

Sermon
Community United Methodist Church of Coeur d'Alene
Feast of Creation in Christ
September 6, 2026
9:30 AM

Texts: Ezekiel 47:9-12 & John 7:37-39

Theme: Living Water

[prayer]

In a recent essay, public historian Jermaine Fowler wrote the following:

“If everyone on Earth lived the way the average American does, humanity would need five planets to support it.

There is one.

Humanity exhausted this one planet’s entire yearly supply of freshwater, fish, timber, and cropland by July 30, a deficit the world has run every year since 1970. Wildlife populations have collapsed 73 percent in that time. Scientists no longer call what is happening to the planet’s aquifers a crisis. They call it bankruptcy: seventy percent of the world’s major aquifers [are] now in permanent decline...”¹

Every generation has had its defining crisis: The Great War. The Great Depression. World War II and fascism. Vietnam. The Cold War and communism. My generation is the 9/11 generation, growing up in the shadow of the war on terrorism and its economic and political fallout.

For our children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren, the defining crisis will likely be global climate change and its far-reaching consequences.

A month ago, in the next county over, wildfire jumped a river and burned through entire neighborhoods. The damage has exceeded \$1 billion. An arsonist allegedly

¹ <https://thehumanityarchive.substack.com/p/1-of-people-on-earth-emit-more-carbon>

set the first fire, taking advantage of high winds and a fourth consecutive year of drought.²

Two weeks ago, a slab of the Langtang Lirung glacier on the border of Tibet and Nepal sheared away. The resulting flash flood has killed at least 1,300 people; another 5,300 remain missing.³

These two events are thousands of miles apart, but they are still connected by the same thing: natural disaster amplified by a warming planet. The world is currently headed for 2.6 degrees Celsius [36.68 degrees Fahrenheit] of warming by the end of the century. That amount of warming will precipitate major changes in the West Antarctic and Greenland ice sheets, the Amazon, and the ocean current that has kept Europe from freezing for ten thousand years. This month the UN reported that we have passed the point of no return; we cannot turn back the climate clock. The richest one percent of people on Earth – that's us – emits as much carbon dioxide as the poorest five billion. The bodies buried under the mud in Nepal are proof that the effects of climate change will not be born equally.

Meanwhile, my HOA keeps sending me letters because there are dead patches on my lawn. I water regularly but sod is poorly adapted for this climate. I want to ask them: Who do I owe the greater responsibility to – you or the thirsty, suffering earth on which I stand?

I know the answer to that question. But it is hard not to despair at the destruction our greed and intransigence have sown.

Thankfully Scripture gives us spiritual practices for managing despair. They are called lament and repentance. You tell the truth about what has gone wrong. You repent – turn away – from continuing to do harm. In other words, when you know better, you do better. And we are promised forgiveness.

But forgiveness does not mean the consequences of our actions are erased. There is another step beyond lament and repentance that we often fail to take. That step is repair and reconciliation. The UN may say we have passed the point of no

² <https://www.spokesman.com/stories/2026/aug/21/spokane-fire-damages-will-exceed-1-billion/>

³ <https://www.bbc.com/news/live/cmwyz5er2lwnt>

return, but that does not mean we no longer have the responsibility to care for what is left to us. When you know better, you do better.

This year, for the first time in a century, a new ecumenical feast was added to the liturgical calendar. The Feast of Creation in Christ is celebrated on September 1st or the subsequent Sunday. It originally began in the Eastern Orthodox Church. September 1st symbolizes the day of God's creation of the world in the Byzantine tradition and is the opening feast of their liturgical year, in parallel with Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. On September 1, 1989, the Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios declared, "We invite the entire Christian world to offer... every year on this day prayers and supplications to the Maker of all, both as thanksgiving for the great gift of Creation and as petitions for its protection and salvation."⁴ This year the date was added to the Revised Common Lectionary that guides the liturgical celebrations of churches around the world, including The United Methodist Church.

This is a day set aside to praise our Triune God as Creator. Today we commemorate the great mystery that everything was created through Christ. "In the beginning was the Word / and the Word was with God / and the Word was God...Everything came into being through the Word, and without the Word nothing came into being" (John 1:1,3 CEB). Christ was present at the moment of creation as the very words God used to speak the world into being.

Later, we read that "The Son is the image of the invisible God, / the one who is first over all creation... / He existed before all things, / and all things are held together in him... / Because all the fullness of God was pleased to live in him, / and he reconciled all things to himself through him— / whether things on earth or in the heavens. / He brought peace through the blood of his cross" (Col 1:15-17, 19-20).

When we look at the world around us, at its beauty, its majesty, we are reminded that this earth – the soil on which we stand; the water we drink; the green growing things and every creature great and small – all this earth is the work of our Triune God, made through Christ and held together by Christ. And because our God is alive, the act of Creation did not happen only at the beginning of time. It is happening still. God is still creating and God is still reconciling, making peace

⁴ <https://www.feastofcreation.com/>

through the blood of the cross. The life, death, and resurrection of Christ call us to live into a vision of the world that is redeemed and renewed, where we live in harmony with each other and with the earth.

Before Christ was incarnate, the Prophet Ezekiel shared this vision of the renewed earth. He prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 587 BCE, a consequence of the people's disobedience toward God. But Ezekiel also prophesied their repentance and eventual return to the Land of Israel. With their return he saw the reconstruction of the Temple, and flowing from the Temple Mount a trickle of water that became a stream and then a roaring river, filling the desert and bringing life to the Dead Sea. And in his vision, an angelic guide turned to Ezekiel and said, "Human one, do you see?" (Ezek 47:6). Do you see that wherever the river flows, every living thing that moves will **thrive**? Great schools of fish swimming in fresh water, and people fishing from one end of the land to the other with more than enough to eat. And the trees that grow along the bank of the river will be so well watered that they won't yield their fruit only once a year; they will produce fruit every month "because their water comes from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for eating, their leaves for healing" (v. 12).

Recall that the root of the word "salvation" means to heal. Ezekiel's vision is a vision of salvation that includes not only the healing of our souls, but of the whole created world. The living water that flows from the home of God will refresh and renew everything it touches. It will soothe the parched earth and all of creation will flourish in its lifegiving streams.

The Gospel of John reminds us that this living water we are promised comes from Christ himself. It flows from the Word of God into all those who listen and obey. This means that as disciples of Jesus Christ we are conduits of this living water. It is our mission to heal and transform the world. As his body we continue the divine work of reconciliation, of bringing peace to creation through the blood of his cross.

The Feast of Creation in Christ, also known as the World Day of Prayer for Creation, inspires us anew to care for the gift of the created world. Here at CUMC we are taking small, proactive steps toward adapting to our changing climate. This year we underwent a professional energy audit to help us understand our church's energy consumption and make adjustments. We are beginning the process of

evaluating our landscaping for water conservation. And we have invested portions of our endowment in green funds that exclude profits from fossil fuels. All three of these ideas are steps you can consider taking in your own life.

Will these steps reverse the climate crisis? No. But they do faithfully steward what God has given to us to tend. Remember friends: Despair is not our calling; repair is. When we know better, we do better.

Let us pray:

Holy God, whose Spirit hovered over the waters at the beginning, we gather as part of your community of all creation, thirsty for your grace. We give thanks for the gift of water, the veins of our common home, that sustains the cedar and the whale, the pasture and the city. We are grateful for the local waters that nourish our homelands and our fellow creatures. We give thanks that in your well-watered garden, every drop is a sacred testament to your love.

Yet, we confess that we have treated this gift as a mere commodity. We have choked the seas with our waste and watched the warming tides rise in judgment. We lament the cracked earth of the drought-stricken and the salty tears of the climate refugee. Melt our frozen hearts, O God, and let the waters of repentance flow.

Lord of all Life, you promised that wherever the river flows, everything shall live. Stir in us a calling to care for the waters — to protect the watershed, defend the rights of water, and honor the dignity of the thirsty. May your Word be a spring within us, gushing forth for the healing of the nations.

May God our Father who brought water from the rock sustain us in the desert. May Christ our Lord who is Living Water refresh us for the work of restoration. And may the Holy Spirit carry us on currents of grace until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Amen.⁵

⁵ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1WeWEjt_WxyS6Ed5qD8tnRlahSMJ5SUmi/view