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Are We Having Fun Yet? Wildfires, Drought, Fascist Regimes, and Moments of Joy

Readings and Prayers for These Times
Rev. Allyson Sawtell

Introduction and Notes for Pastors and Worship Leaders

I live in Colorado, where wildfire season is now year-round. I live in Denver, which has had its own issues with pollution, where some days you can't even see the mountains. And it's even worse, now, in the summer of 2026, with the incessant wildfire smoke from Colorado fires and those of Utah, Washington, and elsewhere.

We're also in a time of severe drought out here in the West. The mighty Colorado River, the Rio Grande, and other rivers are drying up. Snowpack is nonexistent. Water restrictions are in place all over the state. Temperatures are soaring, and staying high (as is happening in much of the country).

I, like all of you, live in a time of climate change and climate destruction.

Add to all that, the Mid-Term elections that are looming as of this writing. Two-plus months away to be sure, but looming nonetheless. It's getting intense.

We all live in a battered world, a tattered world worthy of lament. We're divided by lies, politics, fear...the list goes on.

Are we having fun yet?

In the midst of all this despair, and endless games of computer solitaire (come on, I know I'm not the only one!), I went where I usually go, which is towards poetry, liturgy, prayers of lament, and prayers seeking for the truth of joy.

These resources are simply some starter pieces to help us all navigate these times. I hope there will be more in the weeks ahead! They're here to help you put all of the above "stuff" into a faith-filled frame, even if right now that simply means you letting off steam in a biblically acceptable fashion (which is, actually, to tear your clothes, dump the contents of your fireplace on your head, and wander the streets shouting at the top of your lungs. Or not.).

These are resources that include lament, rage, some irreverence and humor, wonder and awe.

Some of the readings or prayers can be done by two leaders instead of just one.

Bless you in the reading of them!

Calls to Worship

Let's Party!

Leader: Welcome to this celebration!

People: Wait, what exactly are we celebrating? Did we miss something?

Leader: Isn't every day we are alive and together a time to rejoice? Isn't every day that we breathe, and know we are not alone, an occasion to celebrate?

People: Alright then! Let's celebrate!

Leader: Isn't every day that brings the warmth of the sun, and every day that brings welcome rain to these lands a chance to be glad? Every day that brings a loved one near, whether in fact or memory, a chance to give thanks, and every day we get to love, and love again, a time to celebrate?

People: Yes, amen, thanks be to God! Let's party!

Gratitude

Leader: As we begin our service, let's breathe together. Breathe in gratitude, open your hearts not to words right now, but simply to gratitude (even if you're not really in the mood for this).

SILENCE

Leader: There are no words, sometimes, God, but now we will try. Sometimes, God, it is too much for hold, this wondrous life, this amazing Creation, this miracle of love.

People: All we can say is Thank You! Deeply from our hearts: Thank You! May we live our thanks in all that we do.

Leader: For the hope that sneaks in on us in the midst of despair; the resilience that surprises us in our struggles; the laughter that tears haven't drowned,

People: All we can say is, "Wow! That was a surprise! Must be a God-thing." May we live our wonder in all that we do.

All: From the deepest depths of our hearts, in awe and in wonder, we say Thank You! Thank You. Amen!

Embracing Creation

L: We gather here not to escape the world, but to fully embrace it.

P: With all its flaws and pains and incredible beauty, we gather to fully embrace your Creation.

L: And we gather to celebrate in and with this community of faith O God.

P: With all our flaws and pains and incredible beauty.

All: May all that we do, and all that we are, fully embrace your good Creation! Amen!

Prayer of Lament for a Time of Drought

Good God, we are empty! We are parched, we are cracked and dried out!

Life refuses to grow in and for us.

The relentless bearing down of heat, of no-promise, all settle around us like a shroud.

The weight of loss thrives on our shoulders and in our hearts.

Good God, we are empty!

We are parched, we are cracked and dried out!

Good God,

do not let us *become* the drought.

Remind us of the wellsprings of love and community that are still within and among us.

Remind us of the growth-giving power of joy, faint though it might feel right now.

Even in drought, sometimes small green shoots somehow find their way through the cracks.

Remind us to spare some water for the hope of their survival.

Remind us that we could become those small, green shoots for another, even as they are for us.

Amen.

In a Time of Wildfire: A Prayer of Rage

It burns, O God, The wildfires that ravish and destroy our communities, our habitats (human and other-than-human), our livelihoods.

It burns, O God,
The wildfires within that scorch our souls.

It burns, O God!
What are you going to do about it??

It burns, O God, this destroyer of dreams, of stability,
of the gift of simple day to day worries and pleasures.

The upheaval.

It burns, O God, the wildfires in our world and in our souls.

We. Have. Had. Enough.

It burns O God: our rage, our helplessness.

“Why do the wicked flourish?!” The ancients cried.
You still haven’t answered that one, O God.
(Do we expect too much of you?)

It burns, O God, our rage.

This onslaught by the powers that be on our life and liberty,
the picking and choosing of who is worthy of love and life, and who is not,
the erasure of people, histories and species.

It burns! O God!

Where is its cleansing, its healing?

Wildfires at least clear space for new growth in the forest.
Some seeds cannot sprout without the fire.
There is something of redemption, sometimes, in wildfires.

Where is *our* redemption, God?

Can rage clean out a space within us for courage, compassion, action?
Can our churning rage change to something good, O God of transformation?
Can there be life that emerges from the burning, O God of resurrection?

It burns. It is hard to breathe.

Your children are burning.
We thought you should know.

In a time of trouble and doubt

So, what are you going to do about it, God? This time of upheaval, trouble, crisis?

We know, we know: you work *through* us.

But still.

We could use some help here, O God.

We know you don't manipulate us as a puppet-master does the marionette. But still.

We could use some guidance, O God.

What does that look like, your help? Your guidance?

A nudge of our thoughts?

A twinge in our stomach?

As sense that something feels right? Or wrong?

Aren't you more than an idea, or a moment of nausea?

But could you actually be in the trusting of our senses? In discernment?

Maybe this is where the Mystery part comes in? And a simple "yes" to the mystery?

Our traditions teach us you are found

In communities of love and hard work,

of justice and joy,

in food and drink shared even in the midst of scarcity.

You can't be held by our imaginings alone.

You are more.

And you are never far. Even when we doubt. Even when we over-think.

You are unknowable even as we are held in your arms.

Readings: Reflections on the Holy in the Natural World

Green Shoots

What is a tree, if not love wrapped in bark, and roots connected?

Ancient wisdom

Nurturing darkness

Even in drought, sending signals and nourishment to each other.

Wildfires and beetles lay waste.

Still, some green pokes through the charred branches and brown pine needles.

What is a tree, if not persistence

that sees through the pain,

and knows that at least some of them will see the future?

What is a tree, if not love wrapped in bark?

What is community, if not connection rooted in love and persistence,

where we become the stubborn green shoots for each other,

poking through the charring and the drought,

and into a future that is still unknown.

The Pheasant

One winter day I watched as a pheasant ran from out of the cornfield, started across the road, hit a patch of ice, and landed on its butt.

I laughed out loud.

It rose and stalked off, ruffled pride and feathers alike.

And I had to wonder –

Do you, too, O God?

Laugh out loud at the antics of your human creatures?

(those harmless antics; not the ones that cause devastation?)

Do you guffaw as we slip and fall in our misguided endeavors to get where we think we want to go, and more often than not, land on our butts?

Do you haul us upright, dust us off, and send us off on the right way?

Or do you instead let us heave ourselves unsteadily to our feet and stalk off, alleged pride ruffled, like the feathers of a pheasant?

The Raven

The raven strutted and hopped by the creek side near the highway, making her raven sounds.

Some I had never heard before.

Deep-throated, and very intently “ack ack ack” like she was trying to communicate with something. Looking at rocks as she sounded, and as she hopped around.

Was she looking for a nesting site? A mate?

She appeared very purposeful, not just making sounds for fun. As if she was awaiting a response that never came.

She got closer and closer to the highway with its morning traffic beginning to speed on by, but thankfully she flew away in the opposite direction, and landed on a stone wall. Still making her searching sounds.

Silently and slowly I moved closer and closer to get a better look.

Then my brain kicked in and reminded me that the raven was indeed a wild animal with quite an impressive beak. And she was watching me.

I moved quietly away.

She went about her raven-business. I might imagine and surmise of what she was about, but that doesn't really matter.

She went about her raven business of which, fittingly, I knew nothing.

Amen.

The Coyotes

Under cover of quiet night,

three coyotes trotted down the street of our urban neighborhood.

One promptly sat down, threw back her head and howled.

Our dog sat by the window, silently watching, mesmerized.

Intent. Staring. Immobile.

Was she curious, fearful, stunned? In awe? Or worshipfully watching?

Was the proud and loud coyote, disrupter of the night, her god? Free, strong, and singing.

Is worship actually stone-still silence? Awe?

And prayer – open-eyed, taking in wonder and surprise?

Silent like the night. And then, singing.

Watch the Water

1.

Watch the water:

See the life it holds –

The turtle swimming for the reeds

The reeds themselves, sheltering and feeding.

The insects skipping across the surface

The fish leaping to catch lunch.

Watch the water, and see the unseen – the microscopic, the camouflaged.

Water is never really empty, you know.

Even when you think it is, there is something there.

Maybe only algae – but it's proof that life is possible.

Watch the water –

And know we are never really empty, either.

Watch the water.

2.

Watch the water:

Watch out! For the water.

Hidden depths, undertow, current, waves. So much beyond our control or knowledge.

Watch the water – watch where the human touch has brought destruction.

Bear witness. Let your tears – your water – mingle with its pain.

Watch the water – it doesn't have to be this way, the pollution, the rising temperatures, the destruction of its marine life.

Watch the water.

3.

Watch the water:

Watch over it, protect it from further harm.

Listen to its needs.

Join with its resiliency, so that it might heal itself.

Watch the water.

We are beings made mostly of water,

With the strength that can carve out canyons,

that can cradle life in oceans and womb,

that can save a parched earth, a parched people.

Watch the water. It is us.

Prayer of Praise For all that Connects Us

Oh, most Holy One,

How wondrous are your works in all Creation!

The moon and stars, sun and soil, the rocks and trees, all creatures that roam through the waters, the earth and skies, and even in our own bodies – How wonderful are your works in all Creation!

Oh most Holy One,

How wondrous are the connections that flow between us,
like the roots of trees that send messages, nutrients and warnings.

That cycle of life that connects us through time and space.

The interplay of species – blossoms and pollinators, sun and growth, even prey and predator.

How wondrous are your works that connect all Creation!

Oh most Holy One, isn't that wondrous connection really what love is?

The connections between us and within our own bodies.

The way cells and neurons, and all those wobbly bits inside:
the way they communicate and connect, sending messages, nutrients, warnings.

From our very core,

From our very cells,
arises the miracle called love.

Oh most Holy One,

How could we ever think that we are separate from your Creation, from each other, from you?

Oh most Holy One,

How wondrous are your works in and through all Creation!

Amen!

A Benediction of Wasps

At the trailhead by the river, someone had shot at the interpretative sign. In the resulting bullet hole, wasps were building their nest. Keeping my distance, I wished them well. And blessed them for creating space and life out of destruction.

I never until then imagined God as a wasp.

(*The White Anglo Saxon Protestant* image many of us grew up with notwithstanding).

God, a wasp?

A small and pointy-ended being so diligently at work in creating home?

Perhaps so. God is, after all, still at work, creating, even now, out of the chaos and fear.

Or perhaps, it's not God, but we – the Church – who are the wasps? Or called to be such?

Us, the Church? Tiny in the scale of the world, sometimes sharp with others, all working to build a place of community and new life. For all. Even in the chaos and fear.

God, we so desperately need the builders of connection and community! Of people who build *home* out of destruction.

God, we need the spaces of love and justice and joy!

God, we need the wasps who build out of bullet holes!

God, bless the builders of love and hope. And may we be among them.

Amen!



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