

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of April 28, 2024

Weekly Prayer

Holy God, you bring hope for all of creation. I praise you for making all things new. Hear the cries of my heart and the brokenness of our whole world. Give me courage and confidence to partner with your healing and restoring work. Help me to listen and act in ways that share your love for all of creation. Amen.

Monday, April 29

Scripture: Romans 8:19-25

The whole creation waits breathless with anticipation for the revelation of God's sons and daughters. Creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice—it was the choice of the one who subjected it—but in the hope that the creation itself will be set free from slavery to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of God's children. We know that the whole creation is groaning together and suffering labor pains up until now. And it's not only the creation. We ourselves who have the Spirit as the first crop of the harvest also groan inside as we wait to be adopted and for our bodies to be set free. We were saved in hope. If we see what we hope for, that isn't hope. Who hopes for what they already see? But if we hope for what we don't see, we wait for it with patience.

Observation

This passage from Romans reminds us that humanity is not alone in experiencing the goodness of God's creation, nor the consequences of our brokenness. But we are not without hope! God invites us to transform our ways, that all of humanity, every creature, and all the earth might be restored. Verse 22 tells us that "the whole creation is groaning together," reminding us that we are not alone. Each part of God's creation relies on one another for joy, sustenance, and life. What might creation be saying to us today?

Application

As I write this, I am sitting outside, listening to the sounds of birds singing. This is one of my favorite parts of spring. Imagine what their songs tell: do they declare the goodness of God for protecting them through the winter? Do they sing out with hope that their natural habitats might be safe? How do the songs of creation inspire you today?

Prayer

Life-giving God, thank you for the gifts of creation. Help me to listen more closely to the cries and needs of your creation, knowing that you have called me to care for all of your created world. Give me hope when I feel despair, and help me to act in ways that lead toward healing for all your creatures. Amen.

Did You Know?

According to the MN Department of Natural Resources, Minnesota has 246 species of breeding birds. If we listen, especially in the Spring, we hear thousands of songs every day. Some birds spend up to 70% of their day singing. They sing to mark territory, to attract a mate; perhaps they sing songs of praise! Today, listen for bird songs when you are outside. To see a great video and learn more: <https://www.birds.cornell.edu/home>

Tuesday, April 30

Scripture: Isaiah 24:4-5

The earth dries up and wilts;
the world withers and wilts;
the heavens wither away with the earth.
The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants,
for they have disobeyed instruction,
swept aside law,
and broken the ancient covenant.

Observation

The prophet Isaiah knows how to make an impact with his words. These verses remind us of the ways that our actions have caused harm: “the earth lies polluted under its inhabitants, for they have disobeyed instruction.” The result of this causes harm to God’s created earth, its creatures, and to its most vulnerable people.

According to the World Health Organization, “3.6 billion people live in areas highly susceptible to climate change. Despite contributing minimally to global emissions, low-income countries and small island developing states (SIDS) endure the harshest health impacts. In vulnerable regions, the death rate from extreme weather events in the last decade was 15 times higher than in less vulnerable ones.” (<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health>)

Application

Have you considered the ways our mission to grow in love of God and neighbor might influence personal habits around creation care? One way we can care for the most vulnerable is by caring for creation and thereby limiting harmful effects. Reflect today how you might shift one personal habit as a sign of discipleship and love for one another. Whether it’s turning off a light when you leave the room, studying up on recycling practices, or something else – I invite you to make one small change today, as an act of love.

Prayer

God of all creation, I confess that I have caused harm by what I have done, and what I have failed to do. Forgive me, O God. Guide me on the path of healing and help me to act in ways that honor you. Amen.

Did You Know?

As we think more about what we buy and how we get rid of the packaging (and what is left over when we’re done using it) have you ever asked “I wonder how long it takes for this to decompose in the landfill?” Great question! For some answers to this question: <https://recyclops.com/how-long-does-it-take-to-decompose/>

Wednesday, May 1**Scripture: Nehemiah 9:6**

You alone are the LORD. You alone made heaven, even the heaven of heavens, with all their forces. You made the earth and all that is on it, and the seas and all that is in them. You preserve them all, and the heavenly forces worship you.

Observation

The book of Nehemiah tells of us about the restoration after the Babylonian exile. Throughout this book, we’re given examples and encouragement to thrive through difficult situations. It helps address questions like: Has God abandoned us? Will we be delivered? Is there hope after

hardship? The verses read today are one response to these questions. Collectively, they say: *Yes. God is with you, and all of creation.*

Application

One of the ongoing themes throughout scripture is God forgiving God's people who have gone astray. Another is God's assurance and comfort that we are not alone. When we consider, this week, the ways we have caused harm to the earth, both messages are necessary. The story of God reminds us that it is not too late to try again, to turn toward God, and be transformed. And that even when the work set before us is difficult, we are not alone, but God will see us through.

Prayer

Holy One, as Nehemiah declared, "you alone are the LORD. You alone made heaven...You made the earth and all that is on it, and the seas and all that is in them. You preserve them all, and the heavenly forces worship you." Help me to follow you more closely today, and to care for the beautiful world you have made. Amen.

Did You Know?

The Three Rivers Park District is the largest parks agency in the county, with approximately 17,000 acres of parks and 140 miles of regional trails. Named after the three rivers in Hennepin County — the Mississippi, the Minnesota, and the Crow — Three Rivers Park District owns and manages 5 park reserves, 9 regional parks, and 3 special recreation features within the county. What a great way to get out and enjoy Creation—go to a park! For ideas of where to go, things to do, programs and events: <https://www.threeriversparks.org/locations>

Thursday, May 2

Scripture: John 1:3

All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.

Observation

There's something both inspiring and restorative about spending time in creation. My family is fortunate to live near Theodore Wirth Park, and we love to walk the trails near our house. We often see deer, turkeys, ducks, and wildlife. And, of course, we are surrounded by beautiful, tall trees. Being in nature reminds me that I am part of something larger than myself, and God has intentionally made us to live and work in harmony with one another.

Application

How does the beauty of God's created world inspire and encourage you? If you can, spend time outside today. Breathe in deeply the spring air, listen for the song of the birds, watch as the trees begin to bloom. And as you do, remember: God has created you in love, and has called you to love.

Prayer

God of all creation, thank you for the reminders of your presence all around me. May the gifts of nature encourage me to breathe deeply, love boldly, and rest comfortably in you. Amen.

Did You Know?

From Genesis through Revelation, the Bible contains more references to trees and wood (over 525) than to any other type of living organism except humans. Minnesota is home to 53 native tree species. As trees grow, they help stop climate change by removing carbon dioxide from

the air, storing carbon in the trees and soil, and releasing oxygen into the atmosphere. Trees provide many benefits to us every day. <https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/trees/native-trees.html>

Friday, May 3

Scripture: Genesis 41:46-57

Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from Pharaoh's presence and traveled throughout Egypt. During the seven years of abundance the land produced plentifully. Joseph collected all the food produced in those seven years of abundance in Egypt and stored it in the cities. In each city he put the food grown in the fields surrounding it. Joseph stored up huge quantities of grain, like the sand of the sea; it was so much that he stopped keeping records because it was beyond measure. Before the years of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph by Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On. Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, "It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household." The second son he named Ephraim and said, "It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering." The seven years of abundance in Egypt came to an end, and the seven years of famine began, just as Joseph had said. There was famine in all the other lands, but in the whole land of Egypt there was food. When all Egypt began to feel the famine, the people cried to Pharaoh for food. Then Pharaoh told all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph and do what he tells you." When the famine had spread over the whole country, Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold grain to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe throughout Egypt. And all the world came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because the famine was severe everywhere.

Observation

In this part of Joseph's story, we see how he helps Pharaoh through a famine. Joseph makes and executes a plan to save and store food wisely so that there will be enough for the people. While God has given us a big responsibility to care for the earth, God has also given us the wisdom and means to do so. What might we learn from this part of Joseph's story?

Application

Food is a critical part of our daily lives, and food waste plays a major role in climate change. According to the United States EPA, "When food waste decomposes in a landfill without oxygen, methane is born. Methane is ~20 times more harmful than carbon dioxide, rapidly contributing to the destruction of our ozone layer." The good news is that we can improve our practices around food and waste, to help nourish our bodies, communities, and make a positive impact on the world. Here are a few simple ideas: (1) Many local communities have begun composting, which is a simple way to make a big impact. Look up your city and see what resources are available. (2) Try meal planning this week or set aside a "leftover day" to clear the fridge before food goes bad. (3) Keep a food diary of what you throw away. How can this influence your shopping and cooking practices?

Prayer

Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest. Let these gifts to us be blest. By thy hand, we all are fed. Thank you, Lord for daily bread. Amen.

Did You Know?

Each year, one third of all food that is produced globally for human consumption--roughly 1.3 billion tons--is wasted. "It's estimated that Americans waste 30-40% of all food produced, or approximately 63 million tons each year. To put that in perspective, if all that food we wasted

annually came from one farm, that farm would be three quarters the size of California, and it would harvest enough food to fill a 40-ton tractor every 20 seconds.

Saturday, May 4

Scripture: Genesis 9:13

I have set my [rainbow] in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

Observation

At the end of Noah's story, God offers a sign of promise to them, and to us. A sign of God's presence, of God's ongoing restoration, and of God's forgiveness. This sign is a rainbow -- a beautiful arch of color that stretches across the skies, as a sign of promise.

Application

One of my favorite things about rainbows is the way they inspire surprise and delight. Every time one appears, you can hear the chorus, "oh, look! A rainbow!" It's almost impossible not to smile and feel joy when you see them. That is a gift, too: a reminder from God to find joy and know delight. To trust that even in surprising places, God will show up. What other signs of God's presence and love are around you today?

Prayer

God of the rainbow, thank you for this beautiful world you have given us. Help me to find joy in the gifts of your creation, and trust that you are with me. Amen.

Did You Know?

Have you ever looked at clouds and noticed shapes? What are clouds? Clouds appear when there is more water vapor in the air than it can hold. The water vapor (gas) condenses to form tiny water droplets (liquid) and it is the water that makes the cloud visible. These droplets are so small that they stay suspended in the air. Clouds affect climate in two major ways. First, they are an essential part of the [water cycle](#). Clouds provide an important link between the rain and snow, oceans and lakes, and plants and animals. Clouds also play an important role in warming and cooling our planet. However, as Earth's climate warms, we won't always be able to count on this cooling effect. Learn more! <https://climatekids.nasa.gov/cloud-climate>