

Introduction

We are living in extraordinary times. Much has changed in regards to how we work, learn, play and live. Some are wondering what, of these changes, will be permanent. As communities and countries tentatively move back into public spaces, there are calls for a just recovery and a green recovery. These are invitations to reflect on how our choices can make a difference now and into the future.

To assist in personal and faith community based reflection on our way forward, Social and Ecological Justice Huron, offers this program. The resources provided can be used individually, via video conferencing and/or in person. Our hope is that those who engage with these resources will find tools to strengthen our commitment to seek to safeguard the integrity of God's Creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

However you use this program, may your journey be blessed.

Session #1 – The “Green Gang” at St. James Anglican Church, Stratford, Ontario

Reflection: this year’s theme for the Season of Creation is “Jubilee for the Earth”. As the world has been challenged to pause in so many ways, the earth has had a chance to find some renewal. People are beginning to look differently at the world around us. What have you noticed during our collective pause? How have you come to witness, perhaps in a new way, the wonder of God’s creation?

Opening Prayer – See Collect for Rogation Days and Harvest Thanksgiving (BAS p. 396)

Creator of the fruitful earth, you made us stewards of all things. Give us grateful hearts for all your goodness, and steadfast wills to use your bounty well, that the whole human family, today and in generations to come, may with us give thanks for the riches of your creation. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.

Video:

<https://youtu.be/WVmXWQLOQbI>

Read: Jeremiah 2:1-13

Questions:

- What images or words in the passage stood out for you?
- What ‘worthless things’ in Jeremiah’s time might the prophecy have been referring to that defile God’s land and make God’s heritage abominable?
- What are some worthless things that we go after today?
- Where can you find hope and nourishment in this challenging passage?
- What are some immediate things that we individually or together can do to change – or to set in motion – toward reconciliation with God and God’s plentiful land, a Jubilee for the Earth?

Close with prayer.

Session #2 – Nature, the Rev'd Chris Brouillard-Coyle, St. Paul's/Trinity Anglican Churches, Essex/Cottam, Ontario

Opening reflection: When you want to 'get away from it all', where do you go? To a cottage? Camping? To the beach? A walk in the woods? How many head for places where we can connect with nature as a way to calm our souls in the midst of the challenges of life? What is it about nature that offers such peace?

Opening prayer: Lord, out of love you created a world filled with beauty, wonder and grace. May we hold your work before us at this time as we seek to remember that your gifts are more than we could ask or imagine. Amen.

Scripture: Read Genesis 1:1-2:3

What do you notice? What stands out for you? Why is this such an important text for our story of faith? What messages should we take from this story?

Video: Contemplating Nature https://youtu.be/4Y_mp5wtYel

What did you notice? What stands out for you? What was surprising for you? What was challenging?

How much do you know about the ecological history of your area? What native species can you identify? What benefits do these species have for your region? What more would you like to learn?

In what ways are you seeking to safeguard the integrity of God's creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth? What is being done in your congregation? What more could be done?

Final Prayer: Lord, out of love you created a world filled with beauty, wonder and grace. You have asked us to care for your creation. May our gratitude for the gifts of creation help inspire us as we seek to safeguard the integrity of Your Creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth. Amen.

Session #3 – Symbiosis, Caroline Sharp, St. John’s Cambridge, Ontario

Opening reflection

Read: Genesis 2:4-9

What does this passage tell you about our relationship with the land?

Introductory Notes

Humankind was formed from mud, dust watered by a stream. The ancient biblical Hebrew text identifies our connection to Creation as a whole. Adam (or humankind) is made from adama (the land) which is adom (red). Adam, adama, adom. Biblical Hebrew is known for its wordplay, however, an English equivalent might be something like human from humus.

Our lives are finite but the earth has lived since the beginning of time. The land has history and the place in which you stand has a story. The land is alive literally! The land was made before God created humankind so that we would have a place to live. Humans had the perfect world to live in! Eden was a place where people could roam around the garden and forage for their food. The only waste produced was compost but even that was part of this perfect system. The compost produced from food, animal, and human waste fed the soil which, in turn, fed the plants. There was no slash and burn, no tilling the earth, and none of the back breaking labour that happens with farming. This garden paradise was a perfect ecosystem, a permaculture land that gave and took. It gave us food and we returned what we didn't eat. It gave us air to breathe and took the bad air. We had a relationship with our environment. There was a mutual symbiotic relationship where both sides won.

It was the fall of humankind that caused our relationship with the land to drift as agriculture and then empires were born. We attempted to create a new land where we could force the land to give us what we wanted. Our relationship with the land became parasitic where we only take and don't give. But when one part of a machine is broken, the entire machine is broken. Today our main method of acquiring food, through industrial farms and grocery stores is a broken part of the machine we call our planet. Our planet. There is no longer a relationship. The planet is our thing to manipulate as we will. The land that the industrial farm walks upon has been whipped and slashed, broken and bruised, and there is no more life in that land. The farmer adds fertilizers, pesticides, and fungicides while reducing the diversity of God's perfect paradise. The land is artificially alive - it is on life support!

Videos

How regenerative agriculture can help farmlands thrive and improve ecosystems (4:36)

https://youtu.be/N_NtNyvOyRM

One Hundred Thousand Beating Hearts (14:57)

<https://youtu.be/UoQWLK8-CYE>

Questions:

1. How did these videos make you feel about how we primarily acquire our food? Were you aware of the environmental impact of agriculture?
2. How does the Genesis reading relate to regenerative farming? How does God want us to steward all of creation?
3. How can we support change in the agricultural sector?

Notes regarding Regenerative Farming

In small numbers, some longed for a new garden of Eden, God's perfect place of mutual symbiosis and they are attempting to put the pieces back together. These pioneering farmers who use restorative methods are stitching the land back together and tending to its wounds with fresh dressings. They do not till the land because doing so would destroy the life within the soil:

- *'Soil is essential for the maintenance of biodiversity above and below ground. The wealth of biodiversity below ground is vast and unappreciated: millions of microorganisms live and reproduce in a few grams of topsoil, an ecosystem essential for life on earth...'*
- *Fertile soils teem with microorganisms, which directly contribute to the biological fertility of that soil. Biological fertility is under-studied and our scientific knowledge of it is incomplete. Science and religion go together swimmingly if you are of the opinion that science allows us to try and understand God's omniscience.*
- *In addition to fertility, soil microorganisms also play essential roles in the nutrient cycles that are fundamentally important to life on the planet.*
- *In the past, agricultural practices have failed to promote healthy populations of microorganisms, limiting production yields and threatening sustainability. The life in this healthy soil leaches into the food being grown and is actually healthier than produce grown on industrial farms. They also contain more flavour and each area will have a slightly different flavour thanks to something called terroir. It is far better to be salt for the earth than to have to eat salt from the earth because your food has no flavour.*

"You are what you eat" isn't at all far from the truth. Wendell Berry believes that the health of the farmer is directly linked to the health of the food and the health of the consumer. They say that variety is the spice of life. Diversity in farming is key to the continuity of our food. Getting seed for "out of the box" varieties can be challenging. Only one company (that we know of) sells the type of cherry tomatoes we grow. This year we will be saving our own seed just in case our supplier gives up on this variety. The plants themselves grow very well and tall with large clusters of fruit but it can also be a bit unruly and wild. Once you transplant them they need extra care and constant harvesting. These are reasons that an industrial farm might not want to grow them. Small farms that practice regenerative techniques grow the food they love and because they love what they do, they happily steward the plants and are rewarded with delicious foods and happy customers who have a relationship with the grower.

When Jesus told us to love others, there's no reason to think that he didn't include all of creation in that statement. Everything God made is connected and when one part of the body suffers, everything else suffers along with it. We are all one body.

Session #4 – Reduce, reuse, recycle, the Rev'd Andrew Wilson, St. John the Evangelist Anglican Church, Leamington

Before the 20th century, household waste was relatively small. Families had creative ways to reuse items until they were no longer usable. At which point, refuse might be buried in a garden, tossed into an outhouse or simply out a window. Even then, there were 'swill children' who would collect what they could to sell for pig feed and the "rag and bone man" who would trade for rags (used to make paper) and bones (used for glue).

There are remnants of these practices that have persisted through the years: using bones to make broth, hand me down clothing, and sharing toys from one generation to the next.

Questions:

- What practices are you familiar with from your history and experiences where people seek to make the most out of items?
- How do you/can you share these practices with the next generation?

Today, it has become very convenient to throw things away. We put what we don't want in containers that are picked up weekly and disappear from our view. This makes it easy for us to take advantage of new trends, sales and updates in technology. What would tried to apply the ideal of reduce, reuse and recycle beyond what we sort into the various bins that are whisked away? Is it possible to sustain and renew the life of the earth when we seek to update our homes?

Video: <https://youtu.be/16wUY5BB2z4>

Questions:

- What was familiar in this video? What was surprising? What did you learn?
- To what extent have you considered the implications of updates to your home?
- What choices have you made that privilege fixing, reusing, and recycling?
- Note: there is also a current trend to 'upcycle' – repurpose items in new ways. For example, taking a cupboard that is no longer useful in the kitchen and transforming it for another room and use. Some are particularly creative in doing this. What examples of 'upcycling' have you seen and/or done?

For a fuller glimpse of the results of Andrew's efforts to reduce, reuse and recycle check out "Andrew's renovation network" through this video: <https://youtu.be/RhkBx7UsKGw>

Session #5 – A Green Audit, the Rev'd Jim Sutton and Neil Dunning, St. Mark's, Brantford

Opening Reflection: What steps have you taken to safeguard the integrity of God's Creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth in your church, your home and your community? What tools have helped you to make these decisions?

Video: <https://youtu.be/ratE6BwAoVU>

Reference link: https://www.faithcommongood.org/greening_sacred_spaces

Questions:

1. How do reading Genesis Chapter 2:4-25 in the context of our call to Green our Sacred Spaces change our thinking about the Human role in the environmental crisis?
2. What will our worship and teaching themes look like as we try to gird up our reflection to encourage parishioners, and others to face the need to shrink our carbon footprint?
3. In our congregations, where do we begin, and how does that beginning signal others?
4. How do we encourage our building users and others to share the journey?