



A devotional guide

Booklet 1 *March 1 – March 22*

This devotional uses the work of Claudio Carvalhaes, Associate Professor of Worship at Union Theological Seminary in New York City and prolific author, and the writings of Robin Kimmerer, State University of New York Distinguished Teaching Professor at the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry in Syracuse. She is the founding director of the Center for Native Peoples and the Environment.

Compiled by Pastor Virginia Cover
Grace Lutheran Church, Camp Hill, PA.

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A Word about This Devotional. . .

Like many devotional booklets, this one engages the reader in spiritual practice and discipline. Like many Lenten devotionals, this one engages the appointed worship readings throughout the season of Lent.

Quite possibly unlike other devotional guides for Lent, this one asks you to engage in a spiritual and physical practice you might never have engaged in before. That is a part of its design. While you may feel uncomfortable with this new practice, we encourage you to continue on throughout each day's discipline, in the hopes that your comfort level and understanding will increase on your Lenten journey to Easter.

Setting up Your Devotional Space. . .

This devotional is designed with the reader(s) and a live planting together. At Grace's Lent Event, every household is given a bulb, planted that day, in the hopes it will grow and bloom around Easter. Whether you received a bulb at this event or not, consider positioning your devotional area with a live planting. (If your bulb fails to sprout, use another live planting in place of it at that point in the weeks of Lent).



Set up your devotional area based on the growing needs of your plant or bulb. Consider a window where the sun can warm it, and you can see out into the world beyond yourself. Pick a

comfortable chair to place in your space, if possible. Perhaps you like to have a candle near when praying, so add that as well. Another ancient practice of prayer involves mindfully gazing into an icon, a visual picture or “window” into God’s activity in the world. Consider how your plant and its actual window could function the same way for this devotional.

Often we use devotionals to read or pray in our hearts (silently). While that is a wonderful practice, this devotional asks you to broaden your discipline to include praying, reading, or speaking out loud. This is the case whether there is another human around to hear you or not. This may be a practice that takes you away from your comfort zone, or at first makes you feel ‘silly,’ but we encourage you to stay with it and see how it changes you over the journey of these 40 days.

Sunday, March 1, The First Sunday in Lent

By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return. –Genesis 3



Many of us have a disconnected relationship with nature and we relate to nature as “outside things,” as “it,” as “commodities,” or “resources” for our use. Is that the only purpose of nature? When God created the heavens and the earth, the plants and animals, trees and oceans, they were created out of the same ground we were. We are dirt kin, family members held together by the blood of the earth, by the dust we will one day return to.

Over this Lenten journey, we will embark on reconnecting with our long-forgotten earthly brothers and sisters. You will be asked to talk with your plant, with rocks, and soil, and listen to them. It may be very uncomfortable at first, but do not let that discourage you. After all, there was a time when we conversed with these things on a daily basis, ages ago; the scriptures have captured Eve having a full conversation with a snake! Imagine! There are peoples even now who practice this as a way of life—and they have something to teach us about ourselves that we, to our detriment, have forgotten.

Prayer (pray out loud):

Holy God, we give you thanks that you breathe life into all living things, though we are but dust. Sustain and renew us, and watch over us as we grow. Amen.

Monday, March 2

See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? –Isaiah 43

Every Monday in this devotional will lift up the practice of attentiveness: of noticing something you did not notice before. Let us begin with looking out your window: what do you see outside that is full of life? Take a moment to jot that list down, and keep it nearby. We will pick it up later.

Prayer (pray out loud):

Creating God, you have made all living things, and take delight in them. You call everything good. Teach us how to do the same. Amen.

Tuesday, March 3

Then the Lord God formed humankind from the dust of the ground, and breathed into their nostrils the breath of life...and out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food...and out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air... - Genesis 2

As creatures ourselves, in and of the earth, we are inextricably bound together in a web of life, as organisms deeply entangled in ecological community. Consider that you and your plant are a community—which at its root means you “hold things in common.” We share the air we breathe, the ground from whence we came, the one who gave us life. We share a death, a returning to the ground, and a resurrection.

Without coral reefs, we can’t breathe. Without seeds we cannot eat. Without rocks stable under our feet, we collapse. Without trees we cannot have water. Without the miraculous balance of the interconnectedness of life, we cannot survive. This is how it was made from the beginning; this is how it still is now. We worship the God who made all things, and gave us the gift of community within its creation.

Prayer (pray out loud):

God of all the earth, you have given us each other to journey with—not only people, but also trees, fish, animals, oceans, and even this plant. This plant is present with me on this Lenten journey. Show me how to be present with this plant on its journey too. Amen.

Wednesday, March 4

Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it. Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them; let all the trees of the forest sing for joy. -Psalm 96

I knew a pastor who would practice his sermons by walking in the woods. He would preach to the trees. Someone once asked him, “Why don’t you practice your sermons by speaking to someone who can listen to them?” He replied, “But they are listening.”

Trees are the oldest citizens of the world. We can only stand in life because they stand for us,



purifying the air and cleansing the waters that we drink. The scriptures are full of trees, from beginning to end—the Word of God is the “tree of life” from Genesis to Revelation.

The Psalms have the most interesting lines of all about trees. They call for the trees to give God praise, as if they have on other occasions. Perhaps they have, and we just didn’t notice.

Prayer (pray out loud):

Gracious God, may we be like tall trees planted by streams of water, who give their fruit in due season, praising you each day. Amen.

Thursday March 5

Jesus said, “I am the vine; you are the branches.” –John 15

One of our greatest gifts is technology. You can be connected to a person on the other side of the world in seconds; you can see national and international events unfold in real time. My cousin, a Naval doctor, was stationed in Afghanistan as part of his rotation. He is an orthopedic surgeon by training; he was stationed with 2 other doctors to serve a large and medically diverse population of service personnel, who came in to his operating room with injuries that were beyond his orthopedic specialty. Technology enabled him to talk with a brain surgeon halfway around the world, and in real time, he could video conference the surgery procedure, saving lives.

Technology is also a great curse, because it separates us from our natural family members, our dirt kin. We have fallen into the trap of relating to things and not people; our phones rather than our children; our screens rather than the fields and parks right outside our doors. Our food, our water, are technologically brought to us, such that we do not even think about their sources, or how we depend on their earthiness so that we, who are of the earth, can survive. In an ironic twist, we call this “advancement.”

Prayer (pray out loud):

We bless you, great God, for the gifts of ingenuity and invention that connect us to so many things. May we never lose sight of what we are truly connected to—the good creation, each other, and you. Amen.

Friday March 6

When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. – Revelation 8

The church in Lent has often marked off Fridays as a way to observe, in a small way, the realities of Good Friday—the death of Christ. Catholics refrain from eating meat, as a way of fasting. Others fast the whole day, breaking it at dawn. Silence is often kept in

some form, as a way of remembering that even the sun would not give its light, and those who witnessed the crucifixion stood by at a distance, silent.

Sit in silence with your plant for a period of time. Begin with 5 minutes. Set a timer, because this will feel long to you at first. Let your mind and heart be attentive to how it is growing—what might be happening under the surface, that is active but not yet seen?

Prayer (pray out loud):

Holy God, you are active in ways we cannot always see. You bring life from what appears to be dead. We give you thanks for life in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Saturday, March 7

And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals? –Jonah 4



Do dogs go to heaven? Many of wonder about this question after burying a beloved pet, a near-son or daughter in many households. The fact that we wonder about this question, consider it as a possibility that God through Jesus Christ has redeemed the life of even an animal, should tell us something. We long to be

connected to every living thing; not only while we have the breathe of life, but even when we return to the ground.

And yet, we do not live as if this were the deepest truth about ourselves. We treat animals as if they exist only for our consumption, or our entertainment, or our pleasure. What if we relented of this mindset, and turned instead to see animals as co-occupants of this world God so loves?

Prayer (pray out loud):

God, thank you for the gift of animals. Show me how to live with them and learn from them as you intended. Amen.

Sunday, March 8, The Second Sunday in Lent

Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths, lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds..., you mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds -Psalm 148

Robin Kimmerer, a respected forester, botanist, and also a member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, joins science's ability to "polish the art of seeing" with her personal, civilizational lineage of "listening" to plant life — heeding the languages of the natural world. Her bringing together of two worlds opens a new way for us to reimagine a natural reciprocity with the world around us as "a generative and creative way to be a human in the world."

She writes about how humans have forgotten that all living things are our kin. She says we need to relate to plants differently. They are living creatures, that deserve to be treated with honor; they are not here only to please us or give us something. They are not only for sale, a commodity, or a resource. She suggests calling them a "he" or "she" instead of an it.

Today, give your plant a name. Decide if you will refer to your plant as a he or she.

Prayer (pray out loud):

Gracious God, thank you for the gift of all living things. Thank you for the gift of _____(your plant's name). Move your Spirit in both of our lives, renewing us each day. Amen.

Monday, March 9

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. -Isaiah 11

We have returned to another Monday, and it is time to practice our discipline of attentiveness once again. Look closely at your plant. Do you notice a sprout, or any other sign of new growth? Do you think your plant needs anything at this point in the journey—more or different light, water, etc.?

Prayer (pray out loud):

Thank you God for my plant _____(name). Help me to care for him/her in the best way possible, as you care for every living thing on earth. Amen.



Tuesday, March 10

Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself -Philippians 2

Professor Kimmerer calls attention to the “economy of gifts” that exists in nature. Nature offers us gifts and we are responsible for the gifts we receive. They are not to be used for profit or to be exploited; they are not ours to take exclusively and as often as we desire, demanding more and more. With the gifts from the earth, we share, we give away, we honor the giver and embrace our responsibility for the earth’s richness and beauty. We return the gifts by respecting, protecting, and caring for the earth just as God cares for us. This is a posture of gratitude, a humbling of ourselves, so we can bend low and see the life at our feet and all around us.

Prayer (pray out loud):

Gracious God, I thank you for _____(your plant’s name). Keep us both in your loving care on our journeys. Amen.

Wednesday, March 11

It is God who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to live in –Isaiah 40

This beautiful earth seems like it will be hanging around within this universe forever. Within this earth we humans live as if we can live and invent life all on our own. Our problem is that we have lived in our world as if the earth was in the backdrop of our world, serving this world, making it possible for our world to exist. Many of us humans have lived as if the earth was just a support system for our world. We have seen the earth as natural resources for our desires, animals as creatures ordained to our appetite or amusement, mountains for our buildings, oceans for our food, the soil for our movement around the world. However, this disconnected way of living cannot be supported anymore. We are coming to a time where the earth is going from the backdrop of our adventure to taking over the central stage of our world. We are coming to a time where the earth will continue but our world will disappear. So we might have an earth without a world.

Prayer (pray out loud):

Gracious God, I thank you for _____(your plant’s name). Keep us both in your loving care on our journeys. Amen.

Thursday, March 12

Jesus said to them, “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” –Luke 12

A word for our times is “extractivism” – everything you can think of has been or is being extracted: fossil fuels, minerals, trees, diverse biome, waters, ocean species, mammals, etc. Everything in the creation has been turned into profit. Landscapes are good if they can be used for profit, for development, for tourism (which means development). Animals are good in as much as they can give us something. And yet, our way of being in the world, our constant need for development and growth cannot be sustained by the earth. We see this in an unimaginable rate of species extinction, glacier melting, and an unprecedented phenomena of forced migration. We need a new way of thinking and being in this world, one not derived from endless development and a search for profits, but one derived from our kinship with the earth—from solidarity with every living thing.

Prayer (pray out loud):

Gracious God, I thank you for _____ (your plant’s name). Keep us both in your loving care on our journeys. Amen.

Friday, March 13

Be still, and know that I am God -Psalm 46

Sit in silence with your plant for a period of time. Set a timer, and mark 5 minutes. Let your mind and heart be attentive to how your plant is growing—are there things you can see above the surface at this point?



Prayer (pray out loud):

Holy God, you are with us, even in the silence. You are with us even in death. We give you thanks for Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Saturday, March 14

I know all the birds of the air, and all that moves in the field is mine. -Psalm 50

I know many of our homebound who cannot move easily about their home or apartment; they do not have the ability to come and go as they please any longer, having given up

the privilege of driving, or losing the ability altogether. They spend a lot of their day in the same chair, or at least the same room.

Many of these same folks find a sense of purpose and life in bird watching. They secure food or housing for the birds through their family members who come to visit. When I sit with them, they tell me stories about them—what they like to do, with whom they interact, what their best features are. And when one of them is missing, they worry and wonder when they will return. For this pastor, the similarities to the stories they tell me of their own children and grandchildren are striking.

Prayer (pray out loud):

Gracious God, I thank you for _____(your plant's name). Keep us both in your loving care on our journeys. Amen.

Sunday, March 15, The Third Sunday in Lent

A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit. –Proverbs 15



Using Professor Kimmerer's view of the natural life around us, from this point on, you are encouraged to speak to your plant, using his/her name. As she says in a recent interview, "We don't call anything we love and want to protect and would work to protect 'it.' That language distances us."

Today, an introduction is where we begin. Here is a sample of what you might say:

"Hello _____(your plant's name). My name is _____, and today I am trying something very new and different. I thought I would introduce myself to you. I feel a bit odd talking to you, but I want to relate to you differently and see you as a fellow member of the creation of God. Let us pray together: God of all life, I give you thanks for _____(your

plant's name). I thank you for giving him/her life. Help me to see _____ in a new way, as part of your good creation. Amen."

Monday March 16

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. -Matthew 5

Today we return again to the spiritual and physical practice of attentiveness. Look closely at your plant. Is it getting enough light? Does it need to be turned slightly to aid the light warming it? Is it moving toward the light on its own?

Do you think your plant needs anything at this point in the journey—water, etc.?

Close with this prayer, and pray it out loud next to your plant:

God of all life, you have given _____ to me, and me to _____. Thank you. Amen.

Tuesday, March 17

Praise God, 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. –Psalm 148

Many saints and forebears in the church spoke of the earth differently than we do; they claimed a deep connection with creation, and they wrote and taught its way as life-giving. St. Francis of Assisi is the saint most fondly remembered for his love of animals (his day is when churches often hold a ‘Blessing of the Animals’). He wrote a beautiful canticle – a sung prayer celebrating a world fully interconnected:

Most High, all-powerful, all-good Lord, All praise is Yours,
all glory, all honour and all blessings.

To you alone, Most High, do they belong,
and no mortal lips are worthy to pronounce Your Name.

Praised be You my Lord with all Your creatures,
especially Sir Brother Sun,

Who is the day through whom You give us light.

And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendour,
Of You Most High, he bears the likeness.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,
In the heavens you have made them bright, precious and fair.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air,
And fair and stormy, all weather’s moods,

by which You cherish all that You have made.

Praised be You my Lord through Sister Water,
So useful, humble, precious and pure.

Praised be You my Lord through Brother Fire,
through whom You light the night and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

Praised be You my Lord through our Sister,
Mother Earth

who sustains and governs us,

producing varied fruits with colored flowers and herbs.
Praise be You my Lord through those who grant pardon
for love of You and bear sickness and trial.
Blessed are those who endure in peace, By You Most High, they will be crowned.
Praised be You, my Lord through Sister Death,
from whom no-one living can escape.
Woe to those who die in mortal sin! Blessed are they She finds doing Your Will.
No second death can do them harm.
Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks,
And serve Him with great humility.

Speak to your plant again, and tell your plant something about your day. Use the paragraph from Sunday if needed to get you started.

Close with this prayer:

God of all life, you have given _____ to me, and me to _____. Thank you. Amen.

Wednesday, March 18

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea... -Genesis 1

Dominion has become a dangerous word. We do not understand the word 'dominion' the way our scriptures reveal its meaning; we think only of the way the use of the word is in our time today, in a world that has born witness to colonization and slavery, to human trafficking and poaching. We see dominion as *rule over*, as take what we want, as please only ourselves, as the purview of a harsh master. And yet, when God granted the first humans the task of dominion, it was to relate to every living thing in creation as God relates to us (according to our likeness). The scriptures reveal that God relates to us not in a harsh "ruling over," but in a nurturing, protecting way—even when we deserve otherwise. In Lent we recall a verse from Joel to reflect God's character throughout all of scripture: gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. Dominion is our work of guarding, protecting, and caring for what God has called good.

Speak to your plant, and tell your plant something about your day. Use the paragraph from Sunday if needed to get you started.

Close with this prayer:

God of all life, you have given _____ to me, and me to _____. Thank you. Amen.

Thursday, March 19

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind: “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? . . . Who shut the sea with doors when it burst from the womb? ... Do you give the horse its might? Do you clothe its neck with mane?...Is it by your wisdom that the hawk soars, and spreads its wings toward the south?” -Job 38-40



An indigenous leader once said, “What you call natural resources, we call our parents.” Many people, of various religious groups and spiritual affiliations, call the earth Mother Earth. In our tradition, this conversation God has with Job richly points to the great attention

and care with which God formed everything – and still does. God is our ancestor, and Christ Jesus our closest kin. The earth and every thing therein belongs to God, and so it belongs to us—as a gift on our journey here.

Speak to your plant, and tell your plant something about your day. Use the paragraph from Sunday if needed to get you started.

Close with this prayer:

God of all life, you have given _____ to me, and me to _____. Thank you. Amen.

Friday, March 20

The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him! – Habakkuk 2

Sit in silence with your plant for a period of time. Set a timer, and mark 7 minutes. Let your mind and heart be attentive to how your plant is growing. What is changing with your plant? What is changing with you?

Prayer (pray out loud):

Holy God, you are with us, throughout our lives. Though we change, you are a constant companion. We give you thanks through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Saturday, March 21

I lift up my eyes to the hills— from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. -Psalm 121

The mountains are immemorial beings of time. They carry the markers of our cosmic life and are witnesses of our history. They are the elders of all of our lives, holders of wisdom and bearers of our stories. Once, a company wanted to extract a mountain and they asked an indigenous man. He said, “You cannot just go take things from there. You have to ask the mountain if the mountain agrees with it.”

Mountains are the witnesses of biblical history. As I teach my confirmation classes, in a kind of biblical shorthand, “Everything important in the bible happens on a mountain!” Moses receives the 10 Commandments at Mt. Sinai, his face shining like the sun; Jesus is transfigured on a mountaintop, shining bright as God’s Son; the disciples are gathered together on a mountaintop and sent into the world to go and baptize and teach everyone about Jesus.

Here in Pennsylvania, we are blessed--we can lift up our eyes to the hills and behold the beautiful gift of mountains. Consider all they have witnessed.

Speak to your plant, and tell your plant something about your day. Use the paragraph from Sunday if needed to get you started.

Close with this prayer:

God of all life, you have given _____ to me, and me to _____. Thank you.
Amen.



Pick up Booklet 2 of this devotional guide for reLent in the narthexes of each worship space.