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Wait with Eager Longing

Core Faith

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, YEAR A

Romans 8 calls us to see creation's groaning as bound up with our own salvation, inviting us to exercise dominion not as exploitation but as Christ-shaped care for a world longing to be reborn in hope.

REFERENCES

Genesis 28:10-19a

Psalm 139:1-12, 23-24

Romans 8:12-25

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

COLORS

Green

Worship Planning Notes

Focus text: **Romans 8:12-25**

For many of us, waiting is not our strong suit. As I write this, just a few days removed from Epiphany Sunday, the season of Advent is still fresh in my mind, and with it the sense of sitting in the liminal space of the kingdom of God, here and not yet. This is the kind of waiting I witness in Paul's words in Romans 8:19, except it's not just us who are waiting—it is all creation. I love the image of all creation groaning, because that's certainly what I want to do when I feel like I'm waiting in vain for everything in the world to get better. I groan. I lament. I complain. The stronger I feel it, the louder (and more annoying) I get. All I want is for someone to hear me and *do*

something, to fix all the problems that seem too big to even comprehend but impact so many of us daily.

At the heart of the groaning are two things: (1) Something is not right; (2) I need someone else to listen and confirm that something is not right. This week, we have an opportunity to listen, join in, and do something alongside the groaning of creation. For some communities, creation care is top of mind; for others, it feels too big and overwhelming. Some of us have been touched by natural disasters, and our economies have been negatively affected by unpredictable weather. Some of us experience the effects of air and water pollution, while others rarely get more than a glimpse of green space. Whatever is happening in your community, focus there first. Pray for and with creation. Set up prayer stations or use images on slides to guide a time of prayer for our common home, beginning with your neighborhood. Find ways to draw those gathered into *delight* with creation. “Go touch grass” has become shorthand online for “disconnect and go be in nature,” and while it is definitely a fad, it’s also true. How do we help our congregants encounter the invitation and even the opportunity to “touch grass” in worship? Maybe it’s filling the altar with flowers and rocks and wild things from outside, not a manicured floral arrangement, but something that celebrates the abundance of God’s beauty and creativity in creation. Maybe it’s having the children participate in a nature scavenger hunt during Sunday school and then share their treasures during the children’s message.

By bringing together delight and prayer with creation, we are empowered to imagine what is ours to do, how we will reveal ourselves to be God’s children (Romans 8:19) by caring for and with creation. How will we show creation that we are listening to the groaning? Consider including an invitation to discipleship that offers two or three small acts for congregants to choose from that they can do during the week ahead. Or, depending on the size of your congregation, have congregants brainstorm small things they could do with others sitting around them as a response to the sermon. And then, end the service with a blessing to pay attention, to groan alongside, and to follow the Spirit’s nudging to act for the well-being of all creation, beginning right there in your own community.

Author biography:

Dr. Lisa Hancock, Director of Worship Arts Ministries, served as an organist and music minister in United Methodist congregations in the legacy Northwest Texas and North Texas Annual Conferences. After receiving her Master of Sacred Music and Master of Theological Studies from Perkins School of Theology, she earned her PhD in Religious Studies from Southern Methodist University, where she researched and wrote on the doctrine of Christ, disability, and atonement.

Lisa is also the co-lead of the “Growing in Grace: Accessible Worship for All God’s Children” initiative.

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