

September 11, 2022 First Sunday of Season of Creation  
The Rev. Amanda Gerken-Nelson

Listen to the Voice of Creation.

The Psalmist writes: (Psalm 19:1-4)

The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims  
God's 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.

Like the Psalmist, the 7th Century saint, Maximus, reminds us that the  
entire cosmos praises and glorifies God "with silent voices" – although,  
recently NASA released a recording of what a black hole sounds like. I'm  
not sure we could call it a "joyful noise" (Psalm 100) but I'm sure it's doing  
its best

St. Augustine, from the 4th Century, wrote, "[Creation] is the divine page  
that you must listen to; it is the book of the universe that you must observe.  
The pages of Scripture can only be read by those who know how to read  
and write, while everyone, even the illiterate, can read the book of the  
universe."

And, 16th Century theologian Martin Luther wrote, "God has written [the  
gospel] not only in books, but also in trees and other creatures."<sup>1</sup>

Listen to the voice of creation – are we listening? Are we attuned to what  
Creation is telling us?

What we've heard lately doesn't sound like good news:

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<sup>1</sup> "Listen to the Voice of Creation." *Season of Creation: Celebration Guide 2022*. Season of Creation  
Advisory Board.

Heatwaves across our country this summer<sup>2</sup>

Hail the size of softballs in Spain<sup>3</sup>

Massive floods in Pakistan<sup>4</sup>

Pieces of the antarctic that should they melt could increase sea level by 10 feet<sup>5</sup>

I wouldn't blame you if right about now in my sermon I saw you all start to plug your ears and say "no more!"

Why would we want to listen to creation if this is what we're going to hear?

It's bad news! The situation is dire – where do we find hope in listening to creation? When do we hear the good news, the gospel?

The situation is dire – scientists who have been proclaiming the dangers of climate change for decades continue to prophesy in our midst and their prophecy continues to land on plugged up ears

We know that there are folks in our world who are NOT listening to either Creation or the climate prophets

But, many of us are listening and still struggle with what we hear

Partly, I wonder if we are such creatures of habit that we *want* to know the truth about our creation and how it is crying out, but we're so comfortable in

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<sup>2</sup> <https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/images/150152/a-july-of-extremes>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2022/08/31/hailstones-storm-spain/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/videos/world/2022/09/07/flooding-in-pakistan-monsoon-on-steroids-coren-dnt-ebof-vpx.cnn>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/antarctica-doomsday-glacier-global-sea-levels-holding-on-by-fingernails/>

our patterns that we can't imagine *really* changing our habits so drastically as to make a dent in what's happening

Or, perhaps for some of us, we're listening to the voice of creation and we just feel paralyzed under the weight of what we're hearing and we just don't know where to start - "what can I really do? Will it make a difference?"

If we take Jesus' example from this morning's gospel, the direction we head is towards the issue, not away from it

In this morning's gospel, after being accused of welcoming sinners – remember that was an insult and a negative judgment against Jesus at the time – Jesus asks "which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until you find it?"

Well, Jesus...none of us do that?

No shepherd, if they lose one sheep, would abandon ninety-nine other sheep in the *wilderness* to go find one who decided to wander off?

Common practice would say "I'm sorry you wandered off, but I'm sticking with the ninety-nine" – I'm going to hedge my bets on the 99 over the 1

It's an irony that likely Jesus' audience back in the day also picked up on and so he follows it up with a specific example about money – if you lost a coin, would you not search the house for it?

Well, yeah

When it comes to lost money we get it

But, Jesus is saying that lost lamb is as important to him as a lost coin is to us – that lost cause is as important to him as the coin is to us (and we know

that much of the hesitation to drastic change in our world and society related to climate change is due to “the coin”)

For Jesus, the cause is NOT lost – the odds may seem ever against it (99 to 1), but Jesus seeks out the lamb and rejoices when he can bring it home

Jesus goes out toward the lost sheep, the lost cause, and gives *that* lamb his attention.

If we really think about it, Jesus was always going after the lost causes – the sinners he was judged for eating with, the sick and outcast, those on the edges of society

It is in their reconciliation that the whole world is reconciled.

When others say you should give up, Jesus says this is what matters

Perhaps we too can cultivate a spiritual practice of positioning ourselves towards the “lost causes,” including the seemingly lost cause of creation, and to listen to what creation is saying

The Season of Creation Advisory Board who created many of the resources we used to create our liturgy this morning, and is made up of faith leaders across the many Christian denominations, wrote that “Cultivating a spirituality of active listening helps us to discern the voices of God and our neighbors [amidst] the noise of destructive narratives. [Listening] moves us from despair to hope, from anxiety to action!

“Listening to the voice of creation” they wrote, “offers members of the Christian family a rich entry point for interfaith and interdisciplinary dialogue and practice.”

Can we, the community gathered at St. Bart’s, move towards God’s great creation, the lost sheep, the dire situation?

Can we listen and in listening propel ourselves towards action?

I think the answer is “yes, but how?”

The Advisory Board of the Season of Creation have created an Examen for us to practice as a tool for becoming more attentive to Creation

An examen is a spiritual tool often used in monastic communities.

In Ignatian spirituality, an examen is a technique of prayerful reflection on the events of the day in order to detect God's presence and discern God's direction for us.<sup>6</sup>

The Advisory Board has adapted that process in a way that can help us pay attention to Creation – I have printed out the instructions and put them at the back of the church for you to take with you when you leave this morning

But, the steps are simple:

Pick a natural or agricultural place to contemplate, and then:

1. Become aware of God's presence in this space.
2. Reflect on the ecological cycles of this place with gratitude for all that it provides
3. Listen for the voices that speak in this place and pay attention to what you feel as you contemplate the health of this site.
4. Choose one feature of the site and pray for it, its rest and its renewal.
5. Look toward your response. What can you do to ease demands or promote the rest of this ecological site?

It's a simple process with a, hopefully, profound result.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen/>

Just as Jesus believed going after that lost sheep was not only worthy of his time but would produce a result worthy of celebration

Let us approach our lost connection to creation with a belief that not only is this worthy of our time, but it will also produce a result worthy of celebration.

Listen, listen to the voice of creation.

Amen.