

## 7/9/23 WORSHIP SERVICE

### WELCOME

Good morning and welcome to this time of worship at Alexanderwohl, whether you are here in person or tuning in from elsewhere.

We gather in the name of Jesus to celebrate our hope in God's love and redemption.

For the next several weeks, we open our hearts to how God is calling us to pursue peace with God's beautiful created order. We'll also hear some sharing about the Mennonite Convention this past week.

### INVOCATION

(Adapted from Psalm 104 and prayer from *Current: Seeking Peace Together*)

Creator God,

You make springs pour water into the ravines to give water to all the beasts of the field.

The birds of the sky nest by these waters and sing among the branches.

You make grass grow for the cattle and plants for people to cultivate, bringing forth food from the earth.

The land is satisfied by the fruit of your work.

All creatures look to you to give them their food at the proper time until you take away their breath.

When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground.

Your creative power continues to form and shape us. Your divine breath continues to breathe life into us. Your compassion continues to call us to partner with you in caring for the earth.

Let us feel your power, breathe in your life, and hear your call in this time of worship. Amen

### MORNING PRAYER – PASTOR LOIS HARDER

Loving God, this morning we are aware of how far away we are from the ways you intended for humanity to live in harmony with the rest of your creation. We acknowledge that you created the earth and all of its inhabitants with an order, a balance, a richness of diversity, a natural rhythm, and an abundance of resources. We pray, God for the will and the wisdom required to move us to seek that harmony, to live in ways that restore and heal the earth, that respect and protect the balance and diversity, and that disperse the resources in ways that meet the needs of all of your creation. We pray for your kingdom to come here on earth as it is in heaven.

We thank you God for the places on this earth where we can go to be in the midst of your beauty and creation. One of those places is camp – where the beauty of nature comes together with the beauty of relationships and intentional time spent learning of you and being with your

people. We pray for Delaney, for Darla and for all who will be attending Camp Mennoscah, Rocky Mt. Menn. Camp and other camps this coming week. Bless them with safe travels, with meaningful time and an opportunity to learn and grow in their faith.

We give you thanks for the wheat harvest and we ask for your continued blessing on the other crops, both in the fields and in the gardens that are growing and thriving.

For those we know and love who are struggling with health concerns, we ask for your healing presence. We pray especially for Braxton, Amanda and Natalie as they leave this afternoon for the Colorado Children's Hospital for tests and treatment for Braxton. Be with Kelcey as he holds down the fort here at home. Be with the doctors and other care-givers as they work to discover more about Braxton's health needs. Give Braxton comfort and courage as he goes into this week. O God, we pray for others we know who need your healing touch for bodies, minds or spirits.

Thank you God for safe travels and for what was learned and experienced at the Convention in KS City this past week. Thank you for your Holy Spirit presence with us there and for the ways it continues to be with us here – and wherever we are. May that same Spirit move among us as we continue now to worship you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

#### CONVENTION SHARING – PASTOR CALEB

This past week, multiple people from our congregation participated in different aspects of the Mennonite convention held in Kansas City, including Travis Duerksen and Tina Schrag through their work. You'll hear from Kris and Nathaniel a little later.

Lois and I had the privilege of taking these young people [up front] with us. We had Cambry Duerksen, Colby Nafziger, Eli Gaeddert, and Natalie Church. Levi Schrag was also at the convention with Tina and joined us much of the time.

Each of the youth along with Lois are going to share some aspects of their convention experience, including the worship times, seminars, time to process as a group, and the opportunity to meet youth from other places. We also have a few pictures that you'll see on the screen at the same time.

#### CONVENTION SHARING – PASTOR LOIS

There were 5 different people who preached during the worship sessions. We got to take in all but the last one on Thursday evening. Each of them spoke about their perspectives on transformation – the transformation of ourselves as individuals, of our congregations and of our denomination. Transformation is only possible when we're willing to release something known and embrace something new and unknown. This is both difficult and exciting. It involves both some loss and pain as well as some new life and joy – and those things don't always move in a straight line. At the worship time on Thursday morning there wasn't just one speaker, but an intergenerational panel of 4 speakers from a High school student to a fairly recently retired pastor. They offered us insights into some of their wisdom, their frustrations, their hopes and dreams for where God might be leading us as a faithful people as we look to the future.

They inspired and encouraged us to remember that the Mennonite Church reaches far beyond our local congregations but the strength and support of our local congregations provides the backbone for our denominational outreach; in other words, we need each other – locally and globally.

#### OFFERING PRAYER

Provider God we thank you for the gifts that are brought here to you today, through your church. Every good gift comes from you and so we ask you to receive and bless these offerings as we return them to you as a reminder of your faithfulness and love for us. May we be faithful to you and loving to one another as a sign of your kingdom. Amen.

#### TAKING CARE OF GOD’S GARDEN – PASTOR CALEB

Genesis 2:4-23

At the convention this past week, the guys and I spent a little time in the prayer room. There were multiple stations with instructions for different modes of prayer or prayerful activities. One of the stations had bags with clay, and one was encouraged to fashion an object out of the clay that symbolized transformation through Christ.

It had been a long time since I had worked with clay, so I awkwardly tried to fashion a chalice, constantly reshaping it. This is what comes to mind when I read about how God formed the first human out of the dust of the earth and then breathed the breath of life into his nostrils.

It’s as if God took clay and fashioned the first human, perhaps having to patiently redo whatever didn’t come out quite right. It is a very intimate picture, almost as if God fashioned humans like a work of art. Adam comes from the adamah – the ground or soil. Adam means “humanity.” Humanity is God’s crowning achievement, but humans join a created world rich in plant and animal life.

At the beginning of our passage, the earth is barren, because God had not sent rain and there was no one to work the ground. So God sets to work watering the surface of the ground and planting a garden. God fills the garden with trees and plants of every kind, and God creates wild animals and birds.

God places humanity into this garden this garden to work it and take care of it. This sentence has two very important key words. The first phrase, “work the ground,” could mean cultivate or till the ground, as a farmer does. It could also be understood as “serving the earth.” It expresses not a relationship of struggle, conflict, or domination, but a relationship of interdependence, reverence, and respect. The second phrase, “take care of it,” is the same word used of a shepherd tending a flock. It is also the same word used to talk about “keeping the law,” “keeping watch,” or guarding.

This primordial vision is one where humans are an integral part of creation, acting as caretakers, both benefiting creation, and also benefiting from creation, as they enjoy its fruit. The tree of life gives perpetual life, similar to “trees of life” mentioned in the creation stories of other cultures that neighbored the Israelites.

One of our human needs is companionship and relationship. That relationship exists with all of the creatures of the earth. Adam names the creatures one by one, but yet, none provide the companionship and support that is fitting for him.

The creation of woman, and therefore a couple, allows for a relationship between two creatures who are of the same bone and flesh. Even so, the relationship between humans does not negate the sacred relationship that we have with other creatures and with creation itself. As we embrace the vocation of serving and taking care of the earth, we join God in God's creative work.

While Genesis 2 presents a very idyllic vision, we all know that things go downhill beginning with chapter 3 and on. In human history, from the dawn of civilization, humans have had a major impact on the natural world, and arguably an antagonistic relationship.

For example, I find it fascinating that the total mass of all the wild mammals in the world has drastically decreased over time. Some of this happened in prehistory as our ancestors hunted the largest mammals, like the wholly mammoth. Estimates are that the total mass of wild mammals had decreased by about half by year 1900 compared to 100,000 years ago. Today, that biomass is just 30% of what it was in 1900.

If you put all of the world's mammals on a scale, about a third would be humans. 62% would be livestock, like cattle, pigs, sheep, and goats, which exist to feed humans. Only 4% of the mass are wild mammals, including all the world's whales. The world's poultry – mostly chickens – weighs more than twice as much as the weight of all of the rest of the wild birds of the world.<sup>1</sup>

Most of us are unaware of the huge impact we have on the natural world.

I'll admit, it is complicated to answer the question what exactly it would look like for humans to thrive and also live in harmony with the earth.

But I'm pretty sure the best answer would not look like our current way of life.

While we have been some very cool days in Kansas for July, the signs of climate change are increasingly obvious.

Climate change has made wildfires in the US and Canada more likely than they otherwise would be, as the northern and eastern part of the country have been blanketed in thick smoke that makes spending time outside hazardous.

Meanwhile, this past week saw the record of the global average temperature broken three times: Monday, Tuesday, and again on Thursday. Thursday the average temperature around the world topped 63 degrees for the first time since records have been kept, and quite probably the first time since the last interglacial period some 125,000 years ago.

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://ourworldindata.org/wild-mammals-birds-biomass>  
<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/may/21/human-race-just-001-of-all-life-but-has-destroyed-over-80-of-wild-mammals-study>

Heatwaves, such as the ones that have hit the south are the most dangerous of extreme weather events, especially for people without air conditioning. I can't imagine how people manage to live in the hottest parts of India. Or how farmers in the developing world survive as once predictable rainfall becomes unpredictable. In Genesis, Adam has the privilege of meeting and naming the animals. Today we are in the midst of a mass extinction event.

The theme of the Mennonite Convention this past week was transformation. What transformation is God calling us to in our relationship with the earth that God has created?

I don't have full answers, but I do have some suggestions I gleaned from a seminar I attended this past week, facilitated by Sarah Werner and titled, "Got Climate Anxiety? Strategies for Hope and Resilience."

She suggested taking a clear view of reality rather than denial or false optimism. But that doesn't preclude hope. She shared a quote from Joanna Macy, "Hope is something that you have to continuously nurture."

Hope is a practice – as Christians we believe God's Spirit is working in a dire situation and that we have the capacity to change, adapt, and be resilient, though it may not be easy.

We have the opportunity to be God's agents of healing. If we get stuck in anxiety, we are not helping anyone, not least people in the world that are most vulnerable to the effects of a changing climate.

Rather than either feeling paralyzed by guilt or feeling too small to effect more than a drop in the bucket, find simple actions that you can take to move in the direction of honoring and caring for the earth. That might mean rethinking your purchases, consuming less, rethinking your diet, your travel, or how you heat and cool your home.

We can't do much on a global scale, but we can take simple actions that encourage conversation and a shift in culture. The garden sharing table that we have this time of year [along with the flowers we have up front] are small actions that we take to recall the goodness of the earth and our relationship of dependence with the earth.

May we be open to God's call as we lean into the healing and restoration that is possible in all dimensions of life.

#### QUESTIONS

1. What is a small step you can take to better care for God's earth?
2. What gives you anxiety when it comes to ecological concerns or climate change?
3. What gives you hope?

## BENEDICTION

*(Based on 2 Peter 1:3–7)*

God's divine power has given you everything you need for life and godliness, through the knowledge of the Holy One who created and called you.

God has given you precious and great promises that you may partner with God and become participants in the divine nature.

So support your faith with excellence, knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, mutual affection, and love— love for each other, love for creation, and love for God, who so deeply loves you.