

*We are Disciples of Christ, a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. As part of the one body of Christ, we welcome all to the Lord's Table as God has welcomed us.*

MAY THIS ASSEMBLY DEVOTIONAL HELP YOU TO BETTER EMBODY THAT SELF-UNDERSTANDING.

# General Assembly ECO-THEOLOGY Guide for Disciples



## WEDNESDAY

**Genesis 2:4b-10, 15** - *We celebrate Creation as God made it: whole and good*

After an initial, detailed accounting in which God creatively orders chaos into the cosmos, even down to the smallest minutia of life on planet earth, the author of Genesis then recounts another tale of this divine endeavor. In this second tale of creation, the reader is told of a special creature that God creates.

In the story, a living being is brought forth even before the potential of God's intention sprouts in the first bud of plant life, pips the first crack in the first egg, is seen through the eyes of any other more-than-human creature, or the first gill of God's swimmers in any of God's great oceans separate oxygen from the salty depths. Before all of this potential is unleashed by God's great creative ways, with only the solid foundations of dry land underfoot, God intends for an other to share the joy of this creative work.

Thus, pregnant with possibility, God breathes out intention and a pile of dust is inspired to become human; Earth becomes Earth-Creature. And then, the Earth-Creature is welcomed into a garden of all the best possibilities, and asked to do only one thing: "take care of that which God has created;" become a partner in the ongoing way of God, the way of mindfully nurturing forth the goodness of life, and then compassionately caring for this good creation so that every creature is loved into the fullest breath of God's generosity.

1. In this story of creation, what is the primary thing God intends for humans to do?
2. Is there a difference in my understanding between "having dominion over" something and "being a care-taker" of the same thing? If so, what is the difference?
3. What do I believe is God's truest intention for me in this matter?
4. How well do we/I currently live into the primary intention from God for humans to be care-takers and nurturers of all creation in the human and more-than-human world? Specifically, how do we/I fail to do so?
5. What message do I imagine I convey to God, when I, and/or the communities of which I am part, harm God's human and more-than-human creatures by certain unjust actions or inactions, habits of consumption, and attitudes of entitlement that shape selfish behaviors?

6. What are some challenging but realistic actions I/we/the church could do to better reclaim our vocation from God, to "take care" of God's good creation? How will I help my church envision, plan for, and accomplish such?

by Warren Lynn

*Warren Lynn is director of Search and Call in Disciples Home Missions of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Indianapolis.*

## THURSDAY

**Genesis 3:1-9** - *We confess our failure to live up to God's intention for us, and our participation in fragmenting Creation.*

Most of us know Genesis 3 as the story of "the Fall," but many of our ideas about it (that God created humans immortal, Eden's serpent was the devil, and all humans are now born guilty) developed centuries after Genesis was written. This is, nonetheless, a story about things going wrong. By its end, not only the God/human relationship, but our relationships with the soil, animals, and each other have been disrupted. And the story rings true: we act all too much like Adam and Eve and certainly live in a broken world.

But for centuries Jews and Christians have also asked, "didn't God know what would happen?" "Doesn't God want people to know good and evil?" We are attracted to the image of life lived in naked innocence, just plucking fruit off the trees, but we also recognize it as the innocence of animals, lacking in the self-awareness, knowledge, and technology distinctive of human life as we know it. Was our exit from Eden part of God's plan all along?

1. What attracts you about Genesis 3's picture of life in Eden?
2. How might you read this as a "growing up" (for better and worse) story?
3. How do you feel about the punishments God imposes?
4. Are such post-fall human activities as clothing and agriculture worth keeping? How can they be practiced in ways less disruptive of our relationships with God, animals, the soil, and each other?

by Marti J. Steussy

*Marti J. Steussy is the Macallister-Petticrew Professor of Biblical Interpretation at Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis.*

## FRIDAY

**John 17:19:20-23** - *We remember Jesus' prayer for us that we "may all be one" (whole) for the sake of the world.*

Jesus, in his last hours on earth, prays his heart out. The one thing on his mind, his last earthly request, was that all his followers, all those who would ever even hear about him from other followers, might be one – for the sake of the world.

Disciples remember that prayer. In the 1800's Thomas Campbell wrote, "the church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally and constitutionally one." One hundred years later, Disciples gathered 30,000 strong at Pittsburgh celebrating Christian unity. Today we remember that visible unity is a sign of something bigger still. "... creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God." (Rom. 8:19)

On a recent visit with Congolese Disciples, on the equator, where geographical north meets south, amid the dense rain forest, we felt as one – as in Jesus’ prayer. And yet we knew that to the east nations ravage eastern Congo in search of mineral wealth. We felt called to advocate for an end to the pillage. We owe that to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Actually, though, it's not just for them. There in the rain forest - the lungs of the earth - we also realized that our own lives depend on joining with our partners to protect this forest, this nation, this people. All of creation waits...that we all may be one.

- 1. What does an answer to Jesus’ prayer for oneness look like in your context?**
- 2. In the 21st century, we have said Disciples are a “movement for wholeness in a fragmented world.” How is wholeness demonstrated in our global partnerships? How do you participate?**
- 3. How do you see Jesus’ prayer for oneness extending to all of creation?**

By Sharon Watkins

*Sharon Watkins is the General Minister and President of the Christian Church(Disciples of Christ).*

## SATURDAY

**Acts 2:1-12, 38-39** - *We reclaim the blessing of the Holy Spirit, who empowers us to be a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world.*

God’s Spirit entered the Disciples’ house that first Pentecost Day with the sound of a mighty wind. God’s Spirit is never a presence we see but always one we feel, just as we feel the invisible breeze on our skin. Like the wind, God’s Spirit is sometimes strong and forceful, lifting us to new heights of understanding. Like the wind, God’s Spirit is sometimes soft and caressing, sustaining and comforting us.

In the words of the Young Children and Worship Pentecost story we are told that Jesus’ Disciples were “. . . still waiting for God’s promised gift of the Holy Spirit so they could say and do the amazing things that Jesus did.” Once the promised gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them, they got busy telling everyone about God and Jesus. The people understood the message of God’s love and forgiveness, and were baptized by the Disciples.

Today, the waters of baptism, through which we willingly travel, remind us of God’s ever-present grace. Like those early believers, the waters of our baptism refresh us, cleanse us and awaken in us a deeper understanding of ourselves in relationship to God.

Wind and water – words we continue to use to describe the presence of the Holy Spirit. Wind and water - essential elements of the natural world. This is no accident, for the Spirit of God and the natural world are intrinsically interwoven.

Let us go forth from the 2009 General Assembly prepared by God’s Spirit to say and do the wonderful things that Jesus did, and determined to care for God’s creation where we so often experience the presence of the Holy.

- 1. Think of a time when you were aware of God’s presence. What did it feel like?**
- 2. Was it a challenging presence?**
- 3. Was it a comforting presence?**

## 4. In what tangible ways does God’s Spirit continue to work with you and your life?

By Kaye Edwards

*Kaye Edwards is the director of Family and Children Ministries in Disciples Home Missions of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).*

## SUNDAY

**Revelation 22:1-5** - *We look forward to the NEXT 200 years – of the Disciples participation in God’s redemption of Creation – by extending Christ’s invitation to the Table where we are one.*

At the start of their history in Canaan, the people Israel found a devastated environment. Constant warfare between Canaanite city-states destroyed wells, springs, fields, forests and scorched farmlands. Israel was called by God to hope and work for a time of shalom when nature would prosper and all could sit under their own vines and fig trees and no one could make them afraid (Micah 4:4).

In the Mosaic covenant, the structures of political and social stratification that oppressed both human beings and nature were rejected. God made with Israel an ecological covenant: “I will make for you a covenant with the wild animals, the birds of the air, and the creeping things on the ground: and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land” (Hosea 2:18). The covenant with Noah and all his descendants (all human beings) was also with “every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark” (Gen. 9:9-10). Farmland was to have a “sabbath of complete rest” every seventh year (Lev. 25:4), so that the earth could be left to itself, a no-man’s land.

Jesus sends his disciples to proclaim the good news to “the whole cosmos” (Mark 16:15), as John repeats: “God so loved the cosmos that he gave his only Son, so that the cosmos might be saved through him.” The cosmos comes to fulfillment in the new Jerusalem through which flows the river of life and in which is a tree; “and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.” It is not too late to recover the scriptures’ ecological covenant.

- 1. In ancient Israel the “land” was a metaphor for the whole environment and we were to care for the land and its inhabitants as we were to care for people. To what extent do you and your congregation manifest this care for the land? How do our food choices reflect our understanding of the connection between us and the land?**
- 2. According to the Bible, blessing, inclusive well-being, is available to us as a gift that we may receive only if we share it mutually with all other inhabitants of the land, including other species which are called to “be fruitful and multiply,” as are human beings. To what extent do we help other species realize God’s blessing?**
- 3. In the creation stories and in the prophetic promises of the future that God has in store for us, there is no killing either of human beings or of animals. Are we ready to take this seriously for how we live our lives?**

By Clark M. Williamson

*Clark M. Williamson is the Indiana Professor of Christian Thought Emeritus at Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis.*

## Summary and Reflection: An Eschatological People with an Ecological Mission

by José F. Morales, Jr.

We are an eschatological people. Meaning, to be eschatological is to live between “the heavens and the earth” of Genesis and the “new heaven and new earth” of Revelation; between God’s creation and God’s re-creation; between the Garden of Eden and the Tree and River of Life.

It should be noted that the language of the Eschaton comes from nature – it’s “green” in content and scope! – much like the metaphors for the Spirit’s activity, as Kaye Edwards points out. Thus, to be an eschatological people means, among other things, to have an ecological purpose. For we recognize that God’s redemptive acts are “cosmic.” As Clark Williamson reminds us, a cosmic break in the whole created order requires nothing less than cosmic redemption. In the past, otherworldly preachers and teachers have shrunk the extent to which Genesis 3 speaks of sin, keeping it “personal”, consequently highlighting the separation between God and humanity at the expense of the other, equally debilitating break-ups portrayed in this text. Yet Marti Steussy rightly asserts that this story depicts the enormous separation, not just between God and humanity, but also within the human race, and between humanity and the earth – the same earth (adamah) out of which the first human (adam) was formed. Sadly enough, divisions among the human family and humanity’s lovelessness toward creation still define how we live and interact in the world and even in the Church.

Of all the cosmic texts that speak of the wideness of God’s saving work, I have always been attracted to the pneumatological soteriology of Romans 8, a text Sharon Watkins calls us to consider. In this passage, we “hear” the cacophony of our eschatological struggle. In it, our ears are opened to...

- the groaning creation that awaits the final renewal of all that is (v 22);
- the groaning humanity that awaits our complete liberation from sin (v 23);
- and the groaning Spirit that intercedes for us in our weakness (v 26).

St. Paul reminds us that we as an eschatological people find ourselves in a triangular solidarity of suffering, a groaning triangle that nonetheless refuses to let sin and decay have the last word and that defiantly hopes for God’s “glory to be revealed” (v 18).

In drafting his triangle, St. Paul is merely drawing from a rich tradition. The people of God throughout space and time have always insisted on this interconnectivity between the Divine, the human, and the earth. The early Jewish communities preserved this idea in the telling and retelling of the creation stories. The psalmists and the prophets continued in this tradition, proclaiming to the people the earth’s doxological essence and its sharing in Israel’s redeemed future. Throughout Christian tradition, the witness of various movements, like the medieval mystics and the Celtic tradition in Ireland, serve as friendly reminders of our spiritual bond to both God and creation. The Hebrew Bible scholar Theodore Hiebert claims that humans personify this connectedness, in that the two creation stories, when taken together, speak of both our imago dei (image of God – Gen 1.27) and our imago dirt (image of dirt, of earth – Gen 2.7).

And this rich tradition, this triangular relationship between God, earth and humanity, should be passed on to our children and to our children’s children. We must go beyond the slogans of “save the planet” and “go green”, and help our children see the Spirit-drenched web within which they find themselves. We should help them cultivate spiritual sensibilities that prepare them to encounter creation in all its doxological majesty. Anything less than this will fetter our children’s spiritual formation.

So...if we are indeed an eschatological people with an ecological mission, how then should we respond? If we’re truly living in the in-between-ness of God’s saving activity, deeply connected with Spirit and earth, how should we live?

How about claiming our proper place within the triangle of eschatological groaning? How about being a people who groan – who suffer – with a broken humanity, with a decaying-yet-resilient creation, with the Spirit of life and of new life? After all, that’s what compassion means: to suffer (-pathos) with (com-).

To claim this triangular space is to embrace our in-between-ness, our edginess, as Church. This means rejecting the worldly pursuit of prestige and power, a pursuit which has led to our present ecological disaster. As a Latino raised in the United States, every day is a reminder of my cultural in-between-ness: not Puerto Rican enough for the islanders and not “American” enough for the U.S. In-between-ness defines me, as it should the Church. I’ve always said that the greatest gift that we Latino Discípulos bring to the whole Church is not our singing, nor our liturgical exuberance, nor our savory foods to church potlucks. No! Our greatest gift is our incarnated in-between-ness. Latino Discípulos stand in the Church’s midst as a bodily parable of the Church’s call to embody an eschatological in-between-ness, to be in this world but not of it (John 17.14-18); that it too must never place itself conveniently outside the groaning triangle, but instead take on the hard task of praying “with sighs too deep for words” for the whole inhabited world; that the Church must never attempt to resolve its eschatological edginess (a tendency among the status conscious), but rather use that radical impetus as fuel for mission; that the Church must never accommodate to the world as is, but instead groaningly pray and strive for the world that is to be, until the groaning stops!

Church, let us claim our eschatological identity, our ecological mission. Let us once more “become a partner in the ongoing way of God...mindfully nurturing forth the goodness of life” (*Warren Lynn*). Let us fine tune our ears so as to hear the groans all around us and within us that call us to unity and witness. Let’s us be filled with Pentecost fire to “do the amazing things that Jesus did.” Let us set our vision on the New Jerusalem, giving us the defiant hope needed to wait, to work, and to witness during this in-between time.

<sup>1</sup> *Eschatology has to do with the study of the end times and the last things.*

<sup>2</sup> *I.e. theology of salvation rooted in the work of the Holy Spirit.*