

Joining the Dance

*Lenten Reflections about Sabbath
and the Stewardship of Creation*



Cheryl Bradbee

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*“For the creation waits
with eager longing”*

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Welcome!

This study is designed to help you deepen your relationship with God the Creator, creation and one another through a greater understanding of a lifestyle based on Sabbath and the stewardship of creation.

The study can be used in various ways. It is set out to coincide with the beginning and ending of Lent. There are 47 reflections: one for each day of Lent beginning with Ash Wednesday, one for each of the six Sundays in Lent, and finishing with Easter Sunday. However, these reflections can be used at anytime of the year — by individuals, groups or a combination of both. For example, individuals might do the daily reflections on their own during the week in preparation for weekly small group gatherings using each week's final Sunday reflection. Group gatherings can take place on any day of the week but will preferably incorporate, or emerge from, the reflections of the preceding week. Along with the reflections, you will need a Bible, a notebook and pencil.

Each reflection provides time for scripture, reflection and action. The primary action is to pray, but other times you are also asked to go for a walk — inside or outside. A walk, unlike any other means of travel, places us in the natural world close enough and long enough to have most of our senses affected. However, this action raises questions about people who cannot walk easily or who need assistance. It raises issues about your housing, whether or not you have easy access to nature in a yard of your own or some other open space. In some places, the Canadian winter may also pose challenges, particularly in the Lenten season. Tailor the study to yourself. There are no rules here; allow yourself to be led by God.

I hope this study will enable you to join the dance with the Creator. It is a dance that brings together the principles of Sabbath and environmental stewardship — with movements about creation, invitation, economics, freedom, right relationships, change and resurrection. It is a dance that has challenging rhythms and transforming impacts. My hope is that words like Sabbath, theology of ecology, economic justice and social justice will become familiar steps that lead you to dance around with all creation, full of the new life that Christ offers us.

Cheryl Bradbee
Mississauga, Ontario
June 2006

Group Study

Individuals using these reflections may welcome an opportunity to meet weekly in a small group with others who are also using them. The Sunday reflection material can be used for this purpose, with participants sharing in the group leadership. Each Sunday reflection begins with prayer, is followed by scripture, a reflection and questions referring to themes of the previous week, and ends with a hymn.

Week 1

Sabbath and Creation



*“Six days of creating and
one day of resting”*

Ash Wednesday

The Creator's rest

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

Genesis 2:1-3

These verses conclude the first creation story, acknowledged to be the later of the two creation accounts in Genesis. We all know the story. God the Creator turned “a formless void” into “the heavens and the earth, and all their multitude.” And then God rested. The story of the creation of the universe includes seven days — six days of creating and one day of resting.

The creation story links the concepts of creating and rest. The Creator creates, but also pauses from creating; the Creator works, but also rests. The Genesis story has a time out, a break from creating known as the rest of completion, a job well done. For the Creator this time is also “blessed” and “hallowed.” This time is set aside as sacred and holy time, a time to be happy, to be reverent, to offer praise.

The Genesis creation story reminds us of the importance of Sabbath-keeping. This story, and the keeping of the Sabbath, defined the Hebrew people when they were in exile and their other institutions — monarchy, temple and land — lay in ruins. The Sabbath institution made a unique contribution to mid-Eastern culture since it set forth a seven-day week that included a Sabbath day of rest. Perhaps the Genesis story's concept of Sabbath can make a unique contribution to our efforts to be faithful in a world full of anxiety and busyness, to our lives full of never-ending to-do lists and deadlines.

Action/Prayer

The Genesis story links God with the acts of creating and resting; it links all of creation — the natural environment and humankind — with a time for holiness. Today take a walk if you are able (alternatively imagine a walk in your community) and look at the creation around you. Think about how it appears in the different seasons. When and where are you most aware of the presence, or the absence, of the rhythm of creating and resting? Stop for a Sabbath moment to focus on one marvelous detail of creation and offer praise and thanksgiving to God the Creator in prayer.

When you return indoors, quietly reflect on your walk. What do you want to pray about? We pray to express praise, thanksgiving, repentance, petitions and laments. Record words or symbols in a notebook to offer in prayer. Ask God to open your heart and mind to creation's needs in the coming days and weeks of this Lenten season.

Thursday

Creation's goodness

God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good... The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good... God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Genesis 1:10,12,31

“God saw that it was good.” It is like a refrain in the Genesis 1 creation story. The refrain appears six times (Genesis 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). Unlike some creation stories from other cultures, the Genesis story includes neither violence nor deceit; it emphasizes simply the goodness of what has been created. The Creator declares that everything is good in and of itself.

The story also has no hint of creation being a problem to be solved, a resource to be exploited, a commodity to be consumed or dishonoured in any way. Nothing in creation has to *earn* the designation of being “good.” Simply in being created by God, creation is intrinsically good and praiseworthy.

In the Genesis 1 story, the act and results of creating are followed directly with the Sabbath observance and celebration of creation's goodness. Coherence and brightness have replaced chaos and darkness. In place of the void, there is now teeming life in the oceans, on the earth and in the skies. Everything moves towards the dance of life. On the seventh day, the Sabbath day of rest, the Creator celebrates the created world. Likewise today we are invited to join with the Creator to observe Sabbath time, a time when we rest and celebrate the created order.

Action/Prayer

The creation story links creating and creation's goodness with resting and praising. Again today take a walk if you are able (alternatively imagine a walk in your community) and look at the creation around you. Where do you see goodness in creation? Look and breathe and listen prayerfully. Allow the Creator to open your senses so that you can experience, perhaps in a new way, the goodness of the creation in which you live. In a moment of prayer, stop and name the parts of creation that you want to celebrate. Praise and thank God the Creator.

Friday

God's glory in creation

The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.

Psalm 19:1-4a

The psalmist proclaims that God's glory and handiwork are revealed in creation. By its very being, by its goodness, creation glorifies its Creator according to the psalmist. Do we believe this? Does the natural world act as a mirror reflecting back to us the attributes of God our Creator? There are other biblical references that echo this theme. Paul writes that God's power and nature "have been understood and seen through the things he has made" (Romans 1:20). Jesus said that if he did not receive praise from people, the stones would recognize him and would be compelled to "shout out" his glory (Luke 19:40).

Many people speak of having spiritual experiences when they are immersed in nature. At the very least, most people would agree with Psalm 24:1, that the creation belongs to God: "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it." When we witness the work of God's handiwork, we might ask, 'What is humanity that God should even have us in mind, much less care for us?'

What happens then if creation is overworked or injured? We hear a lot today about environmental degradation and the effects of global warming. Sometimes the recovery of creation seems almost impossible. How do such situations affect the Creator? How do they affect our experience of "the glory of God"?

Sabbath rest was a critical part of the Creator's work. Could it be that Sabbath rest is still critical to the ongoing work of the Creator even in the 21st century?

Action/Prayer

Creation and God the Creator are interrelated. When a part of creation hurts or tires or dies, then isn't our experience of God also affected? Take another walk in your community, if you are able. Where can you experience God's glory in creation? Where do you see aspects of the natural world that have been exhausted, hurt or killed? Think about a current story about environmental damage and recovery. (Or read story #1 from page 63.) Then in a moment of prayer, stop and quietly ask the Creator for a greater understanding of the needs of creation.

Saturday

God's glory in humankind

All the nations you have made shall come and bow down before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name. For you are great and do wondrous things; you alone are God. Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart to revere your name. I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify your name forever.

Psalm 86:9-12

The psalmist proclaims God's greatness and that all humankind will glorify God. The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* speaks of this with its first question and answer: "What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever." Like the rest of creation, we exist to glorify God. But can we fulfill this purpose if we dishonour other parts of God's creation by our attitudes and behaviours? This calls into question our place in creation.

There has never been unanimity about how humankind fits into creation. Some scholars believe that humans are separate, more important and with a privileged status. Others assert that humankind is no more important than other aspects of creation. They believe that men and women are part of the natural environment, that our welfare is equal and interrelated to the welfare of the natural world, and that we are to obey the same rules of life on earth.

Theologian Douglas John Hall describes these two options as humanity *above* nature and humanity *in* nature. He rightfully points out that neither of these expresses the Judeo-Christian view which may be summarized as humanity *with* nature. "Humanity is neither superior to the rest of creation (above) nor simply identical with it (in), but the human creature exists alongside the others, in solidarity with them, yet also distinct" (*The Steward: The Biblical Symbol Come of Age* by John Douglas Hall. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Friendship Press, 1990). *With* expresses the language of love — Emmanuel, 'God with us' — and reminds us that we are to tend and care for the garden of earth and the rest of creation.

We are a *part of* creation with the same end: to glorify the Creator. However, we don't have to look very far before we see reminders that human activities regularly obstruct creation's glorification of God. How can we fulfill our purpose if we degrade the environment and damage the ecology; that is, if we harm creation? In today's passage the psalmist seeks a Sabbath moment to focus on God's way of truth, to express thankfulness and reverence for God. Perhaps we too need Sabbath time to understand better humankind's place in creation and how we are to glorify God the Creator.

Action/Prayer

Reflect on how much your life depends on the natural world and the amount of time and thought you give to this in a normal day. Stop for a Sabbath moment to *look* around and *declare* the goodness of God's creation. Then ask yourself, "How do I prioritize human and environmental needs?" In your notebook describe in words or images the relationships you see between humans and other parts of creation.

First Sunday in Lent

Stewardship of creation

Pray, asking to *see* the Spirit of God in this time and place.

God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."...The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.

Genesis 1:28; 2:15

Christians have understood that the Genesis "mandate" requires people to be managers or stewards of creation — caretakers of the environment. Historically there have been people and nations who have asserted control over the environment to meet human needs — and human wants — with little regard for the natural world. This represents a serious misreading of 'have dominion' which to a sinful humanity came to mean 'power over' instead of care-full responsibility.

According to biologist David Ehrenfeld, stewardship of the earth requires Sabbath. He believes that responsible use of our gifts from creation must include restraint and a cessation from exercising power. Are we not seeing that stewardship of creation without restraints does not work? Using the description of Sabbath from some Jewish traditions today, what is required is "a time for human *being* instead of human *doing*."

In observing Sabbath, we remember that the universe was created by God and belongs to God. As stewards we have responsibilities, but we also have limits. Sabbath celebration can continually remind us of those limits. It can protect us from being arrogant and abusive with regard to the natural environment. We are to till and keep the garden. When will we begin?

1. How do you understand the mandate to care for creation? How do you think stewardship of creation relates to Sabbath?
2. Recall the walks you took this week and reflect on
 - nature's rhythms of creating and resting
 - the places where you see the goodness of creation and God's glory
 - the changes and actions that you want to make happen.
3. If you seek a lifestyle that includes Sabbath and stewardship of creation, what might you do differently? What issues might you raise at a church meeting? At a neighbourhood gathering?

Action/Prayer

List places and situations to pray about. Refer specifically to this list as you pray

- asking for forgiveness on behalf of all people
- expressing thanksgiving for the knowledge and abilities we have
- celebrating the places and times when our knowledge and abilities have benefitted creation
- seeking God's guidance to address concerns.

Rejoice in the hope of resurrection. Read or sing "Simple Gifts" (see page 62).

Week 2

Sabbath and Invitation



*“Being connected to
the rhythms of the earth”*

Monday

Risk-taking

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you... In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.

John 14:16-17,19-20

In John's gospel, Jesus says the relationship of 'three persons in one' can apply to us, because God will send the Holy Spirit to dwell in us. Theologian John of Damascus (675-750 AD) was likely the first to describe this relationship as *perichoresis*, a word derived from two Greek words meaning moving or dancing around. For John, *perichoresis* meant that God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are interpenetrating and interdwelling; each separate from the other, yet each completely abiding in the other. As our church's Committee on Church Doctrine wrote (*The Acts and Proceedings*, 2001, page 259), *perichoresis* is a "dynamic and relational" view of God's way of being that many theologians have embraced over the centuries. C. S. Lewis suggested that "the whole dance of this three-person life is to be played out in each one of us" (*Mere Theology: A Guide to the Thoughts of C.S. Lewis* by Will Vaus. Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2004).

The dance metaphor may also help us better understand Sabbath-living. To dance with a partner there is first an invitation, then some steps become a flow of movement around a dance floor. There is a leader and a follower, who together seek to create harmonized movements, to enhance each other's efforts, and to appear unified. In Sabbath-living the Creator invites humankind to stop and join the *perichoresis* — the dance that draws us together into God, harmonizing relationships, glorifying the Creator and the creation. Risk and discomfort may be part of accepting. Some people may refuse; others may accept, but will find it difficult to follow; and others will embrace it wholeheartedly because this is the way to abundant living.

Through Jesus, God invites us again to dance or, as the "Simple Gifts" lyrics say, "to turn... 'til by turning, turning we come round right."

Action/Prayer

Think of times when you tried to respond to God's call. Why is it risky and uncomfortable to follow? List some of the barriers and challenges. Circle one or two that you would like to focus on. Stop for a quiet moment to pray to God for courage and strength to accept the invitation to dance, to have the Holy Spirit fill you and to move around, following Jesus' footsteps.

Tuesday

Dancing with creation

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now.

Romans 8:19-22

In Romans, Paul speaks of creation waiting for the revelation of “the children of God.” He describes a creation that wants to be freed from its subjection. Our role in dancing around with the Creator seems to involve us as well in a relationship *with* creation.

While Jesus did not directly address the issue of caring for the environment, he did frequently evoke images of farmers and shepherds lovingly tending their fields and animals. He lived close to the elements in his cross-country travels by foot and boat, seeking peace and solace on hillsides, on or by the water, and in gardens. It is difficult to imagine that the people of the new covenant are called to devastate creation. Yet that is what humans are doing. To paraphrase Catholic priest and eco-theologian, Thomas Berry, “The glory of the human has become the desolation of the Earth. The desolation of the Earth is becoming the destiny of the human” (*The Dream of the Earth* by Thomas Berry. San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club Books, 1988).

Surely creation, as a revelation of the Creator and as our context for living, must be renewed along with our renewal. As Paul says, creation awaits a final release from decay, to be resurrected along with us and made new. This calls for a radical shift in our attitude and relationship to the environment. Through an intimate relationship with creation we can glorify the Creator. Are we ready to accept the invitation to join the dance with creation?

Action/Prayer

Stop to consider your relationship with, and your attitude toward, creation. When given opportunity to be in direct contact with the natural world, what is your approach to it (e.g. the land, water sources, vegetation, wildlife)? How do the goods and services you use and buy (e.g. utilities, transportation, food, clothing) demonstrate your regard for creation? Pray about one area of your life that you would like to change so that you can be a blessing to creation.

Wednesday

Disobedience

And to the man he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

Genesis 3:17-19

In the Genesis story, Adam and Eve accepted God’s invitation to life in the Garden of Eden, but then chose to disobey. They ate the fruit they were told to leave alone. Because of their actions, they were separated from God and from the Garden; relationships between parts of creation broke down. Humans were cast into utter dependence upon working the land for food and well-being. Sabbath-living became a greater challenge.

The story reminds us that, from the beginning of time, humans have been poor dance partners with the Creator and creation. The Old Testament frequently speaks about being in right relationship with the land. This special relationship was rarely articulated as a priority in the Western world of the 19th and 20th centuries. Humans were often hostile and exploitive in their behaviour toward the land and other parts of the natural environment, often showing little sense of stewardship. The rich and powerful got richer and more powerful, exploiting workers and the environment to produce more wealth and power for themselves.

Yet the covenant with Israel, with its promise of abundance when in right relationship with God, remains a promise for us in the new covenant. A Sabbath lifestyle is one characterized by rest and trust in God’s provisioning. Like our primordial parents in the Genesis story, we are free to hold on to control and to struggle constantly to meet our own needs — to do it our way. Or we can accept God’s invitation into holiness, to follow obediently the Sabbath way of life. Just as God provided a garden overflowing with everything good, so today we are invited to trust in the God of abundance.

Action/Prayer

Consider how you approach your daily life. Do you usually labour restfully as a joyous offering to God, or do you labour in a frantic attempt to get enough to meet your needs? No matter what our work or income, we are called to accept God’s invitation to Sabbath-living, and to follow, believing in the possibility of abundance. Consider people you have known or known about who are faithful followers, no matter what the circumstances. Record their names in your notebook. Stop for a moment of prayer, thanking God for these people’s inspiring example.

Thursday

Provisions

Week 2

Sabbath and Invitation

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?...But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

Matthew 6:25,33

Anxiety attaches itself to us very readily. Our culture says, “Whatever you have, it will never be enough.” Through the media we hear that we should not be satisfied or content with what we have. We hear that we should strive, work, aim to have more, more than we have, more than our neighbours have, more than we really need.

Jesus reminds us of God’s invitation to “strive first for the kingdom” and not for consumer goods. God promises to provide for our needs. We are not to worry about having enough for the future since God knows our needs and does what is necessary to fulfill them. How many of us really live this way?

Our economy is based on growth. Corporations and their shareholders want a continual increase in profits; increased profits require an increase in products and services; increased supply must correspond to an increased consumer demand for the products and services. Our time and energy are spent earning and spending money and filling our homes and our lives with commodities. Products are redesigned or new products are developed and we discard the old version to get the new. We are distracted by the objects piling up around us, and our landfill sites overflow.

God’s people are invited to leave the frenzy of consumption. God wants us to learn how to live in rest. God the Creator invites us into a dance where we can learn to move around in harmony with God and all of creation.

Action/Prayer

Consider God’s provisions in your life. Remember how God has provided for your needs in the past. Stop for a moment of prayer. Ask God for help to let go of anxieties about the future. Seek guidance about how you can celebrate the abundance and goodness of creation with a lifestyle focusing *less* on acquiring and focusing *more* on accepting God’s invitation to Sabbath-living.

Friday

Kairos time

Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe the good news."

Mark 1:14b-15

*Bob Flowerdew, a British gardener, can tell you how to avoid all sorts of "required" garden tasks (*No Work Garden: Getting the Most Out of Your Garden for the Least Amount of Work* by Bob Flowerdew. San Diego, CA: Laurel Glen Publishing, 2003). Another gardener with a no-stress approach is Eliot Coleman. Coleman gardens all year round in Maine, using simple cold frames (plastic or glass in a wood frame placed over the plants to protect them). In January he enjoys fresh greens from the garden and supplies organic salad greens to restaurants in the area. He paces the work of growing food over four seasons — never hurried, but enjoyed in a restful way. Both these men have learned something important: by being connected to the rhythms of the earth — its seasons and years of growth — they have figured out how to slow down and enjoy their work.*

Our economy is run by *chronos* time — the time of the clock, the moment-by-moment time that keeps moving on. Chronos was a Greek deity who devoured his own children; he was driven by his wants and never satisfied. During the development of industry, much was done to increase people's efficiency at work, to pack more labour into less time. For many people, their labour is overseen and managed by the clock; chronos time.

The time Jesus spoke of is *kairos* time — a decisive point in time. Pastor and writer Mark Buchanan calls this the time of gift, seasons and opportunity (*The Rest of God, Restoring Your Soul by Restoring Sabbath* by Mark Buchanan. Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 2006). It is a time ripe with possibilities, to be approached with deliberation and care. To live kairos time is to choose rest and to trust in God's provisioning and care. Kairos time is Sabbath time. To return to kairos time is to step again into creation in the way we were meant to be, in the way that relates us rightly to God, others and the environment.

We can be freed from chronos time. Maybe we can't all become fulltime gardeners, but all of us can accept the invitation to live fulltime "believing the good news." Now is the kairos moment. Shall we accept the invitation to the Sabbath way of life?

Action/Prayer

We are a generation of clock-watchers, list-makers, agenda-keepers. How does chronos time rule your life? Stop for a moment of prayer. Pray about one thing you would like help doing differently this week so that you can step into kairos time. Record what you would like to do by completing this phrase:

"This week I want to take time to ..."

Saturday

Dehumanization

I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment... Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother — especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

Philemon 1:10,15-16

Slavery was a fact of life in both the Old and New Testaments. The difference between a slave and a free person was not the degree of liberty, but the degree of humanity. A slave, technically and legally, was less than human and, therefore, was not deserving of human consideration. Paul shatters this assumption in his letter to Philemon. Slave Onesimus is to become a full human being, a family member. Paul asks that Onesimus be treated like a “beloved brother.”

Despite worldwide support for human rights, many people in the 21st century still experience a sort of slavery. The International Monetary Fund has negotiated structural adjustment programs with the governments of many developing countries by means of debt repayment schedules. In order to meet these requirements, governments in developing countries focus their economies on producing and harvesting food for export to rich countries rather than expanding food production and essential services for their own people. The consumerism and materialism of the world’s wealthy determine the priorities and the production schedules of others. This process enslaves others for our benefit and dehumanizes them.

Refusing Sabbath rest for ourselves means that we inevitably refuse it to others. And in turn it is refused to creation. Our Southern brothers and sisters who labour to grow food and make commodities for export cannot allow proper rest for the land, water and air without risking their livelihood. So bush meat is slaughtered and species eliminated; trees are cut down for fuel and exposed land is eroded by mudslides; fields are used over and over, and soils are degraded. All humankind and all of creation become enslaved, unable to dance.

By changing our lifestyle we can, with integrity, invite others to experience full humanity and to enjoy God!

Action/Prayer

Think of times when you or your friends and family have spoken about feeling trapped, or caught in a “rat race,” or being “burned out.” How does the stressful behaviour of one family member or one colleague have a domino effect? Stop for a moment to ask God for forgiveness and guidance to live in a way that restores you, your loved ones, all people and all creation. Think of people who have made a positive difference in your community or globally, and thank God for their example. (Or read story #2 on page 63.)

Second Sunday in Lent

Trust

Pray, asking to *experience* the Spirit of God in this time and place.

But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; my soul is like the weaned child that is with me.

Psalm 131:2

If a child never learns to trust adults, that child will find it almost impossible to feel safe and secure; as a result it will have difficulty satisfying other basic needs, like the need for love and belonging. Trust, or the lack of trust, often becomes an issue in adult relationships. So, too, in our relationship with God. If we cannot trust God, then this mistrust will be acted out in many ways — in our relationships and in our approach to work and rest.

When we don't trust God to provide for us, we try to take control. Sometimes we decide that God needs our help fulfilling promises. Ben Franklin is credited with coining the phrase, "God helps those who help themselves." Many of us live that kind of life: we join self-help groups; we're proud of what we achieve for ourselves; we judge the homeless beggars as getting what they deserve.

But a life emphasizing our power and control is not according to God's way. No matter how weak or strong, we are invited to trust completely God's promise to provide. Trust in the Creator is the way to a Sabbath lifestyle that will free us. Then we will be able to accept the invitation and join the dance in right relationship with all creation.

1. What is the role of trust in God in your life? How do you feel about the tension between trusting God and taking control?
2. Recall some insights from this past week's reflections on the themes of risk-taking, joining with creation, disobedience, God's provisions, kairos time, dehumanization and trust. Who can you talk to about these?
3. How does the metaphor of dance — with the concepts of invitation, partnership, leading and following — help you understand Sabbath-living? What might be your first step in dancing with creation? What issues might you raise at a church meeting? At a neighbourhood gathering?

Action/Prayer

List places and situations to pray about. Refer specifically to this list as you pray

- asking for forgiveness on behalf of all people
- expressing thanksgiving for the knowledge and abilities we have
- celebrating the places and times when our knowledge and abilities have benefitted creation
- seeking God's guidance to address concerns.

Rejoice in the hope of resurrection. Read or sing "Simple Gifts" (see page 62).

Week 3

Sabbath and Economics



*“Abundance does not require
constant gathering”*

Monday

Theology of ecology

[Moses said,] “Six days you shall gather it [manna]; but on the seventh day, which is the sabbath, there will be none.” On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, and they found none. The Lord said to Moses, “How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and instructions? See! The Lord has given you the sabbath, therefore on the sixth day he gives you food for two days; each of you stay where you are; do not leave your place on the seventh day.”

Exodus 16: 26-30

The Israelites following Moses were anxious and unsure in their faith. God had provided sufficient food for them each day, but they were instructed not to gather manna on the Sabbath. Yet, some of them vainly, and unnecessarily, tried. Are we so different from the Israelites? What if tomorrow the manna does not come? Entirely dependent upon the earth and its atmosphere for our well-being, we believe that our needs will be met only by our constant efforts. Humans have, over centuries and without ceasing, gathered and taken and altered the natural world. The daily news reminds us of the resulting environmental impacts.

Whether we speak of the theology of ecology, environmental theology or a theology of creation, these phrases share a similar meaning and occupy a special place in 21st century Christianity. Theology of the ecology focuses on the honouring and caring for creation as being intrinsic to humankind's relationship to God as Creator and sustainer of creation. Theology of the ecology is consistent with Sabbath economics.

The words *ecology* and *economy* have the same Greek root — *oikos* — meaning *household*. When first used in the 19th century, ecology referred to the natural world that “houses” human life. The word *economy* originally referred to the management of a person's household. Used together, the economy of the ecology refers to the human management of the natural world — activities like planning for resource production, storage, and usage and distribution among members of that household. In economics, wealth is maintained, not by degrading or exhausting assets, but by protecting and enhancing them so that they will contribute to household wealth for a long time. Doesn't this sound a lot like stewardship of creation?

Action/Prayer

Reflect on your daily living. Where does your life reflect a theology of ecology? What actions could you take to live more faithfully as a steward of creation? Note these ideas and post them as reminders in a prominent place. Stop for a moment and focus on God's creative powers. Then pray, “God help your people to honour and care for creation.”

Tuesday

Biblical economics

This shall be a statute to you forever: In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall deny yourselves, and shall do no work, neither the citizen nor the alien who resides among you... It is a sabbath of complete rest to you, and you shall deny yourselves; it is a statute forever... Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: When you enter the land that I am giving you, the land shall observe a sabbath for the Lord. Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather in their yield; but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of complete rest for the land, a sabbath for the Lord: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard... You shall count off seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the period of seven weeks of years gives forty-nine years... And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants..

Leviticus 16:29,31; 25:2-4,8,10a

The biblical meaning of Sabbath extends beyond a weekly day of rest. In the detailed instructions God gave to Moses, Sabbath was commanded to be a way of living — the seventh day, a day in the seventh month, the seventh year, the year of Jubilee following “seven times seven years.” Days and years were to be set aside to observe Sabbath rest.

As the Israelites learned in the wilderness, Sabbath-living requires faith that God will provide abundantly for everyone as needed. No longer does humankind need to manage out of a fear of scarcity or unequal opportunity. God wants everyone to have their share. No longer does humankind need to work itself and creation exhaustively. Instead we have an alternative way to manage.

Abundance. Just sharing. Restraint. These are the elements of Sabbath economics that we will reflect on in the coming days. Whether Sabbath as a way of life seems practical or impractical, according to the Bible, God commands that we adopt it and that we manage our lives and our world, trusting in the goodness of the Creator and the creation. How else can God teach us that God’s provision is sufficient for us?

Action/Prayer

Stop for a moment to focus on the goodness of the Creator and the creation. Then consider the implications of following Sabbath economics. Maybe you or your community are already experiencing or implementing them. (For an example read story #3 on page 63.) How does Sabbath economics feel? What does it look like with respect to human and environmental relationships? What part of your life could be changed to fit a Sabbath economic model? Pray for God’s guidance in this area.

Wednesday

Abundance

And [Jesus] said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, 'What shall I do for I have no place to store my crops?' Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample good things laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry."'" But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

Luke 12:15-21

When someone in the crowd asks Jesus to tell his brother to divide the family inheritance with him, Jesus tells the Parable of the Rich Fool. The rich man tears down his barns and erects new and bigger ones for his abundant supply of grain and goods. When people acquire an abundance of anything, they must spend time and money sorting and counting, storing and maintaining, and protecting it. Their treasure, rather than God, becomes closest to their heart (Matthew 6:19-21). Perhaps this is why the Bible often connects greed with idolatry.

Few people will deny that many of us live in an affluent society and that our lives have ample material goods. More and more we insist on owning rather than sharing and borrowing. Our behaviour may make economic sense for an individual or family, but is it consistent with our mandate to manage the resources of this planet, to be responsible stewards of creation? And what are we doing with our spiritual lives when the responsibility of ownership of such abundance requires that we divert more and more of ourselves to its care? Sabbath economics are based on God's promise of abundance for all creation — an abundance that does not require constant gathering. Sabbath-living requires that people put their faith in God, becoming "rich toward God" rather than rich in material treasures.

Action/Prayer

Walk through your house and outdoor space, looking for possessions that indicate how you use your time and money (e.g. appliances, garden and recreational equipment, hobby materials). When you engage in activities with these possessions, what are the implications for the environment? For your relationship with God? Stop and offer a prayer of thanksgiving for the abundance of creation. Ask the Creator to guide you to put more of your heart into creation's stewardship.

Thursday

Sharing

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.

Matthew 25:34-36

The ways of the kingdom seem consistent with Sabbath-living. Sabbath economics are about *sharing* rather than hoarding; *giving* rather than taking. Jesus ministered to the poor, the sick, the oppressed, the people on the margins of society. He not only shared food and drink, but also his time and attention. He gave of himself as he took time to bless a child, to listen to a woman who was advocating for her daughter, to heal blind men by the roadside. Jesus lived as though there was always enough food for one more at the table, enough time for one more question, enough of himself to heal one more person.

The 21st century global economic system stands in stark contrast. It is a system that enriches a few and impoverishes many; it functions on the assumption of scarcity rather than on abundance. It fosters behaviour of competition and selfishness rather than cooperation and sharing. People get caught up in consuming lifestyles, fueled by a fear that there may not be enough resources for everyone, particularly in a national emergency. We focus on our needs and wants today, often oblivious to the impact we have on others and our environment.

What are we doing to creation with our great demand for the manufacture of so many goods only to discard them a few years later, sending them to landfill sites? Good stewardship does what First Nations peoples thought to do when making decisions, that is, thinking forward by seven generations of consequences, effects and outcomes and choosing the best for the long-term future. In this approach, sharing not only crosses physical distances and boundaries, but also crosses the boundaries of time. The hope is that today's decisions will be in the best interests of tomorrow's generations.

Action/Prayer

We do not like to think of ourselves as greedy or as fearful. Take a moment to reflect on your consumer habits — the food you buy, the clothes you wear, the furnishings in your home. Open cupboards and closets and read labels. Name some wants (i.e. not needs) in your life and note them. Pray, asking God to help you recognize what is driving your lifestyle so you might be free of society's pressure. Seek to experience the freedom of living in right relationship with the Creator and creation — or as the "Simple Gift" lyrics say, so that "we find ourselves in the place just right...in the valley of love and delight."

Friday

Economic justice

For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield; but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the wild animals may eat. You shall do the same with your vineyard, and with your olive orchard. Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest, so that your ox and your donkey may have relief, and your homeborn slave and the resident alien may be refreshed.

Exodus 23:10-12

According to the laws God handed down to Moses, Sabbath requires humans to cease all activities. For the Israelites, Sabbath rest had many consequences: the land was left fallow, domesticated animals had “relief,” their slaves — both home and foreign-born — were “refreshed.” Household management was turned topsy-turvy. Even parts of creation that normally didn’t concern the Israelites — the poor and the wild animals — benefitted from Sabbath rest. Economic justice became a reality.

Most people feel far removed from the land and natural elements. Yet, we want farmers and the land and waters to provide us with the nourishment we need for healthy lives. And most of us do make daily decisions about land use. For example, we want access to yards, gardens or parks within our urbanized communities. Such spaces provide recreation and esthetic beauty. They even add monetary value to our properties. Yet many outdoor spaces are designed so that wild animals and plants are unwelcome. There is nothing left for them to glean in the pristine garden or lawn. Rather than achieving a healthy eco-system, we often landscape to have minimal maintenance even if this means maximum inputs of chemicals, water and energy; the result is that we replace natural habitats with sterile environments.

The land, the air, the lakes and seas, and all sorts of living animals and organisms work for us constantly. They provide us with all the materials and the processing for everything we need and want. Creation serves us, but in doing so it gets overused, worn out and damaged. Sabbath economics calls for human *self-restraint*. By commanding humans to observe the Sabbath, God provides the means for all creation to rest, have relief and be refreshed.

Action/Prayer

When have you exercised self-restraint by *not* buying, eating, or doing something? How did your act of self-restraint affect others? Unjust treatment of the earth is frequently a result of people taking more than they need. Consider acts of self-restraint that you could take in at least one aspect of your life. Record what you resolve to do by completing this sentence: “I pledge to begin practicing Sabbath economics by ...” Then stop and ask God the Creator to help you.

Saturday

Social justice

Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work — you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns.

For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

Exodus 20:8-11

The fourth commandment is one of the wordiest. It clearly describes Sabbath as a sacred time. It places us in relationship with God and in renewed relationships with the other people in our lives. Sabbath-living not only benefits us, but it also benefits everyone who works for us.

In the 21st century, we do not live in isolation; many people and things sustain our lifestyle. For example, there are people who make our clothes, household products, food, appliances and cars; there are people who work to provide entertainment and recreational experiences for us; there are people who provide hospitality and transportation, health care and education.

In our global economic system, members of our society are great consumers. There is a tendency to value people for their utility, for what they produce for us. There are many impoverished people — often in far-away countries — who make the goods we consume. We may have heard that if we would only consume more, these people would be better off. But then we learn that not everyone is treated fairly, that some workers are more like slaves with little pay, poor working conditions, long hours and little rest. We wonder if we can even make a difference if we restrain ourselves from normal buying habits — if we support initiatives like fair trade, local organic farming, or ethical investment.

Sabbath-living breaks the control humans have over each other. In Sabbath-living wrong relationships are halted. Relationships between people, between people and creation, between other parts of creation, all become holy.

Action/Prayer

Stop for a quiet, prayerful time. Think about how you relate to all those people who work for you, one way or another. Try to identify them — those people you deal with directly; and those people you don't know and may never see, who labour to make your life more comfortable with goods and services. Ask God how you can extend Sabbath rest to others. Record words or symbols to remind you of the people and places you have identified. Resolve to speak with a loved one or friend about Sabbath and the justice it brings to people worldwide.

Third Sunday in Lent

Unconventional economics

Pray, asking *to be surprised* by the Spirit of God
in this time and place.

Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Ephesians 5:15-17

Sabbath — and its emphasis on abundance, sharing and restraint — calls us to live differently. We are to live as wise people, not fooled by all the advertising and cultural cues around us. Paul wanted the Ephesians to recognize the folly of their culture's conventional wisdom, which could easily distract them from living God's way.

Sabbath life is about being deeply grateful. It is about recognizing that everything we have comes from God, the Great Giver. All is gift — even our very breath. From this recognition springs a desire to be generous with others, as God has been generous with us. The Israelites were told to remember that it was God who had brought them into the Promised Land. And when they remembered, they were to thank God and share with those around them. This attitude is radically counter-cultural. The focus is on the qualities of the Giver and not on human need. We are released from the fear of "not enough." We are freed; we can rest from being driven by work, consumption and money; we can exercise restraint so that others and the environment might prosper. Sabbath economics invites us to manage our creation household radically different. Are we ready to accept the challenge?

1. How do you understand the implications of Sabbath economics for your lifestyle in Canada in the 21st century?
2. Recall some insights from this past week's reflections on the themes of theology of ecology, biblical economics, economic and social justice, self-restraint, abundance and sharing. Who can you talk to about these?
3. In seeking a lifestyle of Sabbath economics, what would be your first steps? What issues might you raise at a church meeting? At a neighbourhood gathering?

Action/Prayer

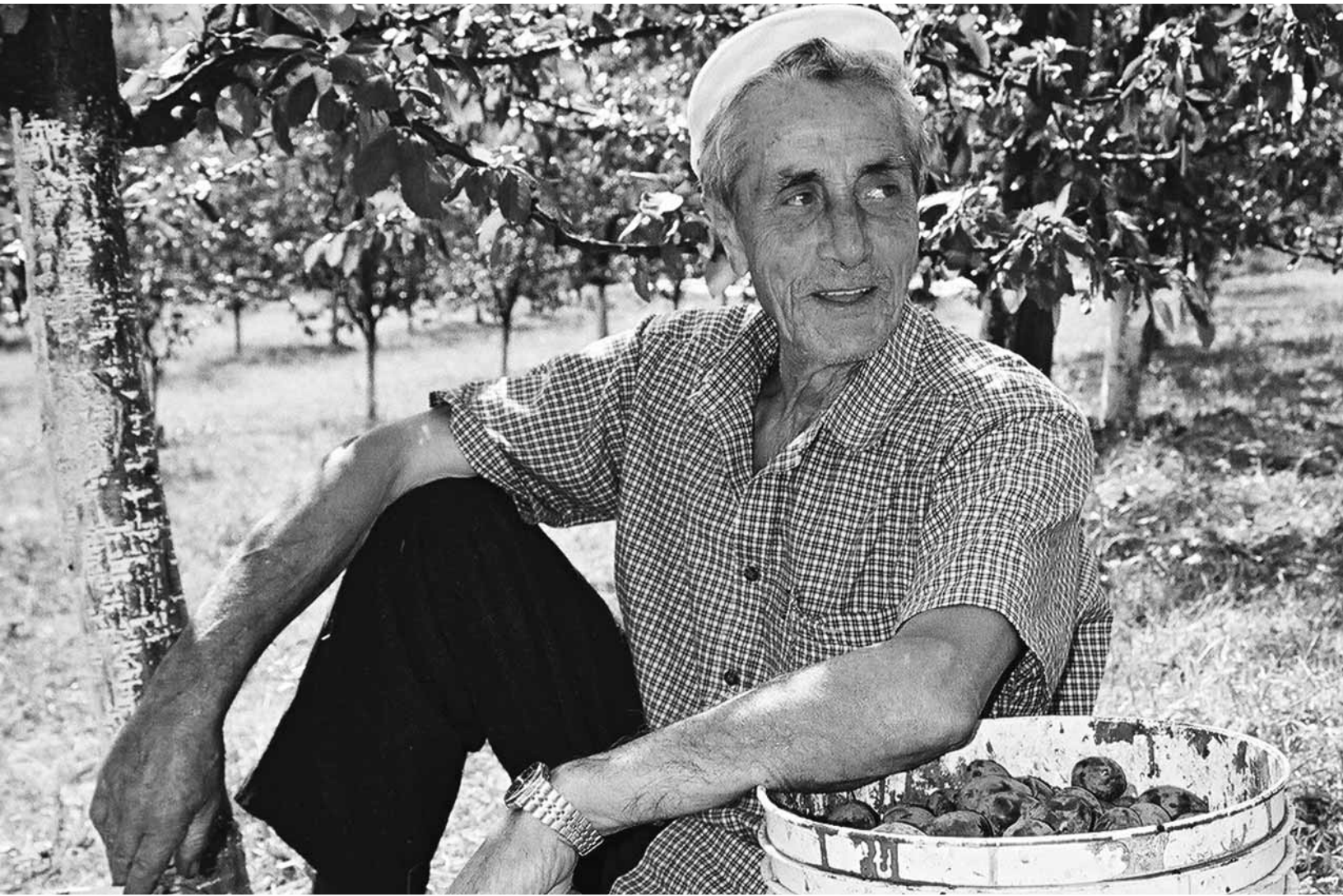
List places and situations to pray about. Refer specifically to this list as you pray

- asking for forgiveness on behalf of all people
- expressing thanksgiving for the knowledge and abilities we have
- celebrating the places and times when our knowledge and abilities have benefitted creation
- seeking God's guidance to address concerns.

Rejoice in the hope of resurrection. Read or sing "Lord of the Dance," verse one and the refrain (see page 62).

Week 4

Sabbath and Liberation



*“Know and find peace
in God’s faithful provisioning”*

Monday

Confinement

Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.

Deuteronomy 5:15

For the Hebrew people, Sabbath-keeping was also a way of remembering how God had liberated them from bondage in Egypt and had brought them through the wilderness to a new place — a land of abundance. But in the wilderness they had to learn the lesson of the manna. They had to learn that it was God, not manna, that sustained their lives. And they had to learn that the manna was given them “to humble you and test you and in the end to do you good” (Deuteronomy 8:16). Because they received the word of deliverance from God and understood that God had delivered them, the link between Sabbath-keeping and liberation remained strong.

Freedom for the Israelites began with 40 years of wandering in the wilderness — a place that we tend to associate with spaciousness. There was room to stretch out, move around and breathe deeply. These images contrast with our busyness when our personal space and time seem to shrink. We feel confined, without options. Each new encounter with another person, each new possession, holds the potential for being another burden, another reduction in our personal space and time. We may feel stressed. We may get cranky. We may have rage. We may be resentful of others who have the resources to enlarge their space — to hire help, to acquire more living or office area, or to take escape vacations.

We live in a society where we can pay for time management courses and hire the services of professional home and office organizers. But there is another alternative. We can stop and remember our relationship with the Creator and with creation. We can step out of enslavement and into the dance with God, moving around freely to live lives that praise and honour the work of creation.

Action/Prayer

What people do you know personally, or have you heard about, whose lives are overcrowded and bursting with a non-stop barrage of consumer goods and activity? Prayerfully reflect on when and where you have felt confined or overwhelmed. How does a lack of liberty affect you physically and emotionally? How does a lack of liberty affect your relationships with God, with others and with creation? Stop for a moment to pray, first naming those things that confine you from dancing around. Then ask God to liberate you from these and give you rest.

Tuesday

Self-interest

Then Jesus told his disciples, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

Matthew 16:24

*W*e want it all: wealth, security, love, comfort, power, prestige, eternal youth and happiness. Our society bombards us with messages about how to get ahead and how to get it all. If we will just put ourselves first, acquire competitive skills, indulge ourselves; if we will just put our career before everything else, our needs before our community’s needs, our needs for efficiency and speed before the environment’s needs... maybe then we will be satisfied.

In our high-tech lifestyle, everything seems possible. Proposals and reports can be submitted electronically seconds before deadlines. A final manuscript can be grammatically perfect, free of spelling errors. We can provide immediate feedback and we can receive immediate demands. We can do round-the-clock research, movie-viewing, investing and bill-paying; we can shop and communicate instantly worldwide. The technological way is exhilarating in its ease and addictive in the way it takes over our lives. Like a form of enslavement, we become tied to the technology and less available — to God, our environment, our community and our neighbours. Sometimes we are even less available to the people with whom we live.

In Jesus’ day, people wanted it all too. They believed that power and wealth went hand-in-hand and could be attained only if they put their own interests first. Many people did not understand Jesus when he talked about denying themselves worldly goods and ambitions. But Jesus understood that wealth and power separate humankind from God and creation. To follow Jesus and join the dance, we need to lay aside our false gods, remove ourselves from the rat race, and stop. We need to observe and praise creation’s goodness around us. We need to rest and trust in God. This is the Sabbath way of life. It liberates us and allows us to extend liberation to others and to creation. “Follow me,” Jesus said. Will you accept the invitation?

Action/Prayer

To deny oneself and take up a cross — that is, an instrument of death — is a scary proposition. Often it means challenging society’s values. Is there one thing, or two, that could reflect your faithful action in self-denial? In your notebook, write or draw words or symbols to represent them. Stop for a moment of prayer, asking God to help you re-order your life so that at least in some way you can take up this cross and be free to experience the Sabbath way of life.

Wednesday

Doubts

They said to [Aaron], “Make us gods, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.”

Exodus 32:23

When the Hebrew people left Egypt they only knew how to be slaves. They had lived lives full of doubt and mistrust and had little faith in the unseen. They were accustomed to living in oppression, controlled by their overseers and, ultimately, the pharaoh. But the dramatic and visible acts performed by Moses in bringing them to freedom had impressed them. Thereafter they had relied on him, perhaps not quite understanding how God was acting and speaking through him. Although the former slaves were now free, waiting alone without either oppressor or liberator was a new, uncomfortable experience. When they saw Moses disappear up the mountainside and not return, it wasn't long before they doubted him and all that he had told them. Feeling abandoned and longing for a sense of security, they reverted to pagan ways.

Like the Hebrew people, we want to know who is in control — and often we want that controller to be us or someone appointed by us! We've learned to be doubtful of anything we can't examine or test out for ourselves. Perhaps that is how we manage to set aside the ominous predictions about global warming and environmental disaster. When we take sideway glances in our busy lives, the natural world around us still seems alright. Those who speak doom and gloom, like Al Gore in the movie, *An Inconvenient Truth*, are doubted or ignored.

However, many people living in the Southern hemisphere are already facing the reality of environmental degradation on a daily basis. They are struggling for survival because of crop failure, insufficient wood fuel and water shortages due to changes in their environment. They have little choice but to live moment-by-moment, day-by-day, trusting that God will provide. They experience daily Sabbath-living.

Our Southern brothers and sisters challenge us to replace the doubts in our lives with steps toward Sabbath-living. If we join the dance now, caring for creation and giving it necessary rest, creation will be liberated.

Action/Prayer

Consider how important it is for you to feel in control. Reflect on how you feel when you hear news stories about extinct species, contaminated land or water, or impending environmental collapse. How do these feelings affect your relationships with God, other people and creation? Stop for a moment of prayer and take your doubts to God.

Thursday

Fears

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ...And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.

Matthew 6:25-26, 28-29

Sabbath-living is life without worry about what will happen tomorrow. Jesus spoke about such worry to his disciples who, in following Jesus, had embarked on a risky path with only the clothes on their back. Jesus' words remind us that a life grounded in faith in God is a life confident in God's love and provision. Like the Israelites who received manna in the desert, we can trust God's ample provision. We have no need to fear.

These days we hear a lot about "sustainability." Environmentalists say that our current lifestyle is not sustainable because our lifestyle depends upon large amounts of water and fossil fuel energy. We also use land carelessly and create excessive waste. It is a lifestyle that is in many respects unhealthy for the earth, land, water, air, and subsequently, for our own bodies. Much of the discussion about sustainability promotes fear — fear of a lack of resources, fear of the results of excessive consumerism. Doesn't this sort of information give us every reason to worry?

Sabbath-living provides an alternative lifestyle. In Sabbath-living, we recognize and give thanks for God's abundance in creation; we are free to take only what we need and to ensure that others have similar access. In Sabbath-living, people let go of their worries and fears about having enough or about anyone taking more than they need; people know, and find peace, in God's faithful provisioning. Sabbath-living is built on faith, faith that God's reign will bring humankind and creation into partnership, in a dance that will set everything right.

Action/Prayer

What parts of your life are based on worries and fears? What parts are based on faith in God's abundance? Stop for a moment to pray: name a family member, friend or colleague whose state of worry troubles you; name one creature or species that is endangered; name one natural resource that is at risk. Then ask God to bring peace and freedom to these parts of creation.

Friday

Global village

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.

Isaiah 1:16-17

The Old Testament prophets often begged the people to consider the impact of their lives on others, and to refocus on living God's way and serving God's people. Similarly, our lives connect with the lives of others, many of whom we will never see as they live in other parts of the world. Our consumer choices affect the lives of those on the bottom rungs of the economic production chain. For example, when we buy a pair of running shoes, we may make our final choice based on getting the best value for the lowest cost. We may not think about the factory workers who were inadequately paid so that the shoes could be sold at that price.

Almost 50 years ago, writer Karl Polanyi noted that a capitalistic economy, particularly a global one, has terrible moral implications. Gone is the ability for an individual to simply go before God and confess individual sin. Now we live in a web of connections with other people. We now must deal with our exploitation of people and land in a new way, a corporate way, a community way (*The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* by Karl Polanyi. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1957). Ironically, globalization affirms that we are our brother's and sister's keeper.

The prophet Isaiah reminds us that the rich have a responsibility for the welfare of disadvantaged people. What a responsibility that is in the global village! The challenges are immense. Even with awareness, we wonder whether we can really make a difference in the small choices we make — if, for example, we buy fairly traded coffee or products manufactured under just working conditions. But is the inability to see the path forward sufficient reason to reject Isaiah's urgings? To reject the repeated biblical calls to Sabbath-living is to be disobedient. Sabbath-living is about God's creative goodness and abundance for all, not about getting the best deal for ourselves. In choosing a Sabbath lifestyle there is rest and freedom, compassion and care, generosity and sharing, not just for ourselves but for all of creation.

Action/Prayer

Consider your spending habits. What factors determine the model or brand that you buy (e.g. country where grown or manufactured, convenience, price, environmental rating)? Think about one global issue that particularly concerns you and record a word or symbol for it in your notebook. Then stop for a moment of prayer, asking God to help you take one action toward bringing about justice for this part of creation.

Saturday

Global environment

For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land where you may eat bread without scarcity, where you lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron and from whose hills you may mine copper. You shall eat your fill and bless the Lord your God for the good land that he has given you. Take care that you do not forget the Lord your God, by failing to keep his commandments, his ordinances, and his statutes, which I am commanding you today.

Deuteronomy 8:7-11

In Deuteronomy, Moses vividly describes the natural environment that God is giving the Israelites. These words evoke images of beauty and abundance. The Israelites “will lack nothing.” And all of this is gift from God. However, they are also expected to live in God’s way. This includes observing the Sabbath tradition.

Not all cultures have the same attitudes toward the natural world. For example, with respect to land tenure laws and practices, many North American Aboriginal cultures have understood land as belonging to the Creator. Therefore, it is beyond the scope of human ownership. Most Aboriginal cultures value the earth, water and air as gifts to be managed collectively in response to God, the Creator of all things. In contrast, many cultures originating from Europe value private ownership and, therefore, have a history of trying to establish international land, water and air rights; there is little sense of humankind being entrusted with the gift of creation.

Current news headlines remind us that we have not given creation a rest. Just as our consumerism affects the lives of people in other parts of the world, it also has a detrimental effect on the environment worldwide. In Genesis 2, God commands humankind to look after creation — “to till it and keep it.” The management mandate from Genesis 1 does not give us the right to enslave the natural world, for that can lead to its exhaustion and death. This is in direct opposition to God’s plan which saw everything that had been made as “very good.” Perhaps the time has come for humans to remember and respond to God by keeping God’s “commandments . . . ordinances . . . and statutes.” Perhaps it’s time to give creation its Sabbath.

Action/Prayer

When do you feel connected or disconnected from the environment? Stop for a moment of prayer, asking God for forgiveness for failing to take responsibility for the world’s environment and for ignoring the implications of our consumer lifestyle. Seek God’s guidance to help you do one thing that will address an environmental issue that matters to you. (For examples, refer to the stories on pages 63-64).

Fourth Sunday in Lent

Jubilee

Pray, praising the Spirit of God in this time and place.

You shall count off seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the period of seven weeks of years gives forty-nine years... And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family. That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you: you shall not sow, or reap the aftergrowth, or harvest the unpruned vines. For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you: you shall eat only what the field itself produces.

Leviticus 25:8, 10-12

Jubilee. It's a word that makes us want to dance and shout with joy. In the biblical tradition, Jubilee is the Sabbath of Sabbaths, an observance of a whole year of Sabbath that happens every 50 years. At Jubilee, slaves are set free, debts are forgiven, wealth is equitably shared among all, and the land is given rest from its labour. What an economic and social revolution! While it is not known whether the Jubilee was ever implemented by the Hebrew people, it sets forth an amazing vision of justice for all. Even the land would experience a Sabbath rest.

Jubilee's call for right relations among God's people and with creation is a call that is repeated elsewhere in the Old Testament and also by Jesus. Jesus began his ministry saying he was fulfilling the scriptures to "bring good news to the poor... to proclaim release to the captives and...to let the oppressed go free" (Luke 4:18). The situations addressed by Jubilee continue today: debt, unjust working conditions, poverty, and the potential for environmental exhaustion. The question remains: How are we going to respond to the call to Jubilee in our time?

1. How do you understand the implications of Sabbath as liberating? Where in your life has God already given you freedom? Where in your life do you seek freedom?
2. Recall some insights from this past week's reflections on the themes of confinement, self-interest, doubts and fears, sustainable lifestyles, global living, and Jubilee. Who can you talk to about these?
3. If you are seeking a lifestyle with the liberation offered by Sabbath-living, what will be your first steps? What issues might you raise at a church meeting? At a neighbourhood gathering?

Action/Prayer

List places and situations to pray about. Refer specifically to this list as you pray

- asking for forgiveness on behalf of all people
- expressing thanksgiving for the knowledge and abilities we have
- celebrating the places and times when our knowledge and abilities have benefitted creation
- seeking God's guidance to address concerns.

Rejoice in the hope of resurrection. Read or sing "Lord of the Dance," verse two and the refrain (see page 62).

Week 5

Sabbath and Right Relations



*“We exist to praise, glorify and humbly
serve the Creator within creation”*

Monday

Discerning

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God — what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 12:1-2

Paul challenged the Roman Christians to live dramatically apart from the values of the society around them; he admonished them to live like Christ. Certainly Jesus lived differently. During the years of his ministry, he was homeless, a wanderer and a leader of people who had dropped out of the mainstream of society. Jesus often confronted the religious and political leaders. At times he disregarded the traditions and rules of his culture and faith. He called his followers to do the same if it meant living compassionately, living according to the good, acceptable and perfect will of God.

Over the centuries, and on occasion, the church and its people have followed this direction to live differently. Yes, the church has courageously challenged political leadership and advocated for the oppressed. However, other times the church has conformed to the world, valued its own position of wealth and power, sided with the ruling elite, aligned itself with the status quo, or simply turned a blind eye to the way the most vulnerable parts of creation are being treated.

In everyday life, we may criticize blatant and obvious moral failings. But we are reticent to question more systemic immorality like the industrialization of agricultural production, the design of automobile-loving cities, and government policies that poison the environment or disadvantage the poor. Is it possible that we need to take Sabbath time to “discern what is the will of God” and to realize that anything that goes counter to this will is sin?

Action/Prayer

Consider what Paul might say to us if he visited today. Walk around your home, inside and outside if possible, looking at the items that fill your spaces. What does your home say about the way you live your faith? In a tour of your home or by listening in to day-to-day conversations, what would a stranger understand as being important to you? How does the way you live (e.g. the things you decide to buy or not buy; the consideration you give or don't give to environmental impacts; the activities that fill your time as noted on your calendar and “To Do List”) reflect your relationship with God the Creator and the creation? Stop for a moment to pray to God, expressing your desire to learn God's will for your life. Repeat this whenever you can in the coming days. Discernment is a process that cannot be hurried.

Tuesday

Doing God's will

Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling: for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Do all things without murmuring and arguing, so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world.

Philippians 2:12-15

Paul's words to the Philippians are a reminder that each of us must discern God's will. Everyone — clergy and lay people, men and women, young and old, regardless of our individual differences — is called to serve God in all facets of life. How that is expressed often depends upon our context — where we live, the times we live in, and our individuality. Sometimes it has meant opposing slavery; sometimes it has meant demanding equal rights for women; sometimes it has meant lobbying for the homeless in our cities.

Today two parts of creation are experiencing profound brokenness — the natural world and impoverished people. In the past decade, various studies have called for global policies to ensure the restoration and well-being of the earth's environment and to ensure health and prosperity for all people. Destruction of the environment condemns whole countries to the most degrading poverty and threatens the health of future generations. We hear the debates about climate change and global warming; we know that the extinction of species is affecting the earth's biodiversity; we know that mudslides occur where poor people have needed to remove the trees for firewood. Yet, how much of our everyday behaviour — whether at work or school or home or church — responds to such needs? In this 21st century context, can we be faithful to God if we live our lives ignoring these two issues?

In a Sabbath lifestyle, we focus on doing the will of the Creator. Because of God's work within us, we are able to do far more than we imagine. We rest from actions that threaten the goodness of creation; and we take actions that will restore relationships between the Creator, humankind and creation.

Action/Prayer

Stop for a moment in quiet prayer. If you have had a time in your life when you felt sure of God's will for you, think about the related experiences. What were the challenges and the rewards? If you haven't had such an experience, reflect on the times when you have most longed to know God's will. Invite God to direct your life; prepare to let God take the lead as you join the Sabbath dance to care for creation.

Wednesday

Being the light

You are the light of the world... No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

Matthew 5:14a,15-16

How are we the light of the world? In the 1960s musical *Godspell*, Stephen Schwartz' lyrics say, "You got to stay bright to be the light of the world." But how do we stay "bright" so we illuminate the world?

We go to church. We read the Bible. We pray and reflect. Certainly this is part of Sabbath-living. But these actions do not necessarily connect us with the world. What are the day-to-day things we do that identify us as the people of God? Didn't Jesus repeatedly direct his disciples, and the crowds that gathered, to live out the good news of the gospel, to be the medium for his central message of God's abundant, grace-filled love for the world?

The Gospel reminds us that the light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it. Our light, no matter how inconsequential, cannot be snuffed out by darkness. Ultimately, our light is to shine brightly so that glory may be given to the Creator — that all will celebrate and participate in the never-ending dance of joy in the new heaven and the new earth.

In Sabbath-living, God seeks renewal for the whole creation. The time for this is now. Waiting any longer invites disaster. We need to participate now by letting go of our hesitancy, our timidity, and all those things that divert our energies and mask our faith. If we let God's love shine through us, then we will "stay bright." Then the world will see the reality of God's reign on earth.

Action/Prayer

Stop for a moment in quiet prayer. Think about the last time you had a conversation with someone who didn't know you or anything about you. Perhaps it was a store clerk, someone in a doctor's office, a business colleague or a school teacher. From your encounter, what do you think the person learned from you about God's abundant and grace-filled love for them? Ask God to guide your living so that it may always be a bright, unconcealed reflection of God's love for all creation.

Thursday

Other people

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

Paul's words to the Corinthians are a reminder of the challenge of living and loving in God's way. We might engage in many activities that we consider necessary and virtuous; we may do all sorts of things for all sorts of good causes; but if we do them without love, then we are "nothing." If we do not act through loving relationships, then we will be unable to reap the rewards of loving relationships. *Doing* the "right" thing is not enough. *How* we do it is what counts. It seems that when it comes to living and loving God's way, the end does not justify the means.

God the Creator intended humankind to live in loving relationships. As we go through life, we realize the challenges and complexities of this. Sometimes we wish we didn't have to deal with other people — to listen, to negotiate, to interact with them. Living and loving God's way requires a close relationship with God, a relationship grounded and nurtured by time spent with God. Only then can we truly love God with our whole being, and our neighbour as ourself.

In Sabbath-living, we give the time and energy to rest and renew ourselves and our relationships. We may have to learn to say 'no' to activities that sound great but are not what we are called to do at this point, or that we would be unable to do in a truly loving way. At the same time, we may find that we take on an activity that we would never have chosen for ourselves.

Sabbath-living can help us become more than a noisy instrument. It can help us learn the steps and follow the lead of the Lord of the Dance.

Action/Prayer

In your notebook, draw concentric circles. Working from the centre, write in the names of those you love, beginning with those with whom you have the closest relationships. A family member might be in the inner circle; a charity you support might be in the outermost. Follow your way in and out of the circles, praying about each relationship in turn. Ask for God's guidance to act always in loving relationships with others.

Friday

Creation

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements — surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?

Job 38:4-7

Job, being righteous, asks God why he is suffering. The mystery of suffering drives most of us to question God at some point. Why are bad things happening? Why are they happening to us? Rather than giving Job an answer to these very important questions, God grants Job a revelation of God as Creator. Only God has been able to create the cosmos with its myriad of different beings and ways of life. Overwhelmed by this encounter, Job humbles himself before such a magnificent Creator (Job 42:1-6). This immediately restores his relationship with the Creator and by extension with all of creation.

In light of the environmental crises of the past 50 years, many innocent people are suffering through drought, loss of traditional livelihood and devastation of the land. At the same time, the land, air and sea are suffering because of the human footprint in this world. Many people have tried to understand why humans and nature relate so badly to one another. Social ecologist Murray Bookchin believed that human domination of one another leads to domination of nature, and that social hierarchies and the authoritarian relationships between people cause both social and ecological problems. Ecological philosopher Paul Shepard believed that the relationship between humans and nature became upset with the rise of agriculture and a hunting-gathering lifestyle. As a result, humans became distant from nature and ultimately arrogant and controlling toward it.

We must strive for a new relationship between humans and nature that recognizes the interrelatedness of all life. While the biblical view indicates a unique status for humans, created in the image of God, as stewards we have a special responsibility to care for creation. This is not simply a nice ideal, but an imperative if this earthly vessel that is our home is to be sustained. It is time we develop a respectful sense of awe for the creation that God calls “good.”

Like Job, when we acknowledge the power of the Creator, we are humbled and can come into right relationship with creation. Sabbath-keeping gives us the opportunity to set things right with creation, restoring our relationship so that it is mutually just and liberating.

Action/Prayer

Sit in the presence of nature — perhaps before some houseplants or with a pet at your side. If possible, go to a favourite outdoor spot. Use all your senses to benefit from nature’s qualities. Consider what you give to this aspect of nature and what you receive. Ponder the validity of nature’s existence apart from humans. (Or read story #4 page 64). Stop for a moment in quiet prayer, thanking God for the natural environment that enriches your life.

Saturday

The Creator

You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.

Revelation 4:11

Astronomy asserts that we live in an immense and expanding universe. Over and over again this startling creation demonstrates the Creator's power and glory, calling us to humility, worship and obedience. The writer of Revelation recognizes this. Yet, over the centuries people have not made stewardship of creation a priority. Is it possible that we have honoured God as Redeemer, and neglected honouring God as Creator?

We have not cared for creation; rather we have exploited and degraded it. We need to live rightly with nature because to do otherwise is to endanger the earth *and ourselves*. Since the earth is our context for living, to destroy it is to sentence ourselves to death. While we endorse the absolute necessity of living rightly with nature, this argument is based on self-interest alone. Such attitudes suggest that the natural environment exists solely to serve us.

The Judeo-Christian tradition, with its belief in Sabbath and Jubilee, seeks to encourage careful tending of the environment, not merely because of human need but, more significantly, out of respect and love for the good works of God the Creator.

We exist to praise, glorify and humbly serve the Creator within creation. A right relationship with the Creator establishes us in right relationship with everyone and everything else. We serve alongside of the creation which also brings glory to the Creator.

Action/Prayer

Reflect on how you relate to God as Creator. How does your relationship with the Creator affect your relationship with creation (e.g. an animal, a garden or park, the air, an empty lot, a river)? Stop for a moment of prayer, praising God for the marvelous detail and beauty of creation and asking for guidance in how best to honour God as Creator.

Fifth Sunday in Lent

Spirituality

Pray, *welcoming* the Spirit of God in this time and place.

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read... "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." ...Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Luke 4:16,18-19, 21

One Sabbath Jesus read Isaiah 61:1-2a in the synagogue. He shocked everyone by declaring that he was doing God's work as described in the Hebrew scripture — that God's Spirit was with him and working through him. In their shock, the people did not appreciate what Jesus was saying about God. How intimately God wants to live *with* us, even *in* us! What radical good news! The Hebrews traditionally spoke about the temple as being God's space (e.g. Psalm 84). But more than once in his ministry, Jesus suggested that something greater than the temple was present in his own person and that his followers could experience God in an interior way.

Sabbath-living allows God to fill us and re-create us in God's image. Today's passage reminds us that God's intentions for creation include liberation, restoration, justice and renewal. Re-created, and with God in us, our lives can be faithful expressions of God's intentions.

1. How do you understand the good news of Jesus' ministry? Where or when in your life have you had the most success in living this way? What are the greatest challenges for you?
2. Recall some insights from this past week's reflections on the themes of discernment, doing God's will, being "the light of the world," and being in right relationships with others, creation and the Creator. Who can you talk to about these?
3. What would be your first step to live in right relationship with the rest of creation? What issues might you raise at a church meeting? At a neighbourhood gathering?

Action/Prayer

List places and situations to pray about. Refer specifically to this list as you pray

- asking for forgiveness on behalf of all people
- expressing thanksgiving for the knowledge and abilities we have
- celebrating the places and times when our knowledge and abilities have benefitted creation
- seeking God's guidance to address concerns.

Rejoice in the hope of resurrection. Read or sing "Lord of the Dance," verse three and the refrain (see page 62).

Week 6

Sabbath and Change



*“Discover the mystery
of living in rest”*

Monday

Leisure

For thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.

Isaiah 30:15

We exist in a culture with a shortage of leisure time. Sometimes this is accidental but sometimes we have been manipulated into thinking we are too busy to live any differently.

Sometimes technological advances that are intended to increase leisure time contribute instead to a faster pace of living. For example, consider food and the changes in food preparation. After World War II, the producers of field rations had lots of leftover foods. So the producers decided that they would find a way to persuade American women to buy canned, frozen, powdered and dehydrated foods instead of investing time in cooking and preparing meals for their families. Over many years, advertising consistently told women they were too busy to cook and that prepared foods were the answer to the problem. Women's magazines published article after article on the modern woman's busy lifestyle. Busyness was created, as well as the demand for short-cuts in meal preparation.

At the same time there were polls and surveys that reported that women — even women working out of the home — enjoyed cooking best of all the household tasks. They took pride in producing good meals. However, gradually nothing mattered except the perception of busyness. Today we take processed food, and its offspring, fast food, for granted. And we know we are too busy to cook! (For more on this read *Something from the Oven: Reinventing Dinner in 1950s America* by Laura Shapiro. New York: Viking, 2004).

Busyness is not God's way. As part of the act of creation, God rested. Similarly, God offers rest to us today. Running around, frantic with stress, distracted, trying to get lots done — this is not God's way, it is the way of the world. When we make room in our lives for leisure time, we make time to enjoy God, one another and all creation.

Action/Prayer

Stop for a moment to sit by an open window or, if possible, outdoors. Enjoy breathing slowly and deeply, in and out, while you try to experience through all your senses the elements of nature around you. What do you feel, hear, smell, see? Close your eyes and rest quietly, enjoying a moment of leisure. Ask God to help you make the necessary changes so that you can adopt a Sabbath lifestyle.

Tuesday

Work

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

Matthew 11:28

For many people, work is a way of marking time — time to the next break, to the end of the day, to the weekend, to retirement. There may be good days and bad days, but on the whole many people in our industrialized economy “do” their time and wait for the release papers to be signed.

For some people, the burden of work is heavy and there is no rest. Many jobs must be done simply in order to pay the bills. The wages of some jobs are insufficient for people to live satisfying lives. Other people have difficult or joyless jobs. Yet others love their jobs. Some love them too much; their work takes so much of their time and energy they have little left for family members or other relationships.

An existence marked by drudgery contrasts with joyfully living a more abundant life. It is the latter that God wants for us. Sabbath-living means finding rest in what we do. When we respond to Jesus’ invitation, “Come all you who labour and are heavy laden, I will give you rest,” we discover the mystery of living in rest. In spite of the immense work and burden that Jesus was carrying, whether teaching or healing, he proclaimed himself to be a source of rest. For Brother Lawrence, a Carmelite lay brother, coming to Jesus teaches us that even peeling potatoes can be an act of praise and can be done in joyous rest (*The Practice of the Presence of God: The Best Rule of a Holy Life* by Brother Lawrence. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 2004). When we rest in Jesus, we experience the favour of the Lord our God upon our work.

Action/Prayer

Reflect on your attitude to work. Recall past and present jobs. Write or draw in your notebook some words or images that you associate with work. Wonder about what it would be like to experience Sabbath rest even as you do your work. Imagine how your life would change. Stop for a moment to pray to God for understanding and direction.

Wednesday

Choices

*“With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high?”
...He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*

Micah 6:6a,8

Many of us try to do some good works. We may give a few hours regularly to some sort of volunteer job or a worthy cause. But is that sufficient? Is that following in the steps of Jesus? Jesus taught his disciples to do the will of God and act in accordance with God’s rule of love and justice for all people.

In the context of a Sabbath lifestyle, there is no limit to engaging in actions and activities that promote right relationships with God, others and creation. Micah 6:8 defines goodness as doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with God. This is how we witness to the reality of God’s reign on earth — in our concrete, everyday lives. But how difficult it is to live this way full time!

How does our faith make a difference in the decisions we make? Most of us make day-to-day choices that are similar to the choices made by our neighbours and colleagues. We seek the same lifestyles and value the same goals; and if we’re like most people, we make few choices solely because they are in the best interest of others or the environment. What is our lifestyle communicating? How do we communicate God’s love? God invites us into Sabbath-living. If we accept, then we are choosing to live in a manner that expresses God’s love and justice for all creation. Is that a choice we are ready to make?

That choice will lead us closer to God and will help us discover the mystery of abundant living.

Action/Prayer

Think about the various choices you make in a day or a week. Reflect on how a stranger watching you might sum up your lifestyle. In what areas of your life is a Sabbath lifestyle most remote (perhaps evidenced by a lack of peace of mind, by loneliness, or by an alienation from nature)? Stop and pray, asking God for help making different choices — choices that might be the first steps of offering Sabbath to creation.

Thursday

Obedience

So then, a sabbath rest still remains for the people of God; for those who enter God's rest also cease from their labors as God did from his. Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one may fall through such disobedience as theirs. Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account.

Hebrews 4:9-13

The observation of the Sabbath was part of God's laws given to Moses. As the writer of the letter to the Hebrews urges, we must "make every effort" to obey the Sabbath way of living.

Sabbath-living was challenging for the Hebrews. And Sabbath-living is certainly challenging for us. It hardly seems practical or acceptable to "cease" our work. We need to earn money. We must acquire and care for our possessions. We have dependents to look after. We have agendas full of appointments. The details of our busy lives are endless.

However, the concept of Sabbath is meant to define *how* we do our living as much as *what* we live doing. The tradition of Sabbath calls us to embrace a way of life in which we can be holy, living according to God's ways of justice and care for all humanity and creation. In Sabbath-living our way of living is different: we live *in* the world but not *of* the world. We become part of the ongoing re-created world where God reigns.

By living the Sabbath, we are choosing to obey God. In obeying God, we find freedom and rest.

But what does this mean for our practical, everyday life? We cannot simply respond individually. It requires a community of support and mutual challenge. It is often difficult to understand "the thoughts and intentions of the heart." Under the scrutiny of the word of God and through the encouragement of the Christian community, we move forward — both as individuals and as communities.

Action/Prayer

Sit back and take a deep breath. Think about the goodness of God's creation. Think about how you are an integral part of that creation, about how much God loves you, just as you are. Rejoice in the rest God promises. Stop for a moment to pray. Ask God to help you in those areas of your life where you do not find rest and peace. Discern what you need to do in order to live with more faith in, and obedience to, the Creator. Is there another person or a community of faith with whom you can share your thoughts and questions?

Friday

Integrity

And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward...When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Matthew 6:5,7-8

Jesus spoke these words because he knew that many people prayed in public primarily to be seen as pious. In our faith tradition, individual prayer is more often done in private. However, there may be other things we say and do publicly to impress others that we are “good” or “righteous” people. For some of us it might even be our act of worship on Sunday morning.

It seems to be human nature to try to impress others. Wishing to impress others leads us into the hands of the advertising industry. In fact, the industry tries to persuade people to buy products based on the image they want to project. However, Jesus’ words remind us that God is not interested in behaviour or words that are “for show.” Even before we speak, God knows what we need, and God knows what lies in our hearts.

In praying, or in worshipping, God knows whether or not our actions and words are “empty.” The Lord’s Prayer (‘Our Father’) is a communal prayer which Jesus taught his disciples so that they might know how to approach God with honesty in prayer. But, of course, the approach requires that the prayer is prayed with integrity.

For example, in the Lord’s Prayer, we say “Thy kingdom come” (Matthew 6:10a). However, we are no better than the hypocrites of Jesus’ time if our day-to-day actions, as individuals and as communities of faith, are not directed toward bringing about God’s kingdom. Similarly, Sabbath-living is not something to which we can simply give lip-service. We have to live it. Both kingdom-building and Sabbath-living are about living with integrity to bring about God’s reign of peace and justice for all creation.

Action/Prayer

Turn to a copy of the Lord’s Prayer or turn to Matthew 6:9b-13. Reading line by line, pausing after each line, slowly say the prayer. Reflect on the challenges that this prayer poses in the 21st century. If you are going to act according to this prayer, what changes might you need to make in your life? What changes will your community of faith have to make?

Saturday

Renewal

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true."

Revelation 21:1-5

What an incredible vision of renewal the writer of Revelation gives us! It is the ultimate outcome of Sabbath-living.

The renewal of humankind affects our relationship with creation. As a community of God's people, we are re-made in the image of the Creator, becoming more like the One who created the universe. Thus we love and care for all of creation even as God does. The good news is that renewal does not end with us. Christ comes to make "all things new." Creation gets to experience renewal as well. This reaffirms our relationship with creation.

What good news! Especially considering the condition of creation right now, this vision animates us and reminds us that degradation and destruction are not the final word. There are huge and overwhelming problems, situations far too big for us to deal with individually. But we are not alone. As we take Sabbath time to learn how to live in the image of the Creator and to be renewed, so too can creation be renewed.

Action/Prayer

Take a walk outside if you can or look out a window. What are some signs of renewal in the environment? Name them, saying the words aloud. Often people take the natural environment for granted. Look around you and stop for a moment to pray quietly for the environment, for what you have been experiencing and for the details that bring you delight. Ask God to help you join with others to participate in the renewal of creation.

Palm Sunday

Commitment

Pray, rejoicing in the Spirit of God in this time and place.

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it. For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

Isaiah 55:9-12

Even with the best of intentions, human solutions often fall short. The 1970s Green Revolution — the large-scale industrialization of agriculture — was going to increase food production and eliminate world hunger. Food production did increase, but so did pollution, the use of fossil fuels as energy and fertilizer, and deforestation. And hunger didn't go away. Although we have sufficient food resources to feed the world's hungry, we do not have the political will to accomplish this complex task.

The best human response is not always obvious. Isaiah invites us to trust God and to seek God's guidance to find answers. How do we redistribute resources without increasing energy use? How do we respect the land and still have everything we need? How can we respond collectively to ensure sustainability? God promises that creation will be renewed and that the poor will receive justice. Regardless of the set-backs, let us commit to seeking God's way, Sabbath-living and all!

1. How do you understand the tensions between Sabbath-living and global living in the 21st century? What are the greatest challenges for you in Sabbath-living today?
2. Recall some insights from this past week's reflections on the themes of leisure, personal choices, integrity, obedience, and their impacts on creation. Who can you talk to about these?
3. People who wanted change from the injustice of Roman rule joined the Palm Sunday parade. But in the days that followed, the people in Jerusalem didn't seem to understand what was required. What do you think is required to restore justice to creation?

Action/Prayer

List places and situations to pray about. Refer specifically to this list as you pray

- asking for forgiveness on behalf of all people
- expressing thanksgiving for the knowledge and abilities we have
- celebrating the places and times when our knowledge and abilities have benefitted creation
- seeking God's guidance to address concerns.

Rejoice in the hope of resurrection. Read or sing "Lord of the Dance," verse four and the refrain (see page 62).

Holy Week

Sabbath and Resurrection



*“To dance with God is to dance
in a way that sets things right”*

Monday

Wisdom

The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago... then I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race. And now, my children listen to me: happy are those who keep my ways. Hear instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it. Happy is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors. For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord."

Proverbs 8:22, 30-35

In Proverbs, Wisdom is personified as a woman (Proverbs 1:20). She is integral for all the stages of creation and rejoices throughout creation. "To rejoice" means to express pleasure and delight and happiness. One way people do this today is by dancing. Try substituting the word "dancing" for "rejoicing" in today's reading. This joy is captured in the words of the immortal Snoopy, "To live is to dance and to dance is to live."

Imagine dancing in joy because of the sheer goodness of creation. We are wise when we do the same! Over and over again in the gospels, Jesus invites us to new life — to dance because of God's unlimited love for us, to dance because the Sabbath way of life celebrates and preserves God's goodness.

Dance is about action in space. As we dance we carve out a specific space simply in the dance movements. So often we live as if we are hemmed in, oppressed, without options or choices. Yet that is not what the Creator offers us. Rather, the space of creation is vast and bountiful and good. Creation offers us ample space which we can shape with our actions as we dance before the Creator.

Today's scripture reminds us that as we go off into our separate spaces after the Palm Sunday parade, each of us is called to live wisely and to continue the rejoicing. Let's not be like the people in Jerusalem who lost sight of the Palm Sunday vision as the week progressed.

Action/Prayer

Stop for a Sabbath moment and celebrate God's goodness. Consider that creation shares in your joy. Enter this Holy Week asking God to help you live wisely and to help you continue the rejoicing by making life-giving choices.

Tuesday

Humility

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross.

Philippians 2: 3-8

On Palm Sunday the crowds shared Jesus' desire for a world free of oppression. Later in the week, another crowd called for his crucifixion, disappointed by his apparent weakness. The people had expected freedom to be achieved by the greatness of an armed king and troops. Even the faithful disciples had been endlessly confused about what Jesus meant by words like "greatness" and "power" and "kingdom." Paul understood. He reminds the Philippians that the way of Christ requires humility and setting aside our own interests and ways. Our model for change is Jesus. Eschewing power and privilege, Jesus modeled servanthood.

Evidence is now clear that the welfare of humankind and creation is intertwined. Being called to justice, we must not only put the interests of the poor or the next generation before our own interests, but we must also put the interests of creation before our interests. However, we are nowhere near proclaiming a vision of freedom for creation, never mind embracing common solutions. We argue. We deny. We ignore. As individuals, we falter when we want green lawns and cooler-than-necessary indoor temperatures during hot, dry summer months; as cities, we fail when we build more expressways and parking lots; as nations, we fall short when we refuse to cooperate with international environmental agreements.

When we follow Sabbath lifestyles, we lay aside our own agendas. We listen to God as Creator and Sustainer of all life. We give up our power and we welcome God's power. This doesn't mean we become passive and inactive. Rather it means we are able to hear and act on God's call, to proceed unselfishly, cooperating and serving the other parts of creation.

Action/Prayer

Stop for a Sabbath moment. Reflect on what you normally do when you want to change something. Is your first thought to humble yourself and become a servant? What would it look like in any particular situation to do that? Pray, asking God to guide you so that through humility you can participate in the transformation of God's creation.

Wednesday

Hope

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

Isaiah 40: 28-31

It's hard to maintain the excitement and exhilaration of a parade or protest march. We get discouraged when there appears to be no change days after the celebration and proclamation of a brand new world. At such times we need to hear the promise and assurance of God. Isaiah 40 comforts and encourages us: our strength will be renewed, we will run and not be weary.

If we let reports about environmental degradation reach us in our busy lives, we can get discouraged. We start to wonder if there is any hope. In October 2006 the World Wildlife Fund for Nature reported that humans are stripping the earth of its resources faster than at any other time in history, that we will need two planets' worth of natural resources by the middle of this century to support the world's population if current trends continue. What are we to do when we hear this sort of thing?

Kingdom efforts are not meant to be overwhelming. God calls us to a Sabbath lifestyle of restful belief and trust, of knowing that God loves us, all people, and all creation. God will enable us to be faithful to the mandate to care for creation. When we choose to be servants of God and servants to others and creation, when we choose to trust in God, we are assured of the energy and strength we need to soar and glide on eagle wings. God is the source of the vision and equips us with what we need to fulfill it. We are not alone. The Creator and the created are ready to join us whenever we choose to act on our hope.

Action/Prayer

Stop for a Sabbath moment. Reflect on your hope for creation and how this hope sustains you as you seek to serve the Creator. Record in your notebook words or images to describe your hope. When you are feeling overwhelmed or discouraged, what helps you regain hope? Who are your partners in your efforts to act on your hope? In prayer, ask God to give you the energy and the strength to make a difference through your actions and words today.

Maundy Thursday

Community

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord — and you are right, for that is what I am. So, if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.”

John 13: 12-17

Social justice and economic justice movements have changed and multiplied over the past thirty years. But for the most part, churches have not included these matters in their mission programs. Individuals in our faith communities have become involved, but commonly there are no economic justice committees in our congregations, no stewardship of creation teams.

Yet our faith communities are ideal places to participate in this aspect of kingdom-building. We can pray together, reflect together, serve together to care for creation. Opportunities abound to dialogue about environmental issues. The community can lend support to individual efforts and collaborate in finding solutions.

In the days leading up to Passover, Jesus knew that impending events would throw his disciples into crisis. He taught them, by example, to care for each other unselfishly, humbly, in the best interests of the community, in the best interests of bringing about God’s reign.

We are called to live in covenant with God, one another and all creation. God’s answer always involves loving relationships and caring communities. Because Sabbath lifestyle does not come naturally, we desperately need one another. In communities centred on faith, we can find Sabbath rest that will restore balance to our lives and health to the creation.

Action/Prayer

Record the names of family members, friends and colleagues who have expressed concerns about environmental issues. In prayer, ask God to strengthen and guide these people in the days ahead. Then silently focus on the people and times in your church life when concerns about creation have been voiced. Consider how your faith community could make stewardship of creation a priority — taking Sabbath time together to listen to God and discern actions. Think about becoming familiar with a local environmental issue that the church could support. (For an example, read story #5 on page 64.)

Good Friday

Truth

But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about!" At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

Luke 22:60-62

Like Peter, we sometimes have difficulty speaking the truth, particularly if it might implicate us in something risky. If we knew we would be persecuted for our beliefs, or even just ridiculed for being different and seeming radical, would we still express our views?

In North America, we live with many unchallenged beliefs. Sometimes it is assumed that people in the higher income brackets deserve the good life, either because of some inherent virtue, innate characteristic, or the merit of hard work. With that belief goes the assumption that the poor and oppressed deserve their plight. Do we really believe that some people are entitled to a good life while others are entitled to starve, go without medical care, or live in degraded environments? Some people continue to believe the theory that the pie of power and wealth is ever expanding and will eventually feed us all. But we now know that the metaphor of the constantly expanding pie is no longer realistic; we now know that such a situation is not sustainable.

The danger of living in a society where untruths and false assumptions are not challenged is that people become hard of hearing and blind. Although the media regularly report the latest statistics about environmental degradation, North Americans continue to seek materialistic and self-indulgent lives. Are we in denial?

Creation is crying out for a commitment from its stewards. Most environmental experts say that with a radical reorientation we can balance responsible human development with care for our planet. By committing ourselves to Sabbath-living, we commit to struggling daily to discern God's will for us and hear God's truth. In Sabbath-living, we repent of our denials and untruths and ignorance. In Sabbath-living, we join together in community to share and to learn how we can respond effectively to bring about the renewal of God's creation.

Action/Prayer

Stop for a Sabbath moment. When have you lived honestly and courageously in caring for creation? When have you been more like Peter, lacking courage and continuing to deny Christ? Offer these contrasts in prayer to God and listen. Listen for God's forgiveness; open up to receive God's grace. Invite God to give you strength to live your faith, speaking the truth.

Holy Saturday

Joining the dance

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Philippians 4: 8-9

In Sabbath-living we focus on a creation that the Creator called good — even very good. But so often our world seems full of fear and sadness. These emotions can paralyze us, preventing needed action and distracting us from what is honourable and just. It is as if they pull us out of the Sabbath dance and back us up against the wall.

Earlier generations worried about ensuring that their children would receive an education and attain good jobs. Now we must wonder if our children and grandchildren will have good food to eat, clean water to drink and fresh air to breathe. We wonder about the build-up of toxins in land, water, air, and in young people's bodies. We watch warily for the effects of global warming. Where do we turn for safety?

By turning to God and accepting God's invitation to Sabbath-living, we can leave behind the ways of the world, at least in part. We don't know exactly where God will lead us, but we can follow, knowing that to dance with God is to dance in a way that sets things right, in a way that is liberating, in a way that we have never danced before.

On this day between Good Friday and Easter Sunday, we are aware that there are costs. On holy Saturday we pause in awe at the apparent silence of God. But the light shines even in this darkness and on Easter morning, death is reversed and new life springs up. As the hymn says, Jesus "danced in the morning when the world was begun" and "danced on the earth" until the cross. But that was not the end of the dance: "They cut me down and I leap up high; I am the life that'll never, never die; I'll live in you if you'll live in me. I am the Lord of the Dance, said he." Let's join the dance and enter into Sabbath-living with our Lord.

Action/Prayer

Stop for a Sabbath moment. Think about the goodness of creation; think about things worthy of praise. In prayer, focus on this image of a Sabbath lifestyle: imagine saying "yes" to God's invitation to a dance about goodness, freedom and celebration. Feel the joy. Feel the tensions drain away. Read or sing "Lord of the Dance," verse five and the refrain.

Easter Sunday

Lord of the dance

Pray, asking *to dance with the Spirit of God* in this place in a new way today.

For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind... The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent — its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord.

Isaiah 65:17, 25

This amazing vision means that our hope for peace and justice on earth for all creation, now and forever, is not unrealistic. Although this hope is held in tension with the daily news about our environment — ecological devastation, destruction of the oceans, shrinking biodiversity, threatened tropical rain forests and northern hemisphere boreal forests, glacial melting with global warming — ultimately God's will prevails. Resurrection reminds us that death does not have the final word.

Jesus' world and life were not without tensions. As the words of the hymn, Lord of the Dance, say, "it's hard to dance with the devil on your back." But the dance continues. Like the disciples, we may sometimes see only the closed tomb. But with the resurrection, we know God has said "yes" to life and re-creation. God can renew and fill all things with love. Let us hope in that love and live in it by accepting the Sabbath way of life. That is the hope of the world. Alleluia! Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

1. Jesus, the Lord of the Dance, has promised to lead us. In what practical ways can you follow Jesus so that you will contribute to new life for a part of creation?
2. Recall some insights from this past week's reflections on themes like wisdom, humility, hope, community and truth related to the needs of creation. Who can you talk to about these?
3. What might you do to let the hope of the resurrection transform your life and relationships? What might you "give" to the church — in the way of an action that might celebrate your commitment to creation? What might you "give" to your neighbourhood (e.g. volunteer time, offer a suggestion, participate in a program, form a group)?

Action/Prayer

List places and situations to pray about. Refer specifically to this list as you pray

- asking for forgiveness on behalf of all people
- expressing thanksgiving for the knowledge and abilities we have
- celebrating the places and times when our knowledge and abilities have benefitted creation
- seeking God's guidance to address concerns
- asking for understanding, courage and hope to live in the resurrection love and power of Christ so that all creation will be renewed to reflect God's glory.

Read or sing all of "Lord of the Dance" (see page 62).

Scripture Readings

Week 1

Ash Wednesday — Genesis 2:1-3
Thursday — Genesis 1:10,12,31
Friday — Psalm 19:1-4a
Saturday — Psalm 86:9-12
Sunday — Genesis 1:28; 2:15

Week 2

Monday — John 14:16-17,19-20
Tuesday — Romans 8:19-22
Wednesday — Genesis 3:17-19
Thursday — Matthew 6:25,33
Friday — Mark 1:14b-15
Saturday — Philemon 1:10,15-16
Sunday — Psalm 131:2

Week 3

Monday — Exodus 16:26-30
Tuesday — Leviticus 16:29,31; 25:3-4,8,10a
Wednesday — Luke 12:15-21
Thursday — Matthew 25:34-36
Friday — Exodus 23:10-12
Saturday — Exodus 20:8-11
Sunday — Ephesians 5:15-17

Week 4

Monday — Deuteronomy 5:15
Tuesday — Matthew 16:24
Wednesday — Exodus 32:23
Thursday — Matthew 6:25-26,28-29
Friday — Isaiah 1:16-17
Saturday — Deuteronomy 8:7-14,17-18
Sunday — Leviticus 25:8,10-12

Week 5

Monday — Romans 12:1-2
Tuesday — Philippians 2:12-18
Wednesday — Matthew 5:14a,15-16
Thursday — I Corinthians 13:1-3
Friday — Job 38:4-7
Saturday — Revelation 4:11
Sunday — Luke 4:16,18-19,21

Week 6

Monday — Isaiah 30:15
Tuesday — Matthew 11:28
Wednesday — Micah 6:6a,8
Thursday — Hebrews 4:9-13
Friday — Matthew 6:5,7-8
Saturday — Revelation 21:1-5
Palm Sunday — Isaiah 55:9-12

Holy Week

Monday — Proverbs 8:22,30-35
Tuesday — Philippians 2:3-8
Wednesday — Isaiah 40:28-31
Maundy Thursday — John 13:12-17
Good Friday — Luke 22:60-62
Holy Saturday — Philippians 4:8-9
Easter Sunday — Isaiah 65:17,25

Simple Gifts

"Simple Gifts" was written by Shaker Elder Joseph Brackett, Jr., in 1848.

The original version had only one verse and the refrain.

'Tis the gift to be simple,
'tis the gift to be free,
'tis the gift to come down where you ought to be,
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,
It will be in the valley of love and delight.

Refrain:
When true simplicity is gained,
To bow and to bend we shan't be ashamed.
To turn, turn will be our delight,
'Til by turning, turning we come round right.

Lord of the Dance

(See also #250 in *The Book of Praise*, 1997)

I danced in the morning
when the world was begun,
and I danced in the moon
and the stars and the sun,
and I came down from heaven
and I danced on the earth;
at Bethlehem
I had my birth.

*Dance, then, wherever you may be,
I am the Lord of the Dance, said he,
and I'll lead you all, wherever you may be,
and I'll lead you all in the Dance, said he.*

I danced for the scribe
and the Pharisee,
but they would not dance
and they wouldn't follow me;
I danced for the fishermen,
for James and John;
they came with me
and the dance went on.

Chorus

I danced on the Sabbath
and I cured the lame;
the holy people
said it was a shame.
They whipped and they stripped
and they hung me high,
and they left me there
on a cross to die.

Chorus

I danced on a Friday
When the sky turned black;
it's hard to dance
with the devil on your back.
They buried my body,
and they thought I'd gone,
but I am the dance,
and I still go on.

Chorus

They cut me down
And I leap up high;
I am the life
that'll never, never die;
I'll live in you
if you'll live in me;
I am the Lord
Of the Dance, said he.

Chorus

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Stewardship of Creation Stories

Story #1 — The Recovery of Acid Damaged Lakes

The Killarney Provincial Park landscape, in Central Ontario, made famous by the Group of Seven artists, is dominated by the La Cloche Mountain Range. The characteristic white ridges of the La Cloche Mountains is composed primarily of orthoquartzite bedrock which is highly resistant to erosion and has little buffering capability against acid precipitation. In addition to the sensitive bedrock geology, the park is located just 40-60 km southwest of the large metal smelters in Sudbury and within a continental zone of high acid deposition originating from a vast array of long-range industrial sources.

The lakes of Killarney were among the first lakes in North America to be acidified by atmospheric pollutants, some lakes as early as the 1920's. By the late 1970's there were no longer fish in the Killarney lakes. The estimated losses from dozens of lakes totaled thousands of individual populations of fish, crayfish, algae, aquatic insects and microscopic plankton. Loons and ducks — waterfowl that depend on fish and invertebrates for food — also declined.

Between the 1960's and the mid-1990's a combination of legislated control programs and modernization initiatives by industry reduced Sudbury smelter emissions by 80%. In addition, sulphur dioxide emissions from all sources were reduced by 50% in eastern Canada, and by 20% in the United States. The combined effect of these emission reductions is that water quality improvements began in many acid-stressed lakes in Killarney Park. While further reductions in pollution levels are needed, by the summer of 2006 a number of the lakes were again supporting fish and loons.

Story #2 — Campaigning to Protect the World's Water

In 2005 and 2006, through an ecumenical organization called Kairos, Canadian churches including The Presbyterian Church in Canada were raising awareness of issues related to the availability, consumption, quality, privatization and governance of water. This campaign included looking at our lifestyles and the use of bottled water, and a Water Declaration that was signed by 175 municipal governments across Canada. More than 220,000 individuals participated in a postcard campaign to the Prime Minister.

For a variety of reasons, there has been an increasing trend toward water privatization in poor countries. This practice has become a life-or-death issue for the poor in these countries who are unable to afford the rising costs of a privatized service. Unable to purchase the water they need from municipal sources, they find alternate water sources which are often not sanitary. This has resulted in illness and death.

Now in 2006-2007, the focus of the campaign will also include corporate responsibility, including polluting and overuse of water supplies. Kairos (<http://www.kairoscanada.org/>) is asking that local communities and groups participate in a letter campaign to indicate our concern about this issue. What else can you do? You can also learn about water availability, use, abuse, and protection of our ecosystem; examine your use of bottled water; and pray that a solution will be found for the one billion people without access to sufficient, clean, safe water.

Story #3 — Local Organic Farming

It takes some study and restraint as a food shopper to buy from the supply of Canadian organically grown produce. It means turning away from the stacks of plastic containers full of strawberries in November and from bins of polished apples in March. It may mean forging a relationship with an organic farmer who will deliver to your home or it may mean growing your own produce. However, recent research has confirmed that in the area of safe, organic, sustainable agriculture, consumers rather than industry are now driving the market. In fact, small-scale organic farms selling to local markets have been growing in numbers in recent years, bucking the general trend of declining farms in North America.

For example, Seymour Green is a communal gardening space originally built in 1996 by a group of volunteers on Dalhousie Campus — open to students and Halifax residents of all ages and backgrounds. Interested gardeners are invited to become a part of the summer's Seymour Green Working Group — a consistent group of people that

care for the garden throughout the spring, summer and fall. Gardeners have the opportunity to attend once-a-week work parties/workshops and take home a portion of the produce grown. In order to give back to the community, the Seymour Green Working Group also donates a portion of the produce to Feed Nova Scotia. The volunteers secured the first community garden spot and in 2001 they built the community's first garden shed. It was made out of strawbale and was the first ever of its kind in Halifax.

Over the years the gardeners have grown a variety of produce, particularly shade tolerant vegetables, herbs, medicinal weeds and flowers. They have taken workshops on composting, herbal medicine-making, plant identification, and on the basic principles for starting and maintaining a healthy organic garden. The space continually evolves and morphs itself to meet the changing needs and vision of the garden community.

Story #4 — Natural Phenomena or Human Disaster?

Natural disasters are called that because of the devastation they cause to humans. The World Health Organization (WHO) suggests that today's disasters stem from a complex mix of factors, including routine climate change, global warming influenced by human behaviour, socioeconomic factors causing poorer people to live in risky areas, and inadequate disaster preparedness and education. In fact, some disaster experts reject the term "natural disasters," arguing that there is almost always a man-made element.

Natural phenomena do not always generate human disasters. For example, there were several tsunamis in 2005 which were not deemed "disasters" because they didn't endanger anyone. In fact, even the December 26, 2004, tsunami did not endanger all humans in its vicinity. For example, on the islands of Andaman and Nicobar in the Indian Ocean where as many as 15,000 of the "urbanized" residents perished, none of the Sentinelese died. The Sentinelese still live as hunter-gatherers and were preserved by what one local environmentalist and lawyer calls their sixth sense that gave them advance warning so they could seek safety.

Marko Kocic, spokesperson for WHO's Health Action in Crisis department, said that some communities are more vulnerable to the effects of natural disasters than 100 years ago because of ecological degradation. "We need to tackle the underlying issues, such as poverty and inequity," Kocic said. Disasters are also a consequence of development and industrialization. In Europe, experts believe that countries like France and Germany are more adversely affected by floods today because major rivers, like the Rhine, have been straightened to ease commercial traffic. Global warming as well as routine, cyclical climate changes are causing a higher number of strong hurricanes in the Caribbean, meteorologists say. Add to that the increasing number of people living in areas like coastlines, hillsides and in substandard housing, and there is a greater potential for more devastating disasters than a few decades ago.

Story #5 — Residents hope to protect children and natural environment

The British Columbia grassroots, community-based organization — Tsawwassen Residents Against Higher Voltage Overhead Lines (TRAHVOL) — formed in early December, 2004, to oppose the B.C. Transmission Corporation (BCTC) project proposal for the Vancouver Island Transmission Reinforcement Project. The people involved are not unlike residents of other Canadian communities. Some of them are actively involved in practicing their faith; others are no longer affiliated with any faith-based group. However, they all hope that their efforts will make a difference. Among the supporting documents they have compiled, at least one is a letter of support from a mainline church.

The grassroots organization TRAHVOL was formed when BCTC made public its plans to reuse the existing right of way, established in 1955 when Tsawwassen was mainly forest and a few open spaces, without a ferry terminal, Highway 17 or the George Massey tunnel. Residents were shocked that BCTC would plan such a project without due regard to the lives, health, enjoyment, aspirations and property of Tsawwassen and Ladner residents. The project would affect over 140 backyards, many of them gardens and parks enjoyed by the residents and community of Tsawwassen. The proposed transmission lines would have a design life of over 60 years. The associated impacts would affect the Tsawwassen and Ladner environment and residents for more than three future generations.

In addition to the impacts on nature, residents worried about the risks that even the current electro-magnetic fields posed to human and animal life. A five-year study by Canadian researchers at the University of Toronto, in conjunction with the Hospital for Sick Children, found a link between childhood leukemia and high magnetic field levels from sources such as power lines. Children under age 6 were especially at risk. These findings concurred with a 1992 Swedish study that showed a connection between proximity to power lines and various cancers, most notably childhood leukemia.

At the time of writing, TRAHVOL's submissions have been taken seriously and the provincial government is promising that the BCTC project will be altered.