

Good morning, God's people!

The theme for this Creation Sunday is land and plants. I can think of no better theme as we gather outside, in the churchyard...oh wait!

This morning, we were meant to engage in an earth examen.<sup>1</sup> An examen is a way of beholding an object or being in prayerful wonder. Through examining questions, you are invited to reflect on God's presence and the goodness of that which you behold.

And, rain or no rain, that is what we will do. Originally, we would have all made the churchyard our grounding for this spiritual practice. But, as we will be using our imaginations more already, I also invite you to consider if there is another grounding place you want to behold in prayerful wonder.

As I said last week, this creation season we are focusing on listening to the voice of creation. Open your senses to listen to the voices that praise God, and draw our hearts to God's presence here.

We begin by naming the ground we are on - the land of the Lenape people, which was stolen from them and never returned. Lord, have mercy.

Notice the ground beneath your feet. Feel the floor, the foundation. Now imagine roots on the bottom of your feet, connecting you to the ground. They are deep roots, running as far into the ground as you can imagine. You are rooted. You are centered. You are connected.

Now, go to your grounding place in your mind's eye. Like Oliver in her poem, let the earth welcome you. Take in the details. The smells and sounds. Taste and touch. Invite Holy Wisdom to open the eyes of your heart. I will now guide us through the examen. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions.

1. Become aware of God's presence in the place that you are contemplating.

How is God present in this place? How does all the life you see exist in God's spirit? How do you feel knowing that the Holy Spirit has filled this place for geological ages, with every plant, animal, organism and mineral that has called this place home in the deep past, makes its home here with you now, and will live here with creatures in this place in the future? How do you feel knowing that you, earthling, belong to this place, are made of the same carbon, breathe the same air, are nurtured by the same cycles and life processes, and are enlivened by the same Spirit of the Creator?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://seasonofcreation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/SOC-2022-Celebration-Guide-Final-English.pdf>

2. Reflect on the ecological cycles of this place with gratitude for all that it provides.

What nutrient cycles are supported by this place? Is this a watershed that filters water? Is this a meadow or field that fixes nitrogen? Is this a green space that absorbs CO2 and cleans the air? What plants, animals, microbes and minerals are sheltered here? How do they serve the whole earth in their being? For all that this place provides to nurture you and all that belong to this place, let a feeling of gratitude fill you.

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.

Fill your lungs with breath. Be attentive to what you feel (the air, grass, sand, soil, sun, rain) on your skin. Listen to the voices of creation in this place. Who are they? What do you hear them saying? Who is missing or lost from this place? What does their absence tell you?

Is this ecosystem healthy? What must happen to sustain the equilibrium and balance of this place? How do you feel when you consider the fragility of life that depends on the health of this place? What is your effect on this balance?

4. Choose one feature of the site and pray for it, its rest and its renewal.

When you consider the ways that this place is under stress, what does it need for rest, restoration and renewal? What needs to be conserved for this site to heal itself? What features need to be reclaimed? What parts of creation need to be restored to their rightful home here? Pray for this site, and the wisdom to care for it.

5. Look toward your response. What can you do to ease demands or promote the rest of this ecological site?

Based on your examination, how do you identify with this place? What have you discerned is required to care for this place? Whose voice from among this place will you seek to amplify? What will be your act of compassion to promote rest for this common home?

When Oliver remembered and reconnected with the earth that never forgot her, she says,

By morning / I had vanished at least a dozen times / into something better.

Vanishing isn't usually a good thing, yet her pairing this word with "something better" pushes against that negative understanding. We get the sense Oliver wasn't removed or gone, but more deeply connected – less of an I and more of a we, like we are God's good creation. If you vanished into something better through this examen, may that connection keep you grounded and nourished. Amen.