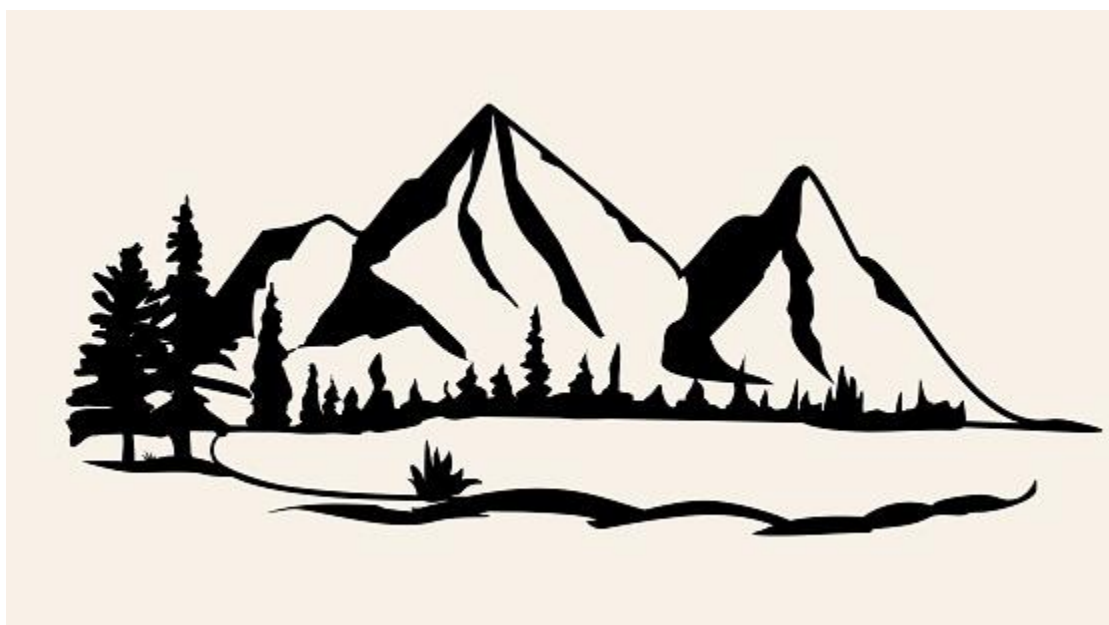


Wildfire Recognition Sunday
Commemorating the Oregon and Western States Wildfires of 2020

A Handbook of Resources
July, 25, 2021



Introduction

In 2020, the State of Oregon experienced one of the most destructive wildfire seasons on record. The 21 fires that year killed at least 11 people and burned more than 1,000,000 acres of forest land as well as populated areas. The wildfires uprooted the lives of at least 500,000 people, destroyed thousands of homes and businesses, decimated old growth lands and urbanized areas alike, and killed countless numbers of mammals, fish, birds, amphibians and insects. The cities of Phoenix, Talent, Detroit, Gates, Blue River and much of Vida were left in ashes.

The unprecedented drought throughout the west continues in 2021. The fire season this year started in May and prompted the earliest and most significant mobilization of fire-fighting resources in history. The Bootleg Fire in the Fremont-Winema National Forest rages destroying wide swaths of the land. At this writing that one fire alone has consumed 610 square miles of precious land, more than twice the area of New York City. Smoke from the fire is impacting the entire globe.

This resource book of prayers, poems, scripture and song is intended to be used by churches and other groups to remember, lament and pray for Earth and its inhabitants shattered by the Wildfires of 2020; as well as all those impacted in the West this year. By resolution, Oregon Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America designated a Wildfire Recognition Sunday, September 5, 2021. September 7, 2021 is the one-year anniversary of the Labor Day Fires.

Please use whatever you find here that is helpful for your context; for comfort, consolation, and peace. You may also choose to prepare a message using one of the texts from Scripture.

While these resources are for your use, we ask you make the appropriate citations as included in the body of these writings. Materials without citation can be used as is. These materials were compiled and written by the Oregon Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's Disaster Preparedness and Response Team, with the assistance of Bishop Emeritus David Brauer-Rieke, Region 1 Disaster Preparedness Project Manager, and The Rev. Christine M. Core. We thank the ELCA Lutheran Disaster Response for their continued and steadfast support.

Suggested Hebrew and Christian Scripture Readings

New Revised Standard Version Translation

The Psalms

Psalm 8:3-4; 6-8

³ When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;

⁴ what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?

⁶ You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under their feet,

⁷ all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,

⁸ the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

Psalm 19:1-5, 14

¹ The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

² Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.

³ There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;

⁴ yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.

In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun,

⁵ which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy,
and like a strong man runs its course with joy.

¹⁴ Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable to you,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

Psalm 36:5-9

⁵ Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the clouds.

⁶ Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains,
your judgements are like the great deep;
you save humans and animals alike, O LORD.

- ⁷ How precious is your steadfast love, O God!
All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.
- ⁸ They feast on the abundance of your house,
and you give them drink from the river of your delights.
- ⁹ For with you is the fountain of life;
in your light we see light.

Psalm 65:9-13

- ⁹ You visit the earth and water it,
you greatly enrich it;
the river of God is full of water;
you provide the people with grain,
for so you have prepared it.
- ¹⁰ You water its furrows abundantly,
settling its ridges,
softening it with showers,
and blessing its growth.
- ¹¹ You crown the year with your bounty;
your wagon tracks overflow with richness.
- ¹² The pastures of the wilderness overflow,
the hills gird themselves with joy,
- ¹³ the meadows clothe themselves with flocks,
the valleys deck themselves with grain,
they shout and sing together for joy.

Psalm 95:3-5

- ³ For the LORD is a great God,
and a great King above all gods.
- ⁴ In his hand are the depths of the earth;
the heights of the mountains are his also.
- ⁵ The sea is his, for he made it,
and the dry land, which his hands have formed.

Hebrew Scripture

Deuteronomy 33:13-16

- ¹³ And of Joseph he said:
Blessed by the LORD be his land,
with the choice gifts of heaven above,
and of the deep that lies beneath;
- ¹⁴ with the choice fruits of the sun,
and the rich yield of the months;
- ¹⁵ with the finest produce of the ancient mountains,

and the abundance of the everlasting hills;
¹⁶ with the choice gifts of the earth and its fullness,
and the favor of the one who dwells on Sinai.
Let these come on the head of Joseph,
on the brow of the prince among his brothers.

Isaiah 16:1-4

Send lambs

to the ruler of the land,
from Sela, by way of the desert,
to the mount of daughter Zion.

² Like fluttering birds,
like scattered nestlings,
so are the daughters of Moab
at the fords of the Arnon.

³ 'Give counsel,
grant justice;
make your shade like night
at the height of noon;
hide the outcasts,
do not betray the fugitive;

⁴ let the outcasts of Moab
settle among you;
be a refuge to them
from the destroyer.'

When the oppressor is no more,
and destruction has ceased,
and marauders have vanished from the land,

Isaiah 40:6-8

⁶ A voice says, 'Cry out!'
And I said, 'What shall I cry?'
All people are grass,
their constancy is like the flower of the field.

⁷ The grass withers, the flower fades,
when the breath of the LORD blows upon it;
surely the people are grass.

⁸ The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the word of our God will stand for ever.

Isaiah 55:12-13

¹² For you shall go out in joy,
and be led back in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you
shall burst into song,
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.
¹³ Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;
and it shall be to the LORD for a memorial,
for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

Christian Scripture

Matthew 6:19-21

¹⁹ Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰ but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 6:28-29

²⁸ And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.

John 1:1-5

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

Romans 8:22-27

²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; ²³ and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.
²⁶ Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. ²⁷ And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Hebrews 12:1-2, 12

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, ²looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

¹² Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, ¹³and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.

Suggested Holy Writings from Eastern and Native Traditions

Great Spirit Prayer

Oh, Great Spirit,
Whose voice I hear in the winds
and whose breath gives life to all the world.
Hear me! I need your strength and wisdom.
Let me walk in beauty, and make my eyes
ever hold the red and purple sunset.
Make my hands respect the things you have made
and my ears sharp to hear your voice.
Make me wise so that I may understand
the things you have taught my people.
Let me learn the lessons you have hidden
in every leaf and rock.

Help me remain calm and strong in the
face of all that comes towards me.
Help me find compassion without
empathy overwhelming me.
I see strength, not to be greater than my brother,
but to fight my greatest enemy: myself.
Make me always ready to come to you
with clean hands and straight eyes.
So when life fades, as the fading sunset,
my spirit may come to you with out shame.

Translated by Lakota Sioux Chief Yello Lark, 1887

The Garden is Rich

The garden is rich with diversity
with plants of a hundred families
in the space between the trees
with all the colors and fragrances.
Basil, mint and lavender,
Great Mystery keep my remembrance pure,
Raspberry, Apple, rose,
Great Mystery fill my heart with love,
Dill anise, tansy,
Holy winds blow in me.
Rhododendron, zinnia,
May my prayer be beautiful
May my remembrance O Great Mystery
be as incense to you
In the Sacred grove of eternity
As I smell and remember
The ancient forests of earth

From the Chinook Psalter

First Peoples' Prayer for the Earth

Honor the sacred
Honor the Earth, our Mother
Honor the Elders.
Honor all with whom we share the Earth:
Four-leggeds, two-leggeds, winged ones,
Swimmers, crawlers, plant and rock people.
Walk in balance and beauty.

The Holy Quaran

Note: The Holy Quaran states Earth is green and beautiful, and Allah has appointed humans as his stewards over it. The whole Earth has been created a place of worship, pure and clean. Whoever plants a tree and diligently looks after it until it matures and bears fruit is rewarded. If a Muslim plants a tree or sows a field and humans and beasts and birds eat from it, all of it is love on his part. Below are verses from the Holy Quaran on the creation of the Earth and its beauty.

Surat Aale Imran: "And to Allah (swt*) belongs the dominion of the Heaven and Earth, and Allah (swt) is over all things. Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and earth, and the alternation of the night and the day are signs for those of understanding."

Surat Al-Roum: "Devote thyself single-mindedly to the faith, and thus follow the nature designed by Allah (swt), the nature according to which He has fashioned mankind; there is no altering the creation of Allah." [30:30]

Surat Luqman: "He created the heavens without pillars as you see them, and put mountains upon the Earth lest it might convulse with you, and He spread it with animals of all kinds; and We sent down water from the clouds, then caused to grow therein (vegetation) of every noble kind." [31:10]

Surat Al-An'am: "And it is He who sends down rain from the sky, and We produce thereby the growth of all things. We produce from it greenery from which We produce grains arranged in layers. And from the palm trees – of its emerging fruit are clusters hanging low. And [We produce] gardens of grapevines and olives and pomegranates, similar yet varied. Look at [each of] its fruit when it yields and [at] its ripening. Indeed in that are signs for a people who believe." [6:99]

* Arabic translated to *Glorious and Exalted Is He*. In saying or reading the name of Allah, the shorthand of "SWT" indicates an act of reverence and devotion toward God.

Atharva Veda XI, 4* Extolling the breath (prāná)

Note: The Atharva Veda is the "knowledge storehouse of atharvāṇas, the procedures for everyday life". This text is the fourth Veda, but has been a late addition to the Vedic scriptures of Hinduism.

Praise to the Breath of Life!
He rules this world,
master of all things,
on which all things are based.

Praise, Breath of Life, to your uproar!
Praise to your thunder!
Praise to your lightning!
Praise, Breath of Life, for your rain!

When Breath of Life with his thunder
Roars o'er the plants,
then, pregnant with pollen,
The flowers burst forth in abundance.

When Breath of Life the broad earth
with rain bedews,
the cattle exalt:
"We shall have plenty," they say.

The plants converse with this Breath,
Drenched by his moisture:
"Our life is prolonged,
For you have made us all fragrant."

Breath of Life, do not forsake me.
You are, indeed, I.
Like the Embryo of the Waters
I bind you to me that I may live!

Suggested Hymns

(Note: suggested hymns are taken from the Evangelical Lutheran Worship hymnal.
We urge you and your musicians to look
to the myriad of sources for appropriate music.)

Come Join the Dance of Trinity, ELW#412
When Long Before Time, ELW#861
For the Beauty of the Earth, ELW #879

Poetry and Other Writings

An Obituary for the Land by Terry Tempest Williams

It was time, a terminal disease where humans put themselves at the center of the universe. And in so doing, have been dead to the world that is alive. To the power of these burning illuminated Western lands who have shaped her character, inspired our souls and restored our belief in what is beautiful and enduring, I will never write your obituary because even as you burn, you are throwing down seeds that will sprout and flower.

Trees will grow and forests will rise again as living testaments to how one survives change. Let this be a humble tribute, an exaltation, an homage, an open-hearted eulogy to all we are losing to fire, to floods, to hurricanes, and tornadoes and the invisible virus that has called us all home and brought us to our knees. We are not the only species that lives and loves and breathes on this planet called Earth.

May be raise a fistful of ash to other lives lost that it holds. Grief is love. How can we hold this grief without holding each other? I will mark my heart with an "X" made of ash that says, 'the power to restore life resides here.' The future of our species will be decided here, not by facts, but by love and loss.

Let us cry every day like rain in the desert. Penned on my heart I pledge of allegiance to the only home I will ever know.

A Poem by Wendall Berry

He goes free of the earth.
The sun of his last day sets
Clear in the sweetness of his liberty.

The earth recovers from his dying,
The hallow of his life remaining
In all his death leaves.

Radiance knows him. Grown lighter
Than breath, he is set free
In our remembering. Grown brighter

Than vision, he goes dark
Into the life of the hill
That holds his peace

He's hidden among all that is,
And cannot be lost.

The Peace of Wild Things
by Wendall Berry

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake rests
in his beauty on the water and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water
and feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

Excerpt from *The Selected Poems of Wendall Berry*,
North Point Press, 1998

A Poem by Mary de LaValette

I do not have to go
To Sacred Places
In far-off lands.
The ground I stand on
Is holy.

Here, in this little garden
I tend
My pilgrimage ends.
The wild honeybees
The hummingbird moths
The flickering fireflies at dusk
Are a microcosm
Of the Universe.
Each seed that grows
Each spade of soil
Is full of miracles.

And I toil and sweat
And watch and wonder
And am full of love.
Living in place
In this place.
For truth and beauty
Dwell here.

Taken from *Life Prayers from around the World: 365 Prayers, Blessings and Affirmations to Celebrate the Human Journey*
Edited by Elizabeth Roberts and Elias Amidon
Harper One, 1996

Prayers

Caring for Creation

Most High, good Lord,
You revealed to St. Francis
that You are Father of all creation and
that all creatures are related as brothers and sisters.

Praised be You, my Lord,
with all Your creatures,
especially Sir Brother Sun who is the day,
and through whom You give us light.

Praised be You, my Lord,
through Sister Moon and the stars,
Brother Wind,
Sister Water
and Brother Fire.

And praised be You, my Lord,
through our Sister Mother Earth,
who sustains and governs us,
and produces varied fruit
with coloured flowers and herbs.

Grant us, Lord,
the grace to see Your beauty and likeness
in created things
that we may follow St. Francis
in showing care for creation.
Amen

*- adapted by Br. Cathal Duddy OFM
from "The Canticle of the Creatures" by St. Francis of Assisi*

A Prayer of Gratitude for Creation

God of the universe,
We thank You for Your many good gifts -
For the beauty of Creation and its rich and varied fruits,
For clean water and fresh air, for food and shelter, animals and plants.

Forgive us for the times we have taken the earth's resources
for granted
And wasted what You have given us.
Transform our hearts and minds
So that we would learn to care and share,
To touch the earth with gentleness and with love,
Respecting all living things.

We pray for all those who suffer as a result of our waste,
greed and indifference,
And we pray that the day would come when everyone has enough
food and clean water.
Help us to respect the rights of all people and all species
And help us to willingly share your gifts
Today and always. Amen

Fiona Murdoch, Eco-Congregation Ireland

Creation Prayer

God our Father, you created the world and sent your own Son to live among us, made of the same stuff, breathing the same air, marveling at sunrise and sunset just as we do. Help us to participate in the life around and within us as your life, as you living in us and we living in you and in each other. God of love and life, restore us to your peace, renew us through your power and teach us to love all that you have created and to care for the earth as your gift and our home.

The Earth Community: In Christ through the Integrity of Creation

The Creation Lord's Prayer

Note: This prayer is intended to be read with two voices. You may have a leader read the left hand column, while those assembled read the right. You may divide the assembled into two groups and assign each group a part. Adapt this prayer as you see is appropriate.

Our Father, who art in heaven...	You are also at home in the air, the soil, the forests and the oceans,
Hallowed be Your name...	by the care we take of your creation,
Your kingdom come...	all that you see is good,
Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven...	Your will to till and care,
Give us this day our daily bread...	that all may have sufficient to live life in fullness,
Forgive us our trespasses...	our greed, our exploitation, our lack of concern for other species and for future generations,
As we forgive those who trespass against us...	by reconciliation with justice and peace,
Lead us not into temptation...	the temptation to equate dominion with exploitation,
And deliver us from evil...	the evil of destroying your gift of creation,
For Yours is the Kingdom...	Yours Lord, not ours,
The Power and the Glory...	in the cross and the resurrection,
For ever and ever...	And so be it.

Amen

*Creation Care Prayers
From The Church of England Environment Programme*

Suggested Prayer of the Day

Holy God, we give you thanks for your great work of creation. We praise you for the beauty, diversity and interconnectedness of all life in the universe and on our Earth. But we mourn the ways in which our earthly home has been destroyed by our selfishness or inaction. On this Wildfire Recognition Sunday, we hold before you all that has been lost – precious lives of people, animals, trees and valuable vegetation. We know you will never abandon your creation and that through your grace, we will be given all that we need now and always. Amen

Suggested Prayers of the People for Wildfire Recognition Sunday

Gracious God, we remember today those who fight fires to protect our homes and our livelihoods; those who stand by to respond in times of disaster and chaos; first responders, medical professionals, police and fire chiefs, deputies and volunteers. Thank you for their care and expertise and keep them safe and out of harm's way. God of Creation, **listen to your children praying.**

We remember today those who have lost their homes, their hope, their livelihoods, and their communities to fire. And we name before either silently or with our voice those from whom our hearts grieve. (Pause) God of Creation, **listen to your children praying.**

God of Healing, as we move from loss to renewal, grief to hope and pain to promise, walk with us in grace, mercy and compassion. God of Creation, **listen to your children praying.**

A Litany of Lament and Thanksgiving

Creator God, for all those who experienced wildfires throughout the Western United States and Canada during 2020 and again this year, we pray:

Have compassion on them and keep them safe from harm.

For the families and friends of those who have lost their lives to the raging fires, we pray:

May they know the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding.

For those in the affected areas who have lost their homes, precious mementos and tangible remembrances of lives well lived; pets and tenderly tended domestic animals, for their loved ones, neighbors, friends, we pray:

We grieve their losses and pray our presence and prayer gives comfort and solace.

For wildlife and old growth in the path of the flames and whose ashes we now sift through our fingers, we pray:

Let your creative and limitless power allow the land to regenerate and grow, even as we know that regrowth and restoration will happen slowly over the span of centuries.

For firefighters and first responders, we pray:

Meet their needs, shield them from harm, lift their weariness and send them relief.

For those who have lost jobs and businesses, we pray:

Comfort and sustain them; help them to restore that which has been lost.

For all those whose health is threatened by smoke and ash, we pray:

Ease their suffering and protect them from any long-term damage to their health.

For those still displaced and unhoused, for the discouraged, we pray;

Lift their spirits and restore hope to them.

For all who are feeling stress or anxiety and fearfully following continued news of drought and tinder-dry conditions, we pray;

pour out a healing and calming balm.

And, Holy God, when these fiery trials have ceased, renew lives, families, communities and environments in ways only You could have foreseen and brought back to life. In You, Holy God, we place our trust; for you, Holy God, we wait in the steadfast assurance of your loving presence.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

