

**Sermon for Sunday, October 1, 2023**  
**Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**“Healing in Creation”**  
**Reverend Amy Zalk Larson**  
**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church**  
**Decorah, Iowa**

[Click here to read story for today.](#)

Beloved People of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

*Is the Lord among us or not?* the people asked themselves and Moses in the wilderness. There was no water, would they die in the wilderness? When water began flowing from a rock, they knew, yes, God is among us.

That’s wonderful for those people, back then. It’s good to know we have a God who can do such miracles. But what about us now? When large swaths of the earth face extreme drought while others recover from violent storms and flooding; when we’re feeling the impact of generations of trauma inflicted on so many bodies; when our government came to the brink of a shutdown because the divisions in the country are so great; it can feel like we’re wandering in a desert without hope, without help. *Is the Lord among us or not?* Does God still provide for us? Last I checked, healing waters were not flowing out of Pulpit Rock, and it doesn’t feel as if justice is rolling down like a mighty stream. *Is the Lord among us?*

This week I learned something that helped me see our story today differently. Apparently, water can and does still gush forth from rocks in desert regions if the rocks are struck hard enough. (If you’re interested in the science behind this, there’s a link to an article in the text of the sermon.<sup>1</sup>) The story isn’t revealing a God who did a flashy magic trick back then but leaves us high and dry now. It’s about our good God, our good Creator, who works through the healing capacities in creation to help us creatures.

Old Testament teacher Dr. Terence Fretheim writes, “God does not create water for the [Israelites] out of thin air, nor is the natural order disrupted. Water does in fact course through rock formations. And so, it is a matter of finding the places of flowing water. The actions of both God and Moses enable their hidden potential to surface. God leads Moses to help that is available in the world of nature.”<sup>2</sup> Dr. Fretheim and others make the case that manna in the wilderness, the pillar of fire and cloud, even the parting of the Red Sea can also be understood as God working through the good creation.<sup>3</sup> When the people ask, *is the Lord among us or not?* The answer is yes. God has been with them all along. What they need is there and has been all along, they just need their eyes opened to see it.

Does God provide for us still through the world of nature? Does God lead us to help that is available through the created order? Is the Lord among us? Our Indigenous siblings show us the an-

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<sup>1</sup> [www.europhysicsnews.org/articles/e pn/pdf/2005/03/e pn05306.pdf](http://www.europhysicsnews.org/articles/e pn/pdf/2005/03/e pn05306.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/third-sunday-in-lent/commentary-on-exodu s-171-7-10](http://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/third-sunday-in-lent/commentary-on-exodu s-171-7-10)

<sup>3</sup> [www.europhysicsnews.org/articles/e pn/pdf/2005/03/e pn05306.pdf](http://www.europhysicsnews.org/articles/e pn/pdf/2005/03/e pn05306.pdf)

swer is a resounding yes. They help us to see the Creator's care for us. This fall, Good Shepherd members have been learning from the wisdom of Indigenous peoples who find healing through the natural world, even after generations of trauma. Many members have been sharing in Zoom sessions offered by ELCA's Truth and Healing Initiative, and discussing them afterwards. In those discussions, Good Shepherd member Anne Clausen, our reader today, has been reflecting on what she learned through years in ministry with an Indigenous Lutheran congregation in Alaska.

Another Good Shepherd member, Bev Sheridan, attended the Women of the ELCA convention in September and got to learn from Dr. Kelly Sherman Conroy, the first Native Woman Theologian in the ELCA with a Ph.D. Dr. Sherman Conroy writes a beautiful blog in which she offers wisdom shaped by both Lakota and Lutheran teachings. In one essay, she describes the healing she experienced on her grandparent's ranch on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota.

"When you entered my grandparents' homestead," she writes, "you were greeted by a towering tree line whose role in the life of the ranch was to be a protector. It protected the ranch from the strong and ever-changing seasons. And almost daily, the trees provided protection and comfort to a child who often looked for solace. I remember my tree, my friend, was always there to greet me. She created a chair for me, a spot that curved around me when I sat at her feet, almost like she was hugging me. Within her branches lived my friends, who would sing to me a beautiful song while the life around me would sing along. It was a beautiful choir that often can get neglected in our daily lives ... I would breathe in, connect with the world around me, welcome that full moment of peace, of happiness ..."

Sherman Conroy continues, "Find a place to walk or to sit, close your eyes and feel and listen to the world ... Feel the breeze hug you gently. Hear the music of the world around you that God created. And breathe it in ... Remember this closeness we have with our Creator through the world around us wherever we are. Live into this wisdom and let it give you the strength, hope, peace and healing you need."<sup>4</sup>

Is the Lord among us? Yes. The trees create chairs for us to rest and hear God's choir. The breeze embraces us with God's presence. In every moment, God is as close to us as our breath. God works through the ordinary gifts of creation, through bread, wine, water, the gathered community, Zoom, our larger ELCA. God works to forgive us and set us free so that we can be people who do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.

As poet Wendell Berry helps us to remember, what we need is here.  
God is among us.  
We can breathe in this good news.  
We can help others to see God's presence as we live in God's ways.

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<sup>4</sup> [sacredthoughts.blog/2020/03/31/healing-owaste/](https://sacredthoughts.blog/2020/03/31/healing-owaste/)