Waking Up to the Beauty of Life

Earth Day 2018

Environment: A bowl of water, a watering device, a container of potting soil, and seeds (preferably large) are placed in the center of the prayer space.

Opening Song: *(Choose appropriate music, if desired.)*

Leader:

Violence to creation is violence done to us all. The damage to our common home and the loss of the richness and beauty entrusted to our care is a wound we feel at the soul level. Such profound pain can rob us of our joy, our optimism. Yet, even as we experience this pain, may we experience conversion, transforming our vision of what is possible through *active hope*.

Quotation from Pope Francis

Reader:

[O]ur common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us. "Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs."[i]

This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all

forms of life. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she "groans in travail."[ii]

—*Laudato Si': On care for our common home,* paragraphs 1 & 2

Personal Reflection

Pause and contemplate the many forms of violence our species has inflicted on Earth and the Earth community. Choose one or more losses that you especially mourn.

Tears for Our Common Home

The water in the bowl represents our tears for our common home. In turn, come to the bowl, dip your hand in the water and let it trickle though your fingers, saying ***"My tears are for…",*** *naming specific beings and/or places. After each one speaks, the group responds as indicated below.*[iii]

Response: Our hearts are moved by all we cannot save.
So much has been destroyed.[iv]

Quotations from Pope Francis

Reader:

Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change. We lack an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone. This basic awareness would enable the development of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life. A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal. (*Laudato Si': On care for our common home,* paragraph 202).

Reader:

Yet all is not lost. Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start, despite their mental and social conditioning. We are able to take an honest look at ourselves, to acknowledge our deep dissatisfaction, and to embark on new paths to authentic freedom…. May our struggles and our

concern for this planet never take away the joy of our hope. (*Laudato Si': On care for our common home,* paragraph 205, 244).

Leader:

The word *hope* has two meanings. The first involves hopefulness, where our preferred outcome seems reasonably likely to happen. The second meaning is about desire, knowing what we long for, what we'd love to take place. It is what we do with this hope that makes the difference. Passive hope is about waiting for external agencies to bring about what we desire. *Active hope* is about becoming active participants in bringing about that for which we long.

Active hope is a practice. Like tai chi or gardening, it is something we *do* rather than *have*. It involves taking a clear view of reality, identifying what we desire in the face that reality, and consciously taking steps to actualize that desire. *Active hope* doesn't require optimism; we can apply it even in areas where we feel hopeless. The guiding impetus is intention; we focus on our intention and let it be our guide.[v]

Shared Reflection

(*Individuals in the group reflectively proclaim the following stanzas.*)

Active Hope is not wishful thinking.
Active Hope is not waiting to be rescued
by a [champion] or by some savior.

Active Hope is waking up to the beauty of life
on whose behalf we can act.

We belong to this world.
The web of life is calling us forth at this time.
We've come a long way and are here to play our part.

With Active Hope we realize that there are adventures in store,
strengths to discover, and comrades to link arms with.

Active Hope is a readiness to engage.
Active Hope is a readiness to discover the strengths
in ourselves and in others;
a readiness to discover the reasons for hope
and the occasions for love.

A readiness to discover the size and strength of our hearts,
our quickness of mind, our steadiness of purpose,
our own authority, our love for life,
the liveliness of our curiosity,
the unsuspected deep well of patience and diligence,
the keenness of our senses, and our capacity to lead.

None of these can be discovered in an armchair or without risk.[vi]

Personal Reflection

- *Which of the above stanzas speak most to you?*
- *What are your deepest hopes for our common home?*
- *What commitments will you assume to bring these hopes about?*

Closing Ritual

Each participant comes forward, chooses a seed or seeds, plants it/them, states her commitment(s), and waters the seed(s) while the group responds together:

Response: May these tears for our common home transform us and give new life to our hopes.

Closing Prayer

God of all creation, help us to see the world as it is:

To acknowledge the pains of our current reality,
That we might dare to dream of the world as it could be.
Grant us courage, O God, to transform our hopes into actions.
Like the seeds we plant today, let our intentions become the actions that will fruit and multiply for future generations.
Amen.

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[i] *Canticle of the Creatures*, in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol. 1, New York-London-Manila, 1999, 113-114.

[ii] *Romans* 8:22.

[iii] Adapted from Joanna Macy and Molly Brown (2012), *Coming Back to Life*, Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, page 129.

[iv] Adapted from Adrienne Rich, "Natural Resources," https://pages.stolaf.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/421/2014/08/Rich-NaturalResources.pdf.

[v] Adapted from Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone (2012), *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy,* Novato, CA: New World Library, p. 3.

[vi] Adapted from Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone (2012), *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy,* Novato, CA: New World Library, pp. 35-36.