

## Poetry & Reflections

Artists, musicians and writers around the world invite us to use our senses to explore and deepen our relationship to earth. Many prayer practices include tactile components like beads, paths, smoke, water and chimes. Language transformed into hymns, psalms and poems has the power to stir our senses, unmasking the mystery of the world around us and revealing God's life in new ways.

Praying through psalms and poetry reminds us of the beauty and brokenness we are called to heal and increases our desire to make lasting changes. The Rev. Dr. Jennifer Phillips has been writing, preaching and teaching the church about our responsibility for the earth for decades

You are invited to read her poems with all your senses. Pay attention to the places that ignite your passion to be an advocate for Creation Care. If you are doing this in a group, leave time for silence before beginning a conversation about what you saw, heard, touched, tasted and smelled as you walked the paths of these poems.

### **Hymn for Two Pines**

In this year of great burning  
it seems a vain task  
to feed two great pines that grew as gaunt  
as prisoners-of-war, transparent  
through two droughty years,  
trying to buy them time,  
to buy me time, to listen  
to their calm wisdom and so, learn  
to will one thing.

Seems we flail, adrift  
like torn-loose astronauts,  
untending the ground  
we are knotted to by wonder and design,  
unfallowing, unhallowing neglected fields,  
stoning life out of soil  
with our high-rise aspirations,  
the flattening pavements of our collective wills.

So here in one churchyard, suburban,  
nondescript, though I describe it daily,  
I feed two trees  
through noon's combustion of late-summer sun,  
and I am earthed and mended doing this,  
like any hermit carrying night and the Milky Way in her eyes.

## Underneath Are the Everlasting Arms

Because you are a person of good conscience  
I have no doubt you rise in the morning with zeal  
to pray and mend and shift and heal the world,  
girder by girder to build up the shining city  
or dismantle the wreckage of its worst.

And likely, as the polar winds buffet your walls,  
you wake, as I do, in the lonely hour  
intuiting the dying of the forests,  
the smell of distant smoke,  
and the muddying and drying up of water sources,  
perhaps even your own wellspring.

Because you are kind and have your eyes open,  
I suspect, with all the frightened children,  
you, too, feel the steel chicken wire between your fingers,  
palpating the horror, the sorrow  
from which thousands will bear scars always —  
be they Uighur, Rohingya, Syrian, Latinx or Kurd —  
they are all our own.

Here we are, rowing our tiny boats  
in unforgiving seas out of sight of the inundated land  
hoping help will materialize across the waters  
and come to us and come to them,  
and in the meantime holding on to one another.  
Take courage, hold fast, and row.

But in this moment, you are here  
among friends, in this warm, calm and sustaining air  
that none of us create nor earn,  
and the thankful breath has just come into our lungs  
and will again. Allow it, notice it, and be glad.  
There are moments like this when you need not add your grief  
to the world's griefs. There is suffering enough.

We are all bell-divers in the world's rude weather,  
tethered to love's inexhaustible supply.  
So place your feet with care on the fragile reef  
and pause to wonder at the mystery of it and the beauty,  
and the mercy holding you, and all of us,  
even in the uttermost parts of the seas.  
Today, pause and be thankful  
simply to watch the bubbles rise.

## Birdsong Says to Us: Live Here

Turn of Summer into Fall.  
Such silence.  
Just the scratch of a squirrel's claws up the trunk of the sugar maple  
twig breaking  
leaves swish and shush.  
And then, a lone vireo piping.

Our human ears are made for birdsong  
more than any other voices, save our own —  
the way elephants and earthworms are attuned —  
to the slower music of the ground,  
its deep vibration.

The air to us seems derelict  
once the Spring wrens have gone from the porch  
and the redwing blackbird drifted on from his stump in the swamp.

Out west, as a storm blows up  
all the fibers of the Sitka spruces sing  
a string bass under the bow of the wind

that we strain to notice,  
nor do we hear the silence  
where forests were.

We are more loud, than listeners.  
The drone of rubber on the asphalt highway  
turns to a hiss in rain,  
a schirr in snow,  
so near the city —  
even the wooden house rumbles at intervals,  
and at night, creaks and sighs  
like an old dog turning in its dreams.

But quiet tells us, the birds are going.  
Every Spring, a thinner symphony.  
Sparser bluejays at the winter feeder.  
Fewer kinglets whistling  
in the northern birches.

My ears are less sharp with age, but we all seem to be turning up  
our music's volume  
as though afraid to be drowned out by the arriving silence  
predicted so long ago.

## A Little Number for Late Fall

Daylight holds its breath  
here in Westwood. Comes to a halt.

So quiet this Sunday hour —  
no dog barking on the block

except the dog you imagine in too much silence  
barking from the house next to yours.

But not here.

How loud the mind can be  
humming down its customary rails.

How cluttered with its plans and recollections.  
Clickety-clack.

Here, even the grass seems to have paused from growing,  
stiff like fingers against the ground's chin,  
in a brown study, as they say,  
looking back. Looking in.

The mind is the eternal mill  
grinding the heart's gravel  
to one bland macadam.  
But in the topaz wood  
each leaf  
is shimmying down to its own music  
like a tot dancing with abandon  
at the world's delight  
when no one is watching.

Nothing entirely stands still that is living.  
A seethe and press of joy  
shifts everything from below.  
Magma shifts and resettles its hot coils.  
Waters rise and push the sand aside.  
Moles heave up the turf  
and the plump grubs snooze away winter in their elbows of air  
under the roots of the alders.  
Makes you want to bring your mind out to play!

Bring your imaginary dog -- do some shimmying yourself.  
Even with winter coming on  
the bulbs are stretching their toes under the blanket  
and the wood is laying its green dress away in the trunk  
humming the band's last number.  
Imagining the next.



*Judith, a farmer in Oyani Village in Western Ghana, was trained to grow high-value food and now applies her knowledge for her dairy animals, which tripled their milk production. She can sell the extra milk and uses the money to pay for school fees for her two daughters and to buy extra food for her family.*