Earth Day Theological Reflections: A Decade of Laudato Si’

**SLIDE ONE: Introduction & Welcome**

* Ecotheologian
* Engage mind body spirit -- Laudato Si is theology of encounter and I want to live in the spirit that it was written
* Tools: Handouts -- Prayer, Theology of LS, and Practical Steps to Eco-conversion

**SLIDE: TWO Pope Francis**

* Format: Movement between
  + priming our cosmic imagination,
  + what is happening in the world,
  + theological treasures from Laudato Si’ and
  + A Movement to Action
* Before lunch -- Water and Earth
* After Lunch -- Air and Fire
* Website blogs have more
* Book

**30 min**

**SLIDE THREE: Water**

* We are water -- adult men 60%; adult women 50% … our brains: over 80%
* Earth is watery -- 71% of Earth is water but only 3% is drinkable

We live a very watery existence but we are numb to this … when was the last time you reflected on the fact that having water 24/7 waiting in a tap is not the reality of so many in our world? Let us tap into our cosmic imagination to reconnect and remember our aqueous essence

Now close your eyes

Let the watery depths soothe your soul and allow your memory to take you to a time when you were with or in or beside water. Perhaps you feel the fluidity in your body, your veins, your minds

Re-member

Re-connect

Imagine what the breath of God over the dark, stormy, moving waters must have felt like in the beginning ... this ancient water lives on in the water cycles on our planet today ...

Re-member

Re-connect

Now let the Psalmist poem - My soul thirsts for God, for the living God (Psalm 42:2) - roll off your tongue. Say this over and over in your imagination as you listen to the sounds of the music of the ancient, deep water.

Re-member

Re-connect

Now imagine a moment of great thirst in your life. How did you connect to life-giving water? Who gave you a drink when you were thirsty? How did it feel?

Re-member

Re-connect

Imagine you are stripped of these intimate moments with, in, and by the planet's waters touched by the breath of God. Imagine your skin, brain, and bodies shrivelling as a deep thirst overtakes your. Who would you be? Imagine if your most formative experience of water is contamination, scarcity, pollution, fear, death?

Devoid

Life-less

Meditate on the following truth offered by Pope Francis in Laudato Si' (233): "The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person’s face."

When water is polluted, oceans become too warm and acidified and water is commodified and people lack access to clean water, part of God's message to us is lost.

Re-member

Re-connect

What would you -- a person of faith -- do to change this?

**(5-10 min) SLIDE FOUR: What is happening**

Pollution: Chemicals (Fertilizers, pesticides, Fracking; coal ash; CAFOs), plastics (Fabrics; single use plastics), sediment (erosion)

* CAFOS: NC is ranked 3rd in pig CAFOs behind Iowa and Minnesota. Most CAFOs are located in historically under-resourced, low income, communities of color, in lands previously used as agricultural plantations with enslaved communities. Many in Eastern NC are low lying and prone to flooding. Duplin and Sampson Counties are the country’s capitals in pig population, where the ratio of hog to person is close to 29-to-1.In NC total there are 2200 operations totaling 8 million hogs … equallying 27 billion gallons of hog urine and feces generated every year, held in 4000+ waste lagoons.
* Synthetic Nitrogen, Phosphorous are used in our industrial agriculture system and in our wastewater -- and then washed into ground water. This coupled with warmer water and changes in waterflow has caused harmful algae blooms. This diminishes the oxygen in the water effectively strangling aqueous neighbors.
* Plastics -- 8 million metric tonnes of plastics thrown away every year. Microplastics are impossible to see but are dangerous - abrasives in toothpastes, small globs of paint, breakdown of plastic in oceans, and microscopic pieces of fabrics from washing clothing -- Ellen MacArthur Foundation report indicates that approximately 60% of our clothing are made from plastics -- synthetic fibers -- and break down into microplastics … and even more concerning is the waste from fashion: Of the 100 billion garments produced each year, 92 million tonnes end up in landfills.
* Sediment: RUN OFF … According to Penn State Extension, during a one-inch rainfall event, one acre of forest will release 750 gallons of runoff (most absorbed by soil, roots, trees, plants…), while a parking lot will release 27,000 gallons! This runoff causes the erosion of streams and tributaries, filling them with soil sediment that blocks light and kills stream dwellers, which are unaccustomed to the magnitude and frequency of the sediment. It also impacts humans -- it blocks pipes, and impacts tourism with muddy streams and swimming areas being unappealing to tourists

**(5 min) SLIDE 5: Theology**

What does our faith say about how we are treating this gift from the Creator?

In silence, take a moment to let the theology of Laudato Si and the Canticle of the Sun speak to your spiritual imaginations.

Concentrate your efforts on God, Creator and Jesus, Living Water

Be aware of

* What terms ignite your spirit
* What phrases or concepts have been pushed to the recesses of your faith life
* Where is the Spirit leading you today
* What is the Spirit asking of you

**SILENCE (put music back on from slide 2)**

**(5 min) SLIDE 6: Living Faith**

Now let’s share our findings: What spoke to you? How is our faith living today in light of what is happening

DISCUSSION 5 minutes

Now let us turn our attention to Earth

**30 min**

SLIDE 7: Earth

* Have you stopped to think about how we are stardust … beautiful, gifted, and fragile, inspirited stardust within a sacred cosmic communion?
* Have you stopped to notice how incredible the Earth that we inhabit actually is!
* Did you know:

A single teaspoon of healthy soil can contain around 10,000 different species, including bacteria, fungi, and other microbes.

That our bodies are actually a zoo -- theologian Norman Wirzba awakened this in my imagination just recently in a video entitled Food Farming and Faith. This further illustrates how false our sense of singularity or autonomy is and how the principle of meritocracy … I deserve what I alone have earned … has serious conceptual flaws.

That Creation is a Communion of Subjects -- with agency, stories to tell, contributions to make, and all the while giving Glory to God in their own ways.

**MEDITATION: Fantastic Fungi**

We are stardust … but as Thomas Berry so aptly told us, in the human the universe awoke to itself -- we can tell the origin and unfolding story of the universe. When humans looked to the heavens, we learned that life emerged from a singular moment of great cosmic exuberance wherein the subsequent primordial furnace crafted the elements hydrogen, helium, and lithium. Later, this material formed stars, which gave birth to the elements that would eventually constitute Earth, including the materials that comprise every aspect of our bodies --

* iron is part of our Hemoglobin,
* carbon makes up our tissues and organs,
* hydrogen constitutes almost 10% of our body mass,
* lithium helps protect and create neurons,
* sodium and potassium fuels our muscle contractions,
* nitrogen is a building block for amino-acids, and
* calcium is an integral part of our skeletons.

Alas, we are stardust, along with everything around us.

We are Earth, but how then did we come to alienate ourselves from Earth's landscapes and place our worth above that of all other creatures?

To show this, I tell the story of **three successive shifts in human mindscapes**: a shift from seeing the world as a nurturing mother to seeing her as an untrustworthy, seductive temptress who must be controlled and then, later, as a machine to be exploited for human betterment.[2](https://theotherjournal.com/2017/08/stardust-toward-ecotheological-anthropology/#easy-footnote-bottom-2-11418) These shifts were not arbitrary; rather, they addressed a deep fear: if we were not the center of the universe, that could mean we are not God’s beloved children … we are mere specks of matter adrift in an incomprehensible universe that could be both cruel and fecund. To fortify our own worth and insulate ourselves from our innate frailty, we built dualistic philosophical and scientific systems aimed at separating us from the beasts and promoting the dream of our unequivocal control over creation.

Story: **Ovey Mohammed** -- Theology professor for my PhD: three balls

**SLIDE EIGHT: What is happening**

We have dropped all three balls -- and this has had serious consequences

* Earth is not a communion of subjects -- merely dead objects to be used and discarded
* When our technologies grew powerful enough to change the face of Earth and Earth’s life systems, we failed to realize the consequences of this to ecosystemic and human health.
* We forgot we are interconnected and interdependent planetary citizens
* We forgot that creation is a gift not a possession -- and we were gifted this world not due to our superiority
* We were entranced with God’s transcendence and our self-appointed, divinely sanctioned role as Earth’s master, that we forgot that God is immanently present and all creation gives glory to God

But Pope Francis and many others are re-igniting our spiritual imaginations to see and juggle the world, God and human balls differently

Incarnation -- great place to start (explore quote from Laudato Si’)

**SLIDE NINE: Incarnation**

Look at sheets -- highlight aspects of Incarnational theology

Let participants discuss with your neighbor what theology speaks to you… try to discern why it does so.

**SLIDE TEN: Living Faith**

What does a deep incarnational life look like -- yours?

What are your spheres of influence

What could we do? Immigrants, LGBTQ+, Marginalized…

What is your calling?

Drink in the powerful imagery of Celtic imagination -- so intimately connected to Earth as our source of life … fortify yourself for this work in our political climate today without our papal shephed

**Celtic Woman: Play (5min) Cue to 0.57**

**LUNCH**

**Welcome Back**

**20 min**

**SLIDE TEN: Air**

Let’s center our minds and spirits now that our bodies have been fueled

Deep breaths -- focus on the air you are inviting into your bodies

Imagine now, 2.4 billion years ago, photosynthetic cyanobacteria started what is called the Great Oxidation Event. But not enough for complex life forms … this was about 800 to 600 million years ago -- the moment Earth birthed animal life, including our own. Without the gift of these bacteria and other photosynthetic organisms, our lives would not be possible

Think of how incredible a Creator is to create a world that gives lives to others -- how the bacteria gave glory to God by being fully themselves.

Breath in deeply, let rise and fall of your your lungs be a cadence of gratitude.

Take a moment to meditate on Job in light of the gift of Earth’s tiniest gift givers years ago, and our green neighbors today.

The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life (Job 33:4)

* Think of how you understand the Holy Spirit from the Book of Scripture -- can the bacteria teach us something about divine revelation in the Book of Nature

**SLIDE ELEVEN: Air Pollution**

Now think of another creature whose emissions, just a few hundred years ago, are poisoning the air, stopping the life-giving gift offered so long ago.

The rise in air pollution is closely tied to the **Industrial Revolution**, beginning in the **mid-1700s and then 20th century**. Why?

* 1700s saw increased coal consumption for heating and powering factories, leading to higher levels of air pollution.
* 20th century saw an increase with the rise of automobiles and increased energy consumption

Air pollution is a significant contributor to chronic breathing issues, including **asthma, COPD, and lung cancer**. Prolonged exposure to pollutants like **particulate matter, nitrogen dioxide, and ozone** can lead to inflammation, reduced lung function, and an increased risk

World Health Organization: 2019

* Ambient (outdoor) air pollution is estimated to have caused 4.2 million premature deaths worldwide in 2019.
* Some 89% of those premature deaths occurred in low- and middle-income countries, and the greatest number in the WHO South-East Asia and Western Pacific Regions.
* USA: The “State of the Air” 2024 report from Lung Association finds that despite decades of progress cleaning up air pollution, **39% of people living in America—131.2 million people—still live in places with failing grades for unhealthy levels of ozone or particle pollution**. This is 11.7 million more people breathing unhealthy air compared to last year’s report. AND Although people of color make up 41.6% of the overall population of the U.S., **they are 52% of the people living in a county with at least one failing grade**. In counties with the worst air quality, …**63% of the nearly 44 million residents are people of color, compared to 37% who are white**.
* 1970s saw an increase in l**ight pollution** -- astronomers saw an increase in artificial light on their work, and since then, the sky is estimated to have been becoming brighter by between three and ten percent every year -- the worst happening over North America. How? Urbanization and the inefficient use of light. In 2010, the UN stated that **“For the first time in history, more people live now in urban than in rural areas,” and that “2/3 of the Earth’s population have NEVER seen a truly natural night sky. Most of those live under a perpetual orange dome.**”
  + PROBLEM: compromising human health, disrupting ecosystems, and spoiling aesthetic environments. Avian neighbors -- artificial lights disorient them, alter migration patterns, increase the risk of collisions, especially during migration, and lights lure them to spaces where they are more vulnerable.

Is this glorifying the Spirit that animates and breathes life into the world? We are inhibiting the Spirit when we contribute to air pollution or stand by idly

**SLIDE TWELVE: THEOLOGY - Pneumatology**

But we are people of great faith, and for every breath you breathe, you connect with the Spirit of possibility that can loosen the knots of even the most challenging problem … you can cooperate with the Spirit and change the world.

Take out your handout and take a moment to let the pain of our current behaviors lead you to where the Spirit needs you to go. What element of the pneumatology -- the theology of the Holy Spirit offered Laudato Si’ is calling your attention. The chart & Living Laudato Si’ brochure are tools to discover at practical things we can do to Live Laudato Si.

Listen. Sit with it. Let your lungs breath it in … how can we change how we live to reduce particulates, CO2, methane, greenhouse gases, ozone

**Meditation -- Speigel im Spiegel**

**SLIDE THIRTEEN: LIVING FAITH**

What new behaviors are you breathing in -- share where the Spirit was calling you? Do you want me to speak more on any aspect of the pneumatology of Laudato Si? Or the practical implication chart -- the Q and A at the end might also be a good time for this…

**20 min**

**SLIDE FOURTEEN: FIRE**

We are walking into the Fire now … quite literally for some in our world

Here we will be reflecting on how we power our world, our energy-dependent lives, and the prophecy of Laudato Si’ -- it is the latter that will ignite our spirits and change our behaviours.

**SLIDE FIFTEEN: Problems**

Here I want to prayerfully engage with Climate Change with you:

What do you know about Climate Change? Discuss

* Top things that contribute to CC:
  + Burning fossil fuels (coal, oil, gas -- 75% of GHG emissions),
  + Land use changes -- cutting down forests for agriculture (loss of ability to absorb and more emissions),
  + Deforestation & wildfires
  + Industrialized Processes -- emissions from factories, food systems…
  + Agriculture -- increased use of fertilizers & livestock farming increases Nitrous oxide and methane (GHGs)
  + Urbanization
* Top three contributors to climate change
  + China
  + USA
  + India

How is Climate Change a Spiritual Issue?

**SLIDE SIXTEEN: Theology**

Look again at the theology handout and find the theology from Laudato Si’ concerning the Trinity.

* We have looked at Creator God and Jesus, Living Water
* We have explored the Incarnation
* We have examined the Holy Spirit
* Now we need to reflect on how we understand the Trinity

What speaks to you -- interesting, overlooked, forgotten?

**SLIDE SEVENTEEN: Living Faith**

What is a prophetic voice for today?

How can a more robust understanding of the Trinity help us today?

Let’s let LS have the last word … Take time to meditate on Paragraph 240 in LS on the slide

(music)

**SLIDE EIGHTEEN: Q & A**