

## Interdependent

Friends of open hearts and open minds: On this day when we honor the integrity of creation, let us draw inspiration from both the early Jesus movement as depicted by the writer of the Acts of the Apostles and from the vivid imagery of sheep, river, valley and pasture depicted by David – a shepherd turned king. With eyes open or closed, I invite you to join your hearts with mine in prayer.

Holy Loving Spirit, we are grateful to be able to gather here in freedom to worship – both on our live stream and on this land, which has been loved by First Nations and others across time and where we are now weaving our way of community. Help us in this hour to notice anew some of the ways we can embody your love in the world such that we support the integrity of your creation. We pray this in the name of our great teacher, Jesus. Amen.

This past Wednesday, at Connecting with the Word (our weekly opportunity for discussion of the readings for the coming Sunday), I asked my conversation partners this: “What is God like? And how does that affect how you are connected with everything that is?” Here are a few of the descriptors (as I recall them) that we offered for what God is like: light, creativity, mystery, goodness, expansive, trust, big!

You will often hear me share my core conviction that God is a loving energy more widespread and powerful than we can imagine yet active in the minutia of each of our lives. As those gathered on Wednesday proceeded to share how their experiences of God affect how they are connected with all of creation, we shared a sense of clarity in that our very vast God’s light, creativity, mystery, goodness, expansive and trusting nature permeate our day-to-day living (including our mundane actions, reflections, and relationships).

I use the word transcendence to categorize those characteristics of God's vast impact – which our human concepts and vocabulary can only begin to describe. As God's transcendent power permeates each of our connections in the web of life, we also experience God as very imminent and intimate support.

I find that the most transformative moments in my walk of faith occur when I can feel God's transcendence directly informing how I will move in action, reflection or relationship.

They are the moments of deeper, clearer knowing:

- knowing that I need to and will **make a change**
- knowing that I need to and will **stay a course**
- or, least comfortable, knowing that I need to and will **pause to listen** for the Holy Spirit moving in my life – opening myself to release my grip on preconceived notions of what will happen next

On this Integrity of Creation Sunday and across this spring more broadly, I hope that we will each pause to listen for the Spirit of our God whose love pervades everything and welcome that vast loving presence to work imminently within our relationships and interactions with the rest of creation.

**On a broad level** – as we emerge from the particular intersectional crises of Metro Surge, as our federal administration continues to wage an unjustifiable war on Iran, as we approach mid-term elections while our democracy continues to erode – in those societal circumstances, how will you lean into our God whose transcendent loving power pervades our imminent experiences as you make a change, stay the course or pause to listen in regard to societal-level experiences?

**And on a personal level** – as you grieve a loss, begin a new adventure, continue to manage chronic physical and mental health challenges, grapple with both the good and the ill in a relationship, as you wonder what’s next for you – how will you lean into our God whose transcendent loving power pervades our imminent experiences as you make a change, stay the course or pause to listen in regard to one of those very personal circumstances?

Let’s turn to today’s reading from the book of the Acts of the Apostles to notice how Jesus’ early followers practiced their faith – their leaning into the transcendent yet imminent love of God. I noticed four practices that might serve as models for us. I hope that one of more might resonate with you.

We heard this: *“They **devoted themselves** to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”* Jesus’ lifetime had passed. Some of them had witnessed first-hand his public execution that had resulted from his outspoken struggle against the injustices of empire. Some of them had experienced Jesus appearing to them in what we call the resurrection period after his death. All who decided to continue to pattern their lives in the way of Jesus did so by devoting themselves to those teachings and practices – welcoming God’s presence as they gathered in community to break bread and to pray.

**I wonder, would you consider yourself devoted to Jesus’ teachings and to fellowship with other disciples of Jesus?** I also wonder, can you feel God’s loving power moving in you as you connect with people here at St. Croix United Church. I recall my search in my late 20’s for a right-fit thread of the Christian community amidst so many denominational options in which I had moved and wandered.

I knew that I had found the right fit for me in the United Church of Christ and also now in Congregationalism when I recognized that community members valued spiritual and theological curiosity and exploration at least as much as they valued arriving to shared answers to their wondering. I continue to gravitate toward gatherings of people devoted to exploring Jesus' teachings and engaging in fellowship – that is, the development of supportive relationships.

In what other ways did those early disciples practice their faith (their leaning into the transcendent yet imminent love of God)? We heard: “***Awe came upon everyone because many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.***” Those early followers included direct witnesses to the life and work of Jesus as well as 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation disciples. It must have taken a lot of courage and vulnerability to stay tenderly open to feeling awe in the presence of God's love at work through their community.

In our lives, community can be as small as two people, as comfortably homey as 50 to 60 people gathered together on a Sunday, as large as 200,000 of us gathered at our MN state capitol, or as huge as millions of people in solidarity across the global community. **I wonder, in which spaces of community in your life (small and intimate, comfortably homey, large or huge) do you open yourself tenderly to being awestruck by the transcendent yet imminent work of the love of God?**

In what other ways did those early disciples practice their faith (their leaning into the love of God)? Well, we heard, “***Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts...***” What a gift that the temple community in which the early disciples lived some of the hours of their days and weeks inspired them to carry gladness and generosity of heart into the rest of their daily living.

You may have heard be say that I think of the local church (us!) as an incubator – a space of encouragement, challenge, and affirmation that can weekly buoy each of our spirits (during the two or more hours we each find ourselves here) so that we have strengthened capacity for the grit and grace required for the rest of our daily and weekly living.

In what other ways did those early disciples practice their faith (their leaning into the love of God)? Well, finally, we heard, *“And day by day the Lord added to their number **those who were being saved.**”* I wonder, are we saving one another through our connections within this faith community as St. Croix United Church? From what and for what do we need saving? I trust that we are part of God’s salvific work every time that we remind each other of our interdependence – our reliance on one another. We do this by honoring each other. This happens through eye contact held for an extended (possibly even uncomfortable) moment of love, a kind word offered with specific and genuine intention, and even an email sent on a Sunday afternoon to tell someone how their presence had added something positive to your life this very morning. By leaning into our transcendent yet imminent God, we can be part of saving one another from loneliness and disconnection and for life in community.

In closing, let’s review some of the ways that the shepherd turned king and poet David experienced the power of this transcendent yet imminent God. I’ve chosen three portions that really spoke to me:

*“You bring me to green pastures for rest  
and lead me beside still waters  
renewing my spirit;  
You restore my soul.  
You lead me in the path of goodness...”*

May we be on the lookout for our God's power through the restful, renewing, and restorative experiences we need to buoy our faith.

David went on:

*"For You are ever with me;  
your rod and your staff they guide me,  
they give me strength and comfort."*

May we follow in the way of Jesus' earliest generations of disciples by staying devoted and knit together in order to experience the comforting, strengthening guidance of the love of our God.

And finally, it always makes me smile from the inside out to read this:

*"...my cup overflows.  
Surely goodness and mercy will follow me  
all the days of my life..."*

May we stay especially open to the transcendent moments of awe, overwhelm, overflow – such that we are part of goodness and mercy continuing in this web of creation.

May we move into this spring open to opportunities to live out our interdependence with more intentionality – leaning into our transcendent, amazing, and imminent God – because Love is counting on us. Amen.

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April 26, 2026 | Integrity of Creation & Bible Sunday  
Acts 2:42-47, a companion text to Psalm 23