavens and earth. The Psalm calls first on the heavens and their inhabitants, and then on the earth and its inhabitants, who are named roughly in the order they appear in the story of creation in Genesis 1.

As we observed when looking at part of that Genesis story in the ‘Flora’ week (page 7), the new story of science describes mechanisms of evolution very different from the direct creating activity of God described in this Psalm’s ‘he commanded and they were created’. Science tells us that our bodies are made of stardust, elements forged in the explosion of supernovae over billions of years.

Science tells us too that the universe consists of billions or trillions or quadrillions of galaxies; many times that number of stars; and that we are the latest chapter in a long story of evolution from single-celled organisms in ancient seas; and the human brain is the most complex system yet found in the natural world, with 100 billion neurons connected through some 100 trillion synaptic junctions. At the same time, science tells us that the subatomic world is unimaginably small; its constituent particles are still being discovered, and the interactions of quarks, leptons and suchlike are barely understood.

How are we to praise the God manifest in a universe of such long duration, so unimaginably huge, and of such microscopic scale? Pastor and theologian Paul Smith comments that most traditional monotheistic religions view God as a supreme being entirely separate from creation, a ‘man upstairs’ who sometimes intervenes in the world to make things happen. “The size of the conventional God of theism of most churches has become much too small for a world of infinite cosmic dimensions and quantum measurements of time and space.”²

The God of infinite duration and scale Smith names as The Infinite Face Of God. He suggests we pray to this ‘face’ of God by opening our bodies and saying words that echo Paul’s in Acts: Infinite God in whom I live and move and have my being.³ Our praise that follows such an approach might be a mix of awe, admiration, reverence, respect and gratitude.

² Integral Christianity, Paragon House, Minnesota 2011, pages 173-174.

³ ibid, page 192. Smith also describes the Intimate Face Of God, often known as Jesus or Spirit, to whom we pray saying ‘Intimate God, you are always with me’, and the Inner Face of God within us, our True Self to whom we pray saying, ‘Inner God, I am the light of the world.’

Smith’s understanding of God is panentheistic ‘God is both right here (immanent) and out there (transcendent)’. A simple summary of panentheism is ‘All is in God and God is in all’. A more extensive summary is provided by John Haught ‘God is not a reality that we reach only by leaving this world behind. Rather, God is the reality into which all events in the universe are finally synthesized and preserved as they aim toward a continually more expansive beauty. Thus we may say that the conservation and prolongation of nature’s beauty actually contribute intensity and beauty to God’s life. God is affected, indeed changed, by what happens in the cosmic process. When nature suffers, God suffers.’ (The Promise of Nature: Ecology and Cosmic Purpose, Paulist Press 1993; cited in At Home In The Cosmos, David Toolan, Orbis Books, New York 2001)

Saturday October 5 Reflect on this week's scripture using the Lectio Divina technique on page 2.

Sunday October 6 Worship service at Harcourt: listen for similarities and differences with your own reading.

Monday October 7 Reflect on the wonder of the universe, the magnificent scale of galaxies, the wonder of the physical processes that sustain creation. Also bring to mind the wonder of your own life, your gratitude for ancestors right back to single-celled organisms, and the immense physical processes that created the energy and matter to sustain life in the first place.

Tuesday October 8 Reflect on ways in which you lament our universe (for example, how little we know or understand, how we ignore or take for granted the wonders of science that reveal God's presence, the way that companies and nations approach space as a new arena of resources ripe for exploiting). Also bring to mind ways in which you are personally complicit in these behaviours.

Wednesday October 9 Reflect on ways in which humanity needs to change in our treatment of cosmos (for example, in opening our sense of awe, taking time to look at the wonders of cosmos around us, and trying to see the presence of God in all things as the Psalmist did). Also bring to mind ways in which you personally need to change how you live and what political causes you support.

Thursday October 10 Reflect on what courage and perseverance humanity needs to take action to change how we deal with cosmos (for example, acknowledging the limited nature of our understanding, embracing humility and acknowledging our responsibility to care for the whole creation, insofar as our reach extends). Also bring to mind the courage and perseverance you personally need to take the actions that are within your own reach.

Friday October 11 Reflect on your thoughts, feelings and journal notes from the past week and pray over them. Try writing a prayer; one possible format is set out on page 5.

If you wish to contribute a prayer or prayers you write, please place a copy in the collection box in the meeting place or email them to Marion Auger at marionauger@sympatico.ca. If you prefer your prayer to be anonymous, please indicate.



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October 12-October 18: Harvest

When you have come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it, you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him, “Today I declare to the Lord your God that I have come into the land that the Lord swore to our ancestors to give us.”

When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the Lord your God, you shall make this response before the Lord your God: “A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, we cried to the Lord, the God of our ancestors; the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression.

The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O Lord, have given me.”

You shall set it down before the Lord your God and bow down before the Lord your God. Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the Lord your God has given to you and to your house.

(Deuteronomy 26: 1-11)



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Commentary on the scripture

The Book Of Deuteronomy is an exposition of the law, spoken by Moses to the Israelites. The land of Israel, flowing with milk and honey, is God's gift as an inheritance to God's people on condition that they keep the covenant to obey God's will as expressed in the law. Disobedience of the law defiles the land; nature will not yield its abundance and the people will be expelled.

This stark message caught people's attention. 2 Kings tells what happened when the lawbook (believed to be Deuteronomy) was discovered during a repair of the temple: King Josiah was sufficiently impressed to launch a religious reform that saw the closing of the hill shrines, with sacrificial worship centralized in the main temple. Those were big changes in religious observance and social practice.

This week's passage addresses an important aspect of the law: how to deal with the harvest. There are two main steps: show your thankfulness by bringing firstfruits to the temple; and share the bounty with those who do not have their own harvest (Levites and aliens). That same message - be thankful, and share - still resonates today.

Once a year, we celebrate Thanksgiving as a harvest festival in the Christian church in Canada. In this modern economy, however, our productivity is not tied to the cycle of the seasons, critical though that remains to food production. We reap the bounty of our labours year-round. And so perhaps we are called to be thankful and to share all year round.

The following description of the 'honourable harvest' in First Nation foraging practice expresses more graphically than Deuteronomy the reciprocal relationship of care between people and the land.

"The guidelines for the honourable harvest are not written down, or even consistently spoken of as a whole - they are reinforced in small acts of daily life. But if you were to list them, they might look something like this:

Know the ways of the ones who take care of you, so that you may take care of them.

Introduce yourself. Be accountable as the one who comes asking for life.

Ask permission before taking. Abide by the answer.

Never take the first. Never take the last.

Take only what you need.

Take only that which is given.

Never take more than half. Leave some for others.

Harvest in a way that minimizes harm.

Use it respectfully. Never waste what you have taken.

Share.

Give thanks for what you have been given.

Give a gift, in reciprocity for what you have taken.

Sustain the ones who sustain you and the earth will last forever."⁴



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⁴ Braiding Sweetgrass, Robin Wall Kimmerer, Milkweed editions, Minneapolis, 2013, page 183

Saturday October 12 Reflect on this week's scripture using the Lectio Divina technique on page 2.

Sunday October 13 Worship service at Harcourt: listen for similarities and differences with your own reading.

Monday October 14 Reflect on the bountiful land that God has given to this nation, Canada (for example, forests, trees, minerals, rivers, lakes, coasts, productive farmland, pristine wilderness). Also bring to mind gifts given to you personally (for example, your health, skills and talents, your capacity to work, the support and encouragement of others).

Tuesday October 15 Reflect on ways in which you lament our harvest (for example, failure to share the fruits of our economy fairly; failure to provide for those who cannot care for themselves; agricultural monocultures that erode diversity and resilience; treatment of nature mechanically instead of as a living system). Also bring to mind ways in which you are personally complicit in this damage.

Wednesday October 16 Reflect on ways in which humanity needs to change in our treatment of harvest (for example, in fairer taxation and social support systems; agricultural practices that care for the land as living system). Also bring to mind ways in which you personally need to change how you live and what political causes you support.

Thursday October 17 Reflect on what courage and perseverance humanity needs to take action to change how we deal with harvest (for example, embracing global economic and political systems that distribute wealth fairly; extending our ethical concern to include not only all people but all species and ecosystems; being willing to pay more for ethically raised food). Also bring to mind the courage and perseverance you personally need to take the actions that are within your own reach.

Friday October 18 Reflect on your thoughts, feelings and journal notes from the past week and pray over them. Try writing a prayer; one possible format is set out on page 5.

If you wish to contribute a prayer or prayers you write, please place a copy in the collection box in the meeting place or email them to Marion Auger at marionauger@sympatico.ca. If you prefer your prayer to be anonymous, please indicate.



Image by Chris LeBoutillier from Pixabay

October 19-October 25: Sabbath

The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt. In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the Lord’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.”

Then the Lord said to Moses, “I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days.”

So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “In the evening you will know that it was the Lord who brought you out of Egypt, and in the morning you will see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?” Moses also said, “You will know that it was the Lord when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the Lord.”

Then Moses told Aaron, “Say to the entire Israelite community, ‘Come before the Lord, for he has heard your grumbling.’” While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the Lord appearing in the cloud. The Lord said to Moses, “I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, ‘At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God.’”

That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, “It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat. This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Everyone is to gather as much as they need. Take an omer for each person you have in your tent.’”

The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little. And when they measured it by the omer, the one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little. Everyone had gathered just as much as they needed.

Then Moses said to them, “No one is to keep any of it until morning.” However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell. So Moses was angry with them.

Each morning everyone gathered as much as they needed, and when the sun grew hot, it melted away. On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much—two omers for each person—and the leaders of the

community came and reported this to Moses. He said to them, “This is what the Lord commanded: ‘Tomorrow is to be a day of sabbath rest, a holy sabbath to the Lord. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning.’”

So they saved it until morning, as Moses commanded, and it did not stink or get maggots in it. “Eat it today,” Moses said, “because today is a sabbath to the Lord. You will not find any of it on the ground today. Six days you are to gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will not be any.”

Nevertheless, some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather it, but they found none. Then the Lord said to Moses, “How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions? Bear in mind that the Lord has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where they are on the seventh day; no one is to go out.” So the people rested on the seventh day.

The people of Israel called the bread manna. It was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey.

(Exodus 16:1-31)



Commentary on the scripture

In this old story of quails and manna, God is again depicted, as in the first in this series (September 7-13), as acting directly in human affairs, on this occasion responding to their complaints directed to Moses and Aaron. Some scholars have tried to identify natural phenomena that could be responsible: quails settling overnight in mid-migration from northern Africa to Europe; and for manna some combination of seeds falling from the tamarisk tree and ‘air honey’, a glutinous substance deposited from the air. However, the story’s account of the daily consistency of God’s provision over an extended period of time seems to suggest to modern sensibilities that the feeding was either miraculous or metaphorical.

Without trying to resolve that question, we may notice the emphasis on Sabbath observance, and this during the time in the wilderness, before the sabbath commandment is given on Mount Sinai (Exodus 20). The practice of ceasing work on the sabbath, resting everyone including parents and children and slaves and livestock and foreigners, had become deeply ingrained. After all, the holy myth in Genesis 1 describes sabbath as an example set by God by resting on the seventh day of creation.

Throughout the manna story, we get glimpses of the people’s reluctance to trust. Some keep manna until the next morning, not trusting a fresh supply to reappear. Their lesson is that we are utterly dependent on God, every day; we cannot save enough manna or money to make ourselves self-sufficient. Others go out to gather on the sabbath, perhaps hoping to get fresh bread (which tastes better than day-old). Their lesson is to take seriously and obey the commandment to rest. It is for the benefit of everyone, including the land that produces food.

These two lessons still have resonance today. It is easy to stay busy in our lives, and there is plenty of encouragement to focus on saving for security. It is easy also to find ways to avoid times of silence, for fear that the still small voice of Spirit may whisper to us of who we are and might become, calling us beyond our comfort zone. Perhaps we are called to slow down, let go, cease our endless doing, calm ourselves and remember that we are God’s beloved children and attend to Spirit.

Today, Sabbath is sometime framed as not only rest but resistance. Resistance to the dominant culture involves rejection of its dominant messages of consumption, fearful insecurity and selfishness. Sabbath Economics can be summarized by its three main characteristics. 1. Gather/take what you need, not what you want. 2. Refrain from accumulating surplus: redistribute it. 3. Keep the sabbath, giving yourself and others a rest from constant work.⁵

Sabbath ... thousands of years old and still revolutionary.

⁵ See Sabbath Economics: Household Practices, Matthew Colwell, Tell The World, Washington DC, 2009

Saturday October 19 Reflect on this week's scripture using the Lectio Divina technique on page 2.

Sunday October 20 Worship service at Harcourt: listen for similarities and differences with your own reading.

Monday October 21 Read through your notes about thankfulness from the past six Mondays in this season of creation. What stands out, individually or as a recurring theme? Reflect on the gifts of sabbath rest; what might you add to your stand-out thankfulness?

Tuesday October 22 Read through your notes about lament from the past six Tuesdays in this season of creation. What stands out, individually or as a recurring theme? Reflect on ways in which you lament failures or missed opportunities for sabbath rest and sabbath resistance; what might you add to your stand-out laments?

Wednesday October 23 Read through your notes about change from the past six Wednesdays. What stands out, individually or as a recurring theme? Re-reading your notes from Monday and Tuesday of this week, what might you add to your stand-out changes?

Thursday October 24 Summarize by bringing to mind the top two or three ways in which you personally need to change how you live and what political causes you support. Reflect on what courage and perseverance you will need, and identify some specific steps you will take, and the help, support and company you will seek.

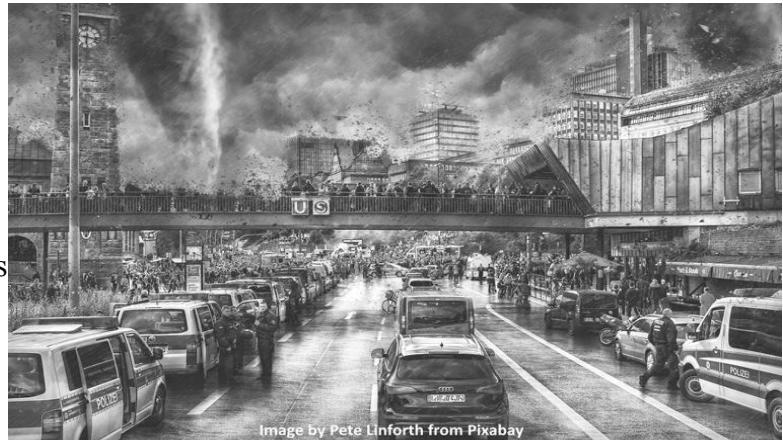
Friday October 25 Reflect on your thoughts, feelings and journal notes from the past week and pray over them. Try writing a prayer; one possible format is set out on page 5.

If you wish to contribute a prayer or prayers you write, please place a copy in the collection box in the meeting place or email them to Marion Auger at marionauger@sympatico.ca. If you prefer your prayer to be anonymous, please indicate.



What's next? - Actions For Change

While each of us will be able to take some actions alone, there will probably be some areas where your effectiveness will be greater if you join forces with others. Watch the Harcourt Herald and the weekly bulletin for news of meetings where you might be able to team up with like-minded people. And in the meantime, talk to your friends and fellow Harcourters.



What's next? - Prayer Life

You may have come to appreciate the rhythm of daily prayer over the past few weeks. If you do not have a practice of prayer currently, here are a few suggestions.

Scripture The weekly bulletin lists Weekly Scripture at Home and Readings Next Week. You could use these daily, using Lectio Divina or other modalities such as gospel contemplation.

Guided devotions Franciscan priest Richard Rohr posts a popular series of daily devotions on his web site <https://cac.org/category/daily-meditations/>

Harcourt library Many resources are available in the library. You can check out the catalogue at <http://www.harcourtuc.ca/space-resources/library/>

Harcourt web site The adjunct to the Harcourt web site <http://spiritualpractice.ca> is a rich resource.

Conversation You may approach one of Harcourt's Covenanted Spiritual Companions (Stan Bunston, Andre Auger, Kathy Magee, Lisa Beattie or Peter Jackson) or another member of the Spiritual Life Committee (Bill Lord, Theresa Daly, Nicholas Mann or Megan Ward), or Jim Ball and Miriam Flynn.

Awareness Examen This popular method of praying without scripture helps you be aware of Spirit working in your life, so that you can respond to this presence. Here is a summary of the version in John Veltri's book Orientations (<http://orientations.jesuits.ca/bob/examen.htm>).

1. Look over the day and see what emerges. Give thanks to God for whatever it is.
2. Ask for enlightenment about what God wants you to see.
3. Again look over the events of the day, and ask where God has been present in your life, in you, in others or in public events. Where and when have you been drawn by God? How have you been responding?
4. Respond to God about any area that you are being nudged to focus on, pray over or act upon. Express whatever needs to be expressed: praise, sorrow, joy, gratitude, desire for change etc.
5. Ask for help and guidance for what you need to do tomorrow.

Spiritual Life Committee invites your feedback. We would also like to hear from you if you see opportunities for other resources that would nourish you on your spiritual journey.