



# ANOINTED TO ACT JUSTLY

**Luke 4:14** Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. **15** He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. **16** When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, **17** and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

**18** “The Spirit of God is upon me,  
because God has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.

Has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,

**19** to proclaim the year of God’s favour.”

**20** And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. **21** Then he began to say to them: “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

**Elaine Wainwright** is a biblical scholar specialising in eco-feminist interpretation and is currently writing a Wisdom Commentary on Matthew’s Gospel.



Elaine Wainwright reads Luke 4:14-20 ecologically, pointing to our invitation to respond to the Spirit poured on us to do justice in our world.

**T**he text from the Gospel of Luke is the Gospel we will hear and read during the 2019 liturgical year. It is a familiar text reflecting what would have been a regular event in Jesus’s life: his going to the synagogue in his home town of Nazareth on the Sabbath and his being called to read from the Torah from time to time. The text from the prophet Isaiah that Jesus selects to read on this occasion as narrated by Luke is often called *programmatic* because it sums up the mission and ministry of Jesus – good news to the poor, liberty to captives, sight to the blind and freedom to the downtrodden.

### Reading with All Earth Community in Mind

Traditionally we have read/heard this text against the backdrop of suffering and injustice of the human community. We need to continue to do so as suffering abounds across planet Earth despite our work for justice. For instance, we know that 20 per cent of Earth’s human population consumes 80 per cent of the planet’s resources – which causes extreme poverty and degradation far beyond our imagining for many of the other 80 per cent. But the Spirit of God is given to us in these days as it was given to Jesus, inviting us to expand our discernment of justice. One of the voices that can guide us in this regard,

as the prophet Isaiah guided Jesus, is that of theologian Elizabeth Johnson who envisages: “a flourishing humanity on a thriving planet rich in species in an evolving universe, all together filled with the glory of God: such is the vision that must guide us at this critical time of Earth’s distress to practical and critical effect” (*Ask the Beasts*, p 286).

If this becomes our vision, the lens through which we read our sacred texts, then the planet and indeed the entire universe and all its constituents becomes the context both in which and through which we seek to read the Gospel. Attentiveness to the other-than-human as well as to the human elements and characters in a text is another way of describing the new, expansive way of reading which we now call “reading ecologically”.

### **Spirit Gives Understanding of New Relationships**

The opening verse of the scriptural selection (Luke 4:14) places us in a rich interactive environment. The human Jesus is said to be moved by the power of the Spirit, by a force that is more-than-human but interactive with the human. This Spirit seems to impel Jesus into a material context: the geographical region of Galilee and the village of Nazareth in particular; and the synagogue as the explicit location. Habitat, human and holy in spirit-infused interrelationships opens this section with the natural environment (Galilee and Nazareth in particular) in creative interaction with the built environment of village and synagogue.

It is in this rich, interactive context that Jesus stands up to read. He is handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, a papyrus scroll made from the papyrus plant, the medium for bringing the Jewish scriptures to the community. Creative interrelationships between the human and the material continue to be made explicit in this text (Luke 4:16-17) with the entire interactive context being spirit-filled. It is evident in the opening words of the text of Isaiah 61:1-3 (and Is 58: 6) from which Jesus reads. The Spirit of God has been given to the prophet in a material human body over which oil has been poured out. The oil evokes Earth’s materials: ancient olive trees with their fruit processed into olive oil which is used to anoint – the human and the divine intertwine. The Lucan text specifies Jesus as the prophet to whom this text is addressed. He claims: “Today this text is being fulfilled in your hearing” (Lk 4:21).

### **Anointed to Do Justice**

There is now another “today” – our day – when this text is being fulfilled yet again. We can hear it speaking in an ecological key. The Spirit of God has been given to us, to the entire Earth community, anointing us to bring about now the vision of justice and restoration appropriate to our day.

“Good news to the poor” extends beyond the human community to include all Earth’s species. That good news is of right and just relationships that support the flourishing of all on land, in the oceans and in the air.

“Liberty to captives” includes species which are caught in the web of human power so that they are dying a

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thousand times faster than through the natural process.

“Sight to the blind” evokes the urgent need that the human community sees beyond its own narrow wants and desires and opens its eyes to the plight of the planet itself and all its diverse species.

“To set the downtrodden free” envisages an Earth community in which all its constituents live fully.

This vision enables us to proclaim with the prophet Jesus, in the words of Isaiah, a year of God’s favour. At the time of Isaiah and at the time of Jesus, the words of each prophet rang out for justice. They resound anew in our time and in our circumstances – a time of profound ecological crisis.

As we enter this new year, with the crisis even more acute, may we be attentive to habitat, the human and the holy as we are anointed prophets of a new justice. This new justice extends beyond Earth to include the cosmos. 🐾



## **Residential Retreats 2019**

**Mary McKillop Centre, 56 Selwyn Ave,  
Mission Bay, Auckland**

**‘Deep calls to Deep’ May 24(10am) — 26(3pm)**

3-day silent retreat. If your heart is calling you to put down your technology, come aside, and take this opportunity to be silent, still and notice the deeper desires of your heart; then this retreat could be for you. *Application open to all. Cost to be advised*

**‘A New Heart’ July 21 (7pm) — 30 (9am)**

An 8-day silent individually guided retreat in the dynamic of the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola. *Application open to all. Cost to be advised*

**‘Attending to Holy Mystery’ September 20 (7pm)**

— 27 (9am) A 6-day silent individually guided retreat in the dynamic of the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola. *Open to all. Cost to be advised*

**Further information and registration visit:**

**[www.ignatianspirituality.nz](http://www.ignatianspirituality.nz)**

**or email: [info@ignatianspirituality.nz](mailto:info@ignatianspirituality.nz)**



**Luke 15:** 1 Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to Jesus. 2 And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying: “ This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

3 So Jesus told them this parable: 11 “There was a man who had two sons. 12 The younger of them said to his father: ‘Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.’ So he divided his property between them. 13 A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. 14 When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout the country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. 16 He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. 17 But when he came to himself he said: ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! 18 I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him: ‘Father I have sinned against heaven and before you; 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.’

20 So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. 21 Then the son said to him: ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ 22 But the father said to his slaves: ‘Quickly, bring out a robe – the best one – and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24 for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.

25 “Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. 27 He replied: ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.’ 28 Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. 29 But he answered his father: ‘Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came back, who had devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’ 31 Then the father said to him: ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’”

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## LOSS AND RESTORATION

**ELAINE WAINWRIGHT** gives an ecological reading of the parable of the Lost Son in Luke 15:11-32.

**W**e are so very familiar with the parable we call *The Prodigal Son* that it is challenging to read it with fresh eyes. When we read it ecologically we bring new perspectives, new reading lenses to the narrative so that we look at Earth, the material, the other-than-human as these intersect with the human.

The three opening verses set the scene for Jesus’s preaching through three parables. First is the shepherd and his lost sheep (Lk 15:4-7), next, the widow and her lost



coin (Lk 15:8-10) and then the father who loses a son, or perhaps two (Luke 15:11-32). The context is significant. Tax collectors and sinners are seeking Jesus to hear what he has to say while Pharisees and scribes are complaining that he not only teaches but welcomes sinners and eats with them. Our attention is drawn to the human characters and their interrelationships. And in this context the parable begins: “A man had two sons . . .”

The parable focuses the reader on “the younger” son who requests the “share of the estate” that would come to him, his material inheritance which preempts the death of his father. The material and the social are intimately interconnected in the negotiations but

we do not hear of the implications for the father and his older son. We hear only that the younger one gathers together all his material possessions and leaves for a distant country. He has fractured the family — its material and social fabric — and he is left with only “his share of the estate”.

That fracture finds expression in his going to a “distant country” and his squandering of his inheritance in what the parable calls “dissolute living”. He is without both a “right place” and right relationships with the material realities necessary for survival and for living with the human community. All have broken down, the material as well as the social. An ecological reading invites us to consider both as integrally related to our wellbeing, integrally related in the son who is totally abandoned — “no one offered him anything”.

This young man has, however, a memory of his previous life in his father’s house where both material and social resources abounded. There was an abundance of food for the household — “no one was in want”. It must also have been a place of acceptance and love so that he is able to decide to return to his father and to confess that he has sinned “against heaven and against you”. With our tendency to focus on the human community, it is easy for us to miss the reference to sinning against heaven. The son’s actions have torn not only the social fabric but also the ecological — both will need to be restored.

As the parable unfolds, that social and ecological restoration becomes apparent. The son is a long way off from his father’s household when he is seen. Material distance does not, however, equate with emotional distance. The father is moved with compassion, moved in the depth of his being at the approach of his son. When father and son are reunited, the father “clasped him in his arms and kissed him tenderly”. The material, the bodily manifestation of the father’s welcoming love is so overwhelming that he does not attend to the son’s protestation of guilt. Instead, he “clasped him in his arms and kissed him tenderly”. Again the material, the bodily, manifests

the emotional: “This son of mine was dead and has come back to life, he was lost and is found”. And the words find expression in actions and we are drawn into a material and social world: that of the best robe, a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. It is a time of celebration and the material contributes to such a celebration.

But another note is struck, however, and another material and social world evoked. It is that of the elder brother who is “out in the fields” — indicating a work context which contributes to the household economy. As the son makes his way home, he hears the music and dancing, the sounds of celebration, and when he enquires he discovers that his long lost brother has returned and his father has ordered a household feast. The material and the social continue to intersect — and in amongst this stands the angry elder brother. He challenges his father speaking of his faithful contribution to the household over “many years”. And in loving response his father indicates the material and social worlds that he shares with his father: all the material elements of the estate are his.

Jesus does not “complete” the story. Indeed it is a parable that evokes our engagement with the unfolding threads. We are not told if the elder son joins the feast to celebrate his brother’s return. Does he feast and dance with the rest of the household and rejoice? We do not know. What we have seen, however, is that a parable is drawn from the experience of the human community: a father, his two sons and his household. The material world of estates, food and food production (or lack of such as in famine) engages us as readers. Parables are full of material details — it is through these details that we are able to develop an ecological awareness. This awareness will enable us to read both old and new life situations ecologically. 🌀

Painting: *The Return of the Prodigal* by Grace Carol Bomer © Used with permission [www.gracecarolbomer.com](http://www.gracecarolbomer.com)



# RESURRECTION is GOD ACTING NOW



**Luke 24:1-12** On the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. 2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3 but when they went in, they did not find the body. 4 While they were preplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. 5 The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them: "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. 6 Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, 7 that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." 8 Then they remembered his words, 9 and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. 10 Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and other women with them who told this to the apostles. 11 But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. 12 But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

**ELAINE WAINWRIGHT** suggests that we read the resurrection story of Luke 24:1-12 as the culmination of Jesus's life and death and as God's continuing acting in all of creation.

**A**t the beginning of March many of us in Australia and New Zealand were grappling with the death of Denis Edwards, outstanding eco-theologian in our region and internationally. A priest of the Adelaide Archdiocese, South Australia, Denis was captured by the question of *how God acts* (the title of one of his books) in an evolving universe. Having spent his life questioning how we might understand the Christian tradition in an evolving universe and amid complex eco-systems, Denis now knows the profound experience of this reality at the heart of life in a new way.

In *How God Acts*, Denis describes resurrection as "an unimaginable and amazing act of God in our history . . . a promise that human beings and with them the whole creation will be transfigured in Christ." He goes on to say that resurrection "contains a claim that the final transformation of all things has already begun in Jesus and is at work in the universe." Elsewhere, he says that

“resurrection is not only the culmination of the life and death of Jesus, but also the inner meaning of creation.” He makes this very explicit when he says that “resurrection is the central expression in our history of the self-giving love of God who is present in every ancient oak tree, every ant, and every kangaroo, closer than they are to themselves, as the source of their being and the enabler of their action.” He invites us through the enduring quality of his words to encounter this “self-giving love of God” not only in ancient oak but also majestic kauri; in kangaroo and kiwi. God is appealing to us through Denis’s life and work to discover anew how God acts.

*"The God of resurrection is the God who is present, in the life-giving Spirit, in the events of the big bang, in the stars which lit up the early universe, in the first bacterial life on Earth, in the lives of the first human beings in the history of Israel, and in the life and death of Jesus."*

At Easter time each year, we seek to "discover anew how God acts". In this, we turn to our sacred texts, the scriptures and their story-ing of Jesus’s journey through life, death, and resurrection. Our growing ecological consciousness also turns our attention to Earth and Earth’s story as it interacts with the Jesus story. In this short article I seek to listen to each of these stories and their profound interrelationship in the text of Luke 24:1–12 as they reveal a little more clearly for us the God who acts.

As with most stories, the account of Easter morning in the Gospel of Luke grounds what is recounted in time and place.

It is the first day of the week and at the first sign of dawn. These details are not mere props in the story. They invite us to attend to time that both locates each happening and alerts us to its potential: the *first* day of the week and the *first* sign of dawn. Interdependent with time is place – the women go to the tomb – and it is in this time and this place peopled with the materiality of human bodies and fragrant with the spices that the women had prepared, that resurrection will be experienced.


The materiality permeating the narrative engages us as readers as the narrator informs us that the stone, the cover to the entrance to the tomb has been rolled back. The earthen tomb that had received the body of Jesus who had been crucified is revealed. But, the text says pointedly, the material body of Jesus was not there. The words of the two figures who appear to the women provide an explanation: "He has been raised" (Lk 24:5).

How might we understand this resurrection of Jesus from an ecological perspective? Denis Edwards can help us. He says that in "Jesus's act of self-giving in death, he falls into the arms of God and is raised up and transformed in the life-giving spirit . . . In the paschal event, part of evolutionary history gives itself completely into God." Denis tells us: "The God of resurrection is the God who is present, in the life-giving Spirit, in the events of the big bang, in the stars which lit up the early universe, in the first bacterial life on Earth, in the lives of the first human beings in the history of Israel, and in the life and death of Jesus."

As we read/hear the Lucan text this Easter, we are

invited to encounter the "God of resurrection". This may occur as we hear the words of the ones in dazzling apparel: "Why do you look for the living among the dead. He is not here but has been raised" (Lk 24:5). But for those of us who seek to hear these words in a world understood from an evolutionary perspective, there needs to be an expansion of our consciousness.

The final verses of Luke 24:1–12 remind us that this extraordinary expansion of consciousness occurs in a world marred by limitations and injustice. For instance, the testimony of the women is not believed by the male disciples, even though three of them are specifically named which indicates their significance in the community. Peter quietly confirms "what had happened", providing a conclusion to the obvious gendering of the narrative.

When we return to the heart of the story, Jesus has been raised. We each spend our life-time engaging with this reality. Our growing ecological consciousness is inviting us, as it invited Denis Edwards, to allow the call of the universe to lead us along new pathways for interpreting and understanding the God who acts in ways beyond our imagining. 

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# Peace in the Universe

**John 14:23-29** Jesus answered Judas (not Iscariot): "Those who love me will keep my word, and the Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. 24 Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

25 "I have said these things to you while I am still with you. 26 But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. 27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. 28 You heard me say to you: 'I am going away, and I am coming to you.' If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. 29 And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe."



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ELAINE WAINWRIGHT suggests that the latest space discoveries invite us to read John 14:23-29 with a whole new appreciation of love and relationship in the cosmos.

**A**t this time of year we ponder more explicitly the extraordinary moments of death and life that weave their way through our experience. These moments are always with us, but at Easter our faith communities invite us to attend to this rhythm of life and death even more intimately.

With attentiveness we can expand our horizons with growing ecological awareness. We recognise that these patterns are woven not just in the human community but in the fabric of the entire universe.

While I was composing this reflection an article by Dennis Overbye arrived in my inbox called "Darkness Visible, Finally: Astronomers Capture First Ever Image of a Black Hole". It opened a whole new appreciation of John's text for me.

As the title suggests, Overbye recognises an extraordinarily new phenomenon — an *image* of the unobservable. A black hole — a cosmic abyss so deep and dense that not even light can escape it.

What could this revelation about the story of the cosmos mean for us enlightened by resurrection?

As we undertake these journeys deep into the cosmos, we are reminded of the relational quality evoked by the

words of the Johannine text: "love me", "love them", "make our home with them".

We have tended to read these texts as being directed to humans only. But an ecological reading goes further. In dialogue with Denis Edwards' work last month (*TM* April 2019), I wrote about our engagement with resurrection as including the "inner meaning of creation". I think that Overbye's discussion of the Black Hole can extend the meaning even further when he notes that "supermassive black holes can be the most luminous objects in the universe". It now seems to me that we are being invited to a new way of reading – to a "universal" as well as "ecological" way.

The Johannine text (Jn 14:23-29) names the recipients of Jesus's words as "disciples". How might this text be expanded if we understand the recipients/disciples to be not only humans but all other-than-human – including the universal?

This means that they, too, are addressed as caught up in the network of right relationships (love) that includes divinity as well as the human Jesus. It is in this new context that disciples are reminded of all that Jesus has taught them. This includes the new ecological perspectives into which disciples are being instructed.

In the Johannine text this new perspective is named peace: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives" (Jn 14:27).

The text recognises that this peace differs from that of "the world" – of the human community. We can now read this text as that peace which includes the ecological and the universal – a peace far beyond what the world can give. **i**



## My Passion in Social Justice

I am passionate about awareness of mental health issues in New Zealand and what we can do to help. I believe this is important because of the huge number who experience depression and suicide in our community.

The reason I am so passionate is because of my own struggles with my anxiety. I also have friends and family who are held down by their mental health issues and I know that people are uncomfortable talking about it. That's why I believe it's important to raise awareness so that it becomes normal to discuss mental health in groups of supportive people.

To help address this topic and initiate discussions about mental health, my goal is to hold an event where we are all free to discuss ourselves and our friends and family. Another idea is to simply discuss mental health because the first step to overcoming mental health issues is to talk about them with family and friends. If everyone was to open up about our issues around mental health, then people wouldn't hide this part of themselves away. I believe that talking about it with others is the first step. **i**



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## Listen to the Voice of Sophia

ELAINE WAINWRIGHT focuses on Sophia's song of delight in creation in Proverbs 8:22-31.

We seldom hear readings from the Book of Proverbs in our liturgies. We're familiar with the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, and the historical Narratives – from Joshua to the Books of the Kings. We pray the Psalms regularly which are part of the third segment of the Bible – Wisdom Literature. But it is rare to hear readings from other books in the Wisdom collection.

The extract from Proverbs 8:22-31 is not typical of the maxims or proverbs that give the book its name. Rather it is a song of praise in the voice of *Sophia*/Wisdom of the one who created and shapes the universe. *Sophia* sings she is there – caught up in the creative activity as the

foundations are laid down. "I was by your side", she says to the divine one, "a unique craftswoman".

Through their history the people of Israel usually named God using male imagery, Lord and King being the most common. But encounters with neighbouring nations and more varied roles given to women expanded their imagery to include the female. In this song in Proverbs, *Sophia* draws us into the interrelationships of the universe.

*Sophia* sings of the "first" unfolding of the divine design, before the deep/*tehom* we read about in Genesis 1:2, before the oldest of the works of the Creating One.

*Sophia* already exists before life was called forth by the One who creates and shapes it. It is through the repetition of "before . . . before . . . before" that we can understand the agelessness of *Sophia* in relation to the apparent timelessness of the universe.

It is easy to see the relevance of this text from Proverbs to our world today. *Sophia* is concerned with ecology; she rejoices in the diversity of species: birds, insects, cattle and reptiles. When we think of the human destruction of so many living creatures and their habitats today we realise how far our situation is from the words of her song:


"I was by your side a unique craftswoman  
 Delighting you day after day  
 At play everywhere in the world,  
 Delighting to be among the human family."

Elaine Wainwright is a biblical scholar specialising in eco-feminist interpretation and is currently writing a Wisdom Commentary on Matthew's Gospel.



The song draws us into the interrelationships among the divine, the human and the whole of material reality. It invites us to encounter *Sophia* at play everywhere in the world, delighting to be among the human family.

But we need also to be aware that *Sophia* would weep at human destruction of creation. Recent reports, such as IPBES (Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services) Global Assessment report, give us cause for concern and urgent action. They provide the evidence about the wellbeing of planet Earth from research in the sciences. The *National Geographic* magazine claimed in 2018 that even with its widely diverse collections of animals and plants, Australia leads in extinction rates worldwide. Australia has 35 endangered species and New Zealand has 28 – both countries registering threats to the survival of their native species through human actions.

We can imagine that the voice of *Sophia*, the one who was there before the oldest of God's works, might be lamenting in our time. Her voice from the heart of the Trinity needs to touch us. We, the human community, must now right our wrongs so that we can join in *Sophia's* voice song of delight in the Earth community. 

#### Proverbs 8:22-31

The Wisdom of God cries aloud  
"You, my God, created me when your purpose first unfolded,  
Before the oldest of your works.  
From everlasting I was firmly set,  
From the beginning before Earth came into being  
The deep was not, when I was born,  
There were no springs to gush with water  
Before the mountains were settled,  
Before the hills, I came to birth,  
Before you made the earth,  
The countryside, or the first grains of the world's dust  
When you fixed the heavens firm, I was there;  
When you drew a ring on the surface of the deep;  
When you thickened the clouds above  
And fixed fast the springs of the deep,  
When you assigned the sea its boundaries,  
So the waters could not disobey you  
And when you laid down the foundations of the earth,  
I was by your side a unique craftswoman  
Delighting you day after day  
At play everywhere in the world,  
Delighting to be among the human family."

[Source of Translation Unknown]

Shiloh Sophia McCloud has dedicated her life to the belief that self-expression is a basic human right. She brings this work to thousands around the world through her paintings, poetry and teachings. She leads a global movement of revolutionary education focused in Intentional Creativity®, as offered in the Color of Woman Teacher Training. She co-founded a Studio and Museum, called MUSEA, in Sonoma, California, with her husband Jonathan.

Poetry and Paintings: [www.shilohsophia.com](http://www.shilohsophia.com)

Workshops: [www.cosmiccowgirls.com](http://www.cosmiccowgirls.com)

Movement: [www.musea.org](http://www.musea.org)

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## The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope For, and Believe

by Richard Rohr

Published by Convergent Books,

SPCK Publishing, 2019

Reviewed by Pat Neuwelt


BOOK

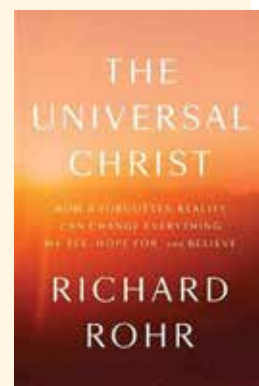
**T**he *Universal Christ* is Richard Rohr's hot-off-the-press book – an absolute gem! It is a call to personal spiritual transformation and action for peace in the world. Rohr invites the reader to explore a richer understanding of Jesus in both his humanity and divinity – a Jesus Christ for our time. In my view, this book encapsulates Rohr's core teachings.

Drawing on a lifetime of study and human enquiry as a Franciscan priest and teacher of the Christian contemplative path, Rohr offers a series of profound insights that take the reader on a journey.

It begins in Part 1, "Another Name for Everything", in which he explores who and what "Christ" is, drawing on rich insights from science and from many Christian mystics.

In Part 2, "The Great Comma", Rohr takes the reader deeply into the humanity of Jesus, openly critiquing Church teachings offering "a disembodied Jesus". Rohr states: "Humanity needs a Jesus who is historical, relevant for real life, physical and concrete, like we are ... a Jesus we can practically imitate, and who sets the bar for what it means to be fully human. And a Christ who is big enough to hold all creation together in one harmonious unity."

While this book may sound heavy, Rohr writes in a conversational style that is honest, often humorous and truly heart-warming. For example, after dedicating the book to his recently deceased dog he later writes: "Honestly, and without any stretch, my dog Venus taught me more about 'real presence' over a 15-year period than my theological manual ever did." The writing style invites personal reflection. The book lends itself to being slowly savoured alone, but can also be broken open collectively. It is a book worthy of shared study by a circle of friends or small faith community – and there is a companion study guide available for purchase. *The Universal Christ* is highly recommended to anyone who has an inkling that Christ is truly another name for everything, a force of Love at the heart of the universe. 



Richard Rohr's *Daily Meditations* are at:  
<https://cac.org/category/daily-meditations/>





Painting: Our Father by Jen Norton © Used with permission www.jennortonartstudio.com

**Luke 11:1-4** Jesus was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him: "Lord/Kyrios, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples."

- 2 He said to them: "When you pray, say:  
Father, hallowed be your name.  
Your kingdom/*basileia* come.
- 3 Give us each day our daily bread.
- 4 And forgive us our sins,  
for we ourselves forgive  
everyone indebted to us.  
And do not bring us to the time of trial."

**Elaine Wainwright** is a biblical scholar specialising in eco-feminist interpretation and is currently writing a Wisdom Commentary on Matthew's Gospel.



## Our Daily Bread

Elaine Wainwright suggests how we can pray the Our Father in this time of ecological crisis.

**T**his prayer of Jesus is one of the best known and loved from our scriptures. It has been translated into many languages – and with each translation and iteration the nuance varies. In this article I'll suggest how we can use it in our ecological context.

In the opening phrase of the story Jesus is praying (Lk 11:1-4). He's engaged in a human activity but one which links him with the Divine. It reminds us that prayer is grounded in place and time – Jesus prays in "a certain place" and he ends his praying. We can ground our prayer in our own space, place and time when ecological concerns are at the forefront of our consciousness.

Then one of the disciples asks Jesus to teach them to



pray. He responds from his own experience: "When you pray say: 'Father, hallowed be your name'".

Jesus offers his disciples his own intimate name for God: Father. This name draws the disciples into a loving relationship including them in his experience of being the beloved.

But the name "Father" has other connotations. Addressing God as "Father" immediately sets it within human relationships. It is the title designating the pater familias, the head of the first-century Roman households. He owned and ruled over the entire household: women, children, slaves and property. This image of "father" has accompanied the gospel across the centuries. But in these times we recognise that an image that encourages domination and subjugation in relationships, particularly in relation to gender, is unhealthy for the human community, for the Earth community — and for our relationship with God. So as well as critiquing these connotations, we can use new metaphors such as "mother", "lover", "friend", "gardener" and many others. These addresses for God can enrich our prayer at this time in our world.

*The whole of God's household is gathered up into this prayer — a chorus of the human, animal and material praising the Creator and protector.*

Thinking of the first-century world of Jesus, the sense of "father" as pater familias sees God as protector of the humans within his "household" and also of the other than human — the dwelling itself, land, water, animals, tools, grain and many other items. The whole of God's household is gathered up into this prayer — a chorus of the human, animal and material praising the Creator and protector.

After opening the prayer by naming and praising the Divine One, Jesus invites disciples to pray for the "coming" of the *basileia* — the reign of God not the empire of Rome. Michael Trainor suggests that longing for such a *basileia* is the "recognition that all is not right on Earth and that God's loving power is what will eventually overcome the oppression experienced". We hear this in the request: "Give us each day our daily bread."

The request for daily bread is rich in ecological significance when we face excessive accumulation and desperate want in our world. The prayer asks for the bread that is necessary just for that day. Our challenge in the 21st century is to trust that tomorrow will provide what will sustain all creatures, all life-forms that rely upon Earth for survival. It is a radical challenge to the human community to share and to live in a way that allows all life to flourish.

The prayer continues: "forgive us our sins". In this context sin is not just individual transgressions but includes the structural and ecological sins of the global community and its local manifestations. The sins of polluting, contaminating and dumping affect the air, water and earth — the flourishing of Earth. Michael Trainor calls these "social and environmental sin" because they affect all life on the planet.

There is a sense of reciprocity and restoration in the phrase: "And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive

everyone indebted to us." As Earth dwellers we are all impacted by ecological sin and we are Earth's polluters. We sin and we are sinned against. The prayer invites us first to recognise our own implication in ecological sin and to pray for forgiveness. And our prayer must move beyond words to include restorative action in relation to all Earth's beings.

The final verse is a plea: "Do not bring us to the time of trial". In an ecological context we have heard the evidence suggesting that our Earth is slowly moving towards a tipping point where it will no longer be able to support life. Rather than dismiss these warnings as fearmongering we can face the evidence and urge the global community to change. In individual and in global ways we can promote truth and work with hope.

This prayer that Jesus first taught his disciples continues to be our prayer in the context of ecological awareness. We can pray it from a personal perspective — to guide us through our daily life — but it can also become humanity's prayer for the protection of Earth. As we pray it in our communities, liturgies and public events we can remind one another of our participation and responsibility in seeing that the whole of God's creation flourishes. Michael Trainor sums it up well: "Rather than prayer being a private... address to God, it is an address to the One who desires ecological and social renewal."

Our challenge in the 21st century is to trust that tomorrow will provide what will sustain all creatures, all life-forms that rely upon Earth for survival. It is a radical challenge to the human community to share and to live in a way that allows all life to flourish. 🔍



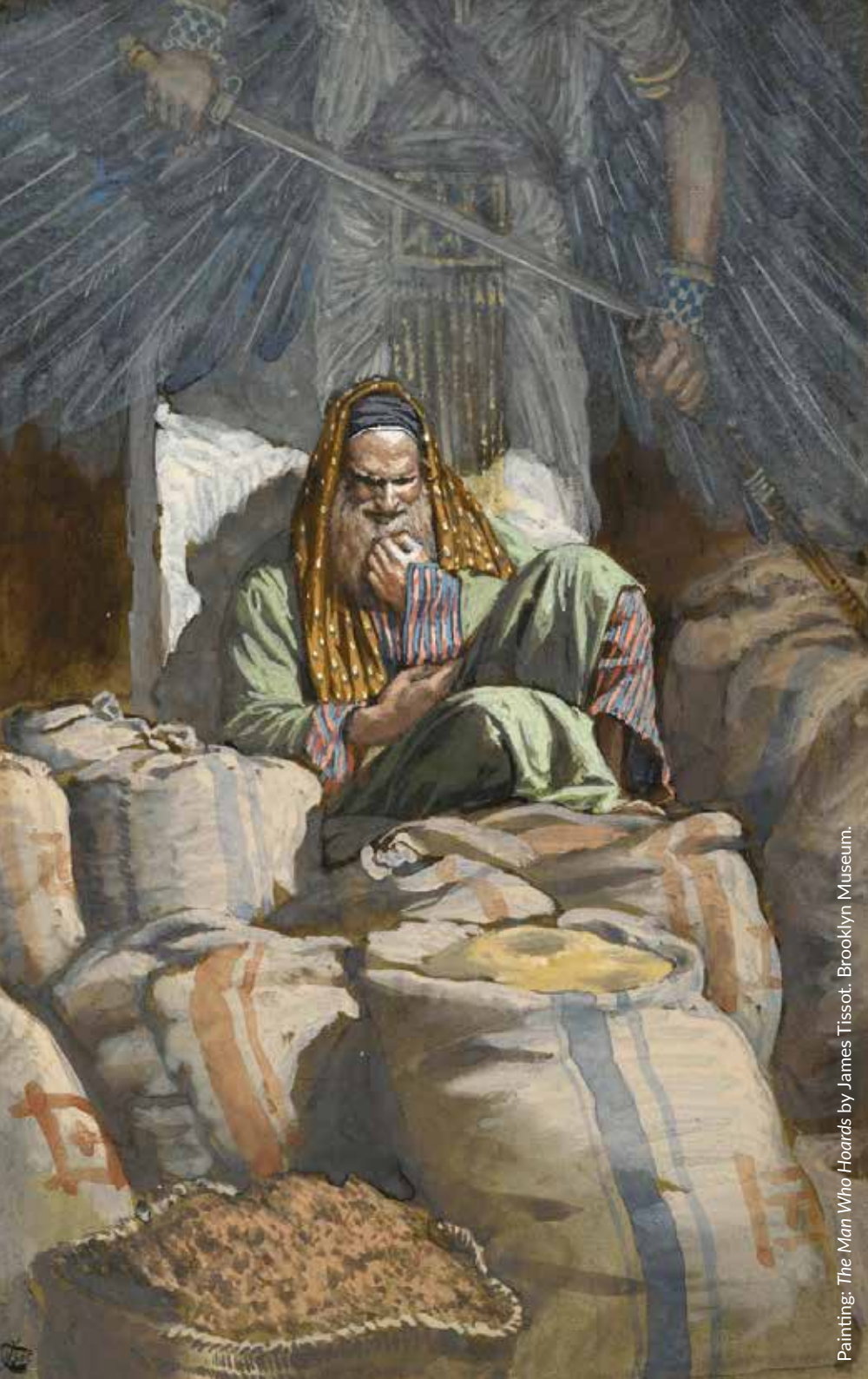
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Painting: *The Man Who Hoards* by James Tissot. Brooklyn Museum.

# Avoiding Foolishness

ELAINE WAINWRIGHT says that human centredness can distort our capacity to recognise that Earth's resources belong to all life.

The major feasts in our liturgical year are behind us and “ordinary time” stretches ahead until the celebration of the Universal or Cosmic Christ on 24 November. Each week we will read the Gospel of Luke which has the potential to draw us into new ecological perspectives.

Luke 12:13-21 on first reading is human-centred: divide the family inheritance with me; I will pull down my barns and build larger ones; and many other examples. This is something we can relate to. But in *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis warns against modern anthropocentrism as one aspect which makes us unaware of our effect on Earth.

Human-centredness characterises the world view of the Graeco-Roman world, namely that the head of the Roman household had power over and ownership of both the people and property belonging to that household. This plays out in the story. The first human character we meet (Lk 12:13) wants Jesus to intervene in a dispute over a share in the family inheritance. Jesus's reply: “for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions”, is preceded by warnings: “take care”, “be on your guard”. Jesus is critiquing the prevailing world view where property and possessions were considered to be “owned” by the head of the household.

**Luke 12:13-21** Someone in the crowd said to Jesus: “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” 14 But he said to him: “Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?” 15 And he said to them: “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”

16 Then he told them a parable: “The land of a rich man produced abundantly. 17 And he thought to himself: ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’ 18 Then he said: ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul: ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry!’ 20 But God said to him: ‘You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ 21 So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”



**Elaine Wainwright** is a biblical scholar specialising in eco-feminist interpretation and is currently writing a Wisdom Commentary on Matthew's Gospel.

We can hear this critique of Jesus in our contemporary world. We are warned to be "on our guard against all kinds of greed" – stockpiling of food, consumerism, privatising resources, hoarding. Indeed, the request of the man to "tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me" (Lk 12:13), could be a challenge coming from those who are denied adequate access to Earth's resources: food and water in particular.

*Rather than have our attention absorbed by accumulating goods, we can be alert to the precarious hold we have on life — the call of death can come at any time.*

These resources are the inheritance not only of the human community but of the whole Earth community. They need to be available equitably.

In the parable we see the perspective of unbridled human ownership, control and use of material resources. The man is described as "rich" – he owns and controls an abundance of material resources. The land itself is described as *his* land. The storage facilities are *his* and yet they are insufficient to store the crops that he describes as "my crops". His response to this situation of abundance is to demolish his barns and build larger ones to store the upcoming harvest.

Those who listened to the parable would have recognised their own situation in the story. The land that had once belonged to peasant farmers had been taken over by wealthy Romans – often absentee landlords or resident colonisers – like the landowner in the parable. They accumulated land and wealth, building up bigger and bigger estates, at the expense of the local people.

As we read the parable today, it can conjure up images of the extensive tracts of land owned and farmed by big companies who have the capacity to act like the "rich man" of the parable. In this way, a few become rich and like the man in the parable, are able to eat, drink, and celebrate their lifestyles.

The parable describes such an approach as foolishness because death can come at any time.

Rather than have our attention absorbed by accumulating goods, we can be alert to the precarious hold we have on life – the call of death can come at any time. Death is a part of life and goods are no insurance against it.

The parable critiques the accumulation of resources into the hands of a few. Rather food, clothing and a range of resources must be accessible to all in the human community. Indeed, such resources can have a dignity in their own right, not just in their usefulness to the human community.

Pope Francis said: "We cannot presume to heal our relationship with nature and the environment without healing all fundamental human relationships... Our relationship with the environment can never be isolated from our relationship with others and with God." 🌀

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## Government for the Public Good: The Surprising Science of Large-Scale Collective Action

by Max Rashbrooke  
Published by Bridget Williams  
Book, 2018  
Reviewed by Tui Bevin

BOOK

**G**overnment for the Public Good is a timely and helpful book given that confidence in governments like ours is low and the world's largest companies wield massive power. From a New Zealander's perspective, but utilising global evidence, this sweeping analysis of the role, effectiveness and possibilities of democratic governments explores how "more active government can help solve the big challenges of the twenty-first century".

Full of data, examples and analyses it focuses on the key areas of law and order, the environment, urban planning, basic infrastructure, health and education provision, and income, wealth and the economy. I was particularly interested in the discussions of innovative involvement of citizens in decision-making and public versus private ownership of public utilities.

While not a quick read, it is clearly written and free of jargon. Anyone wondering how we can manage the challenges of increasing inequity, climate change and developing a society where all can flourish will find plenty to ponder. The annotated bibliography and extensive endnotes will help readers wishing to look further. I don't know what I expected from this book, but I'm sure I didn't expect to find what I did: a feasible way forward to a just and sustainable future, and hope. 🌀





# CONSCIOUSNESS *of the* COSMOS

ELAINE WAINWRIGHT suggests readings and activities to raise our consciousness of Earth and the cosmos during the Season of Creation.

The month of September is now the Season of Creation, an annual celebration of prayer and action to protect creation. It begins on 1 September with a day of Prayer for Creation and concludes on 4 October, the feast of Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology in many Christian traditions. Here I focus on *Cosmos Sunday* in the *Season of Creation* and reflect on the three biblical texts for the day.

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## Proverbs 8:22-31

God created me at the beginning of God's work, the first of God's acts of long ago.

- 23 Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth.
- 24 When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water.
- 25 Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth—
- 26 when God had not yet made earth and fields, or the world's first bits of soil.
- 27 When God established the heavens, I was there, when God drew a circle on the face of the deep,
- 28 when God made firm the skies above, when God established the fountains of the deep,
- 29 when God assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress God's command, when God marked out the foundations of the earth,
- 30 then I was beside God, like a master worker; and I was daily God's delight, rejoicing before God always,
- 31 rejoicing in God's inhabited world and delighting in the human race.

In Proverbs we hear Divine Wisdom or *Sophia* singing of her place in the universe. She claims that place as "the first of God's acts of long ago . . . before the beginning of the Earth". Her song of the Universe names the depths, the mountains, the heavens, the sea. In Prov 8:29 she claims her place "beside God" as craftswoman and ends singing of her relationship

with God, the "inhabited world" and the "human race". This song catches us up into the communion of divinity, humanity and the cosmos and invites us to create songs of Cosmic Wisdom for our time.

### Colossians 1:15-20

Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; 16 for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. 17 He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him God was pleased to reconcile to God's self all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

The author of the Letter to the Colossians, whether Paul or someone influenced by Pauline theology, reflects on the risen Jesus through cosmic lenses. The language and the imagery fall over one another, as it were, as the writer draws readers and listeners into engagement with the Risen One. This author speaks of the risen Jesus, not Wisdom, as the "first born of all creation" and "image of the invisible God". Christ is linked to the creation of all things or, as we might say today, the emergence of all things. As with the song from Proverbs, Colossians places us in the communion of creation and invites us to explore the death, the resurrection and the cosmic dimensions of Jesus Christ.

### John 6:41-51

6:41 Then the Jews began to complain about Jesus because he said: "I am the bread that came down from heaven." 42 They were saying: "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say: 'I have come down from heaven?'" 43 Jesus answered them:

"Do not complain among yourselves. 44 No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. 45 It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. 46 Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. 47 Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. 50 This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

The Johannine author like the Colossian writer uses the language of "heaven" to evoke the cosmic dimension of Jesus—he is the "bread that came down from heaven". But his language is misunderstood. His listeners hear his claim to be the "bread that came down from heaven" as a denial of his human birth and relationships. But Jesus does not allow his discourse to be limited by his audience. Rather, he invites his listeners into new perspectives: being drawn to Jesus by the "Father" and being raised. Humanity and divinity coalesce in Jesus's claim to be "living bread" which is given for the life of the cosmos (Jn 6:51).

Now more than ever we need to consider our home in the widest, most expansive sense—our home Earth as a planet in the cosmos. These readings call us to develop an increasing awareness of gratitude, wonder, appreciation and new consciousness of the evolving cosmos. They call us to sacrifice and care to protect our planet. Today, with Earth in peril, this call is urgent.

I suggest two simple activities to engage with the cosmos. First, walk out at night and look up to the sky awash with stars and planets. At the same time be aware of our feet firmly planted on Earth.

And the second is to watch a film



## Redeeming the Time The Art of Spiritual Conversation

*'God is always present to our lives, though we may not always be present to God. And so we misread our lives and are unable to recognize the spiritual journey each of us is on. The weekend offers a time and a process to experience our lives as a unique dynamic encounter with God by looking at our past, our present, and our future not only in the context of private prayer but also within the sacred space of small group sharing.'*

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or TV series, such as Brian Cox's *The Planets*, to expand our understanding and consciousness of the cosmos. 🌿

Photo: Ricardo Helass from Pixabay



**Elaine Wainwright** is a biblical scholar specialising in eco-feminist interpretation and is currently writing a Wisdom Commentary on Matthew's Gospel.





Photo by DOC. The recent South Westland coastal cleanup

# DO JUSTICE FOR EARTH

ELAINE WAINWRIGHT suggests that we read Sirach with protection and love of all creation in mind.

**Sirach 35:12-14, 16-19**

“Our God is a God of Justice  
 Who knows no favourites  
 Who hears the cry of the oppressed and shows justice to the poor.  
 God listens to the plea of the injured party  
 Does not ignore the orphan’s supplication nor the widow’s as she pours out her story.  
 Those who with their whole heart serve God will be accepted  
 their petitions will carry to the clouds.  
 The prayer of the humble pierces the clouds;  
 Until it arrives they are inconsolable,  
 Nor will they desist until the Most High takes notice of them  
 Acquits the virtuous and delivers judgment.  
 Indeed, God will not delay.”

This biblical text is from the Book of Ecclesiasticus (or Sirach), one of the books that belong to the Wisdom literature, which emerged from the sages in Israel reflecting on life. It tends, therefore, to be anthropocentric but it also has the potential to be read ecologically.

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis recognises “the effects of modern anthropocentrism” as one of these roots of the ecological crisis. Such an anthropocentrism places the human person “over” all else in the universe, as having dominion. Francis suggests that we bring the critical lens of “dominion” to our relationships with the environment, within the human community and with God, if we are to bring healing to our world and our times.

The first five lines of the extract from Sirach speak of God as of Justice. This is the God we engage with on our journey to greater ecological awareness and ecological commitment. And justice does not belong only within the human community. The text invites us – indeed impels us

to engage with the God of the cosmos and to act justly in relation to Earth but also the entire universe. God is a God of Justice who knows no favourites in this universe.

As the words of the sage unfold, we are invited to “hear the cry of the oppressed” and to “show justice to the poor”. Today, with social justice at the forefront of our minds, we are familiar with invitations such as these – and as the sage continues, this familiarity is affirmed.

As ecological listeners, we are invited to expand our consciousness. “Our God is a God of Justice”, we can understand as an ecological and cosmic justice – beyond and including human justice. “Who knows no favourites” shows that the stars and planets, the depths of the oceans and all their creatures, are to be given the same weight as humanity. “Who hears the cry of the oppressed and shows justice to the poor” refers to a “who” beyond the human – the planet itself can make this cry, and we are reminded that the cries are heard equally: “God listens to the pleas of the injured party”. Finally, we are told that God “Does not ignore the orphan’s supplication nor the widow’s as she pours out her story” – God is attentive to the most threatened, whether species or the materiality of all life within the cosmos.

The sage continues and the focus shifts to the one who is in right relationship with the Divine: those who with their whole heart serve God. Their petitions shall “carry to the clouds” and their prayer “pierces the clouds”. While this imagery may have functioned symbolically for the sage, as ecological readers with a cosmic vision, we can allow ourselves to be caught up into an expanding view of the universe. The concluding words of the sage in this poem – indeed God will not delay – can function to alert us to the urgency of the cry rising up in our time, not just from the Earth but from the cosmos. We cannot remain, or survive, in our anthropocentrism. 🗨️



Elaine Wainwright is a biblical scholar specialising in eco-feminist interpretation and is currently writing a Wisdom Commentary on Matthew’s Gospel.



# Divine Lover of Life

Reflecting on Wisdom 11:22–12:2 ELAINE WAINWRIGHT suggests that by contemplating creation we will develop love to care of the Earth community.

**Wisdom 11:22** In your sight, O God, the whole world is like a grain of dust that tips the scale, like a drop of morning dew falling on the ground. <sup>23</sup> Yet you are merciful to all, because you are almighty, you overlook people's sins, so that they can repent. <sup>24</sup> Yes, you love everything that exists, and nothing that you have made disgusts you, since, if you had hated something, you would not have made it. <sup>25</sup> And how could a thing subsist, had you not willed it? Or how be preserved, if not called forth by you? <sup>26</sup> No, you spare all, since all is yours, O God, lover of life!

**12:1** For your imperishable spirit is in everything! <sup>2</sup> And thus, gradually, you correct those who offend; you admonish and remind them of how they have sinned, so that they may abstain from evil and trust in you, O God.

**Elaine Wainwright** is a biblical scholar specialising in eco-feminist interpretation and is currently writing a Wisdom Commentary on Matthew's Gospel.



**T**his extract from the Book of Wisdom 11:22–12:2, written in the second or first century BCE, belongs to the biblical Wisdom Literature which includes psalms and proverbs, poetry and prose. A key characteristic of the collection, distinguishing it from the more “historical” literature of the Hebrew Bible, is its reflection on life. For the sages responsible for the texts life includes the relationships of the ordinary human community, with the Divine and with the cosmos.

The poem in Wis 11:22–6 begins with a cosmic vision: “In your sight, O God, the whole world is like a grain of dust that tips the scale, like a drop of morning dew falling on the ground.” Two metaphors expand our consciousness providing a “God’s eye” view: the world is like a “grain of dust” and it is also like a “drop of morning dew”. Each is so small and transient: the grain of dust tips the scales and the morning dew falls to the earth. Yet, each is significant, the sage announces, and is held in the sight of God.

We can imagine just how attentive to and appreciative of the “whole world” the sage was in order for such metaphors to emerge. In our time, separated from the world of the sage by centuries and with our ever-expanding knowledge of the cosmos, we, too, can allow new metaphors to come to the fore to nurture our love of all creation. We can think of the way the first astronauts were stunned at seeing Earth from



their spaceship and how they spoke with reverence for the planet as a jewel in the vastness of space.

Even as the wise one attends to the wonder of the cosmos, they are aware of “sin” within the Earth community, sin that sunders relationships. We know the breakdown is not confined to human relationships but to the relationships of the whole community of Earth — human and other-than-human. From the Wisdom perspective it is possible to repent, to restore the relationships. We hear in Wis 11:23 the urgent call to repent, to change our way of living, not just for ourselves but for the good of the Earth community and for the cosmos.

The sage shares insights with the listener about the Divine’s relationship with creation: “Yes, you love everything that exists, and nothing that you have made disgusts you, since, if you had hated something, you would not have made it. 25 And how could a thing subsist, had you not willed it? Or how be preserved, if not called forth by you? 26 No, you spare all, since all is yours, O God, lover of life.”

The sage names the Divine as “lover of life” — the creative one who loves the universe, loves all that exists, loves life. Love binds the Divine to and within all of creation. It is a loving relationship that is broken by what the sage calls “sin”.

This song of the sage can invite us, as the contemporary wisdom community, to engage in similar reflection. What new names and characteristics of the Divine One might arise from our own contemplation of the Earth community and the cosmos in which we live? How might these names colour our relationships with one another and with the other-than-human?

We know we need a theology — a way of speaking of the Divine — that is attuned to the complexities of life around us, that will assist us in our time. For this, we can engage in a reflection process which will lead to a new vision and also a new praxis — a new way of being in and contributing to the universe in this time.

A first step is to engage with others to be alert to and to understand more accurately the crisis that we are facing as the planet warms bringing with it dire consequences. In her book *On Fire: The Burning Case for a Green New Deal*, Naomi Klein provides resources that can inform us and suggest how to respond to the ecological crisis that confronts the entire planet. As Greta Thunburg says, we can call on the world’s governments and large companies to take the crisis seriously and urgently halt activities that damage Earth.

As the sage understood in his time, ultimately we too want to be motivated by love for all creation. We want to understand more of the complex matrix of relationships that keep the world, including ourselves, alive. We want insight into creative love that will influence our praxis to restore relationships in Earth. By pondering Wisdom’s insights and articulating our own, we will have new interpretations to serve us spiritually and theologically and inspire our praxis as we face the ecological crisis of our day.

The last two verses of the extract are appropriate for us as they prompt us from reflecting on the biblical text to working towards a new ethical praxis day by day.

“For your imperishable spirit is in everything! And thus, gradually, you correct those who offend; you admonish and remind them of how they have sinned, so that they may abstain from evil and trust in you, O God” (Wis 12:1-2). 🕊

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In an ecological reading of Isaiah 35:1-10 ELAINE WAINWRIGHT explains how paralysing hopelessness can change to active hope.

### Isaiah 35:1–10

- 1 The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,  
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;  
like the crocus
- 2 it shall blossom abundantly,  
and rejoice with joy and singing.  
The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,  
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.  
They shall see the glory of God,  
the majesty of our God.
- 3 Strengthen the weak hands,  
and make firm the feeble knees.
- 4 Say to those who are of a fearful heart,  
“Be strong, do not fear!  
Here is your God.  
Who will come with vengeance,  
with terrible recompense.  
God will come and save you.”
- 5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,  
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
- 6 then the lame shall leap like a deer,  
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.  
For waters shall break forth in the wilderness,  
and streams in the desert;
- 7 the burning sand shall become a pool,  
and the thirsty ground springs of water;  
the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp,  
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.
- 8 A highway shall be there,  
and it shall be called the Holy Way;  
the unclean shall not travel on it,  
but it shall be for God’s people;  
no traveller, not even fools, shall go astray.
- 9 No lion shall be there,  
nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;  
they shall not be found there,  
but the redeemed shall walk there.
- 10 And the ransomed of God shall return,  
and come to Zion with singing;  
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;  
they shall obtain joy and gladness,  
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.



**T**his extract from the Book of Isaiah is the work of a prophet of Israel who was preaching in the late 6th century BCE — towards the end of Israel’s exile in Babylon. The prophet bears the name “Isaiah”, as did a previous prophet in Israel in the early 8th century BCE who predicted the exile. The first 34 chapters of the Book of Isaiah in our Bibles are associated with the earlier Isaiah.

This poem from the later Isaiahan prophet was calling the exiled people from the despair of their situation to a new hope for their future. The prophet couches the message of hope in idealised language and imagery drawn from countryside around them and remembered by them. As ecological readers we can attend to the imagery of the message as a way of shaping our own Earth consciousness.

The prophet uses different words to distinguish various aspects of Earth in the opening verse — wilderness, dry land, desert. We could miss these nuances describing the land, but for the exiled people yearning for the land from which they were taken forcibly, these nuances have kept alive their hope.

My ecological awareness of these nuances is sparked by images of the drought-stricken parts of Australia at present. The desert is extending its boundaries and where there were once verdant farmlands, thousands of hectares have become “dry land”. For many, especially those who farmed in these regions, there is a harshness like that of a “desert” and there is no transformation in sight. Perhaps the poem’s opening verse can evoke hope that the “dry land shall be glad” and that the “desert shall rejoice” (Is 35:1).

As the poem continues, the language differs from that which would normally be associated with wilderness or dry land — that it will “blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing” (Is 35:2). Such language is necessary within our lexicon so that we do not despair. The prophet





continues with a plea, which in our own time we can join when we feel overwhelmed by the extent of ecological change needed – “strengthen the weak hands and make firm the feeble knees ... Be strong, do not fear” (Is 35:3-4).

The prophet draws attention to the presence of God in this struggle between despair and hope. We can read it as an invitation to enter deeply into the experience of despair in the face of the societal and governmental lack of engagement with the effects of climate change – even denying its existence.

The strong language of “vengeance” and “recompense” which is attributed to God, is not necessarily descriptive of God. Rather it alerts contemporary ecological readers to the enormity of the disaster that is being caused. We can feel this same wrath when we look at the deserts and wildernesses created by tearing down old-growth forests, polluting our waterways, and much more. While the promise of vengeance and recompense is attributed to God, rather than thinking of it as describing divinity, we can read it as alerting us to the urgency of the situation where the human community is putting the future of the planet at risk. It is alerting us all to change.

The future, which the prophet envisages for a repentant and reformed Israel, is expressed in ecological imagery and captures the process of transformation.


“The eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped” (Is 35:5) imagines the world of human transformation. The two senses described as being transformed – our seeing and hearing – are those which give us greatest access to our human community. Their restoration will transform individual and community life, as do the transformations of the lame leaping like a deer and the speechless singing for joy (Is 35:6).

The description of transformations continue in the poem – the desert, the wilderness and the dry land will blossom. And the human community is brought into the song of transformation. This new way through the desert is for “God’s people” (Is 35:8b).

As the poem continues, the ecological reader will find that the lion and other animals in the category of “ravenous beasts” will not be found on the new highway, the Holy Way. It is for the “redeemed” to travel safely back to the land of Israel.

The theology of the redeemed, of God’s chosen people, can give hope to the people in exile. At the same time, we need to keep a critical approach ensuring that we don’t put some members of the ecological community ahead of, or superior to, others. For example, dividing the Earth community into the “chosen” and “others”. We cannot put some at risk by judging who are the “redeemed of God” who will walk the new highway and who are not – the “unclean” and “ravenous beasts”.

In our own time prophetic voices are calling us to move from the despair that can paralyse us as we face the enormity of climate change that we are experiencing already and the effects which are being predicted. Like the prophet, we can keep before us the possibilities of a transformed future and join with those who are endeavouring to bring it about.

As we engage reflectively with the readings during Advent, Christmas and the New Year and with the cry of the Earth rising around us, we can be shaped by an ecological perspective and praxis.. 



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