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# Not Ordinary Church

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## Service Of And For Creation

*Inspired by “On Care For Our Common Home – Laudato Si’”*

*Encyclical letter of Pope Francis, 2015*

**Allyson Sawtell, 2015**

### **Prelude – “Not Ordinary Times”**

*While the worship leader reads this poem, some soft instrumental music can play in the background. The reader is also to read the Laudato Si’ quotes before each poem*

Yet all is not lost. Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start...*Laudato Si’ Paragraph 205*

These are not ordinary times

We hide from the “not”

We cling to the “ordinary” in our little boxes, calmly adjusting our blinders,  
Shaking our heads at these times.

But a pit opens up in our stomach

The sense of something not right settles in our bones

A “yes, but...” sits uneasily in our souls and gnaws and nags

And a grief too heavy to bear chokes us like summer wildfire,

Hot and violent

Embers scorching all we know.

A suspicion grows in us that if we

Embrace the “yes, but”

And peer into the pit,

A way may be found.

Or a hope of a possibility of a way may be found

And a hole might be burned through our little boxes of protection,

Releasing the toxic gases of denial and despair

Dissipating into the clear cold air

Transforming to hope and hard work.

These are not ordinary times.

Yet we wave it away,

(“Can’t happen to us...Sea levels won’t reach *our* mountaintop”)

And in ignorance, or desperation, or simple greed, we make the “over” the ordinary

Overfishing

Overcrowding

Overgrazing

Overconsuming

Overwhelming loss and devastation

But a pit opens up in our stomach.  
Subterranean fear gnaws, chewing holes in our denial.

“Something is not right” echoes in our souls:  
The cry of Creation  
The voice of God.

“These are not ordinary times” may be the path towards our resurrection.

So we bathe in courage, grasp for community  
Leave the shelter of business-as-usual  
And stare into the face of this unknown future.  
We leave our little boxes and cast off our blinders  
And the bright light of Creation’s pain nearly blinds us  
And grief nearly chokes us.

But not quite.

Because when there’s enough of us stumbling around, trying to make a way,  
sooner or later we’ll begin to connect.

And the power of that connection explodes in hope  
And a different way can be made  
And life can flourish in new and extraordinary ways.

Do you believe? Do you dare?

### **Opening Words**

This service is a journey – through praise and celebration, through confession and grief, and on to hope and hard work. Based on Pope Francis’ encyclical “On Care For Our Common Home”, it looks at both the beauty of all Creation, and its devastation by human hands, our hands.

Parts of this service may be hard to deal with, the words or the silence. For example, there will be drum beats for every Parts Per Million of CO<sub>2</sub> that we are over 350 ppm, the scientifically agreed upon amount of danger threshold for CO<sub>2</sub> concentration

During the service, don’t forget to breathe. Let’s breathe together now: Breathe in Spirit, community, courage. Breathe out fear, denial. Breathe in gratitude, breathe out grief. Let go of what holds you back and take in what gives you life.

### **Responsive Call to Worship – “Praise Be!”**

**Reader 1:** An integral ecology includes taking time to recover a serene harmony with creation, reflecting on our lifestyle and our ideals, and contemplating the Creator who lives among us and surrounds us...*Laudato Si’ Paragraph 225*

**Reader 2:** Praise be! Words begin but cannot finish; hearts open but cannot totally hold

**Reader 1:** Minds catch glimpses but cannot wholly grasp the entirety of the expansive, booming, out flung love that calls forth creation in and through all of us:

**Reader 2:** cells dirt stars

**Reader 1:** sea anemones bananas humans

**Reader 2:** dogs (and probably cats) glaciers koalas sequoias poison ivy

**Reader 1:** ducks canyons galaxies and green chilies

**Congregation:** Each piece of creation – including us – a child of God, enveloped in the vast creative power that is love. It's all here, all around us, within us – cascading through our bodies and into our souls – an anointing, a baptism, a blessing.

**Reader 1:** Life – an incredible dance of beauty and power, of beginnings and endings, instinct and insight, tears and pain, birth and death, hope and questions, work and wonder.

**Congregation:**

A vast expansive circle held together by love, by connection  
A globe of dynamic life and beauty and promise

**All: Our common home!**

**Congregational Song**

*This can be one of your own choosing. I have often used "Image Dei" from the UCC Sing! book. Hymns like "For the Beauty of the Earth" could work well, too.*

**Unison Reading – "Beauty's Psalm"**

**Leader:** By learning to see and appreciate beauty, we learn to reject self-interested pragmatism  
*Laudato Si', Paragraph 215*

**All:**

Talk to me, Beauty

Speak to me – straight to the center of my soul – of the very depth of God, of hope, of life.

Startle me.

Show me what is good and beautiful about being human, then take me outside of myself and into the heart of all Creation.

Connect me to all life.

Through you, I listen to the ancient ones, and to those yet to come.

Oh beauty of song, of color, of movement, of grace, of sky and water, mountain and mud –  
You are glimpses of God, sounds of the holy, the touch of all things sacred.

When my eyes see beauty, and my ears hear your song;

When I dance a dance, and am struck by awe,

When embraced by the gentle breeze or rushing waters, I know I am connected:

to God to my neighbor to myself to the soul of Creation

Praise be!

**Reading – Excerpts from "God's Earth is Sacred: An Open Letter to Church and Society in the United States"** (Through the National Council of the Churches of Christ, February 14, 2005)

We are called to worship God with all our being and actions, and to treat creation as sacred. We must engage our political leaders in supporting the very future of this planet. We are called to cling to the true Gospel – for "God so loved the cosmos" – rejecting the false gospels of our day.

We believe that caring for creation must undergird, and be entwined with, all other dimensions of our churches' ministries. We are convinced that it is no longer acceptable to claim to be "church" while continuing to perpetuate, or even permit, the abuse of Earth as God's creation. Nor is it acceptable for our corporate and political leaders to engage in "business as usual" as if the very future of life-support systems were not at stake.

The imperative first step is to repent of our sins, in the presence of God and one another. The second step is to pursue a new journey together, with courage and joy.

### **Scripture Reading – Luke 10: 25-29**

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself."

And he said to him, "You have given the right answer: do this and you will live."

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

### **Reading and Silence – In A Different Way**

#### **Reader 1:**

There needs to be a distinctive way of looking at things, a way of thinking, policies, an educational program, a lifestyle and a spirituality which together generate resistance to the assault of the technocratic paradigm. Otherwise, even the best ecological initiatives can find themselves caught up in the same globalized logic. --*Laudato Si' Paragraph 111*

#### **Reader 2:**

In a different way: Won't make a difference if same old Business as Usual still holds sway.

Nothing will change if we don't burst those bonds that hold the world in a strangle-grip:  
greed, privilege, fear, despair, hate, materialism.

Business as Usual names us Consumers – Users – Number One

Business as Usual names what is our center, our heart:

more  
mine  
safe  
because I can

We've got to think about the world in a different way. Rename ourselves. Rename our heart.

Rename our vision.

### **Silence**

#### **Reader 1:**

Never give up. Get angry when you need to and transform it to heal.

Have the courage to grieve.

Put the pressure on.

Same old business as usual has a stranglehold on all creation.

Those old names don't work anymore. They never did. They destroy.

We've got to reclaim who we've always been, but have forgotten that we were:

Children of God  
Neighbors  
People of the earth  
Lovers  
Web of life

A different way is the bedrock of who we are and who we can become.

A different way is our call, our challenge, our redemption.

Same old business as usual is a stranglehold.

A different way is an embrace.

*Congregational song here, or appropriate song by the choir, or just instrumental music and slides, if you're on Zoom*

**Responsive Prayer of Confession – Prayer of Confession and Lament for Creation**

**Reader:**

Oh God of time and space  
We confess we are running out of both.  
Species whirling into extinction faster than ever before.  
Habitat created over millennia destroyed in the blink of an eye.  
Sea levels rising, threatening, moving closer,  
and the poor and the brown and the voiceless taste the bitter salt

**Congregation:** Oh God of time and space, we confess we are running out of both.

**Reader:**

Oh God of hope and Resurrection:

**Congregation:**

We confess to despair that creates denial, in this Good Friday world.  
We tremble on the brink of the temptation to simply give up.

**Reader:**

Oh God of transformation:

**Congregation:**

We confess to choosing Business as Usual because it is easier,  
because it hurts too much to care  
because we don't want to give up what we have  
because we are afraid.

**Reader:**

Oh God of deep sighing, these are our prayers.  
And we know it is not only from you we need to ask forgiveness, but from all your creation:

**Congregation:**

You polar bears, forgive us, we pray  
You coral reefs, forgive us, we pray

You Black Rhino and Green Turtle, forgive us, we pray  
 You Monarch butterfly, Ivory-Billed woodpecker, Gray Wolf, forgive us, we pray  
 Oh air that we breathe, oceans that give us life, mountaintops of Appalachia, forgive us, we pray

**Reader:**

Remake us, oh Creator. Transform us into a new being.  
 Open us to your love which can open our eyes and our hearts.  
 Give us courage to walk in your path with all creation.  
 Forgive us and make us free, for healing and for hope.

**All: Amen!**

**A Time of Music and of Silence**

**Silence**

**Drum Beat**

*A hand drum works best here; check the ppm as close to the service time as you can, to have an accurate count; go to <https://keelingcurve.ucsd.edu/> for the latest number*

**Instrumental response**

*Quiet but intense music is to be played here – jazz, blues, classical – it’s all good. Do not make it a familiar tune, because people will get distracted, or will hum along. The following italicized words are to go into the bulletin.*

*Each drum beat is for every Parts Per Million of CO<sub>2</sub> that we are over 350, the scientifically agreed upon amount of danger threshold for CO<sub>2</sub> concentration*

**Charge to the People of God – “Push Back”**

**Reader 1:** The Spirit of God has filled the universe with possibilities and therefore, from the very heart of things, something new can always emerge. *Laudato Si’, paragraph 80*

**Reader 2:** Let your hands shake and your heart break – but speak up

**Reader 1:** Let your mind reel and your soul feel – now act up

**Reader 2:** Push back – resist when status quo would tell you who you are.  
 Push back – resist when technology alone would mold your vision.

**Reader 1:** Push back – financial gain is not our worth  
 Push back – time to redefine “progress”

**Readers 1 & 2:** Push back – and reach out  
 The task is impossible – do it anyway

**Reader 2:** The path is long, rough, frightening – walk it anyway

**Reader 1:** You’re overwhelmed, sorrowful, afraid – sing anyway

**Both Readers:** The Spirit of God has filled the universe with possibilities!  
 Something new is always imaginable!

**Reader 2:** So speak up! Act up! Push back!

**Reader 1:** And life can flourish once again  
 With its scars and broken pieces, yet, astonishingly, made whole

**Closing Reading – From “On Care For Our Common Home”**

The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change.

The Creator does not abandon us...Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home.

**Responsive Benediction – “Let Us Sing As We Go”**

**Reader 1:** Let us sing as we go. May our struggles and our concern for the planet never take away the joy of our hope. *Laudato Si’ Paragraph 244*

**Reader 2:** Let us sing as we go!

**Congregation:** The voice of God inside each of us murmurs and pulls at our hearts; “something is not right” Denial dissipates, and we dare.

**Reader 1:** Let us sing as we go!

**Congregation:** We are all connected to each other – Web of Life, sharing our common home.

**Reader 2:** Let us sing as we go!

**Congregation:** Sing of a beauty that is too much to hold, of a connectedness which is love

**Reader 1:** Let us sing as we go!

**Congregation:** Joyfully proclaiming we have no right to bring extinction; we are simply within – not above – the web of life.

**Reader 2:** Let us sing as we go!

**Congregation:** Startled by beauty, struck by awe, connected to the soul of Creation, we are set free for healing and for hope, to resist and rejoice.

**All: Let us sing as we go! The spirit of God has filled the universe with possibilities!  
Courage and transformation are real! Praise be!**

**Congregational Song – “Keep the Circle Whole For All”**

1. Oh the circle of creation it must be, Lord, be made whole.  
We are connected to each other, we are all one living soul.

Refrain: Let’s keep working, let’s be strong now, keep the circle whole for all,  
There’s a new world we are building! Healing justice is our call!

2. All creation groans in anguish, will it die, Lord, will we die?  
Where’s the hope for life to flourish? This our cry, Lord, this our cry.

Refrain

3. Life within us, life around us, creatures, water, earth and sky.  
All cry out for healing justice. We will try, Lord, we will try.

Refrain

4. Devastation, violence, suffering – This, creation's deepest sigh.  
That is not the final word here. Hope and love will be our cry.

Refrain

## Benediction

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### Notes

- Find a hand drum or some sort of percussion to use during the “Music and Silence” time
- Check the most up to date Parts Per Million over 350 by going to <https://keelingcurve.ucsd.edu/>
- The prayers and poetry were written by Rev. Allyson Sawtell
- “Keep the Circle Whole for All” was written by Luke Rackers and Allyson Sawtell



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