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## For the Love of Creation: A Journey from Separation to Community

Ash Wednesday

Allyson Sawtell, 2022

### **Reflection – Dare to Dream** (*printed in bulletin or read by pastor/worship leader*)

Dare to dream. Dare to make real what we believe can be – a world of interconnectedness, healing in the web of life. A world truly of justice, peace, clean air and water, species thriving. Dare to imagine. Even if we just believe this in our heads, and are waiting for our hearts to catch up.

Lent is a journey toward an alternative reality. It's a journey that we take over and over again. It's a journey that moves through fear and despair to touch hope, to embody hope, to create from a place of hope.

Like a good herding dog, hope is always nipping at our heels, trying to get us to move in the right direction. Maybe the challenge for us this Lent is not only to sit with the pain of the world, but also to dare to imagine a better world. And to believe – head and heart – that this better world is possible. And then, of course, to work and work for it. Together.

### **Opening words**

Lent is a journey.

Lent is a journey from separation to connection and life

The steps are reflection and lament, confession and celebration. There's letting go and taking in.

This is the journey we have to take for the sake of our world, God's good Creation.

We take this journey together.

It starts here, with Ash Wednesday.

It starts here with questions, answers, Communion and ashes.

There will be a time of reflection – prayer – later in the service for you to think silently on questions about what you might let go and what you might take in, for the sake of all of God's good Creation.

Lent is a journey that we take together. We take it over and over again. Lent is a journey, and we are not alone in it. Thanks be to God!

**Song – *When We Survey God’s Creation, Our Earth* (Tune; “*When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*”)**

When we survey this glorious place:  
 God’s good creation, the life that it brings,  
 Full of such brilliance and whimsy and grace,  
 How can we not give thanks and sing?

As we survey this creation of God:  
 Planet, its people, the seas, earth and sky,  
 Don’t you just think that it seems very odd  
 That we allow so much of it to die?

As we survey Your creation, our earth,  
 And see its suffering, its grief, its tears,  
 Help us to bring Your new world to birth  
 Strengthen, us, God, and dispel our fears.

Dream of the beauty that’s been and will be,  
 Dream of the grace of earth and of sky,  
 Dream of God’s children as they become free  
 Strengthen us, God, so our dreams will fly

**Reading – *The Cry of Christ***

Reader 1: The cry of Christ is the cry of Creation.

Reader 2: And when Creation cries out in pain, rage and sorrow, whose voice is it?  
 The One born of Mary, proclaiming the reversing of things, and the tumbling of  
 empires.

Reader 1: The One who ran the money changers out of the Temple, enraged at their exploitation  
 of the vulnerable and voiceless. (Let those who have ears, hear!)

Reader 2: When Creation cries out in pain, rage and sorrow, whose voice is it?  
 Christ of the cross, whose death at the hands of greed, apathy, fear, and Business as  
 Usual, invalidated those same powers.

Reader 1: It is the voice of the Risen One:  
 The Risen Christ, bearing memories, scars, wounds and wonder.  
 The Christ of cup and bread, of calling out into community and power.  
 The One who calls Creation to rise again.

Readers 1&2: And now we are the pierced hands that see to that work.

**Time of reflection (5-10 minutes, with quiet music in the background)**

The “letting go”:

- What is separating you from yourself?
- What is separating you from others?
- What is separating you from all Creation?

The “taking in”:

- What can you try to do to bridge those separations?
- What do you need to help you do this?
- And what of beauty and life will you still celebrate and give thanks for, especially during these times?

**Song** (*Pastor/worship leader's choice*)

**Responsive Reading: Confession and Affirmation of Faith and Community**

Leader: We are not alone! This is our cry. And this is our call.

People: We are not alone, and we owe each other life and love and hope and promise.

Leader: It is through us, together – all beings of flesh and blood and stone and water and air and bark and leaf – that life can flourish.

Together with that unknown mystery that surrounds all of life, that embrace of the Love that we call God, life can flourish.

People: We need each other. We are, and have always been, beings of community, within the web of all life. And we have forgotten that. Or denied it. Or ignored it.

Leader: As a species, we have thought so very deeply: “I am all that is. I am all that matters.” In our own humano-centrism, we don’t realize how isolated we have become from each other: we don’t even recognize the web of life through which we move, so we rip the strands and fray the ties that hold us all together.

People: We’ve lost so much. And we don’t even realize how much that hurts.

Leader: There is a depth of loneliness so profound that we do not acknowledge it except in waves of fear or dominance or power over.

People: We have forgotten. Or denied. Or ignored.

Leader: So we come together to remember and to re-member ourselves. We have to collect the frayed pieces of the web of life, and tenderly weave them together again and make a new creation. We have to soak the strands with our tears, softening the fibers so we can weave each other again.

All: We are connected to each other! This is our cry. And this is our call.  
We are connected to each other, and we owe Creation life and love and hope and promise.

**Ritual of Candlelight and Ashes**

First we light a candle, because shining a light in the midst of gloom is what we do as church. And as we proclaimed during Advent, so will we proclaim during this journey of Lent: The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. Thanks be to God!

Then we impose the ashes. This is a sign of grief over our separation from each other, of repentance, and as a reminder that we are connected to all of Creation. We are of the earth and from the earth, and to the earth we shall return.

So in the light of this candle, we dare lament, confess, and even celebrate. We are a part of God's good Creation, and we are connected to each other.

*[Put ashes on foreheads or hands, in the tradition of your congregation. Use traditional words if you wish, or "Beloved child of God, you are of Earth, and to Earth you will return" or other such words.]*

**Communion** *(Done in the tradition of your congregation)*

**Benediction – Affirmation of Faith for These Times**

Leader: As people of faith, let us affirm who we are and whose we are, and where we are called to be: We are in this together. We move together in covenant with each other and with God, for the sake of all God's children, all of God's good Creation.

People: We are in this together, for the sake of God's world.

Leader: We are the Body of Christ, and each one a beloved and essential part of it. We are not alone. We need each other. We are here to love each other.

People: We are the Body of Christ, empowered by Christ for the sake of God's world.

Leader: We affirm the goodness of Creation and the presence of the Holy Spirit in our midst, creating and re-creating Beloved Community. And, strengthened by the love of God and our love for each other, and God's world, we move through this season with hope and hard work.

ALL: We move together, into a future of justice, healing, hope and community, for the sake of God's good Creation. Amen!

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### Set-up for the service

- Have a large pillar candle up front. NOTE – this is NOT the Christ candle, lit on Easter. It is simply a large pillar candle; purple would be appropriate for the season.
- If you are doing the service via Zoom, ask people ahead of time to have some small bits of potting soil, or even dust, or soot from a candle, to use as ashes, and they will put their own "ashes" on hand or forehead during the Ritual of Candlelight and Ashes.



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