

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of April 7, 2024

Weekly Prayer

Creating God, you envisioned and brought into being all of creation and humanity. Humanity is just one part of your incredible Word. As I read your Word today, open my mind and heart to the delicacy and interconnectedness of all that you have made. May my insight into Your wonder-filled creation grow. Amen.

Monday, April 8

Scripture: Genesis 1:1-3, 24-31

When God began to create the heavens and the earth the earth was without shape or form, it was dark over the deep sea, and God's wind swept over the waters. God said, "Let there be light." And so light appeared.

God said, "Let the earth produce every kind of living thing: livestock, crawling things, and wildlife." And that's what happened. God made every kind of wildlife, every kind of livestock, and every kind of creature that crawls on the ground. God saw how good it was. Then God said, "Let us make humanity in our image to resemble us so that they may take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the earth, and all the crawling things on earth."

God created humanity in God's own image,
in the divine image God created them,
male and female God created them.

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and master it. Take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, and everything crawling on the ground." Then God said, "I now give to you all the plants on the earth that yield seeds and all the trees whose fruit produces its seeds within it. These will be your food. To all wildlife, to all the birds in the sky, and to everything crawling on the ground—to everything that breathes—I give all the green grasses for food." And that's what happened. God saw everything he had made: it was supremely good. There was evening and there was morning: the sixth day.

Observation

This is a portion of the first of two creation stories found in Genesis. The writer(s) wrote poetically, and Hebrew priests may well have used the story in worship. Many of Israel's neighbors in the ancient Near Eastern world had their own creation stories, but the Bible's account was the only one that saw creation as fundamentally good. The world came spotless and "supremely good" from God's hand.

Application

Professor John Goldingay, in his book, *Genesis for Everyone*, expressed the thought of Genesis 1:31 in terms we may find it easier to relate to: "At the end of the week of creation, God is in a position to stand back, survey the six days' work as a whole, and smile in satisfaction. The project has come out very well. It looks great." Make a list of 3-5 ways in which you still see the original goodness of the creator's intention in our world.

Prayer

Dear God, thank you for the miraculous gift of our beautiful, abundant earth, and for entrusting it to my care. Help me be a faithful steward of your gifts, always mindful of my choices and their impact on your world. Amen.

Did You Know?

Did you know that spending time in nature—even as little as 20 – 30 minutes a few days a week—may reduce stress, anxiety, and depression? Scientific studies show that almost any form of immersion in the natural world may improve your overall well-being and engagement with the larger human community. So, get outside and enjoy God’s good world!

Tuesday, April 9

Scripture: Genesis 2:4-9, 15-17

On the day the LORD God made earth and sky— before any wild plants appeared on the earth, and before any field crops grew, because the LORD God hadn’t yet sent rain on the earth and there was still no human being to farm the fertile land, though a stream rose from the earth and watered all of the fertile land—the LORD God formed the human from the topsoil of the fertile land and blew life’s breath into his nostrils. The human came to life. The LORD God planted a garden in Eden in the east and put there the human he had formed. In the fertile land, the LORD God grew every beautiful tree with edible fruit, and also he grew the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The LORD God took the human and settled him in the garden of Eden to farm it and to take care of it. The LORD God commanded the human, “Eat your fill from all of the garden’s trees; but don’t eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, because on the day you eat from it, you will die!”

Observation

Genesis’ second creation story was folksier and less structured than the one in Genesis 1:1-2:3. It said God created a human first, before any plants or animals. (If read as literal history or science, it would contradict Genesis 1.) It used “Yahweh” (translated “LORD”) rather than the more generic “Elohim” as God’s name. Here God gave the newly created humans a “garden,” a perfect setting in which to thrive, and settled them “to take care of it.”

Application

The Hebrew words for human (adam) and fertile land (adamah) sound alike and emphasize the connection between human beings and their land. This connection was intuitive for the largely agricultural people of Israel. In what ways have many of us in more industrialized, office-centered, technological ways of life lost that sense of connection? For what reasons do we need to remember that the land still nourishes our life?

Prayer

Dear Jesus, make me ever more aware of the ways in which my choices affect the people, the other forms of life, and even the life-sustaining earth around me. Amen.

Did You Know?

Up to 100 million monarch butterflies migrate every year, up to 3,000 miles each way. Minnesota is one of their summer breeding grounds, with peak migration in mid-September. Planting native plants can help sustain this butterfly population, which has suffered substantial loss of habitat due to development. Ask your local garden center for help!

Wednesday, April 10

Scripture: Psalm 19:1-4, 33:6-9, 12-15

Heaven is declaring God’s glory;
the sky is proclaiming his handiwork.

One day gushes the news to the next,
and one night informs another what needs to be known.
Of course, there's no speech, no words—
their voices can't be heard—
but their sound extends throughout the world;
their words reach the ends of the earth.
God has made a tent in heaven for the sun.
The skies were made by the LORD's word,
all their starry multitude by the breath of his mouth.
He gathered the ocean waters into a heap;
he put the deep seas into storerooms.
All the earth honors the LORD;
all the earth's inhabitants stand in awe of him.
Because when he spoke, it happened!
When he commanded, there it was!
The nation whose God is the LORD,
the people whom God has chosen as his possession,
is truly happy!
The LORD looks down from heaven;
he sees every human being.
From his dwelling place God observes
all who live on earth.
God is the one who made all their hearts,
the one who knows everything they do.

Observation

Owen Gingerich, Emeritus Professor of Astronomy at Harvard, in his book, *God's Universe*, wrote: "Rather than believe that the universe is simply meaningless, a macabre joke, I would prefer to accept a universe created with intention and purpose by a loving God, and perhaps created with just enough freedom that conscience and responsibility are part of the mix....the elements are just right, the environment is fit for life, and slowly life forms have populated the earth." His precise teacher's prose echoed the poetry of the ancient psalmists.

Application

Perhaps drawing on David's outdoor life as a shepherd, Psalm 19:1, 3-4 said "Heaven is declaring God's glory.... of course, there's no speech, no words—their voices can't be heard—but their sound extends throughout the world." When has nature spoken most powerfully to you of God's glory, goodness, and power? When have you seen nature's ability to "speak" spoiled by human carelessness or greed?

Prayer

O Lord, open my eyes to the signs of your creative power and beauty that can still be seen in our world. Fill my heart with wonder at the wisdom and grace reflected in so much I can see. Amen.

Did You Know?

The Milky Way galaxy—home to the Sun and the Earth—contains millions of stars and is just one of billions of galaxies in the universe. Even at the speed of light, it would take 100,000 years to travel across our galaxy. In the night sky, you can witness God's glory and power.

Thursday, April 11

Scripture: John 1:1-5

In the beginning was the Word
and the Word was with God
and the Word was God.
The Word was with God in the beginning.
Everything came into being through the Word,
and without the Word
nothing came into being.
What came into being
through the Word was life,
and the life was the light for all people.
The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light.

Observation

Many Greek philosophers identified "the Word" (Greek "logos") as the great idea behind the universe. The Hebrew Bible began (like John's gospel) with "in the beginning," and said God spoke all that is into being. John defined what he meant by "light" more specifically. The person Jesus he had seen, heard, and known, he said, was the light who broke into the world's darkness. In coming to earth, Jesus the creator was creating anew.

Application

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light" (verse 5). Both Genesis and John said God created "light," in both the physical and spiritual senses. Have there been times when it felt to you as though darkness was trying to put out God's light in your life? In what ways have you learned to nurture your connection with Jesus, so that God's light can keep shining in and through you?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, what came into being through you was life, was light. Thank you for creating new life in me as your light reaches to the dark corners of my being. Amen.

Did You Know?

You can find comprehensive recycling information for Hennepin County Recycling here: <https://www.hennepin.us/recycling>. This is one way we can help renew the Earth and care for God's creation. If you want to know if something can be recycled and where, visit their web site for more information.

Friday, April 12**Scripture: Colossians 1:15-20**

The Son is the image of the invisible God,
the one who is first over all creation,
Because all things were created by him:
both in the heavens and on the earth,
the things that are visible and the things that are invisible.
Whether they are thrones or powers,
or rulers or authorities,
all things were created through him and for him.

He existed before all things,
and all things are held together in him.
He is the head of the body, the church,
who is the beginning,
the one who is firstborn from among the dead
so that he might occupy the first place in everything.
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.

Observation

Scholar N. T. Wright noted that today's passage made a striking claim: "Jesus holds together the old world and the new, creation and new creation. The 'salvation' or 'redemption' on offer in Christianity is sometimes described as if it meant that the old world, the ordinary world of creation we all live in, was worthless.... Jesus Christ, says the poem boldly, is the one through whom and for whom the whole creation was made in the first place."

Application

Today's passage held an even bigger truth: The world is also full of ugliness and evil, summed up in death itself. That wasn't the original intention, and the living God has now acted to heal the world of the wickedness and corruption that have so radically infected it. The Jesus through whom the world was made in the first place is the same Jesus through whom the world has now been redeemed. Have you ever realized that Easter is not only about saving people, but about Jesus acting to redeem our entire planet?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I am ultimately your creation, and you love me. But you redeemed and love the whole creation. Keep teaching me how to love and value what you made. Amen.

Did You Know?

In the United States, the wind energy potential of just three states—Kansas, North Dakota, and Texas— would be sufficient to meet electricity demand from coast to coast.

Saturday, April 13

Scripture: Revelation 11:15-18, 22:1-5

Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven saying,
"The kingdom of the world has become
the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ,
and he will rule forever and always."

Then the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshipped God. They said,

"We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty,
who is and was,
for you have taken your great power and enforced your rule.
The nations were enraged, but your wrath came.

The time came for the dead to be judged.

The time came to reward your servants, the prophets and saints,
and those who fear your name, both small and great,
and to destroy those who destroy the earth."

Then the angel showed me the river of life-giving water,^[a] shining like crystal, flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb through the middle of the city's main street. On each side of the river is the tree of life, which produces twelve crops of fruit, bearing its fruit each month. The tree's leaves are for the healing of the nations. There will no longer be any curse. The throne of God and the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. Night will be no more. They won't need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will shine on them, and they will rule forever and always.

Observation

Scholar N. T. Wright wrote that for too many Christians, “the aim of Christianity as a whole, and of conversion, justification, sanctification, and salvation, is seen in terms of leaving earth behind and going home to a place called heaven.” Instead, he said, “For the early Christians, the resurrection of Jesus launched God's new creation upon the world, beginning to fulfill the prayer Jesus taught his followers, that God's kingdom would come “on earth as in heaven” (Matt. 6:10), and anticipating the “new heavens and a new earth” (Isa. 65:17, 66:22; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1) promised by Isaiah and again in the New Testament.” That was why Revelation said judgment awaits those who “destroy the earth”—the earth is not temporary and disposable. Rather, God's goal (in which we can join) is to recreate and restore the world to the beauty and harmony for which it was always intended.

Application

Where is “heaven,” anyway? Had you ever before noticed how consistently the Biblical prophets said our eternal hope is in a “new heaven and a new earth”? How does it shift the way(s) you think about this planet if God's plan is that God's people spend eternity on this earth restored, redeemed, and made new—if this may be “heaven”? In what ways have you, your community and your country cared well for the earth? Can you identify areas in which you want to alter your lifestyle to more actively join in God's work of restoring and caring for creation (including, of course, yourself and your well-being)?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I can observe ways in which your creative power works in this vast universe, yet much remains mysterious. I not only believe, but count on, your promise that I can be with you for all eternity. Amen.

Did You Know?

When food goes to the landfill, the nutrients in the food never return to the soil and the rotting food produces the potent greenhouse gas methane. Preventing food waste or composting helps reduce methane emissions and creates healthy soil. Learn more at: <https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-management-food/sustainable-management-food-basics#what>