

In stories of his life, St. Francis is quoted as talking to animals and natural elements, not speaking to them just as birds or wolves but as mutual spiritual beings who are worthy of being addressed.

He was always telling them WHO they are, WHY they should be happy, and WHY they make him happy. He told them they give glory to God just by being who they are!

Creation itself—not ritual or spaces constructed by human hands—was the primary cathedral for Francis. And his love for creation drove him back into the needs of the city, the poor, the neglected—a pattern similar to Jesus’ own movement between desert solitude and small-town healing ministry.¹

When Pope Francis issued his pastoral letter on the environment in 2015, LAUDATO SI’—ON CARE OF OUR COMMON HOME, there was palpable excitement that a leading figure in the Christian community was speaking the truth about the damage human habits are exacting on the natural world and on human and non-human communities around the globe.

- We read LAUDATO SI’ and hosted a series of ecumenical conversations;
- we used its language to frame a liturgy of confession within our worship;
- we penned a letter to Pope Francis pledging partnership (a copy of which you can read in the narthex after worship today) and we planted a tree.

This coming week, 8 years after his original encyclical, Pope Francis is releasing a sequel, LAUDATE DEUM, an exhortation in which he’ll intensify his language even more in response to the increasingly severe symptoms of the CLIMATE CRISIS and the inadequate responses on the part of nations and citizens of the world – Roman Catholic and otherwise.²

¹ Excerpted from Richard Rohr, *A Cosmic Mutuality*. Meditation for October 6, 2020. Adapted from Richard Rohr, [Eager to Love: The Alternative Way of Francis of Assisi](#) (Franciscan Media: 2014), 45, 46–47.

² National Catholic Review online. <https://www.ncronline.org/earthbeat/faith/pope-francis-new-environmental-exhortation-be-released-oct-4>

The prophet Amos has intense words of his own to share this morning, when it becomes apparent that God's people haven't learned to connect the dots between their worship life and the lives of justice God wants them to live.

**Take away from me the noise of your songs;
I will not listen to the melody of your harps, says the LORD,
But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an every-flowing stream.**

Praising God while ignoring the work of justice-making does not compute.

The DUWAMISH RIVER has been in the news again lately, as the question of WHO PAYS for the next phase of the SUPERFUND CLEANUP PROCESS is negotiated behind closed doors.³

Our partners at the Duwamish River Community Coalition are doing their level best to keep that process **public**, for they know how easy it is to ignore or dismiss the voices of people who lack the political and economic clout of corporate and government interests, when the conversation goes on behind closed doors.

Hemmed in by highways, industrial enterprises, and a sick Duwamish River, South Park residents are saddled with the worst air in the city and the most toxic air, soil, and water; lowering the life span of residents by over a decade when compared to wealthier neighborhoods.⁴

If St. Francis visited 21st century Seattle, this is one of the places he'd hang out, celebrating the resilience of the human and non-human communities, while also mourning the shortsighted greed that has made South Park expendable in the eyes of so many of the powers that be.

And yet, amid the many challenges, there are signs of renewal.
One recent win is a new pumping station that will help prevent water from backing up in the sewer system and flooding neighborhoods, as it did last winter.

³ See Seattle Times <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/times-watchdog/toxic-legacy-of-duwamish-river-could-cost-boeing-taxpayers-1-billion/>

⁴ Read more about the challenges that face South Park in this article from Crosscut: <https://crosscut.com/2019/08/view-seattles-most-forgotten-neighborhood-those-fighting-its-future>

Another hopeful sign: the 7000 juvenile salmon which were drawn to the newly-reclaimed Duwamish River People's Park and Shoreline Habitat.

In his poem **THE DREAM**, Wendell Berry imagines rolling back all the signs and marks of human industry and agriculture to gain a glimpse of “the country as it was” in all its wholeness.⁵

Berry’s “inescapable dream” inevitably ends with the awareness that he—that we—are long past such a vision, a return to Eden.

“I see that I am eager to own the earth and to own men,” he confesses. “I find in my mouth a bitter taste of money, a gaping syllable I can neither swallow nor spit out.”⁶

This Earth we inhabit was built to be resilient; evolving over deep time with redundant systems meant to blunt the worst effects of catastrophes that have come and gone over eons of time.

During the last 12,000 years, the Holocene Epoch, Earth achieved a point of balance that has allowed for a stability and flourishing of life as never before.

That stability is now under assault as we leave the Holocene and enter the AnTHROpocene—an epoch marked by great and grave impacts our human species is exacting on the systems that sustain life on our planet home.

Those impacts are falling most egregiously on the poorest of the world’s poor; on the communities least able to weather the changes.

In the face of this, it’s becoming clearer than ever before, that the goals of ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE and SOCIAL JUSTICE are inseparably intertwined.

This is a fearful time, when things we have come to count on—to assume—as we’ve moved through this world, are now being called into question.

⁵ Wendell Berry. *The Selected Poems of Wendell Berry*. (Washington DC: Counterpoint, 1998), p. 26.

⁶ Ibid.

Sticking our heads in the sand—which a good portion of our fellow citizens and political leaders seem to want to do—is no answer.

Nor is it the kind of faithful response God wants from us.

Those of us with financial means may be able to sidestep the worst effects of climate breakdown – for the time being. But the indicting words of the prophet Amos and the soul-searching Dream of Wendell Berry won't let us forget God's clarion call to connect the dots between worship and action, between the need for environmental justice and social justice.

When Jesus addresses the crowds in his SERMON ON THE MOUNT, he proclaims God's reign as a NEW REALITY filled with blessed people who are poor, merciful, pure in heart, hungry, weeping and persecuted.⁷

The world Jesus shows us, the world of God's Dream, is filled by abundant mercy and abundant manna for all.

Jesus tells those crowds not to make material things the focus their living. He lifts up the abundant beauty and richness of the natural world, and says:
IF GOD SO CLOTHES THE GRASS WILL GOD NOT MUCH MORE
CLOTHE YOU?

LET THE REIGN OF GOD—AND THE JUSTICE THIS REIGN IMPLIES—
GAIN TRACTION IN YOUR LIVES, AND EVERYTHING ELSE WILL
FALL INTO PLACE.

Jesus' words are aimed NOT at inciting FEAR but inviting TRUST.

In every age, circumstance, and season; whether the way before us seems clear or obscure, hopeful or hopeless, Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen one, who went to hell and back again for our sake, calls us to put our trust in God's vision of wholeness and to not be overcome with fear.

⁷ See Dan Erlander, *Manna and Mercy, A Brief History of God's Unfolding Promise to Mend the Entire Universe*. © 1992.

He charges us, with the aid and guidance of the Holy Spirit, to make God's dream a reality by living it out in our relationships with one another, with our neighbors, and with the natural world through which God sustains all things.

And he gives us a reminder—a MEAL—in which these very values are embodied week after week.

A MEAL in which all the gifts of creation are present in sun ripened grain and grapes.

A MEAL in which all the barriers that keep us separated from God, one another, and God's good creation, are obliterated.

In, with, and under this MEAL we become in that moment the community God dreamed we would be, a community filled with God's promises and ready to embody his faith, hope, and love in a world hungering for wholeness; ...a world where justice rolls like a redeemed Duwamish River, and washes oppression away.