

Pastoral Retreat on Climate Change
Camp Mennoscah, Murdock, KS
April 8, 2019

Worship I: A Service of Lament and Confession

Led by Jennifer Schrock

Why worship outdoors where the acoustics are worse and it might rain and there are mosquitos?

- By worshipping outdoors, we place ourselves within God’s broader canvas. Simply by looking around us, we are reminded that our world--and God—are both larger than our church walls and the limits we sometimes place on them.
- By worshipping outdoors, we reframe our relationship with nature. Thomas Berry says, “We need to come to see the universe not as a collection of objects but a communion of subjects.” The Psalms speak of trees clapping their hands and fields of grain offering their own praise up to God. By placing our own praise, prayer and lament in the context of creation’s praise, other creatures become fellow worshippers, not just things.
- By worshipping outdoors, we become the beneficiaries of free, expert pastoral care. More and more research shows that humans hard-wired to be part of an interconnected ecosystem. A neurologist might discuss this in terms of the kinds of brain waves that different activities prompt. In biblical language, we could say that time in nature provides the shalom and the Sabbath that God intends for us.

Our worship tonight will be a time to sit with—or walk with—the reality of climate change and the suffering it already has caused and is likely to cause in the future.

During the half hour you will have in silence outside, it will grow darker and darker. However, I encourage you to think of the darkness as a comforter and not as they enemy that needs to be vanquished with light.

In Genesis 1, our scriptures assert that darkness has its place in the order of creation and that it is blessed and good. It is built into the very fabric of our existence on this planet.

So what does one *do* in the dark for half an hour?

Prompts for outdoor time of worship:

- Take a card from our central table and pray for the person whose name is on it. Hold their particular concerns about climate change in your heart as you walk.
(Earlier, participants wrote fears and a hopes related to climate change on cards and shared their ideas with the group.)
- Pray for the species listed on the slip of paper you received.
(At the beginning of the worship service, participants each received the name of a species in their region that is threatened with extinction.)
- Examine your own heart for the things that you most need to lament or confess.
- Take a hickory nut and recall the vision Julian of Norwich once received. She the whole world reduced to the size of a hazelnut. “O God, it is so small! How does it endure?” she asked. The answer that came to her: “It endures because God loves it.” Repeat that sentence as you hold the nut.

Let’s begin with a lament based on the call of the prophet Isaiah:

A Reading from Isaiah 6:9-12

1: How long, O God?

2: How long will we listen but not understand?

1: How long will we stop our ears and shut our eyes?

2: How long will we turn our backs on healing?

1: How long will cities lie wasted without inhabitants?

2: How long will the houses be without people, the land utterly desolate?

All: A vast emptiness fills the land

Go seek the presence of God in the darkness.



(The group returns.)

- Song: Darkness is not dark to you, God*
- Naming of threatened and endangered species

- Is there anything you would like to share?

Confession, p. 326

Gracious God, our sins are too heavy to carry,
too real to hide, and too deep to undo.
Forgive what our lips tremble to name,
what our hearts can no longer bear,
and what has become for us a consuming fire of judgment.
Set us free from a past that we cannot change
open to us a future in which *we can* be changed;
and grant us grace to grow more and more in your likeness and image;
through Jesus Christ, the light of the world. Amen

(Book of Common Worship, Westminster)

- Song: Goodness is stronger than evil*

We will close our worship with a litany on truth. I like this piece because it calls me to think about what assumptions I want to reject and what assumptions I want to live out of. I suppose it could be written differently for each congregation, and you might want to think about how you could write a similar litany for yours.

The litany is from Alan Boesak in Rowthorn, *God's Good Earth*, p. 279

You can find it [online at Journey with Jesus](#), minus the dark and light print cues.

*We used two songs by Greg Smucker, Goshen, Ind., that are not yet published. Other music could be substituted.