SPIRITUAL PRACTICES OF FOOD,

FAITH, AND PLACE

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SPIRITUAL PRACTICES OF FOOD, FAITH, AND PLACE

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION:

Place is a vital part of the Christian faith; yet, our places are often overlooked. Where we live and how we live there are important aspects of faith and expressions of our understandings of and connections to God. Jennifer R. Ayers calls people of faith to practice "inhabitance," which she defines as the practice of recognizing humans are part of God's world and then living well within the context and bounds of our habitats "by seeking to know and love a particular place in some detail and honoring its rhythms, limits, and possibilities."[1] One of the ways that people of faith can learn inhabitance is by paying attention to farmers and the places where their food is grown and raised; however, this approach to learning inhabitance is often ignored, overlooked, or not understood within many churches.

This is a concern for multiple reasons as will be elaborated in the following chapter. Hebrew and Christian scriptures and scriptural understandings of stewardship call people to pay attention to and interact with their natural environments. Human-caused environmental changes threaten species, habitats, and the habitability of many places. Amid these challenges the church has failed to adequately teach practices of inhabitance. Church leaders have overlooked their ecological places and missed opportunities to connect people to their local habitats and food systems. Three keys to beginning to remedy these challenges can be found in listening to the wisdom of food producers, embracing a cosmopolitan theology that extends divine love to the more-than-human helping people of faith to more closely connect to the places where they live

[1] Jennifer R Ayres, *Inhabitance: Ecological Religious Education* (Waco, TX Waco: Baylor University Press, 2019, 2-3.

and practice ministry, and using and expanding the Wesleyan ways of knowing to include the natural world.

Attention to place and how people faithfully interact with and live in their places is a vital part of faith especially as people of faith seek to develop spiritual practices that address the ecological challenges of our time. This project will address this disconnect between the Christian faith, food production, and care of places by exploring six spiritual practices of faithfully inhabiting one's place. This exploration will follow the "Wesleyan Quadrilateral" by examining each spiritual practice through the lenses of scripture, tradition, reason, and experience.[2] Scripture sections will draw upon biblical texts and commentators. The tradition section will look to John Wesley, his sermons, and other writings to better understand the spiritual practices of inhabitance. Reason sections will use theological reflections to better understand these spiritual practices. The experience sections will use written and online sources to examine how some food producers in the North Fork of the Gunnison River Valley in Western Colorado have engaged these practices.

Throughout these explorations, readers will have the opportunity to move beyond the Wesleyan Quadrilateral to embrace what some call the "Wesleyan Pentalateral" in which "creation itself should be seen as a fifth dimension of Wesley's theological method."[3] Luis Wesley de Souza advocates for the Wesleyan Pentalateral stating,

> drawing on what may be learned from creation is part of Wesley's theological method … the theology of creation is important 'because it reveals God's original intent and therefore the final scope of God's healing, redeeming love.' If, however, creation is a key 'underlying presupposition' in Wesley's theology, it is important to reflect upon it. In fact,

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[2] Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), *36.*

[3] Luis Wesley de Souza, "The Wisdom of God in Creation": Mission and the Wesleyan Pentalateral," in *Global Good News: Mission in a New Context*, ed. Howard A. Snyder (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 2001), 142-143.

> creation is a pulsating assumption throughout Wesley's writings, a sensitivity that permeates all his thought.[4]

Thus, discussion of each spiritual practice will likewise invite people to deeper connection with and reflection upon creation. These explorations and reflections using the Wesleyan Pentalateral to engage these six spiritual practices are intended to form the basis of new learning opportunities which could include a six-part sermon series, a small group study, and a service-learning experience.

In part this project will offer tools for communities of faith to access and engage their unique ecological settings. In the sections that follow I will explore the intersection of food, Christian faith, and our understanding of, engagement with, and care for the places we live. I will then use these reflections to propose a six-session curriculum for churches and church participants to develop a sense of place utilizing the spiritual practices outlined in this paper. Each session will contain reflections on scripture readings, the Wesleyan tradition, and theology. Each session will also outline activities to incorporate experience into the teaching curriculum as well as suggestions for site visits within the North Fork Valley. These site visits are meant to serve as an example for the types of food producers that other church teachers may look for in their own ministry settings and places. Chapter one serves as an introduction to the proposed study materials by outlining the spiritual practice of noticing and connecting to a particular place. Chapter two will engage more deeply with cosmopolitan theology and the practice of facing the other and. extending that practice to more-than-human others. Chapter three will explore the spiritual practice of thanksgiving paying special attention to how communion liturgies can call people of faith to deeper engagement with and appreciation of their places. Chapter four will

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[4] De Souza, "The Wisdom of God in Creation," 147-148.

consider the importance of eating locally produced food as a way of connecting to place. Chapter five will look at the practice of composting as an expression of place and resurrection. Chapter six seeks to understand the practice of gleaning as a means of connecting to food systems, reducing food waste, and enacting food justice. The first spiritual practice of faithfully inhabiting place is that of paying attention and noticing one's place.

CHAPTER ONE: The Spiritual Practice of Noticing Place

Throughout the Hebrew and Christian Bibles place matters. Where people live and how they live in that place is an important aspect of faith. Adam and Eve were placed in the Garden of Eden and later expelled when they could not live by the rules of that place.[5] Abram and Sarai left their country to go to the land that God would show them – a place where they would be blessed and be a blessing to others.[6] In the verses preceding The Shema/The Great Commandment the people are invited to follow God's commandments so that they may live well and live abundantly in the land.[7] Even in exile in a foreign land the prophet Jeremiah calls the people to faithfully inhabit their place well by building, planting and harvesting in their place.[8] In the gospels we know that Jesus pays attention to his place because he observes and tells stories about birds,[9] fruit trees,[10] seeds,[11] weeds,[12] and the wheat harvest.[13] Water,[14] mud,[15] and

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[5] Genesis 2:10-15 and Genesis 3:23-24.

[6] Genesis 12:1-9.

[7] Deuteronomy 6:1-9.

[8] Jeremiah 29:4-9.

[9] Matthew 6:26.

[10] Matthew 7:15-20; Luke 6:43-45.

[11] Matthew 13:1-10.

[12] Matthew 13:24-30.

[13] Luke 6:1-5.

[14] John 2:1-12 and John 4:1-42.

[15] John 9:1-12.

trees[16] participate in Jesus' signs and miracles. Jesus also challenges his followers as to how they inhabit their place. Will they inhabit place in the ways of empire which leads to depletion and destruction? Or will Jesus' followers inhabit place like Christ bringing resurrection, healing, and renewal. Place is important, but it takes effort, time, and commitment to notice and pay attention to our places.

For more than a decade my family and I have been vacationing at the same small resort along the same stretch of beach just south of Cancun, Mexico. This resort, while certainly catering to international tourists, has been a place of rest and renewal. Regularly returning to the same place over and over again has allowed us to become familiar with the layout of the resort, the entertainment and culinary offerings in the hotel restaurant. We even have come to know some of the employees at that resort who have worked there for years, if not decades.

Returning to the same place intermittently over the years has also made us keenly aware of the changes taking places along that small stretch of beach. Of course, there are the obvious changes like staff turnover and major shifts in resort theming from a Mexican-inspired retreat to a Nickelodeon-inspired family resort complete with Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and buckets of green slime to a Margaritaville resort with "booze in the blender" and Cheeseburgers in Paradise on the menu. Of greater consequence have been the changes we have experienced in the beach ecosystem.

Granted, a tourist beach is certainly not a pristine environment; however, it has offered a prime opportunity to observe longer-term changes. On our first visit we encountered clear ocean waters. My family and I observed star fish, sea urchins, colorful tropical fish, and a resident barracuda. The beach itself was wide and sandy, providing areas for rows of beach chairs, ample

[16] Luke 13:6-9.

space for beach volleyball and beach soccer, and places to set up tables in the evening for candlelit dinners on the beach. In our first visits to that beach we built sandcastles, celebrated birthdays, and rang in the New Year. My sons discovered conch shells and swam for miles along the shoreline.

But all was not well. While my children were searching for conch shells, they also started to encounter an abundance of salps in the water and washed up on the beach. Little did we know at the time, but these small, gelatinous spheres were an indicator of phytoplankton blooms offshore. On another visit our ability to swim in the ocean was almost entirely blocked by huge mats of sargassum washing ashore. These sargassum infestations were likely driven by increased deforestation, wastewater runoff, and commercial agricultural fertilizer being discharged into ocean from the Amazon River.

On our most recent visit to our vacation beach, we were devastated to find that we couldn't enjoy the beach at all. This time not because of seaweed infestations, but because the beach had eroded to a fraction of its previous size. Gone were the beach chairs and volleyball court. The impact of hurricanes and costal erosion was clear. All that remained was a tiny sliver of beach beyond a rock wall designed to be a barrier between the ocean and the resort. When we did manage to enter the ocean water, it was depressing. The water was murky and brown. The ocean bottom wasn't sandy but squishy mess six-inches deep of decaying seaweed and ocean plastic. We lamented the loss of our place of relaxation and renewal.

The changes to this beach were clear to us because they were so dramatic but also because we had so many reference points over the years with which to compare the changes. Like samples taken over time, we could look back at pictures of previous vacations and observe

the drastic changes taking place. But do we notice the drastic changes taking place in our own ecosystems? Or does day-to-day familiarity make observing those changes more difficult?

Visiting the beach intermittently over the course of a decade makes changes more obvious. It's similar to receiving an elementary school yearbook near the end of the academic year. My school friends and I would open our yearbooks to the individual pictures of each student and laugh. Those photographs taken early in the school year looked so different and foreign from the friends we sat next to everyday in class. Those yearbooks highlighted just how much growth and change had taken place over the course of the school year, but because we were in class together five days a week for nine months, we couldn't recognize the subtle changes taking place every day.

Our places are changing every day. Sometimes this change is sudden and obvious like massive spring snowmelt rerouting portions of the North Fork of the Gunnison River near my home at it did in the spring of 2023, or the increased river flows washing out pedestrian bridges in our community river park as happened in 2022. Some of these changes are seasonal – the blooming of flowers in the spring, the harvest of fruits in the summer, the explosion of orange and yellow tree leaves in the autumn. Some of these changes are linked to climate and ecosystem health, such as prolonged drought or altered growing seasons. How do we non-scientists notice and keep track of these changes that can be indicators of ecosystem health? How do we respond when these changes begin to impact our lives and the lives of human and more-than-humans in our ecosystems? Do we notice the changes occurring in our places on a day-to-day or year-to year basis? Do people of faith and faith communities notice and respond to ecological changes?

When the United States Department of Agriculture released its newly revised Plant Hardiness Zone Map in November 2023, about half the United States found itself in a warmer planting zone. For some landscapers and farmers this did not come as a surprise because they had already been living and working in this reality. The new zone map simply confirmed what they had already observed.[17]

Farmers in the North Fork of the Gunnison River Valley have already noticed the changes taking place in their ecosystem, and they are working to adapt to these changes. Tomatoes are no longer a summer staple; instead, they have become an uncertain autumn crop. My family and I spent an afternoon last October furiously plucking green tomatoes off our backyard tomato vines before the first freeze of the season. Those tomatoes ripened in paper bags on our living room floor because there were not enough semi-cool growing days for these tomatoes to ripen in the garden. Mark Waltermire, owner of Thistle Whistle Farm in Hotchkiss, Colorado, has noticed these climatic changes that make growing heat-sensitive crops like tomatoes and eggplants more difficult. When those crops do grow, their harvest is now often pushed back from the summer to the early fall. "It's been too hot for too long in my fields the past couple of years," Waltermire told the Rotary Club of the North Fork Valley.[18] He hopes to install 10-foot elevated solar panels at Thistle Whistle Farm and grow food beneath the panels which should help keep crops coolers and reduce water loss while also providing energy for the farm and farm workers who live

[17] Remy Tumin and Mike Ives, "What Plants Will Survive in Your Garden? This Map Plans for a Warmer U.S.," *The New York Times*, December 4, 2023 , https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/21/climate/usda-plant-hardiness-zone-map.html?searchResultPosition=1.

[18] Mark Waltermire, (lecture, Rotary Club of the North Fork Valley, Paonia, CO, December 14, 2023).

nearby. Waltermire's attention to and connection with his farm have helped him notice the changes occurring in his place.

Our food producers, our food choices, and our diets offer us ways to connect with our places and keep tabs on the changes occurring in our communities and ecosystems every day Ayers notes that farmers who remain close to the ground through practices of organic or biodynamic agriculture have an embodied wisdom developed through observation, careful response, ongoing engagement, and planning for the future. Ayers calls people of faith to practice "inhabitance" by getting to know one particular place.[19] Regardless of where we live or our professions or income levels, we are all called to some extent to be agrarians connected to and inhabiting our places.

Gary W. Fick places the concept of stewardship at the foundation of a biblical view of agriculture.[20] In this perspective the earth belongs to God, God has given the care of the earth into human hands, and caregivers are responsible for the cultivation, protection, and care they provide.[21] Since God loves diversity, one aspect of ecological stewardship is to protect and provide for the flourishing of all species.[22] This includes caring for the land in part through developing local wisdom and a "sense of place."[23] People of faith can practice inhabitance by connecting with our local environments, and one way we can make that connection is by tapping into the local, embodied wisdom and sense of place of our responsible food producers.

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[19] Ayers, *Inhabitance*, 21, 2-3.

[20] Gary W. Fick, *Food, Faith, and Farming* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 17.

[21] Fick, *Food, Faith, and Farming*, 22.

[22] Fick, *Food, Faith, and Farming*, 41.

[23] Fick, *Food, Faith, and Farming*, 53.

Living faithfully in a changing world will require people who, like Waltermire and others, are actively engaged in their place and responsive to the changes around them. The first step is for people and communities of faith to be intimately connected to the habitats, ecosystems, food systems, and neighborhoods that define their places. This will require new perspectives, new practices, and new approaches for people of faith and church communities, but this will take sustained, intentional work to accomplish this shift in perspective.

Michael Lodahl notes that humans are readers of their world, but as humans read texts and their environments they also interpret. As humans interpret they do so with a set of spectacles comprised of language, stories, traditions, and commonsense wisdom.[24] Lodahl asks what his home religious community taught him about reading the world – particularly the natural world as expressed in Psalm 104 – and his answer is *not much.* When the psalmist writes "The young lions roar for their prey, seeking their food from God," in Psalm 104:21 Lodahl, citing John Wesley, sees creatures as capable of some manner of praying and God as answering the prayers of all creatures. Lodahl sees within the words "These all look to you to give them their food in due season" from Psalm 104:27-28 a description of "God's creative and sustaining power at work in a vast community of living beings existing in a complex web of relationships:"[25] Then, Psalm 104:30, which reads, "When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground," points toward a God who continually breathes the gift of being

[24] Michael E. Lodahl, *God of Nature and of Grace: Reading the World in a Wesleyan Way* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 28-29.

[25] Lodahl, *God of Nature and of Grace, 39.*

into all creatures.[26] But Lodahl does not see the lessons he finds in Psalm 104 – that God's love embraces and enfolds all creatures and excludes absolutely none – being taught in the church.

Lodahl interprets this as many churches' and many Christians' reluctance "to truly engage the world as beautiful, as good, as nature, as bodies."[27] Yet the emphasis of John Wesley on experience as a cornerstone of theological reflection calls people of faith – particularly people of faith in the Wesleyan traditions – to new experiences of the natural world. Lodahl writes, "Wesley also demonstrated a remarkable willingness to learn, to grow, to change his mind – in short, to allow his *experiences of life* to shape his theological reflections."[28] In other words there are numerous instances of faith communities being closed off to and separated from the natural world and the physical places we live, but the Christian faith, and particularly Wesleyan expressions of faith, invite people into closer relationship with the natural world as a way of experiencing God and growing in understanding of God and scriptural truths. Unfortunately, as Lodahl notes, this invitation is often overlooked in churches.

As a pastor in the United Methodist Church I have served nine churches over the course of 20 years of pastoral ministry. Each time that my family and I have moved into a new town to serve a new faith community I have been given a packet of information about the church and its community. This includes lists of church leaders, church budgets, descriptions of church ministries, and accounts of church history. There also have been packets of information describing the larger community and community trends where the congregations are located.

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[26] Lodahl, *God of Nature and of Grace, 42-45.*

[27] Lodahl, *God of Nature and of Grace,* 30.

[28] Lodahl, *God of Nature and of Grace,* 60.

These packets include demographics, population trends, prominent social and political perspectives, income trends, and employment patterns.[29] But habitat, ecosystem, food system, and watershed descriptions are missing from these packets. Perhaps this should come as no surprise since as Ellen Davis notes, "we belong to a culture characterized by unprecedented ignorance about where food comes from – our own food, let alone that of the other creatures."[30]

It is not only information provided to relocating pastors that overlooks environmental settings. Some sociological studies of congregations encourage studying churches' ecological setting, but "ecology" is defined in a way that overlooks the more-than-humans and local habitats. This ecology is defined as a social fabric of relationships that includes demography, culture, and organizational systems.[31] While all of this information is important and many of the recommended study practices such as paying attention to space and walking neighborhoods are beneficial, no attention is given to the habitats, natural ecosystems, farms, ranches, and watersheds that the congregations inhabit. This extends to the act of preaching as well. In preparing to preach Leonora Tubbs Tisdale encourages the preacher to exegete the congregation with attention given to stories church members tell, archival material, demographics, architecture and visual arts, rituals, events and activities, and people. While Tisdale invites the preacher to understand the congregation's worldview including their view of nature, she never invites the

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[29] "Elevate Your Ministry By Empowering Your Church Communications," ACSTechnologies, accessed April 17, 2024, https://www.acstechnologies.com/missioninsite-ppc-landing-page/?source=MissionInsite_GoogleAds&utm_source=MissionInsite_GoogleAds&utm_medium=PPC&utm_campaign=MissionInsight&gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQiA1rSsBhDHARIsANB4EJYiJFeweaz34Kjghj4YQYBzhg9PALXpV05EDPVJwLMnUK6T_hRiJkoaAlkUEALw_wcB

[30] Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 51.

[31] Nancy Tatom Ammerman, et al. *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 40-59.

preacher to consider the ecological setting of the congregation and the impact and importance that setting might have on the congregation and the sermons it hears.[32]

But an expansive definition of place that includes the more-than-human matters. Beyond just the address of a church building or the neighborhood where the church is located or the distribution of church members within a geographic region, how we interact with that region and how we live well and live faithfully in our habitats effects what foods are available to eat, the quality and quantity of water available to drink, the quality of soils, and the quality of life for the people who live and work in our habitats. How we inhabit a place also says something about our relationship with God. Davis notes that "from a biblical perspective, the sustained fertility and habitability of the earth … is the best index of the health of the covenant relationship." This sustained fertility and habitability requires fostering a deep relationship with a specific place, recognizing the "inner spirituality" which makes each place unique, developing local wisdom through "kindly use" or the discipline of caring for land in its particularity, and practicing an economics of permanence rather than a economics of extraction and total consumption.[33] In other words, how we gather information about our places, how we live in our places, and how we treat the other-than-human in our particular places are crucial expressions of faith.

Sallie McFague understands place as part of her understanding of sin which she defines as living a lie, living disproportionately, falsely, inappropriately and refusing to accept the limitations and responsibilities of our place.[34] McFague states, "Sin is the refusal to stay in our

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[32] Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 82.

[33] Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 8, 26-29, 107-108.

[34] Sallie McFague, *Sallie McFague: Collected Readings,* ed. David B. Lott, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 182.

proper place." Traditionally, humans have seen themselves as being just a little lower than the angels and located at the top of the evolutionary ladder with all the inferior and radically different animals below us.[35] McFague suggest an evolutionary bush replace the model of an evolutionary ladder. "There is no privileged place on a bush; rather, what a bush suggests is *diversity* (while at the same time interconnectedness and interdependence since all its parts are related and all are fed by a common root system)."[36] In other words McFague is arguing that sin is failing to live generously in a place or living irresponsibly in one's place. One's place is not at the top of the evolutionary hierarchy – that hierarchy does not even exist; rather; one's place is on one of the varied and interlocking branches of the evolutionary bush. Recognizing our place among the branches of the evolutionary bush is important for at least two reasons. First, it can keep humans from adopting or it can force them to relinquish a position and attitude of superiority, domination, and exploitation. Second, it forces humans to consider their connection to and reliance upon the aspects of creation that make up the other branches of the evolutionary bush. In other words, this evolutionary bush model requires people to acknowledge and nurture their interrelatedness with other aspects of nature.

The concept of place is important because how we think about and act in our places reveals the health of our relationship with God who created us humans to be caretakers. How we inhabit our place impacts how we care for our neighbors including our more-than-human neighbors. How we live in our place may determine how long we are able to remain in these very places. Heather Eaton defines the Anthropocene Era which the planet appears to be entering as

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[35] McFague, *Sallie McFague: Collected Readings,* 156-156.

[36] McFague, *Sallie McFague: Collected Readings*, 163.

an era in which "the ecological consequences of *Homo sapiens* are such that the Cenozoic era is collapsing, and most planetary processes, ecosystems, evolutionary trajectories, and climate and hydrological systems are disturbed or deteriorating.[37] In an age when human activities are negatively impacting the biodiversity of our ecosystems leading to the potential loss of one million species,[38] and levels of carbon dioxide in the earth's atmosphere have reached record highs,[39] exceeding what is considered safe levels,[40] churches and people of faith have not just the opportunity but the obligation to extend the ministries of the church to include the natural world as part of what Namsoon Kang calls the "planetary *we.*" Kang describes the planetary *we* as a concept within cosmopolitan theology that seeks not the exclusion of others, but the recognition and confirmation of each other as part of the planetary *we.* This *planetary-we-ness* stresses infinite responsibility for the other as a fellow citizens of the cosmos.[41] Kang later describes cosmopolitan hospitality as being "planetary in scope" which means that it extends to every

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[37] Heather Eaton, "An Earth-Centric Theological Framing for Planetary Solidarity," in *Planetary Solidarity: Global Women's Voices on Christian Doctrine and Climate Justice*, ed. Grace Ji-Sun Kim, and Hilda P Koster (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), 21.

[38] Sandra Diaz, and Et. Al. "Summary for policymakers of the global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services," Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Publication, accessed May 10, 2019, https://www.ipbes.net/sites/default/files/downloads/spm_unedited_advance_for_posting_htn.pdf.

[39] Jason Samenow, "It was 84 degrees near the Arctic Ocean this weekend as carbon dioxide hit its highest level in human history," *Washington Post*, May 11, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2019/05/14/it-was-degrees-near-arctic-ocean-this-weekend-carbon-dioxide-hit-its-highest-level-human-history/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.3850c3b37b59.

[40] "350 is building a future that's just, prosperous, equitable and safe from the effects of climate change." 350.org, accessed May 22, 2019, https://350.org/about/.

[41] Namsoon Kang. *Cosmopolitan Theology: Reconstituting Planetary Hospitality, Neighbor-Love, and Solidarity in an Uneven World* (Saint Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2013), 91. I am taking this to mean that planetary hospitality can extend to and be inclusive of at least some elements of the natural world.

individual being on the planet.[42] It is important to note here the differentiation between planet – which is "in the species of alterity, belonging to another system and yet we inhabit it"— and globe – which is an abstract place where globalization, the imposition of the same systems everywhere, can take place. This distinction is important because it moves us toward a recognition of differentiated spaces; in other words, it enables the recognition of the uniqueness or singularity of each place. Kang writes, "planetary hospitality of singularity … is also a discourse of hypersensitivity to the marginalized, the subjugated, the excluded, the colonized, and the subaltern, including the concrete other, the distant other, and animals."[43]

Adopting the perspective of cosmopolitan theology which is sensitive to the other including the more-than-human is important for at least four reasons. First, cosmopolitan theology provides the opportunity to recognize the uniqueness of each individual other; this recognition of uniqueness could be extended to particular places. Second, with its emphasis on we or planetary-we-ness, cosmopolitan theology offers a philosophical and theological recognition of the interconnectedness of the planet. Third, cosmopolitan theology reminds us that each person has an ethical responsibility for the other. Fourth, as cosmopolitan theology seeks to include others, it gives us the opportunity to extend inclusion, hospitality, and care to more-than-human others. In other words, every ministry of the church has the opportunity to be inclusive of the natural world in general and the unique ecosystem in which it is located in particular, and cosmopolitan theology provides the theological backing for these ministries.

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[42] Kang, *Cosmopolitan Theology,* 174-175.

[43] Kang. *Cosmopolitan Theology,* 175-176.

While recognizing the uniqueness of each place, it is also important to remember that each unique place remains part of the planetary whole. Eaton works to define *planetary* as the sphere of life that is differentiated, dynamic, and integrated. Drawing on the Gaia Hypothesis which views the planet and planetary processes as one mutually dependent, self-regulating organism, Eaton defines planet as the organic and inorganic matter interacting to regulate the biosphere and the conditions for life. The planet includes the biosphere, lithosphere, hydrosphere, and atmosphere.[44] Eaton is including human and more-than-human aspects and processes in her definition of planet while also challenging the history of Christian beliefs that deem terrestrial life to be defective, humans to be ontologically separate from and superior to the natural world, and humans to be distinct from planetary processes.[45] Eaton argues that "to take seriously *planetary* is to integrate an evolutionary framework, to be ecologically literate, to see humans as one species among many, and to appreciate the other life forms of the Earth community."[46] This means practicing what Eaton calls "deep solidarity" which "opposes the segregation of humans from the planet, other animals, ecosystems, and the biosphere" and where human communities are "intimately intertwined with one another within larger communities of life, and within the natural system of the planet."[47] Eaton makes several important points: first, planetary solidarity extends beyond the human to include more-than humans. Second, practicing solidarity begins with ecological literacy. The spiritual practices of place outlined in this project seek to accomplish both of these goals.

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[44] Eaton, in *Planetary Solidarity*, 20.

[45] Eaton, in *Planetary Solidarity*, 31.

[46] Eaton, in *Planetary Solidarity*, 26.

[47]Eaton, in *Planetary Solidarity*, 29, 42.

While many professional fields such as psychology and medicine[48] are increasingly recognizing the role of the natural world for health and healing, many church buildings and ministries are removed from and not inclusive of their local ecosystems. For example thick descriptions of congregations in preparation for preaching, exegeting the congregation, and even studying congregations take into account numerous aspects of the church, but frequently if not entirely overlook the ecological setting of congregations. This may stem from dominant perspectives within North American religions. North American spirituality often focuses on spiritual biographies while excluding or overlooking spiritual geographies.[49] This connection to natural systems and local ecosystems is needed if we are to address the great challenges that face the planet.[50]

Food, Faith, and Place
A Wesleyan Practice of Place
Session One: Noticing Place

Scripture: Psalm 104:21-30

Reflection Questions:

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[48]G.A. Bradshaw, "Greening Our Minds to Save the Planet," *Psychology Today*, November 4, 2019, https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/bear-in-mind/201911/greening-our-minds-save-the-planet?fbclid=IwAR3_nuX-AvY8CgZJktwN-BUhqI-wbTpyZSSzQAjU9-fCWQikJVPZFbvoMVM; Cat Wise and Jason Kane, "Why doctors are increasingly prescribing nature" PBS News Hour, August 28, 2019, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/why-doctors-are-increasingly-prescribing-nature?fbclid=IwAR0pQNGSU6dkzqPCsrIIi4LL7g4IIjFpeBfgK3guOK_tJWXapKjFkW_ctXY.

[49]Belden Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred: Geography and Narrative in America Spirituality,* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001), 217.

[50]Heather Alberro, "Humanity and nature are not separate –we must see them as one to fix the climate crisis" The Conversation, September 17, 2019, http://theconversation.com/humanity-and-nature-are-not-separate-we-must-see-them-as-one-to-fix-the-climate-crisis-122110?fbclid=IwAR29QQvlrKyn5wLyb5B3gY_5oaCUwZNkArW2ToiGF64uEjmEVbG4yGKJoOM.

1. John Wesley interpreted the lion's roar in Psalm 104 as a prayer that God heard and to which God responded. Have you ever thought of animals as praying? How would your perspectives change if God truly was responsive to animals' prayers?

   How does Psalm 104 describe God's attention and love being extended to creation? What might it mean that God's love embraces and enfold all creatures?

Tradition

In the preface of *A Survey of the Wisdom of God in The Creation: or, A Compendium of Natural Philosophy* John Wesley writes, "I wished to see this short full plain Account of the visible Creation directed to its right End: Not barely to entertain an idle, barren Curiosity, but to display the invisible things of God, his Power, Wisdom and Goodness."[51]

Daniel J. Pratt Morris-Chapman states "drawing upon the writings of natural philosophers, Wesley intended to show that knowledge of God can be obtained by analysing the creation … Wesley considers that a knowledge of God's goodness, wisdom and power is visible in the natural world."[52]

In his sermon "Walking by Sight and Walking by Faith" Wesley's writes "All our external senses are evidently adapted to this external, visible world," and while what Wesley calls external senses cannot perceive the invisible things of God, our senses and observations of

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[51]John Wesley 1784 *A Survey of the Wisdom of God in The Creation: or, A Compendium of Natural Philosophy: The Fourth Edition.*(London: J. Paramore, Upper Moorfields, 1784), iii-iv.

[52]Daniel J. Pratt Morris-Chapman "Beyond the Quadrilateral: The Place of Nature in John Wesley's Epistemology of Theology" in John Wesley's epistemology of theology', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 78(2), a7643. **https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i2.7643**

the natural world can at least point people toward recognizing what Wesley call spiritual senses through which one can begin to perceive the invisible things of God.[53]

Reflection:

1. What role do your physical senses play in your faith development?
2. How do your physical senses help you to perceive God?

Reason – Mapping

If stewardship requires developing a sense of place and recognizing the web of relationships within that place, one way we can begin practicing stewardship is through mapping. Let's get to know our place by turning our attention to a variety of maps.

1. Map your location – on a blank sheet of paper draw from memory a map of your meeting place whether it is an indoor classroom or an outdoor location.
2. Once you have a map from memory, spend 10 minutes actively exploring the area you mapped. What did you miss? What did you get right? What do you need to add to your map.
3. If you haven't already done so, add vegetation types to your map.
4. If you haven't already done so, add culinary and irrigation water sources to your map.
5. Does your map include bird, animal, invertebrate sightings? If not, add them.
6. Draw an arrow to the nearest grocery store. Draw an area to the nearest farm and/or ranch.

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[53]John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley, vol. 4*, ed. Albert Cook Outler, The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984-2015), 50-52.

7. Now, use National Geographic Mapmaker[54] or other mapping software to map your location. In which biome, ecosystem, watershed, and USDA planting zone is your location? Add these layers to your map.

Experience – Sensory Prayer

Leonard Sweet writes that some scholars believe that the root *lig* in the word religion means "to pay attention" which indicates that religion is meant to help people learn to pay attention to people and life; however, we live in an attention-deficit culture that is at odds with Jesus' attentiveness which found God's Spirit in all things both animate and inanimate. Sweet writes:

> The concept of paying attention is related to the ancient notion of respect, which comes from the Latin *respicere*, meaning "take account" or "pay attention." Key to this understanding of respect, however, is a form of observing that implies honoring. In the Latin meaning of respect, by paying attention, you value and honor what you are observing. When we don't pay attention to what God is doing, we dishonor and devalue him. In everything we do, whether it be reading the Word, hiking in the woods, watching a movie, viewing a painting, we respect God when we ask ourselves this question: "What is God's invitation here?" By not paying attention to life, we pay God no respect.[55]

With this in mind Sweet advocates for sensory training as a means of respecting God and noticing God as work in the world.[56] The sensory prayer that follows is one way we can begin to train our senses, pay attention, and respect God.

This prayer is best done outdoors. even if it on a porch, balcony, or sidewalk. Find a place to sit comfortably. This prayer is not about words or petitions but about opening our senses to

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[54] "Mapmaker," National Geographic, accessed November 1, 2024, https://www.arcgis.com/apps/instant/atlas/index.html?appid=0cd1cdee853c413a84bfe4b9a6931f0d.

[55]Leonard Sweet, *Nudge: Awakening Each Other to the God Who's Already There* (Colorado Springs: CO: David C. Cook Ministries, 2010), 51, 53-54, 59.

[56]Sweet, *Nudge*, 138.

God so that one may have new experiences of God. As we pray we will open our senses to more fully perceive the world around us enabling us to more fully experience the natural world and recognize the web of relationships in our places.

Owl Eyes – pick a point in front of you and fix your eyes upon it. Allow your eyes to relax and your vision to blur slightly As you do this your field of vision should begin to expand. While you may not be able to identify everything you see, you should be able to identify patterns, colors and especially movement. The goal is to expand our awareness by increasing our fields of vision so we can take in and observe as much of God's creation as possible.

Hold your head still with your gaze fixed forward. Now, while still using sphere vision, hold your hands out to the side. Begin wiggling your fingers. Move your hands slowly forward until you can see your wiggling fingers with your peripheral vision. Stop moving your hands forward when you can see both of your hands wiggling at the same time. Without moving your hands turn and look at how far apart they are. Repeat this process again but this time hold one hand above your head and one below. How big is your field of view when using "owl eyes?"[57]

Deer Ears – Cup your hands behind your ears. Notice how altering the direction of your cupped hands changes what you hear. Can you hear behind you? What new sounds do you notice? What is the quietest sound you can hear? Make a mental log of the sounds you hear.

Racoon Touch – Feel with your skin. Which direction is the wind blowing? How do your feet feel in your shoes or on the ground? Reach down and touch the ground below you; what textures do you notice? Reach out and touch what is next to you; what do you feel?

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[57]This exercise is described in Tom Brown Jr., *Tom Brown's Field Guide to Nature Observation and Tracking* (New York: The Berkley Publishing Group, 1983), 39-41. This and subsequent exercises are described in John Young, Ellen Haas, and Evan McGown, *Coyote's Guide to Connecting with Nature* (Santa Cruz, CA: Owllink Media, 2016), 302-304.

Dog Nose – Take quick sniffs of the air. What do you smell? Take a long breath in through your nose. Do you smell anything different? Bend down and sniff the ground. What do you smell?

Snake Tongue – snakes are always tasting the air with their tongues. Breath in through your mouth. What do you taste in the air?

Rest for a few moments in your senses. Revisit each sense are you are inspired to do so. Close with a prayer of thanksgiving for your sense and what they have enabled you to experience of God's creation.

CHAPTER TWO: The Practice of Facing

The second spiritual practice of faithful inhabitance is facing. The concept of facing is drawn from cosmopolitan theology. Facing invites us to see and engage with all aspects of creation. Facing invites people to extend hospitality and grace to each unique element of creation. Thus, the spiritual practice of facing challenges us to see, appreciate, and welcome every part of creation. In other words facing asks that humans extend their circles of inclusion to the natural world. The core of cosmopolitan theology is that each and every person is a fellow citizen of the cosmos. Cosmopolitanism regards one's neighbors as oneself through welcoming, receptivity and responsibility for the other or neighbor.[1]

Cosmopolitan practice engages in acts that intentionally guide oneself and others to expand circles of inclusion, rights, and love.[2] This requires a willingness to transcend boundaries so as to extend justice, human rights, and neighborly love to an increasing number of beings.[3] To do this requires recognizing the uniqueness of each individual being. The face is the place for encountering a being in its singularity. Cosmopolitanism prompts individuals to respond to the face of the other.[4] This requires people to acknowledge, to interact, and to engage with other beings as they are. This does not require names or labels. So, the act of facing another and responding to the face of the other is an opportunity for unconditional hospitality without preconditions. In this section, I will explore the possibility of extending the spiritual practice of

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[1] Kang, *Cosmopolitan Theology*, 17, 23.

[2] Kang, *Cosmopolitan Theology*, 13, 130.

[3] Kang, *Cosmopolitan Theology*, 65-66.

[4] Kang, *Cosmopolitan Theology*, 128.

facing beyond just humans to include all creation. Biblical texts open the possibility of engaging in this practice.

Scripture

Kang points to Paul's statement in Ephesians 2:19 "So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God" as evidence of the call to expand circles of inclusion. Kang points to Jesus' teaching in Luke 6:32 concerning extending love to even those who do not love in return as a call to commit oneself to unconditional hospitality that transcends boundaries of self, neighbor, and enemy.[5] In other words scripture invites people to practice faith that increasingly extends beyond themselves. Kang also recognizes Paul's teaching in Romans 2:11 that "God shows no partiality" as pointing to the equality of beings both human and non-human.[6] Additionally, scripture indicates that all creation is included in divine purposes, and people of faith are called to include creation in their lives and ministries.

In "The Longer Ending of Mark," twelve verses that were probably added to Mark in the late 2nd or early 3rd century CE,[7] the resurrected Jesus appears to the disciples and commissions them to "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation."[8] While some scholars have likened this commandment to the disciples as equivalent to The Great Commission

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[5] Kang, *Cosmopolitan Theology*, 130, 174.

[6] Kang, *Cosmopolitan Theology,* 66.

[7] Mary Ann Tolbert, "The Longer Ending of Mark" in Harrelson, Walter, ed. *New Interpreter's Study Bible*. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 1844.

[8] Mark 16:15.

in Matthew 28:16-20,[9] C. Clifton Black interprets Mark 16:15 as describing creation's participation in salvation. He writes, "'all the world' is the theater for (Jesus') disciples' mission; 'the whole creation," the recipients of the gospels' proclamation." This reflects the limitless reach of the gospel and the belief that creation's destiny is bound up with the gospel's fulfillment.[10] In Colossians 1:23 Paul describes himself as being devoted to the gospel "which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven." However, limiting proclamation to only "creatures" discounts the full scope of God's creative activity. The word used for "creation" in Mark 16:15 and for "creature" in Colossians 1:23 has its root in the Greek word χτίσης,[11] which may be translated as "the total physical universe" or "everything that exists."[12] This indicates that more than just humanity is included in God's salvific purposes. Here the cosmopolitan call to expand inclusion to more-than-human creation can be discerned. The call to expand inclusion also has roots in the Hebrew Bible.

The Hebrew Bible contains references to parts of creation participating in acts of praise: mountains and hills skip,[13] mountains sing and trees clap,[14] and sun, moon, waters, and animals praise God.[15] In Habakkuk 2:11 the prophet's prophecies concerning the imperial accumulation

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[9] Gerd Theissen, and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide,* trans. John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 492.

[10] C. Clifton Black, *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries Mark* (Nashville: TN: Abingdon Press, 2011).

[11] Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger, *The Greek New Testament,* 4th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1998), 191.

[12] Johannes P. Louw, Eugene Albert Nida, and United Bible Societies, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains. Vol. 1 Introduction & Domains* (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1989), 1.

[13] Psalm 114:4, 6.

[14] Isaiah, 55:12.

[15] Psalm 148:3-10.

of wealth, the rafters and stones of homes will cry out. In the New Testament Jesus uses the same imagery when he states that if his disciples were silent, the stones would shout out.[16] These verses depict more-than-human creation joining in praise and proclamation. In this way more-than-human creation becomes subjects rather than mere objects. These scriptures, then, support a cosmopolitan practice of faith that welcomes and includes not just other human beings but more-than-human creation as well since they are active recipients and participants in God's activity in the world.

Additionally, the creation story in Genesis 2 invites people to include more-than-human and human creation in its care and attention. Ellen Davis notes that the Hebrew words *ʿ-b-d* and *š-m-r* which are frequently translated as "to work" and "to keep" can also be translated "to serve" and "to observe." The human does not take priority but is an observer, and the land is encountered as a fellow creature to be respected and revered.[17] Davis states,

> Our first role should be to observe. I'm thinking of Genesis 2:15 'And the Lord God took the human being and set him/them in the garden … to work it and to keep it,' but you could also translate that 'to serve it and to observe it' which suggest that the first mode of service, so to speak, is to notice what's happening around. And so, I think that's a really good observation … one pays attention to what nature has to teach us.[18]

The invitation from these scripture readings is to turn toward, notice, and learn by facing creation. This is similar to the cosmopolitan theology practice of facing which as noted previously requires people to acknowledge, interact with and engage others. These Hebrew and

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[16] Luke 19:40.

[17] Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture,* 29-31.

[18] Ellen Davis in the Green Lectionary Podcast "Setting the World on Fire" (James 3:1-12) released Sept 9, 2024 at 10:30 a.m. MDT.

Christian scriptures cited above endorse the cosmopolitan theology practice of facing. The United Methodist faith tradition opens additional pathways to the practice of facing.

Tradition

John Wesley also espoused a theology that extended love beyond just humans to include animals and other aspects of more-than-human creation. Wesley recognized God as being present in creation. Wesley writes in the sermon "Upon the Lord's Sermon on the Mount Discourse Three,"

> But the great lesson which our blessed Lord inculcates here, and which he illustrates by this examples is that God is in all things, and that we are to see the Creator in the glass of every creature; that we should use and look upon nothing as separate from God, which indeed is a kind of practical atheism; but with a true magnificence of thought survey heaven and earth and all that is therein as contained by God in the hollow of his hand, who by his intimate presence holds them all in being, who pervades and actuates the whole created frame and is, in a true sense the soul of universe.[19]

Wesley affirms that God pervades all of creation, and Wesley then calls people to extend care to creation. In his sermon "The General Deliverance" Wesley expresses concern for animals' welfare, highlights God's mercy for all creation, and calls for human affection toward creation. He encourages people of faith "to imitate him whose mercy is over all his works. They may soften our hearts towards the meaner creatures, knowing that the Lord careth for them." Wesley adds that while it may appear to the contrary, God does not forget a single creature. [20] Here, Wesley is essentially calling for an expansion of circles of inclusion to include God's works in general and animals in particular. Thus, Wesley is calling for a Christian ecological ethic.

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[19] Wesley, *Works of John Wesley, vol. 1*, 516-517.

[20] Wesley, *Works of John Wesley, vol. 2*, 449.

Randy Maddox notes that Wesley was unique among his contemporaries for affirming God's ultimate desire to restore creation and for arguing for the humane treatment of animals. Moreover, Wesley's doctrines of grace and human responsibility laid the groundwork for Christian ecological ethics.[21]

Theodore Runyon notes that "Wesley had a keen interest in and fascination with science and the natural world, an interest which extended from observations on the immense variety of species that inhabit the globe."[22] This interest extended to plants, earth, water, fire, and air which contributed to Wesley's understanding that "all things, even the seemingly insignificant, have their rightful place in the created order and ecological balance. And humanity is endowed with the intellect to comprehend and defend that place." Referencing Wesley's preface to the American edition of *A Survey of the Wisdom of God in the Creation,* Runyon writes that "Understanding ourselves within the context of the natural world and in relationship to the rest of creation…, we find our place in *the family of nature*.[23] Wesley writes,

> By thus acquainting and familiarizing ourselves with the works of nature, we become as it were, a member of her family, a participant in her felicities; but while we remain ignorant, we are like strangers and sojourners in a foreign land, unknowing and unknown.

This points to three crucial aspects of the basis of a Christian ecological ethic according to Wesley. First, God is present in all aspects of creation. Second, humans are called to know more-than-human creation. Third, humans are called to steward and defend creation.

Using modern scientific perspectives while also taking into account Wesley's teaching, it is possible to extend Wesley's call for compassion beyond just animals to include all parts of

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[21] Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 246-247.

[22] Theodore Runyon, T*he New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 201.

[23] Runyon, *New Creation, 201-202.*

creation and our places. John B. Cobb notes that "Wesley affirmed the intrinsic value or goodness of all creatures individually as well as the added valued of the ecological system that they jointly constitute." Cobb states that Wesley's teaching challenges people to re-form their ways of relating to creation because his teaching "calls for respect for all creatures, recognition of the importance of biodiversity and complex ecosystems, and working together with God for the benefit not only of human beings but all other creatures as well."[24] In other words Cobb is stating that Wesley's theology extended care to other creatures and even beyond other creatures to include all that makes up ecosystems. Maddox sees in Wesley's theology a belief that God's redemptive purposes were not limited to sentient beings but extended to "the very elements of our current universe."[25] In other words Wesley calls for attention and care to be extended beyond humans and even beyond animals to the ecosystems and all that makes up those ecosystems. Wesley calls for people of faith to include their places and all that makes up those places in their circles of hospitality, compassion, and care. Cosmopolitan theology can likewise call people into compassionate, caring relationships with creation and place.

Reason

Cosmopolitan theology moves us to recognize the equality of all beings both human and more-that-human. Drawing on Taoist philosophy as well as Paul's proclamation that "God shows no partiality" in Romans 2:11, Kang constructs a "radical form of cosmopolitanism" that

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[24] John B. Cobb, Jr., *Grace and Responsibility: A Wesleyan Theology for Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 53.

[25] Randy Maddox "Wesley's engagement with the natural sciences" in *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley,* eds. Randy L. Maddox and Jason E. Vickers (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 169.

recognizes the ontological equality of beings by "extending its kinship not only to humans but also to nature."[26] Cosmopolitan planetary hospitality is offering oneself to the other while recognizing the uniqueness or singularity of each individual while engaging in "hypersensitivity to the marginalized, the subjugated, the excluded, the colonized, and the subaltern, including the concrete other, the distant others, and animals." For Kang, this planetary hospitality is based on "God as *always-yes* – an unconditional affirmation of *yes* to all beings, not only human but also non-human beings in this cosmos." This comes with a caution not to romanticize "Mother Nature" and "planet Earth" as examples of cosmopolitan hospitality because while poetization of hospitality can help one imaginatively extend hospitality to new levels, it risks losing the political, boundary-crossing nature of cosmopolitanism itself.[27] Norman Wirzba points to Tim Ingold's argument that the image of Earth as a globe to be viewed from a distance has contributed to humanity's inability to "live in places in an integrated or harmonious manner." Wirzba concludes that "what one thinks of oneself and one's place changes dramatically if one gardens *in* it, gathers *from* it, walks *on* it, drives *through* it, or flies 30,000 feet *above* it."[28] In other words while one seeks to extend the scope of hospitality, one must not lose the specificity of extending hospitality to specific others both near and far. Thus, one practices facing in a specific place, watershed, or ecosystem, and in that specific place practices trans-boundary hospitality.

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[26] Kang, *Cosmopolitan Theology*, 66-67.

[27] Kang, *Cosmopolitan Theology,* 174-77.

[28] Norman Wirzba, *This Sacred Life: Humanity's Place in a Wounded World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 106.

Cosmopolitan theology embodies, voices, and depicts a passion for the impossible so that others might participate in that passion for expanding inclusion. “Cosmopolitan theology that dreams of ever-enlarging the circle of neighbors — of singular persons, animals, plants, eco-systems, and God — is truly a theology of the impossible.” Kang asks what kind of practices a theology motivates, what kind of gaze a theology prompts one to cast onto others, and to whom one is being a neighbor. Immanuel Kant offers one such practice with his teaching of “practical world knowledge.” Kang rightfully critiques Kant’s Eurocentric white supremacy which was expressed in his “biased human geography” while also noting that Kant’s cosmopolitanism can be used to think against and beyond Kant in ways that pursue justice and peace beyond national boundaries.[29] Kant’s “knowledge of the world” teaches that one have extensive knowledge of animals, plants, minerals, and climates. This knowledge can be applied not just on a global scope but also applied to one’s own environment, ecosystem, or watershed.

Wirzba notes that to love a specific person rather than people in general means appreciating each individual’s personality, limits, and possibilities and recognizing that these will change over time, so to love a specific person means “constant improvisational adjustment as you attempt to attune and commit yourself to them.” The same is true when loving a particular place. “To care adequately for this particular section of land, one must attend to its specific needs and possibilities, and not treat it as an instance of land in general (assuming that there even is such a thing) or land somewhere else.”[31] Wirzba notes that according to philosopher Emmanuel Levinas the failure to perceive and recognize a person’s limits and possibilities is a

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[29] Kang, *Cosmopolitan Theology, 78-80.*

[31] Wirzba, *This Sacred Life*, 27.

refusal to acknowledge another's "face." Wirzba extends the concept of facing beyond just people. Wirzba states, "Although Levinas restricted his analysis of the face to relations between people, one could make the argument that nonhuman creatures and places also present 'faces' that communicate their sanctity, and thus call forth our respect."[32] Wirzba extends the concept of facing to include food. He writes, "To transform eating into a spiritual exercise is to cultivate the practical conditions and habits – attention, conversation, reflection, gratitude, honest accounting – in which food and the world can be perceived to have a face."[33] This act of facing prompts responsibility and accountability that can lead to reconciliation among humans and more-than-humans. Wirzba is congruent with cosmopolitan theology's understanding of facing and applying it broadly to place and all the parts that constitute that place.

McFague writes that Christians love nature by paying detailed careful, concrete attention to nature because one cannot love what one does not know.[34] One way to accomplish this is by "locking eyes" – not looking at someone but looking into their eyes so that both people become subjects rather than one being subject and the other an object.[35] What McFague is describing is akin to facing. With this locked-eye, facing mindset McFague describes an encounter with a particular violet while hiking stating, "I could recognize its otherness and yet at the same time feel a connection with it. It was not simply an object to me. Rather, it had its own very special being, which surprised and delighted me even as I appreciated and felt empathy and concern for

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[32] Wirzba, *This Sacred Life,* 28. See footnote 54.

[33] Norman Wirzba, *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011)*, 32.*

[34] Sallie McFague*, Super, Natural Christians: How We Should Love Nature* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1997), *27, 29.*

[35] McFague, *Super, Natural Christians*, 35.

it."[36] McFague calls people of the Christian faith to extend love to all of nature by recognizing each part of nature – human and more-than-human – as being subjects. She writes that Christians should love nature "with the loving eye, with the eye that realizes that even a wood tick or a Douglas fir is a subject – that each has a world, goals, intentions (though not conscious), and modes of flourishing that make them good in themselves and not simply good for us."[37] Thus facing is a spiritual practice that pays attention to what each unique place and part of creation is and is not and what each unique place and part of creation can and cannot become. In this way facing involves perception, recognition and loving response, or in other words, facing calls us to attentiveness to particular places.

As she calls people of faith to practice faithful inhabitance Ayers notes that one aspect of inhabitance is being attentive to place.[38] "Although people of faith and conscience may sense some urgency in addressing larger planetary crises of water access, climate change, and waste, environmentalists, educators, and ecotheologians agree: it is in knowing and loving a particular place that human beings know and love the planet."[39] In other words loving the whole of creation begins by loving one particular part of that creation. McFague writes that for a Christians to love the whole earth, they first must love one particular place: "No one, I believe, loves the whole earth except as she or he loves a particular bit of it."[40] Facing means not only being attentive to a particular place that one can get to know, understand and love, but also

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[36] McFague, *Super, Natural Christians*, 37.

[37] McFague, *Super, Natural Christians*, 164-165.

[38] Ayers, *Inhabitance*, 81.

[39] Ayers, *Inhabitance,* 88.

[40] McFague, *Super, Natural Christians*, 43.

engaging the world – or one particular part of the world. This type of engagement takes intentional practice. Wirzba writes, "If people are to develop into the unique beings that they can become" they need to "focus instead on developing the disciplines that promote genuine encounters and engagement with others."[41] Just as Wirzba applied the practice of facing to places, his advice concerning developing into unique beings can be applied to places, too. Becoming attentive to place and the aspects of creation in each place will require focused, dedicated work. Thus, each spiritual practice outlined in this project can be understood as one way of practicing the discipline of facing in that they promote encounters and engagement among subjects. These practices help people make connections with their places and the great diversity of unique "faces" in each of those unique places as they work to be faithful inhabitants of those unique places.

Experience

Blue Spoon Ranch's origin is rooted in an act of facing. Lissa Pabst runs the ranch in the North Fork Valley outside of Hotchkiss, Colorado. A fifth-generation rancher, Pabst's mother passed management responsibilities for an Angus cattle herd to her. Pabst tried raising a variety of different breeds of cattle selecting them based on whichever had a cute face at the local cattle sales, but none of them worked out. Pabst writes: "Then one Thursday, while walking through the corrals at the local sale barn with my mom and a ranching friend, we spotted a gorgeous bull. This bull had an unusual brindle hide and big horns, completely different than anything else we had seen. He also had big, sad eyes."[42] Lissa wanted to give that bull one last good

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[41] Wirzba, *This Sacred Life*, 58.

[42] "Our Story." Blue Spoon Ranch. Accessed April 8, 2024. https://bluespoonranch.com/pages/about-us.

summer living on pasture land, but she learned that the bull had already been sold to a "kill buyer" to be sent to a feed lot for processing. "I was devastated. I couldn't get the look in the bull's eyes out of my head. This was not my idea of a good last summer for this beautiful animal. Or any animal for that matter," she stated. "I sat down and tried to watch the remaining animals that were going through the sales ring. My mind, however, kept drifting back to the longhorn bull. There was something special about this silly bull that I couldn't let go." Pabst was able to purchase the bull form the kill buyer, and she named the bull "Outspoken" The bull learned to respond to his name. Outspoken became the cornerstone of the Blue Spoon Ranch Angus cattle herd because Pabst faced the bull named Outspoken. She writes about looking into his eyes and feeling a connection. This act of facing was rooted in a desire for Outspoken's well-being in what Pabst thought would be the bull's last year of life. This acting of facing lead to a connection where Pabst could scratch Outspoken's back, lead him on foot, and have him respond to his own name.

Food, Faith, and Place
A Wesleyan Practice of Place
Session Two: Facing

Scripture

Romans 2:11 and James 3:17

1. What might it mean for human and more-than-human creation that God shows no partiality?
2. What might it mean for a person of the Christian faith to receive God's wisdom which shows no partiality?

Psalm 148:3-10

1. Who and/or what praises God in this psalm?
2. What might this mean for how we view or approach more-than-human creation?

Genesis 2:15

1. Ellen Davis suggests that the Hebrew words "to till and to keep" can also be translated as "to serve and observe." How does reading Genesis 2 with this translation change your approach to creation?

Mark 16:15

1. How would you proclaim the good news to "the whole creation?"

Tradition – All Things Bright and Beautiful

Wesley articulated a theology that divine love extended to animals and even non-sentient aspects of creation. Wesley also expressed concern for animal welfare and an interest in studying the variety of species in the world. This interest also extended to more-than-human creation and fostered a desire to steward or defend creation. Has the church taught you to study and steward creation? If so, how has the church taught you to study and steward creation?

Sing or read "All Things Bright and Beautiful" on page 147 of *The United Methodist Hymnal*. To what aspects of creation does this hymn invite people to turn their attention? What would you include in this hymn today? Write at least one additional verse of this hymn so that it includes some additional aspect(s) of creation.

Reason – An Inventory of Expanding Circles of Inclusion

Wirzba notes that to love a specific place means appreciating that place's character, limits and possibilities. If you are not already outside, go outdoors and find a place to sit. On a sheet of paper or in a journal begin making a list of what you notice. How specific can you be with

your list? For example, perhaps you notice a tree; what is the common name for the tree? What is the scientific name for the tree? What is the shape or the tree? If you can approach the tree what does its trunk look like, feel like, smell like? How is this tree unique; how is this tree similar to and different from other trees? What non-sentient aspects of creation do you see? Describe them as well.

Once you have inventoried your place, walk in a circle around that place. What new aspects of this place do you notice? Now walk another larger circle around your place. What new do you notice? Kang writes about an ever-enlarging circle of neighbors. Enlarge your circle again taking time to notice, study, and appreciate each new aspect of creation within your circle of inclusion. Continue walking ever-increasing circles of inclusion around your places for as long as time allows.

Experience – Locking Eyes

McFague states that one cannot love what one does not know. She describes a practice of "locking eyes" with another person so that both people are subjects. Find a human partner. Sit across from each other. Set a timer for five or more minutes. Without speaking lock eyes with one another. At the end of your time locking eyes, share with one another about this experience.

McFague writes about an experience of "locking eyes" with a particular violet while hiking. Jennifer Ayers notes that one aspect of truly inhabiting a place is being attentive to that place and often that means being attentive to one particular aspect of that place. Now turn toward one specific aspect of the place where you are. It might be a single blade of grass or a flower or an acorn. Spend the same amount of time "locking eyes" with this more-than-human aspect of creation as you did with your human partner. At the end of your time make notes on your paper or in your journal about how you felt during this experience.

CHAPTER THREE: The Practice of Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving is the third spiritual practice of faithful inhabitance that I will explore. Thanksgiving is a core practice of biblical faith and a key practice of United Methodist faith as outlined by Wesley. Thanksgiving is also a key element of traditional communion liturgies. However, much of the practice of thanksgiving has been lost or overlooked. I will explore practices of thanksgiving paying particular attention to how thanksgiving helps connect people to their places. First, thanksgiving is a biblically grounded spiritual practice.

Scripture

Gratitude is and has been a vital aspect of Jewish and Christian expressions of faith as described within the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. In the Hebrew Bible the Book of Psalms contains individual and communal prayers and songs of thanksgiving. Individual songs of thanksgiving such as those found in Psalm 40, 92, 116, 138 and others are marked with a retrospective characteristic in which the supplicant reflects on a time when the supplicant cried out to God for help and God responded.[1] These songs of thanksgiving, then, are recognitions of and responses to liberating or saving action that God has taken on behalf of the supplicant. Psalm 92:1 reads "It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to your name, O Most High." David Albert Farmer notes that Psalm 92 indicates that thanksgiving to God is not only good but also "an unavoidable practice for those who can discern God's handiwork … When God graces us with any kind of gift, the proper response is to be thankful. Beyond being thankful (or perhaps

[1] Bernhard W. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1997), 494-49.

as part of being thankful), we must pass on at least part of what we have received."[2] As Farmer points out, thanksgiving is predicated on discerning the gifts of God.

In addition to individual expressions of gratitude, there were also communal expressions of gratitude that took place in worship settings. Psalm 107 begins with the line "O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever." Psalm 69:30 proclaims, "I will magnify him with thanksgiving." Psalm 100 invites God's people to "Enter his gates with thanksgiving." These communal songs of thanksgiving were used at religious festivals in the Temple.[3] Thus, thanksgiving was a part of communal singing and worship. Sacrifices could also express gratitude. Leviticus 7:11-15 outlines how and why worshippers could make a thanksgiving sacrifice. This sacrifice of thanksgiving was possible because God had provided the symbolic means of grace to pardon guilt and enable people to live in the presence of God.[4] Douglas C. Mohrmann interprets biblical expressions of thanksgiving within the framework of patronage that was common among the Israelites and New Testament Christian communities. Within this framework Israelites would understand that they were benefactors or clients of God and as such they acknowledged God's gifts with grateful reciprocity. The thanksgiving sacrifices described in Leviticus 7 are one such expression of gratitude for God's blessings.[5] In other words thanksgiving was a communal act of worship that recognized God and God's gifts and sought to give something – song or sacrifice – in return for the received gifts. These scriptures indicate

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[2] David Albert Farmer, "Good to Give Thanks," in *The Pastor's Bible Study: A New Interpreter's Bible Study, vol. 1.* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 177.

[3] Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament,* 496.

[4] Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament, 413.*

[5] Douglas C. Morhmann, "Benefaction, gratitude, and reciprocity within the Bible," *Anglican Theology Review* 103, no. 3 (2021): 281.

that expressions of thanksgiving could take many forms and be expressed as part of communal celebrations as well as in individual moments of gratitude. Thanksgiving, then, is rooted in recognitions of God's work in the world and in the lives of individuals. The person giving thanks then must not only ask for but also notice or observe what is given.

In the Christian Bible Jesus gave thanks on multiple occasions. He expressed thanksgiving for revelation to "infants,"[6] while feeding more than 5,000 people,[7] before calling Lazarus out of the tomb,[8] and at the Last Supper.[9] Mohrmann views many of the expressions of thanksgiving in the New Testament as expressions of reciprocity between patron and client since the Roman culture in the time during which the New Testament was written maintained the expectations of benefaction and gratitude.[10] Thus Jesus is giving thanks for the gifts of revelation, food, resurrection, and community all of which are given by God.

This understanding of thanksgiving as a response to God's initiative and God's gifts is likewise expressed in the New Testament epistles. Writing in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, Paul teaches people not to be thankful *for* all circumstances but to practice thankfulness *in* all circumstances because God's presence "is with us in and through whatever difficulty we may endure."[11] Thanksgiving is possible because the gift of God's presence proceeds it and because

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[6] Matthew 11:25; Luke 10:21.

[7] Matthew, 15:36; Mark 8:6; John 6:11.

[8] John 11:41.

[9] Matthew 26:27; Mark 14:23; Luke 22:17-19; 1 Corinthians 11:24.

[10] Mohrmann, "Benefaction, gratitude, and reciprocity within the Bible," 278.

[11] Farmer, "Good to Give Thanks," 179.

of what God has already done.[12] Again, scriptures present thanksgiving as a response to gifts given. People of faith are called to make their every action an expression of thanksgiving. David M. Hay notes that the teaching "And be thankful" in Colossians 3:15 suggests that "The whole of the Christian life should be a thankful response to God's work of peacemaking in Christ." And later, Colossians 4:2 "reminds the recipients of the letter that genuine prayer must express gratitude for gifts already received and not simply consist in petitions for the future."[13] Thanksgiving as depicted in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures turns the focus of prayer and the Christian life away from lacks or needs toward gratitude for gifts that have already been given. The Methodist faith tradition has also maintained the importance of the practice of giving thanks.

Tradition

Wesley recognized the vital role of thanksgiving in Christian faith. In his notes on 1 Thessalonians 5:16-19 which reads in part, "give thanks in all circumstances for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you," Wesley writes that rejoicing leads to praying without ceasing which in turn leads to everything giving thanks which is Christian perfection. One cannot do more than this; neither should one do less, Wesley writes. "Thanksgiving is inseparable from true prayer; it is almost essentially connected with it."[14] In other words Wesley identifies

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[12] Leander E. Keck, ed., New *Interpreter's Bible, vol 10. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000),* chap. 2, sec. 2, Ministry Matters Online Research Library.

[13] David M. Hay, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries: *Colossians* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 121-136, 150-154.

[14] John Wesley, "Notes on St. Paul's First Epistle to the Thessalonians," *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament* (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1754), 531.

thanksgiving as both a result of and a necessary step for growth in faith. In his sermon "On the Unity of the Divine Being" Wesley writes that "as there is one God, so there is one true religion and one happiness."[15] This happiness and true religion is "in two words, gratitude and benevolence; gratitude to our Creator and supreme Benefactor, and benevolence to our fellow creatures."[16] Rebekah L. Miles describes this human love of God as naturally fostering gratitude which produces active benevolence toward others.[17] This means that as one loves God that person practices thanksgiving, and as one practices thanksgiving, that person becomes more loving and compassionate toward others. This places thanksgiving at the center of faithful living: as one grows in loving God that person becomes more thankful, and as one becomes more thankful, that person grows to be more loving. The United Methodist Church continues to promote thanksgiving as a vital part of the Christian faith.

To highlight this point, at the beginning of 2024 the United Methodist Church reposted an article on seven spiritual practices for the new year. The first suggested spiritual practice is gratitude which helps people step out of the cycles of chaos, weariness, and frustration that can overwhelm them. Gratitude reminds people that there is good amid the difficulties of life, God is present, and God continues to provide for them. Writing down three things for which a person is grateful each day can help reshape her perspective of the world.[18]

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[15] Wesley, *Works of John Wesley, vol. 4,* 70.

[16] Wesley, *Works of John Wesley, vol. 4,* 66-67.

[17] Rebekah L. Miles, "Happiness, holiness, and the moral life in John Wesley *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley,* eds. Randy L. Maddox and Jason E. Vickers (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 208-209.

[18] Jayne Davis, "7 spiritual practices for the new year," Resource UMC, accessed January 5, 2024, https://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/7-spiritual-practices-for-the-new-year?fbclid=IwAR2hWCSCw-s6BEnas7ienEtEhXvi9i-bHru7q2FpU0UmtdF4WE1fOCx_8m4.

It is important that people of faith find ways to incorporate gratitude intentionally and regularly into their spiritual disciplines for at least two reasons. First, numerous research studies have highlighted the health benefits of intentionally focusing on being thankful. These benefits include reducing depression, lessening anxiety, reducing the risk of heart disease, relieving stress, and improving sleep.[19] To be effective this thankfulness must be regular (five days a week), focused (15 minutes a day), and ongoing for (at least six weeks). Second, while some of these studies note that people with a grateful mindset have stronger social relationships, gratitude – especially gratitude expressed for and in creation – can also facilitate stronger relationships with God. Wirzba, notes that giving thanks over a meal is among the highest and most honest expressions of our humanity. He states, "In this act we show that we are committed to taking a humble place within the world among each other and before God, and demonstrate that we do not take our place and sustenance for granted."[20] In other words, thanksgiving – particularly over food – connects us to our food, one another, our places, and God. Thanksgiving helps people physically, relationally, and spiritually in part by helping people recognize their place within creation.

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[19] E.T. Bohlmeijer, J.T. Kraiss, P. Watkins, *et al.*, "Promoting Gratitude as a Resource for Sustainable Mental Health: Results of a 3-Armed Randomized Controlled Trial up to 6 Months Follow-up," *Journal of Happiness Studies* 22, (2021): 1011–1032, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-020-00261-5.

Lilian Jans-Beken, Nele Jacobs, Mayke Janssens, Sanne Peeters, Jennifer Reijnders, Lilian Lechner, and Joha Lataster, ".Gratitude and health: An updated review," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 15, no. 6, (2019): 1743-782, https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2019.1651888 .

"Health benefits of gratitude" UCLA Health, https://www.uclahealth.org/news/health-benefits-gratitude, Accessed March 16, 2024.

"Giving thanks can make you happier" Harvard Health Publishing, Harvard Medical School, https://www.health.harvard.edu/healthbeat/giving-thanks-can-make-you-happier, Accessed March 16, 2024

[20] Wirzba, *Food and Faith*, 179.

Reason

While biblical texts, Methodist teachings, and health research emphasize thanksgiving, the actual regular and continuous practice of giving thanks may be lacking. Unfortunately, places of worship often draw worshippers away from these thankful practices in nature. According to Daniel G. Deffenbaugh, "The places where we celebrate God's creative and redemptive presence in the world are more times than not diversions from, instead of immersions in, the vicissitudes of nature." This leads to the silencing of the stories of the more-than-human.[21] Even at church people are neither attentive to nor actively engaged with their places. People suffer from "placelessness" according to Craig G. Bartholomew, citing Walter Brueggemann. Bartholomew writes, "we desperately need to recover a sense of place and placemaking, but theology and biblical studies have neglected creation, nature, land and place.[22] This is tragic because as Bartholomew puts it "we will not attain to the practice of place without a deep spirituality; sensitivity to place requires restful attentiveness, and it is only as we are deeply and existentially centered in Christ that we become alive and attentive to a world 'charged with the grandeur of God.'"[23]

Deffenbaugh, picks up on the deficiency of our thanksgiving practices. He notes the human need to gather and affirm the goodness of food, water, and land as expressed in local fairs, church potlucks and in the secular observance of Thanksgiving in the United States. But these gatherings to affirm and give thanks "have always been ancillary to the *worship* that takes

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[21] Daniel G. Deffenbaugh, *Learning the Language of the Fields: Tilling and Keeping as Christian Vocation* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications), 196.

[22] Craig C. Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place for Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 4-5.

[23] Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell*, 319.

place in the official liturgies and rituals of the church. The Christian faith, I believe, has suffered considerably from this oversight, raising important questions."[24] While too often overlooked, thanksgiving is one practice of place that people and communities of faith can learn and recover from its traditions – particularly in our prayers and in our practice of communion.

The Christian faith tradition contains examples of prayers of thanksgiving perhaps most notably Saint Francis of Assisi's *Canticle of Brother Sun and Sister Moon*[25] which is adapted into the hymn "All Creatures of Our God and King" in the *United Methodist Hymnal* #62. This prayer gives thanks for elements of creation beginning with the sun and moving on to the moon and stars; wind, air, storms and weather; water; fire; the earth, fruits, flowers, and herbs; people who grant pardon, bear sickness, and endure trial; those who endure in peace; and death. As wonderful as all these forms of thanksgiving are, note, that these thanksgivings are general and not necessarily place-specific. To help people understand how place-based thanksgiving might work, I step outside of the Christian tradition and look at two examples of thanksgiving: The Thanksgiving Address and gratitude trails.

First, the Thanksgiving Address of the Iroquois Nation begins by giving thanks to people before moving on to give thanks for the earth; waters; grasses, fruits, berries, herbs, and medicines; animals; trees; birds; air, winds, clouds, and storms; the moon, sun, and stars; the spirits of the four directions; ancestors; and the Great Spirit.[26] While the form of the thanksgiving address is set, the content can vary depending on setting and circumstances of the

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[24] Deffenbaugh, *Learning the Language*, 207.

[25] "Canticle of Brother Sun and Sister Moon of St. Francis of Assisi," Catholic Online, accessed November 20, 2020, https://www.catholic.org/prayers/prayer.php?p=183.

[26] Chief Jake Swamp, *Giving Thanks: A Native American Good Morning Message* (Lee and Low Books, 1995).

person making the address. Jon Young writes about the thanksgiving address, "So as you give thanks all the way up, you browse each level of your landscape for what captures your appreciation. This provides a fan upwards through every edge of ecology. Saying your own version of it at every opportunity, as you wake, as you drive, as you begin a class, can become a wonderful mental habit."[27] This method of giving thanks encourages observation and engagement with specific places.

Second, in his book *Thanks a Thousand: A Gratitude Journey* and his related TED Talk[28] A.J. Jacobs follows what he calls a "gratitude trail" after realizing the inadequacy of an occasional thank you uttered in his urban apartment. This gratitude trail is an effort to thank all the people – or at least 1,000 of them – for making his morning cup of coffee possible. The trail outside his apartment begins with his local barista and travels around the world as he thanks his coffee roaster, the coffee farmers, the taxi drivers who get him to remote farms, and even United States steelworkers who make the raw materials that make the coffee harvesting machines possible. Jacobs notes that the first step of gratitude is learning to "look up," make eye contact, and notice who and what it around you. "The act of noticing, after all, is a crucial part of gratitude; you can't be grateful if your attention is scattered."[29] Wirzba elaborates on this concept from a Christian perspective, "To be genuinely thankful presupposes that we have made some effort to appreciate and know what we are thankful for, having devoted considerable effort

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[27] John Young, Ellen Haas, and Evan McGown, *Coyote's Guide to Connecting with Nature* (Santa Cruz, CA: Owlling Media, 2016), 76.

[28] A.J. Jacobs, "My Journey to Thank All the People Responsible for My Morning Coffee," Ted Talks, accessed January 11, 2024, https://www.ted.com/talks/a_j_jacobs_my_journey_to_thank_all_the_people_responsible_for_my_morning_coffee/transcript.

[29] A. J. Jacobs, *Thanks a Thousand: A Gratitude Journey* (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 2018), 7.

to recognizing the great diversity of gifts that intersect and feed into our living." In this way offering thanks for fellow creatures acknowledges that we could not live much less thrive without them.[30] In other words thanksgiving is a recognition of connections to creation and the Creator. The Thanksgiving Address provides an opportunity, and a structure for starting to look up and follow a gratitude trail. Our faith expressions – particularly our celebrations of Holy Communion – also offer opportunities to foster deeper connections with places.

Deepening the practice of thanksgiving is important because even in the church – or maybe especially in the church – we are people who live with scattered attention especially when it comes to inhabiting our places. Wirzba describes the church as suffering from "reconciliation deficit disorder"[31] in which we humans limit the scope of God's love, dismiss the goodness and beauty of the created order, and suffer from "ecological amnesia." Numerous factors contribute to reconciliation deficit disorder one of which is people's separation from the land. Most people these days live in cities separated from their ecological contexts and their responsibilities to their ecosystems. "This is problematic because what people do not see and understand they will less likely value and protect."[32] One of the challenges for people of faith is to make deep, intentional connections with our ecosystems, our watershed, and the land on which we live.

Fred Bahnson picks up on the idea of ecological amnesia by pointing out that "our experience of place matters in how we are formed."[33] In other words where we live, where we

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[30] Wirzba, *Food and Faith*, 192.

[31] Fred Bahnson and Norman Wirzba, *Making Peace With the Land: God's Call to Reconcile with Creation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 21.

[32] Bahnson and Wirzba, *Making Peace with the Land,* 26, 28- 29.

[33] Bahnson and Wirzba, *Making Peace with the Land* 47.

have formative experiences, how we interact with our surroundings, and what we pay attention to effects who we are. We are created not only for intimacy with God and people but also for intimacy with the land.[34] Most of us live in built environments where the ecological costs of our way of life are obscured. Land is an implicit part of biblical writers' relationship with God; loving God was good for the land, the crops, and the livestock. Jesus talked about, taught with, and healed using water, mud, bread, fish, grains, and seed. God dwells in the land. "The soils and watershed and air are part of our own salvation narrative;"[35] yet, our ecological woes are rooted in our own inability to acknowledge or feel God's presence in the land. Bahnson elaborates, "Reconciliation with the land means learning to see the land as part of God's redemptive plan and acknowledge God's ongoing presence there. That will require putting ourselves in proximity to the land and staying there long enough to be changed."[36] This reconciliation will require new skills, habits, and patterns that align people of Christian faith more fully with Christ.

The church suffers from ecological amnesia, but it was not always that way and it does not have to remain that way. Gratitude is one step toward remembering that can guide practitioners to connect with their particular places and to give thanks for the unique aspects of the natural world around them. And the church has a rich tradition of communion, called The Great *Thanksgiving*, that provides people of the Christian faith opportunities to express gratitude

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[34] Bahnson and Wirzba, *Making Peace with the Land* 51.

[35] Bahnson and Wirzba, *Making Peace with the Land* 54.

[36] Bahnson and Wirzba, *Making Peace with the Land* 55.

and connect with God in their places. But we must recover these opportunities because over the millennia, they have too often been obscured.

There are also many factors that contribute to the development of our understandings of God. Some of those factors are social; some are personal; others are the surrounding physical world in which we live and practice our faith.[37] Physical factors include geography, ecology, and place.[38] Sigurd Bergmann argues that our places impact our patterns of perception, thoughts and action.[39] However, our prayers, thanksgivings, and communion liturgies fail to fully recognize our locations, geographies and environments. When we fail to recognize these factors it can negatively impact our perceptions of our environments, our actions within those environments, and the impact our actions might have on the spaces, places, and geographies we inhabit.

The *anaphora,* which is a traditional term for the communion liturgy or what we call "The Great Thanksgiving," offers us a way forward. The word anaphora in Greek means "lifting up" or "offering." Alexander Schmemann describes the anaphora or eucharistic prayer as a lifting up of our offering and ourselves and the church's ascension to heaven.[40] This understanding of the eucharist is not limited to humans or the institution of the church; it also includes creation as Schmemann notes that "in and through this Eucharist the whole creation becomes what it always was to be and yet failed to be"[41] In other words, the physical

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[37] Sigurd Bergmann, *God in Context: A Survey of Contextual Theology*, (London: Routledge, 2017), location 1005, Kindle.

[38] Angie Pears, *Doing Contextual Theology* (London: Routledge, 2010), 48.

[39] Bergmann, *God in Context: A Survey of Contextual Theology*, location 695.

[40] Alexander Schmemann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Yonkers: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2018), 47.

[41] Schmemann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy*, 48.

surrounding world is also included in the lifting up and reconciliation that occurs in the eucharist. However, the words, symbols, and actions of the eucharist do not always reflect this all-encompassing work.

There are six functions of the anaphora: thanksgiving, remembrance, offering, supplication, reconciliation, and sanctification. The prayer of thanksgiving expresses gratitude for the graciousness of creation and the redemption of the world in Jesus Christ.[42] Thanksgiving for the graciousness of creation has immense ecological implications;[43] yet, this portion of the anaphora is often minimized or overlooked. Schmemann notes the lack of attention given to the "preface" of the eucharistic prayer of which the prayer of thanksgiving is a part.[44] This section historically has been neglected by theologians who sought to address other issues within the eucharistic prayer such as the proper words of institution or the change that takes place in the communion elements. There may be other reasons this section of the eucharistic prayer has been minimized or overlooked in the North American church as well.

The minimizing of the preface in general and the prayer of thanksgiving for creation in particular is, perhaps, unsurprising especially in churches in the United States of America given some of the emphases of American spirituality. American spirituality has tended to place emphasis on telling the story of people while neglecting to pay attention to place. Some of this inattention to place is understandable since American spirituality also tends to emphasize space

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[42] Stephen V. Sprinkle, "Anaphora: The Eucharistic Prayer." (lecture, The Ministerial Leader as Practical Theologian, via ZOOM, Fort Worth, TX, October 8, 2020.

[43] Sprinkle, "Anaphora: The Eucharistic Prayer." The Ministerial Leader as Practical Theologian, via ZOOM, Fort Worth, 08 October, 2020.

[44] Schmemann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy*, 49.

over attachment to particular places.[45] Americans often value wide open spaces, new frontiers, and new opportunities. Western spiritual thought has also tended to be anti-materialistic which has led to a rejection of place in favor of the spiritual. These factors – emphasis on biography, space, and spirit – may help to explain why there is greater emphasis on the redemption of the world in Jesus Christ during the prayer of thanksgiving portion of the anaphora and greater emphasis on the prayer of remembrance as it recalls the work of Jesus Christ. These emphases are understandable in that they lend themselves to spiritual biography, spaces, and anti-materialism, but still the negation of place remains.

While focusing on aspects of food and eating, Wirzba picks up on the transformational potential of the eucharist. Wirzba argues that the eucharist serves as an example of eating in a way that acknowledges and honors God. Communion demonstrates to us and reminds us that creation is healthy and vital only when each member of creation is committed to serving the needs of the other members.[46] In terms of place, Wirzba frames offering as being aware of our places and the needs of our places here on earth. He writes, "Above all, we need to make ourselves students of places where we live, which will instruct us in the ways of faithful living. That is where self-offering begins."[47] If we understand eucharist to be a lifting up or an offering in line with the once and for all offering of Christ, then this offering should include thanksgiving for creation grounded in the awareness of the specific places where we live. In other words, the

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[45] Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred,* 219.

[46] Wirzba, *Food and Faith,* 151.

[47] Bahnson and Wirzba, *Making Peace with the Land*, 128.

anaphora should include robust and place-specific prayers of thanksgiving for the graciousness of creation.

Place-based customization of our prayers has been reduced to an asterisk in our faith lives with negative effect, but that asterisk also represents great opportunity. The United Methodist tradition allows for customization of the communion liturgy. In a "Service of Word and Table II" in *The United Methodist Hymnal* there are throughout the liturgy asterisks (*) in the text which denote "Words appropriate to the day, season, or occasion may be added at these points."[48] These points open the opportunity for officiants to insert the robust, place-specific, ecologically-aware prayers of thanksgiving for the graciousness of creation.[49] We have the opportunity and obligation to transform our faith practices to become uniquely place based. To do this we have to look up, utilize the asterisks, and root ourselves in our places, our watersheds, and our ecosystems as we forge connections to the land.

Experience

Thanksgiving can take many forms from thanksgiving trails to a place-based anaphora. For Shannon Ullman at Elevation Mountain Grown Tea in Hotchkiss, Colorado thanksgiving come in the form of playing the harp for the tea plants.[50] Citing Robin Wall Kimmerer's story of her father pouring out the first cup of coffee as a way of showing thanks,[51] Ulman asks what gift

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[48] United Methodist Church, *The United Methodist Hymnal Book of United Methodist Worship*. (Nashville.: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), 13.

[49] For one example of a placed-based anaphora, see appendix one.

[50] To see and hear Shannon Ulman playing harp for hew tea fields, https://www.youtube.com/shorts/xsZ2b7-YwdI.

[51] Robing Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2013), 34-35.

she has to offer to the fields that grow the plants that make up her herbal tea blends. Her answer is playing harp music to the fields in the evening.[52] This is reminiscent of Psalm 33:2 "Give thanks to the Lord with the lyre; Sing praises to Him with a harp of ten strings." In this way Ulman gives thanks for the sunlight, the plants, the berries, and the summer rain. The thanksgiving through harp music has helped Ulman connect the harmony of music with "the beautiful harmonies in my field"[53] which include butterflies and school busses, hummingbirds and honeybees, mountains and sunrises. Thanksgiving through the ritual of playing the harp for the fields is another way of harmonizing and connecting with place.

Food, Faith, and Place
A Wesleyan Practice of Place
Session Three: Thanksgiving

Scripture – Psalm 95 and Psalm 96

Reflection:

1. What does it mean to you to enter God's presence with thanksgiving?
2. What are the reasons for thanksgiving in Psalm 95:3-5?
3. In Psalm 96:1, 12-13 what is praising God?

Tradition – Canticle of Brother Sun and Sister Moon

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[52] Shannon Ulman, "Cultivating generosity," Elevation Mountain Grown Herbal Tea (blog), July 7, 2023, https://www.elevationherbaltea.com/news/2023/7/7/cultivating-generosity.

[53] Ulmann, "Exploring Harmonies," Elevation Mountain Grown Herbal Tea (blog), https://www.elevationherbaltea.com/news/2022/7/1/exploring-harmonies

Wesley identifies thanksgiving as being inseparable from true prayer. What role does thanksgiving play in your prayer life? Either write down or make mental note of your prayers today. How many of your prayers were prayers of thanksgiving? In your prayers for what did you give thanks?

Wesley also wrote that thanksgiving leads to Christian perfection. While none of us may ever achieve Christian perfection, thanksgiving is a part of growing in Christian faith and practice. What role has thanksgiving played in your faith development?

Turn to "All Creatures of Our God and King" on page 62 of the *United Methodist Hymnal*. The words in this hymn were written by Francis of Assisi around 1225. Sing this hymn or recite the words together. Read this hymn a second time, but this time pause after each aspect of creation is named to allow group members to name either in their minds or out loud why they are thankful for that aspect of creation. For example, we might recite "O brother sun with golden beam," and someone may say something like "Thank you to the sun for shining through my office window and warming the room on a winter day." The goal here is to orient thanksgiving to a specific place.

Reason – Gratitude Trail

Wirzba invites us to recognize the great diversity of gifts that intersect and contribute to our lives. When we give thanks for fellow creatures, we acknowledge that without them we could not exist or thrive. Jacobs promotes practicing deeper thanksgiving by following a "gratitude trail" in which gratitude is expressed to all of the people who make specific aspects of our lives possible.

Pick an item – or better yet, select an item that was on your dinner plate last night – and create a gratitude trail for that item. On a sheet of paper begin to map out the web of

relationships that made your item or food possible. As you add each person or aspect of creation to your relationship web, pause to express gratitude.

Experience – A Place Based Great Thanksgiving

The Great Thanksgiving which is part of the celebration of Communion in the United Methodist Church includes expressing gratitude for the graciousness of creation; however, this aspect of the Great Thanksgiving is often overlooked or omitted. Turn to pages 6-31 in the United Methodist Hymnal. Here you will find four versions of The Great Thanksgiving. Read through them and note what portions are devoted to giving thanks for creation. What do you notice? What do you think has contributed to this representation of creation in the Great Thanksgiving?

Take some time to write your own place-based Great Thanksgiving with particular attention given to the graciousness of creation. Draw upon your previous prayers and gratitude trails to craft this new Great Thanksgiving. When you are finished, use this new place-based Great Thanksgiving to celebrate communion together.

CHAPTER FOUR: The Practice of Eating Locally

The fourth practice of faithful inhabitance is eating locally produced foods. It is too easy to go through life with little to no real connection with where we live, how we live, or what we eat. Becoming an aware, local eater is a vital part of Christian faith. While scripture may not directly address issues of food miles, food transportation, or eating locally, these issues are present in both Hebrew Bible and Christian Bible texts particularly as they pertain to issues of caring for land and food justice. Likewise, Wesley did not show a particular interest in consuming locally produced foods, but he did emphasize physical health and just distribution of food resources. While not written within the context of modern global food systems, one can find within biblical texts and Methodist teachings a call to the spiritual practice of eating locally.

Scripture

Davis argues for reading the Bible from an agrarian perspective; she describes this perspective as a mindset, understandings, commitments, and practices that focus on the cultural acts of agriculture and eating within a specific time and place.[1] Davis notes that while Hebrew Scriptures articulate a clear message about the care for the land, the current generation in the United States of America is the first generation to be "post-agricultural" in which it is dependent on other people in other places to produce its food. The assumption that food can be grown anywhere and "transported long distances to wherever (wealthy) people wish to eat it suggests a lack of prescience about peak oil, not to mention terrorist and climatic threats to regional food

[1] Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible*, 22.

security."[2] This perspective separates readers from the agrarian mindset of biblical writers and their guidance. Davis highlights at least two important points. First, biblical writers have something important to communicate to modern readers concerning modern perspectives on agriculture, food and eating, but these teachings are often overlooked. In noting the creation narrative of Genesis 1 as being focused on what humans and other creatures eat. Davis notes, "If, however, most contemporary readers of Genesis 1 do overlook its concern for eating, that is because we belong to a culture characterized by unprecedented ignorance about where food comes from – our own food, let alone that of other creatures."[3] Second, she points out that transporting food long distances – rather than eating locally produced foods – carries ecological impacts as well and perpetuates systems of inequality where foods are only available to some people.

Biblical writers teach the purpose and meaning of human vocation. Davis points out that is it legitimate to translate the description of the human vocation in Genesis 2:15 as "*working for* the garden soil, serving its needs" rather than the common translation "to till it and keep it." This creates a three-way relationship between humans, soil, and God.[4] This is an important reminder that people of faith cannot truly become post-agricultural because lives of faith are founded on a connection to soil. This connection is a profoundly local one as Davis explains in her description of the valorous woman depicted in Proverbs. This woman and her agrarian efforts, especially as described in Proverbs 31, subvert imperial thinking in favor of practical wisdom which is "a kind

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[2] Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 28.

[3] Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 51.

[4] Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture,* 29-30.

of intelligence bred through generations of work done in particular places, with the practice of the 'the art of locality.'"[5] In other words, Genesis calls people of faith to work for the earth while Proverbs reminds us that we do so in particular places that require placed-based knowledge. Reading the Bible through these agrarian perspectives calls people to live with local understanding and thus eat locally.

New Testament writers pick up on the importance of eating locally but they do so from the perspective of resisting or critiquing the practices of the Roman Empire. Within Rome taxation was one means of controlling land and workers. These taxes enabled the elite to remove up to 65 percent of food that was produced.[6] Infrastructure allowed the systemic exploitation of Roman provinces for the benefit of elites in the city of Rome.[7] Elites would store up grain supplies for export to cities meaning these cities were economic parasites of the rural areas. While the wealthy and powerful enjoyed an abundant and diverse food supply,[8] so much food was removed from food producing communities that the people living and working on the land lived at subsistence levels which was detrimental to their health.[9] Thus, Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:5 that the meek will inherit the earth promises that the land will be returned to those who lack adequate resources and God will end the oppressive practices of the rich and powerful.[10] One of those oppressive practices is the removal of food from local communities.

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[5] Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture,* 151.

[6] Warren Carter, *The Roman Empire and The New Testament: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 46.

[7] Warren Carter, *Matthew and Empire: Initial Explorations* (Harrisburg, Trinity Press International, 2001), *13-14.*

[8] Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament*, 110.

[9] Carter, *Matthew and Empire*, 47-48.

[10] Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament*, 52.

Jesus also teaches disciples to share food with those who are hungry not as a means to enhance one's reputation but as a means of caring for the good of others. One of the criteria for judgment in Matthew 25:31-46 is having fed those people who are hungry.[11] All of this points to the call for followers of Jesus to resist the cultural systems that remove food from local communities and ship that food to wealthy people in cities or far away areas. Inherent within this call is the mandate to eat locally.

Andrew Francis writes that discipleship is not a set of beliefs but a participation in the vision of Jesus for the world. He turns to John 10:10 and Jesus' vision that people "may have life, and have it abundantly" as he considers what this means for food choices for people of faith. "As Christian believers what we do and how we use locally grown food has been and should be shaped by our faith and personal discipleship."[12] Jesus was born into and lived in a culture of hospitality and food sharing, and communities of faith today must be open to sharing all that they have to reveal God's abundance. Francis turns to Revelation 3:20 and Jesus' offer to enter and eat with those who open the door to him as a call to change lifestyles and eating habits for the benefit of others. Francis argues that ensuring there is food to eat is central to Jesus' community. "That community is impaired if not shamed by the fact that there are those who never hear that voice except by our gift and provision. That will demand changing our lifestyle and our understanding of generosity and wealth."[13] In other words not just eating locally produced foods but how we use food that is grown locally matters to our lives of faith. The biblical witness

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[11] Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament*, 112-113.

[12] Andrew Francis, *What in God's Name Are You Eating? How Can Christians Live and Eat Responsibly in Today's Global Village?* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2015), 33.

[13] Francis, *What in God's Name Are You Eating?* 41.

demonstrates that eating locally produced foods is a spiritual practice that enables people of faith to work for the land, practice local wisdom, resist systems of exploitation, and provide God's abundance to all.

Tradition

From a Wesleyan perspective Wesley never explicitly advocated for eating a diet of locally produced foods, but he was interested in healthy eating and food justice which lend themselves to support of a locally-based diet for modern-day eaters. The most reissued of all Wesley's publications is *Primitive Physick* which contains a collection of folk remedies for a variety of ailments.[14] The preface of *Primitive Physick* contains instructions for how to use the remedies outlined in the book along with the advice:

> Observe all the Time the greatest Exactness in your Regimen, or manner of Living. Abstain from all mixt, or all high season'd Food. Use plain Diet, easy of Digestion: And this as sparingly as you can, consistent with Ease and Strength. Drink only Water, if it agrees with your Stomach; … Sup at Six or Seven on the lightest Food.[15]

This demonstrates Wesley's concern for physical health and the role of diet in maintaining health. Wesley advocated for a plain, light diet in limited quantity. Wesley also emphasized that Methodists were responsible for how food was used and whether food caused harm to another.

In his sermon *The Use of Money,* Wesley preached, "We are to gain all we can without hurting our neighbor."[16] In his sermon *The Good Steward* he points out that "God has entrusted

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[14] Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology,* 146.

[15] John Wesley, *Primitive Physick or, An easy and natural method of curing most diseases*, vi. https://ia600704.us.archive.org/10/items/primitivephysico00wesl/primitivephysico00wesl.pdf.

[16] Wesley, *Works of John Wesley, vol. 2*, 270.

us, thirdly, with a portion of *worldly goods*, with food to eat, raiment to put on, and a place to lay our head" and that these gifts are precious if we use them as the Lord has commanded. In that same sermon Wesley later asks how one used these worldly goods:

> Didst thou use thy food, not so as to see or place happiness therein, but so as to preserve thy body in health, in strength and vigor, a fit instrument for the soul? … Wast thou accordingly a general benefactor to mankind? Feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, comforting the sick, assisting the stranger, relieving the afflicted according to their various necessities?[17]

This points out that Wesley cared deeply about what foods people consumed, whether those foods and their production caused harm to others, and how food was shared especially with those who had limited access to food. While there are many ways that a simple diet might be defined, it is reasonable to think that the healthiest, least harmful, and most just food to eat is that which is produced locally. In this sense we can understand Wesley as an advocate for local foods. While eating locally produced foods can be understood as a biblical and Methodist principle, there are numerous challenges to making connections with our food and the places our food is produced. The first challenge is acknowledging our ignorance as eaters.

Reason

Being more faithful eaters starts with acknowledging our ignorance as eaters. Gary Fick makes the point that one of the biggest problems we face with our food system is our own ignorance and apathy.[18] We do not know where our food comes from, who produced it, or how it was grown. Bahnson in describing our oil-dependent food system writes,

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[17] Wesley, Works of John Wesley, vol. 2, 295.

[18] Fick, *Food, Faith, and Farming*, 7.

> Because we are surrounded by a cornucopia of food, it is difficult to see any problem. Because less than one percent of us farm, we have no real understanding of how food is produced. All we know is that the modern food system has truly delivered. We have cheap food that arrives in a convenient manner. Yet *cheap* and *convenient* are questionable adjectives for a noun as important to our lives as food. If we look at the real costs, we begin to see a sight that appears troubling, even sinister.[19]

The abundance of available-in-all-seasons food in our grocery stores keeps many of us from gaining or even needing any real knowledge of our food systems and the impacts these systems have on people and the planet. This disconnection leads to a loss of appreciation for who we are as human beings and the diverse processes that make eating possible. Wirzba states that land is the daily source of livelihood. For this reason it "makes sense to characterize human beings as soil-birthed and soil-bound." But he notes that few people today have a working identification with the land. "In part, this is because most people now shop for life's necessities. They do not, for instance, have a direct or daily hand in the hunting, harvesting or growing of their own food, and so do not have a detailed appreciation for the biological processes that root their eating and their bodies in the soil."[20]

So, instead of purchasing food that was grown in soil or raised within an ecosystem, we purchase and consume images. In describing people's alienation from the sources of life Wirzba writes, "what people are purchasing and consuming are images and fantasies of things. Because images are the products of (mostly) unknown corporate interests – how many people really know where food products come from or how they are processed? – both things and the people who purchase them are increasingly alienated from the life-contexts that make them possible. Rather

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[19] Wirzba and Bahnson, *Making Peace with the Land*, 85.

[20] Wirzba, *Food and Faith 69, 71-72.*

than identifying with the animal or field, one identifies with a brand."[21] The marketing images used on our food products, in our grocery stores, by restaurants, and even during cooking shows function to keep us separate from the realities of life that are necessary for every bite of food we take. This has perpetuated our separation from our food, the people, and the places that are required for us to be fed.

Knowing who, where, and how our food is produced is one challenge to our food consumption patterns; we have also turned food into a form of entertainment. Wirzba notes that many people have time to watch cooking shows, but few actually make time to cook. This turns cooking into a spectator sport.

> Through cooking, and in a manner much like gardening, we move deeply and knowledgably into the world. If our cooking is done with locally grown ingredients and follows local customs (think here, for instance, of Cajun culture and cuisine), we move from an experience of land in general (*terre*) to *terroir*, an experience in which the unique flavors of a region, climate, and production technique make their way into our eating, speaking, sharing, and imagining a world.[22]

In other words growing and cooking with local foods which are embedded in a local culture more intimately connects people to their places and the many unique aspects of their places, but increasingly theses connections are not being made. When we turn food and cooking into a spectacle, we also fail to experience food as a gift from God. Wirzba describes this failure as food being experienced as a commodity made possible not by God but by taste and image influencers. Wirzba states that this shift in how food is perceived as commodity rather than as a gift from God is possible in part because so few people are directly involved in food production and preparation. This disconnect enables an ignorance among eaters who do not have the

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[21] Wirzba, *Food and Faith*, 188-189.

[22] Wirzba, *Food and Faith*, 190.

knowledge necessary to see or understand the destruction and distortions being made to the sources of life as they are transformed into food products. [23]

In addition to the consumption of images and the transformation of food preparation into entertainment, our disconnection from food and the people and land that produce food is further deepened by commodification with serious implications to our faith. As Ayers notes, "The commodification of food is a serious challenge to understanding eating as a faithful expression of gratitude for and relationship to the earth and the food it produces."[24] Wirzba elaborates on the dangers of commodification including food being imported from far away then being transported by unknown means after having been produced by unknown companies using unknown growing practices. Wirzba describes the dangers of commodification of food as shallow understanding and appreciation of the social and ecological factors that contribute to food and the diminished sense of the many relationship that make up a food item. "This narrowing of a food imagination often leads to a narrowing of sympathies and care (for fields and farmers, for instance)."[25] In others words our disconnection from our places goes hand-in-hand with disconnection from the food we eat. Being disconnected from the realities of food production leads us to disconnection from food producers and the ecosystems that are necessary for food production. Ayers elaborates stating that the places in which these people are living are suffering as they struggle with populations shifts, economic instability, food security, and alienation from the sources of food. Attempts to keep up with economic challenges and patterns of industrialization in agriculture

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[23] Wirzba, *Food and Faith 191-192.*

[24] Jennifer R. Ayers, *Good Food: Grounded Practical Theology*, (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2020), 28.

[25] Wirzba, *Food and Faith*, 22-23.

threaten animal welfare and put at risk the health of the soil, water, and air.[26] What and how we eat carries social, ecological, and spiritual impacts.

What people choose to eat can work for the earth, subvert systems of exploitation, proclaim abundant life, demonstrate a commitment to personal and social health, and become a means of justice through sharing food resources. When people engage the spiritual practice of eating locally produced foods, they accomplish this. Pursuing the practice of eating locally produced foods is an act of faith. Ayers reminds us that faith communities have immense capacities to change the regional food systems. "At the heart of it all are the bonds of interdependence that are strengthened in each exchange, resisting patterns of alienation that tend to mark the global food system."[27] People of faith and churches are called to the spiritual practice of eating locally.

Experience

The North Fork of the Gunnison River watershed is considered Colorado's farm-to-table capital.[28] The region contains the highest concentration of organic farms in the state of Colorado.[29] Here, numerous examples of alternatives to detached, image-based, entertainment-

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[26] Ayers, *Good Food,* 35.

[27] Ayers, *Good Food,* 94-95.

[28] "Trump Administration Seeks to Steam-Roll Colorado's "Farm to Table Capital" Colorado Food and Farm Alliance, accessed on July 22, 2019, http://coloradofarmfood.org/trump-administration-seeks-to-steam-roll-colorados-farm-to-table-capital/.

[29] "VOGA Visits D.C." Valley Organic Growers Association, accessed July 22, 2019, https://vogaco.org/project/voga-visits-dc/.

driven, and commodified food systems exist. These examples described below provide possible pathways for faithful eating.

Farm Runners in Hotchkiss, Colorado is a retail outlet in a small, converted gas station. Their business model is to do exactly what their name implies: they run out to area farms to pick up local food products to sell to consumers in their retail outlet. Farm Runners founders Emma and Matthew Kottenstette state that their mission is to support beginning and established family farms by building community relationships around regional food. One part of this mission is making sure that consumers know their farmers and that local residents have access to high-quality, locally-produced food.[30] "For us, local isn't just a marketing catch-phrase, it's a commitment to maintaining the connection between farmer and consumer. We facilitate this connection by building lasting relationships, both with customers and farmers."[31] Each product in the Farm Runners retail store is labeled with the name of the farm, ranch, or bakery that produced the food, where that farm is located, and how the food was grown: certified organic, organically grown, or conventional. The Farm Runners website contains a listing with photos of producers and links to more information for each producer. Farm Runners' practices make it possible for consumers to at least know something about who, where, and how their food was produced. As the Kottenstettes point out this knowledge is the beginning of establishing relationship between food, farmers, place, and consumers. Because Farm Runners is sourcing food from local producers, it also helps create an awareness of seasonal growing cycles. The Kottenstettes write "Because we source our product exclusively from local farms, our product

[30] "Farm Runners," Farm Runners landing page, accessed February 2, 2024, https://farmrunners.com.

[31] "About Us," Farm Runners web page, accessed February 2, 2024, https://farmrunners.com/about-us/.

list is intimately tied to the changing seasons."[32] Farm Runners is an example of informed, local, seasonal eating.

Know Your Farmer – The Valley Organic Growers Association is a non-profit organization based in Paonia, Colorado whose mission is to promote local sustainable agriculture by supporting and educating producers and consumers.[33] VOGA maintains an online member map, prints an annual directory, and hosts summertime "Know Your Farmer Farm Tours."

"Our Know Your Farmer program gives us the opportunity to feature our producing members so that the community can learn about these amazing farmers, ranchers, orchardists and vintners and see all the incredible work they do on their land. These tours also give our community an opportunity to ask questions, learn about local agriculture, see a farmer in action, and build relationships with our producers." These Know Your Farmer tours provide opportunities for producers and consumers to meet. Consumers have the opportunity to meet farm animals, sample produce, and learn how farmers care for their livestock and build healthy soil. [34] These farm tours allow consumers to make connections with place and food as they visit the farms and meet the people who produce their food.

One way to counter turning food into entertainment is to help people return to the kitchen themselves. **Kids' Pasta Project** is a community non-profit that hosts a monthly fundraising dinner. The proceeds from the meal benefit other North Fork Valley non-profit organizations.

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[32] "Seasonality Chart," Farm Runners web page, accessed February 2, 2024, https://farmrunners.com/seasonality-chart/.

[33] "Valley Organic Growers Association, "Mission" web page, accessed on February 2, 2024, https://vogaco.org.

[34] Valley Organic Growers Association, "One of our favorite programs," Facebook, January 23, 2022, https://www.facebook.com/ValleyOrganicGrowersAssociation/posts/pfbid02jA5PZPjUzvCGbBYHe1VDNWkYjy54KWoAELJmuGyaY8LqmDbh3AGpSULZnijcYbwml.

The food served is prepared by local elementary school students using primarily local ingredients. "The idea of the Kids' Pasta Project was seeded as kids churned out homemade pasta in the kitchen and played restaurant. Thinking about sustainable ways to raise money led to involving kids in fundraising and making it a positive educational experience."[35] While this description does describe the work of serving food as "playing restaurant" which could sound like reducing food to entertainment, Kids' Pasta Project does recognize these efforts as being educational as children learn to cook and make connections with their community.

In addition to the Kid's Pasta Project, **The Learning Council,** a Paonia-based non-profit organization focusing on community education, offers a weekly community meal during the farmers' market season.[36] This meal uses local produce some of which is harvested by volunteers. The meal is then prepared by community volunteers.[37] This meal provides community members with opportunities to not only learn how to harvest the food that is being prepared but also learn cooking techniques as they serve the community.

Mountain Oven Bakery in Paonia, Colorado has set about to encourage and maintain a local grain economy in Western Colorado with the goal of using 100 percent local grains in their bakery.[38] Their work invites consumers to shift their values away from capitalism and commodification to community and caretaking. Mountain Oven Bakery owners Chris Sullivan and Dana Whitcomb write, "For local grains to flourish, they need to be valued. It comes up that

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[35] Kids' Pasta Project, "Kids' Pasta Project History," accessed February 1, 2024, http://kidspastaproject.org/about/.

[36] The Learning Council, "Programs," accessed February 1, 2024, https://thelearningcouncil.org/programs/.

[37]The Learning Council, "Community Meal Volunteer," Facebook, August 20, 2021, https://www.facebook.com/profile/100064693423095/search/?q=community%20meal%20volunteer.

[38] Mountain Oven, "Local Grain Economy," Mountain Oven "About" web page, accessed February 1, 2024, https://www.mountainoven.com/local-grain-economy.

small scale grain is too costly. Cost is one consideration that gets more attention than others. When we spin it another way we can say, 'the current food system comes at too great a cost to uphold.' Living moment to moment without regard for the impacts of choices is encouraged in a capitalist society. Make it fast and cheap and defer the costs to future generations. Do we really want to keep doing that? How can we ignore the true cost of the predominant food system?"[39]

Sullivan and Whitcomb state that revitalizing the local food system requires investment in relationships and community. "The remedy to capitalism is nuanced, but pushing against its confines is liberating, awakening, and allows for deeper value of not only food, but farmers, land, and the vitality of all beings."[40] This work involves soils, spirit, bodies, sustenance, and communities.[41]

Rick Steves' *Italy for Food Lovers Guide to Italy* details the culinary wonders of Italy. In it Steves notes the regional diversity of food a diner will encounter in Italy: sea food in Venice, steak in Florence, pasta al carbonara in Rome, pizza in Naples, and cannoli in Sicily. Steves attributes the high quality of Italian food to two main factors: eating locally produced food and eating what foods are in season.[42] He refers to these practices as being a "campanilista" – or those who eat only what was grown and raised within earshot of the town church bell tower or

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[39] Mpountain Oven, "Loca Grain, Part 2" Facebook, November 17, 2021, https://www.facebook.com/mountainoven/posts/pfbid028YMfD5QYAxDsAxM4dSCLB3GGmcUeu9o5nP2fCbPyvddfvTQfydQHWr3BAaFkfUUvl

[40] Mountain Oven Organic Bakery, "LOCAL GRAIN, Part 2," Facebook, November 17, 2021, https://www.facebook.com/mountainoven/posts/pfbid0pEcj1yWiQHbgC6oLV2Br3VNZ7EFJqgA3nLNCmEAohY3rhomRXsDuodrSduiYmRQRl.

[41] Mountain Oven "Our Story," Mountain Oven "About" web page, accessed February 1, 2024, https://www.mountainoven.com/our-story

[42] Rick Steves and Fred Plotkin, *Rick Steves Italy for Food Lovers* (Berkeley: Avalon Travel, 2023), 12. Steves and Plotkin note that "Italians still tend to eat certain foods only when they're fresh from local farmers. Even urbanites possess a surprisingly sophisticated knowledge of agricultural cycles."

campanile. While perhaps not quite as pronounced as what one might find in Europe, in the United States have regional foods shaped by our geographies and unique places. Examples include key lime pie in Florida, barbecue in Kansas City, lobster rolls in the Northeast, or clam chowder in the Pacific Northwest. In the United States there is still regional cuisine shaped by the geography of the places people live. Many churches still produce church cookbooks partly as a fundraiser but also to preserve traditions and share some of the regionally unique cuisine. The oldest known Methodist cookbook comes from Mobile, Alabama and features such regional delights as fried eels, gopher soup, broiled squirrel, pickled oysters, and turtle au gratin.[43] This church cookbook certainly captures the unique dietary options of that time and place. While squirrel as a main dish may have fallen out of favor, each church could produce a variety of unique recipes influenced by where the church is located.

How many of people could eat like a "campanilismo" – those who eat foods that are produced within earshot of our church's bell tower? In the critiques of modern food systems explored above there are at least four remedies to our disconnection from our food and place: gardening, cooking, knowing your food producer, and local ingredients. Pursuing these solutions is an act of faith. Ayers reminds us "Faith communities have immense capacities to change the regional food system … At the heart of it all are the bonds of interdependence that are strengthened in each exchange, resisting patterns of alienation that tend to mark the global food system."[44] In this way the church has incredible power to connect people to their place and their God.

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[43] The United Methodist Church, "Our United Methodist Table," accessed January 12, 2024, https://www.umc.org/en/who-we-are/our-people/our-united-methodist-table.

[44] Ayers, *Good Food,* 94-95.

Food, Faith, and Place
A Wesleyan Practice of Place
Session Four: Eating Locally

Scripture

Proverbs 31:10-31

Reflection: Davis suggest reading Proverbs 31 as a poem extolling the value and importance of practical, local, indigenous knowledge of the land that enables productivity and a sense of belonging to the land. Davis contrasts this type of knowledge with imperial knowledge which seeks to control, oversimplify and dominate.[45] What attitudes, knowledge, and skills do you see embodied in Proverbs 31? Compare and contrast our food system with the Wise Woman in Proverbs 31.

Matthew 5:5

Reflection: Carter notes that in Jesus' time the wealthy elites of the Roman Empire controlled land and people through taxation, infrastructure, and hoarding which left most people living at or below subsistence levels. In this context what might it mean that "the meek will inherit the earth"?

Tradition

The Primitive Physick

In *The Primitive Physick* John Wesley expressed concern for people's diets in terms of maintaining physical health. Wesley also viewed food as a gift from God entrusted to humans; this gift was to be used for maintain health in ways that do not cause harm to others.

[45] Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 151-152.

In what ways does your diet increase health while minimizing harm to others? What actions might you take to increase health and minimize harm? How would your actions accomplish this?

"Grace Before Meat"

John Wesley also recognized the potential for food to convey the presence of God. In the hymn sometimes titled "Grace Before Meat,"[46] Wesley concludes with the stanza

Turn the full stream of nature's tide;
Let all our actions tend
To Thee, their source; Thy love the guide,
Thy glory be the end.

Earth then a scale to heaven shall be,
Sense shall point out the road,
The creatures all shall lead to thee,
And all we taste be God.

This seems to be a recognition that whatever is on our plates is a "fellow creature, gifted to us by God for us to love, through whom God draws near to us and through whom we may draw near to God."[47] Wesley also understood that there was something powerful about eating, and that through eating we could come to experience God. Even within our Methodist tradition we recognize the power of food to reveal God. What we eat and how we eat matters to God.

In what ways does food reveal the presence of God to you?

How does thinking of "all we taste be God" impact how you think about, approach, or consume food? How might it impact your food choices?

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[46] Wesley, *Works of John Wesley, vol. 7*, 210-212. Also in John Wesley, 1966. *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection: As Believed and Taught by the Reverend Mr. John Wesley from the Year 1725 to the Year 1777 (*Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press Of Kansas City, 1966), 16.

[47] Michael Lodahl, *God of Nature and of Grace: Reading the World in a Wesleyan Way*, 165.

Reason

Being a more faithful eater starts with acknowledging our ignorance as eaters. Create a menu of the foods that you have consumed for each meal over the past 24 hours. Next to each item that you ate, write where the food and/or the constituent ingredients of each food item came from and who produced those foods and/or food items. For how many foods do you know who and where it was produced? What does this tell you about our diets and food systems?

Calculate your food miles. If you know from which farm, orchard, or ranch your food came, add up the miles that food traveled to get to your dinner plate. If you are consuming foods produced in another country, calculate the miles that food may have traveled to get to you table using an online mapping service or foodmiles.com. If you cannot determine the source of your food, first, what does that tell you about our food systems, and second, use the sample food miles menu activity at https://colorado.agclassroom.org/matrix/lesson/637/ to help you think about food miles.

Experience

As a group prepare a meal using only foods that were produced within 20 miles of where you are meeting.

How easy or difficult was it to find locally produced foods? How did the season affect availability? How did your geographic location impact what local foods were available? How far did you have to travel to find each food item?

Site Visit: Farm Runners – visit the Farm Runners Station. What foods are available during your visit? Where were those foods produced? Can you map the locations of the farms and ranches that have food items for sale at this store? Using Farm Runners website and other online resources, can you identify the people who grew or raised foods for sale? What difference

does knowing where and who produced your food make in how you understand your food, your community, and your place?

CHAPTER FIVE: The Practice of Composting

A fifth spiritual practice of faithful inhabitance is composting, but this practice is often ignored in modern society. Like the practice of eating locally produced foods, the spiritual practice of composting is rarely directly mentioned in scripture; however, composting embodies the biblical principles of renewing of all creation and praising God. Again, Wesley did not directly address the practice of composting, but his emphasis on natural over synthetic, simplicity, and not being wasteful lend themselves to support of composting. Thus, scripture and Wesleyan teachings guide faithful inhabitance toward composting. Composting, or as the United States Environmental Protection Agency defines it, converting "organic materials into a nutrient-rich, biologically-stable soil amendment or mulch through natural decomposition,"[1] can be a spiritual practice.

Scripture

The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree provides one of the most direct descriptions of composting in scripture. Luke 13:6-9 describes a landowner who asks his gardener to cut down a fig tree because it was not producing figs. The gardener asks to dig around the barren tree, put manure on it, and give it one more year to produce fruit. Spiritual lessons aside, this parable demonstrates the practice of adding organic amendments to the soil to help nurture fruit production. Scripture also espouses life being brought forth out of death. While not addressing composting specifically, John 12:24 describes the process of a seed falling to the ground, dying, and producing much fruit. While the botany of this brief parable might be off – seeds must be

[1] United States Environmental Protection Agency, "Composting at Home," accessed January 18, 2024, https://www.epa.gov/recycle/composting-home.

alive in order to germinate – the point of this story is that abundant life springs forth from death and decay. In 2 Corinthians 5:7 Paul's writing about reconciliation includes the proclamation "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see everything has become new!" Of course, Paul is not referencing compost; however, in composting one can see old, dead, refuse transformed into something new and life giving. The concept can be seen in scripture as an embodied representation of God's work to bring life out of death and fruitfulness out of waste. Wesley elaborates on these scriptural themes in his teachings on the importance of good health, the scope of God's salvation, and the proper use of resources.

Tradition

In the preface to the 1846 edition of *Primitive Physick* Wesley lamented the growth of medical research where "simple medicines were more and more disregarded and disused"[2] and the specialization of medical knowledge in which physicians

> introduced into practice abundance of compound medicines, consisting of so many ingredients, that it was scarce possible for common people to know which it was that wrought the cure ; abundance of exotics, neither the nature nor names of which their own countrymen understood ; of chymicals, such as they neither had skill, nor fortune, nor time to prepare ; yea, and of dangerous ones, such as they could not use, without hazarding life, but by the advice of a physician.[3]

This indicates Wesley's preference for natural over synthetics and simplicity over complexity.[4] While Wesley writes specifically about medicines, these principles can be extended to soil,

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[2] Wesley, *Primitive Physick*, vi.

[3] Wesley, *Primitive Physick,* vii-viii.

[4] William C. Guerrant Jr., *Organic Wesley: A Christian Perspective of Food, Farming, and Faith* (Franklin: Seedbed Publishing, 2015)*,* 86-88.

compost, and food production: simpler and more natural is a better expression of a faith that values physical wellbeing and the redemption of all creation. Thus, it seems likely that Wesley would be a proponent of natural compost over synthetic fertilizers.

Like Paul and others before him, Wesley also believed that God cared for and would redeem all of creation. In his later sermons "the new creation became one of the most prominent themes."[5] The new creation is a physical place dramatically improved over current conditions and includes all creatures. This unique aspect of Wesley's theology set him apart from his contemporaries "in affirming God's ultimate purpose of restoring all creation."[6] Like Paul, Wesley was not referencing composting specifically, but one can see composting as an act of redeeming and restoring aspects of creation.

Furthermore, in his sermon "The Use of Money"[7] Wesley outlines principles of faithfully using financial resources. This is often summarized as gain all you can, save all you can, and give all you can. Wesley outlines that one should gain income in ways that do not jeopardize one's physical or mental health or harm one's neighbors. Wesley calls people of faith to save all they can by practicing simplicity and not wasting any talent. Giving all you can means recognizing all that one is and has ultimately belongs to God. Wesley advised living a life of faith that minimized harm, minimized waste, and recognized God. We can see all three of these principals at work in composting which reduces the impacts of discarded organic waste, minimizes waste by turning waste into something beneficial, and honors the natural processes of

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[5] Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 253.

[6] Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 246-247.

[7] Wesley, *Works of John Wesley*, vol. 2, 266-280.

God. In other words, the spiritual practice of composting embodies Wesley's guidance on the proper use of resources. From scripture and Wesleyan theology one can see the spiritual practice of composting as provoking fruitfulness, bringing life out of death, opting for simple, natural practices over complex, synthetic ones, and offering a pathway to reducing waste and increasing the proper use of resources.

Reason

Composting is one of the often-overlooked joys of organic gardening according to Deffenbaugh, who labels gardening as a spiritual practice in *Learning the Language of the Fields: Tilling and Keeping as Christian Vocation*. "But one of the real joys of organic gardening and the holy listening that can accompany it is the opportunity to sink our hands into a rich soil that we have nurtured over the course of many seasons through the practice of composting."[8] Unfortunately, according to Deffenbaugh, many Americans have little interest in trying to replenish soil through the vital gift of compost. Deffenbaugh points out the grass clippings and leaves that are bagged up and carted off to dumps rather than returned to the soil to replenish its structure and mineral content. In many places these practices have been slow to catch on at a larger scale. The problem, Deffenbaugh states, is that composting has not captured the imagination of the masses. Perhaps the church can call people to the spiritual practice of composting, capturing their imaginations through embodied encounters with waters and soils so that ecological illiteracy may be disrupted. Ayers describes this as worshippers knowing and

[8] Deffenbaugh, *Learning the Language of the Fields*, 182-83.

caring about a particular place with such intimacy that they know what compost in that particular place smells like in August.[9]

Wirzba expands on the idea that compost – the product of natural decomposition – connects us to our place when he describes life as "a rooted, communal phenomenon." Using the example of a tree in a forest dying, Wirzba notes that the creatures dependent upon that living tree must find a new tree in which to live, but the death of that tree allows new connections, interactions, and opportunities enabling the next forest to emerge. Quoting David George Haskell, Wirzba observes that "Rot is the detonation of possibility. *De*composition is renewed composition by living communities." One can see the principal of Jesus' parable about a seed falling to the ground at work in the relationships inside a forest. Wirzba understands this as a call to rootedness in place: "Understanding these communities we also begin to appreciate how our thinking about life more generally, even specifically human life, depends upon being rooted in a place and being responsive to the potential that is there." Rootedness is the precondition of life, which makes possible the relationships that build fertility, fecundity, and diversity.[10] Being committed to a place enables one to appreciate all the relationship that currently are and anticipate all the relationships that can be in that place. This rootedness is demonstrated in the practice of composting.

Composting whether occurring in a decaying tree, a backyard compost bin, commercial windrows, or even in composting toilets can play a role in faithfully inhabiting our places and proclaiming the gospel. For example, in Ched Myers' book *Watershed Discipleship: Reinhabiting Bioregional Faith and Practice* Tevyn East and Jay Beck describe how The

[9] Ayers, *Inhabitance,* 54.
[10] Wirzba, *This Sacred Life*, 86-87.

Carnival de Resistance used composting toilets as one of many practices at festivals in a faith-rooted response to the misplaced priorities and systems that they refer to as the "upside-down" world. Their work is meant to "disrupt the dominant order," "animate resistance," and "support cultural transformation."[11] The Clivus Multrum company states that a composting toilet reduces water use, reduces the nutrient load at wastewater treatment plants, and produces soil amendments and fertilizers that enable the full recycling of valuable nutrients.[12] In this way composting is used to draw attention to what Wesley described as misplaced priorities and improper use of resources.

Composting offers an alternative vision of the world. Bahnson argues that what he calls "the abundant mirage" of cheap, always available, oil-dependent food needs to be replaced with a new way of life. He calls this new way of life "the abundant kingdom" which is not dependent on agricultural systems that destroy ecosystems, creatures, and human bodies.[13] In this way, composting can be considered a means of not just reducing harm and waste but actually giving back to God's creation. Erin Fahey in describing her work as an environmental engineer identifies compost as the base of efforts to restore waterways and implement sustainable "green infrastructure" as traditional street curbs are replaced with bioswales built on compost soil.[14] Regenerative agriculture – of which composting is a crucial component – is a way to pursue not

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[11] Ched Meyers, *Watershed Discipleship*: *Reinhabiting Bioregional Faith and Practice* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016), 181-2.

[12] "Clivus Multrum Commercial and Green Building Systems." n.d. Www.youtube.com. Accessed January 17, 2024. https://youtu.be/nOS_7k_2rcs?si=C3qXAIlVY49QA0gh.

[13] Bahnson and Wirzba, *Making Peace with the Land*, 91, 93.

[14] Myers, *Watershed Discipleship*, 92-93.

only a new food system but "it is a means by which we can seek first the kingdom of God."[15] Composting is one way to pursue transformation of our food systems, our places, and our expressions of faith.

In an age where soil biology has been replaced with soil chemistry through fertilizers, pesticides, and monocrops,[16] the act of composting can be holy. Fick turns to the Psalms to point out that God loves diversity. He notes that Psalm 104:24-25 extoll God's manifold works that fill the earth and the innumerable creatures in the sea. One purpose of this diversity is to declare, praise and glorify God;[17] thus, species should be protected and increased. We see this taking place in the cultivation of compost where new relations and new species thrive on decomposition. Fick also sees the Hebrew Bible describing the land's purpose as to praise God, but damaged land does not praise: rather, it mourns.[18] Furthermore, God's promises to heal the people and heal the land[19] and compost can play a role in this holy work. Compost helps cultivate healthy land and compost helps heal damaged land; thus, composting may be a way for people to increase praise and participate in God's promise of healed land. In this way compost is an avenue for people of faith to practice the principle behind Wesley's advice to give all you can as a recognition that all we have belongs to God. Compost can help humans experience God's provision for all creatures, and compost can be a way for people to give back to God.

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[15] Bahnson and Wirzba, *Making Peace with the Land*, 101.

[16] Bahnson and Wirzba, *Making Peace with the Land*, 148.

[17] Fick, *Food, Farming, and Faith*, 39. Fick also cites Psalm 50:10-11 to argue for diversity and Psalm 19.1 and 98.7 to describe diversity as praising God.

[18] Fick, *Food, Farming, and Faith*, 47. Fick cites Psalm 65.13, 98.8 and Isaiah 44.23 in arguing that the land is meant to praise God. He cites Job 31.38, Isaiah 24.4, 33.9, and Jeremiah 23.10 for land mourning.

[19] Fick, *Food, Farming, and Faith*, 51. Fick cites 2 Chronicles 7.17

Direct experiences with compost can enhance spiritual life and understanding. Compost can be healing, inspiring, and life-giving. A steaming pile of compost has the power to evoke awe, joy, curiosity, grief, love, and imagination[20] -- some of the very emotions Fick describes creation as expressing in the Psalms he cited above. Compost can help teach students to experience the wonders and witness the miracle of life.[21] Like the waters of baptism, compost, too, can be a symbol and material evidence of the interconnectedness of community and belonging to one another and to the earth. Compost is not only a reminder of people's humanity; it also absorbs death and sets the ground for new life and resurrection.[22] In this way compost is a reminder of the new creation that Paul and Wesley envisioned.

Whether people purchase compost or make their own, the benefits of compost are available to all people regardless of where they live or their type of housing. Compost offers people the opportunity to get their hands dirty, connect with their place, help heal the land, and produce their own food. Composting has the power to proclaim the gospel. Compost reminds us of Jesus' incarnation and our own bodily existence. Composting provides healing, joy, connection to people and place, and life-giving transformation. Composting is a reminder of resurrection. Composted soil absorbs and transforms death, and compost sets the stage for new life. This ecological process of composting can be likened to resurrection in which the deceased body is raised to a new and transformed life. Compost provides opportunities to discover new life in death, decay, and decomposition. In compost the entirety of the gospel from incarnation

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[20] Ayres, *Inhabitance, 20,* 47.

[21] Meyers, *Watershed Discipleship*, 140, 152.

[22] Ayres, *Inhabitance,* 54, 114.

to resurrection is made known. Composting is a spiritual practice of inhabitance and an act of praising God.

Experience

Bart Eller, founder of Paonia Soil Company, invests a lot of time in producing compost for the soils his company produces for both professional and consumer uses.[23] "Compost is the base of everything we do, and we spend a lot of time on our compost," Eller states. Compost, which is the first of the 24 ingredients in Paonia Soil Company soil mixes, takes a year to produce. The first four to five months are spent on thermophilic preparation to the compost – think of those steaming piles of compost that evoke joy, curiosity and imagination. The next seven to eight months are spent in a curing process where bacterial and fungal species diversity is cultivated for soil health. In an age where soil biology has been replaced with soil chemistry through fertilizers, pesticides, and monocrops,[24] the act of composting can be holy.

While not necessarily adopting a religious perspective, Eller does view this work as part of an effort to transform and improve ecosystems and food systems:

> I believe we are helping to heal this planet. I've got kids. I really think we need to work hard. There is a lot of data out there that we've only got 30 more years of workable topsoil using the so-called conventional system of agriculture … and we're burning the organic matter out of our soil globally using that system, and so there will be a crisis coming. There is no doubt in my mind that there will be a

[23] "Episode 56: Bart Eller - Paonia Soil Company." n.d. www.youtube.com. Accessed January 16, 2024. https://youtu.be/7M_mJxhn6sI?si=TVz7R2SJI5NQcuQx.

[24] Bahnson and Wirzba, *Making Peace with the Land*, 148.

> food crisis. We're already seeing it; there are health crises people are facing from their diets … It's an honor to me to get to try to heal this rock spaceship that we all have to share and in particular to leave something a little better, hopefully, for our kids than some of the last generations have left for us.[25]

As Deffenbaugh pointed out earlier, many people bag and discard their yard waste instead of turning it into compost. While many people may bag their leaves and yard waste, there are people in Paonia who eagerly snap up bagged leaves before they are taken to the county landfill. Elizabeth Agee, Just Good Food Manager for the Colorado Food and Farm Alliance, collects bagged leaves from around town to make compost for the Alliance's community garden, while others collect unwanted leaves and leftover Halloween pumpkins for their personal compost piles.[26] Agee is not the only person salvaging others' refuse to turn it into nutrient-rich soil amendments. Composting has captured the attention of Elizabeth Yaari, owner of Night Owl Food Forest[27] as she cares for her particular place in Paonia, Colorado. Yaari is drawing individuals and businesses into her dream of a food forest that grows food for the community in a place that receives only about seven inches of rain annually. This dream starts with compost. "When I bought the land, I thought 'You know, I could either import a lot of soil, or I can just make it, and over a very long period of time I will be able to make the soil and amend the clay that is here, and then maybe I'll just grow whatever grows here."[28] Yaari brings to Night Owl

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[25] "Episode 56: Bart Eller - Paonia Soil Company." n.d. www.youtube.com. Accessed January 16, 2024. https://youtu.be/7M_mJxhn6sI?si=TVz7R2SJI5NQcuQx.

[26] Paonia Message Board, Acceessed January 19, 2024.
https://www.facebook.com/groups/237688336671528/permalink/1567586133681735/
https://www.facebook.com/groups/237688336671528/permalink/1800442917062721/
https://www.facebook.com/groups/237688336671528/permalink/1305074263266258/

[27] "Restoring Mountain Ecosystems: Creating bounty with little water," Zero Foodprint, Accessed January 19, 2024. https://www.zerofoodprint.org/case-studies/nightowl.

[28] "Elizabeth Yaari on Regenerating Desert Land at the Night Owl Food Forest in Paonia, Colorado." www.youtube.com. Accessed April 18, 2024. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cC6dJuf1AhU.

Food Forest kitchen scraps from community members, coffee grounds from a local coffee shop, leaves from Town of Paonia Public Works, and wood chips from tree trimming and removal services. She advertised for kitchen scraps in Paonia, and now collects those scraps from 26 bins around town. While this helps her build soil for her food forest, it also impacts the people who are contributing kitchen scraps. A "person said, 'My diet has changed since you've come around because I felt so guilty of what I was putting in the bins.' So, I love that little interaction. Those people that contribute to making this soil are starting to come to visit and to see what's happening and to see the results. Yaari is thinking long-term for her soil-building which she anticipates taking 100 years, but she notes that is starts now with one big pile of compost.[29] Here we see the power of compost to connect us to the earth and to one another as people, businesses, and food foresters. People, food waste, soil and water are linked together through composting.

Whether people purchase compost or make their own, the benefits of compost are available to all people regardless of where they live or their type of housing. With the right containers and a compost-rich soil "even a person that just has a little concrete balcony in the middle of the city can grow a substantial amount of their own food and be healthy and sustainable."[30] Compost offers people – even city dwellers – the opportunity to get their hands dirty, connect with their places, and produce their own food. Composting, whether on the commercial scale at businesses like Paonia Soil Company, on the local scale like Night Owl Food Forest, or on the city balcony or backyard garden scale, has the power to proclaim the gospel through the metaphorical and ecological representation of life, death, resurrection, and

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[29] "Elizabeth Yaari on Regenerating Desert Land at the Night Owl Food Forest in Paonia, Colorado." n.d. www.youtube.com. Accessed April 18, 2024. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cC6dJuf1AhU.

[30] "Episode 56: Bart Eller - Paonia Soil Company." n.d. www.youtube.com. Accessed January 16, 2024. https://youtu.be/7M_mJxhn6sI?si=TVz7R2SJI5NQcuQx.

transformation. In compost the entirety of the gospel from incarnation to resurrection is made known. People of faith can fill their compost bins and turn the compost pile as an act of praising God.

Food, Faith, and Place
A Wesleyan Practice of Place
Session Five: Composting

Scripture

Luke 13:6-9

Reflection: What techniques does the gardener suggest trying before an unproductive fig tree is cut down? What might this tell us about the practice and purpose of composting?

John 12:24

Reflection: In this verse what must happen for life to be generated? From what does abundant life spring forth? How might this be used to describe compost?

2 Corinthians 5:7, Ephesians 4:23, and Colossians 3:10

Reflection: How does Paul's statement in 2 Corinthians that "everything has become new!" describe compost? Colossians 3:9-10 reminds us that the old is being renewed in the image of the creator. Ephesians 4:22-23 describes putting the old away and being renewed in spirit. What might these verses tell us about the purpose of composting?

Tradition

The Primitive Physick

In an argument concerning medicines Wesley argued for simple medicines over complex and synthetic medicines. This highlights Wesley's preference for simple, natural treatments. If we expand this approach to agriculture, what might be Wesley's preferred method of fertilizing crops and producing food?

"The Use of Money"

In his sermon "The Use of Money" Wesley outline principles for managing financial resources. These principles are summarized as earn all you can, save all you can, and give all you can. These principles offer guidance in practicing simplicity, reducing harm, minimizing waste, and recognizing everything ultimately belongs to God. How are these principles practiced in composting?

The New Creation

Wesley cites Ephesians 4:23 and Ephesians 3:10 in his description of the purpose of religion to renew us and create us anew in the image of God. This new creation is the central component to Wesley's understanding of Chritianity.[31] How might the practice of composting be an expression of the renewal of creation?

Reason

Deffenbaugh notes that one of the joys of gardening is sinking your hands into rich soils that has been nurtured through many seasons through the practice of composting; however, composting has failed to capture the imagination of the masses. Write down or share with your study group your experiences with composting and/or your perceptions of or assumptions about composting. If you have access to a compost pile, pit, tumbler, or bin, take a cup full of compost. What does the compost smell like? What does it feel like? Dump the compost out on a sheet of

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[31] Theodore Runyon, *The New Creeation, 8.*

paper. Describe what the compost looks like. Can you identify any of the ingredients or constituent parts of the compost? If you do not have access to a compost pile, purchase a bag of compost from a plant nursery or story to use in completion of this activity.

Wirzba uses the image of a fallen, dying tree to describe the ways that death enables new connections, interactions, and opportunities. With this image in mind, walk around your home, church, or gathering place. Can you find examples of composting happening naturally around you? If you do, take a minute to smell and to touch these places of natural decomposition. What is going on around these places of composting or decomposition? Notice what relationships and interconnections are going on around these places. Record your observations.

Ayers describes a worship experience in one church in which piles of compost from the church garden appeared in the church sanctuary, filled the baptismal font and were used as a makeshift communion table. Ayers describes these acts of worship as a deeper, sensory integration of ecological liturgical language.[32] Plan a worship experience using compost. What theological beliefs are conveyed through compost? If you are able, put your planned worship into practice for your study group or for the larger church and community.

Experience

Using a compost bucket, an old coffee can, a five-gallon bucket, a zip-lock bag or other container, collect your non-animal food scraps for one week. What do you notice about the quantity and contents of your food scrap collection? Now use those scraps to create your own compost. A quick web search can provide guidance for various ways to get started and which composting method might work best for your circumstances. Keep a compost journal documenting what and how often you add to your composting system as well as any personal or

[32] Ayers, *Inhabitance,* 112-113.

spiritual insights from composting. After a few weeks, harvest your compost and add it to your garden, lawn, or trees.

Site Visit: Paonia Soil Company – visit and tour the commercial composting facility run by Paonia Soil Company. From where do the ingredients for their compost come? What method of composting is being used? What emotions or responses do these compost piles evoke ? How does large-scale composting embody "the new creation?"

Site Visit: Night Owl Food Forest – visit and tour the food forest and its small-scale composting operation. How does this differ from the composting taking place at Paonia Soil Company? What are the sources of Night Owl's compost ingredients? What emotions or reactions do the small-scale compost piles evoke? How does small-scale composting embody "the new creation?"

CHAPTER SIX: The Practice of Gleaning

Compost is at both the beginning of our food system and the end. Compost both feeds the soils that grow our food, and it can be the final destination for our food scraps, but before that spiritual practices such as gleaning can reduce the amount of food and food waste that becomes compost. Engaging in practices to intentionally reduce food waste is a way to not only make connections with and care for our places, it is also a way to enact justice. Gleaning food is a spiritual practice that accomplish this. Gleaning has biblical roots and can be an expression of Wesleyan commitments of health, well-being, and the proper use of resources. Additionally, gleaning is a spiritual practice that connects people with particular farms and orchards, thus providing opportunities to make deeper connections to food and the places where food is grown.

The United States Food and Drug Administration estimates that 30-40 percent of food produced in the United States is wasted.[1] A MITRE-Gallup survey found that the average American household throws away 6.2 cups of edible food every week. This amounts to at least $1,500 per household per year.[2] Not only does food waste misuse money, it is a misuse of agricultural land, water, and fertilizers.[3] Food waste also exacerbates food insecurity as edible food never makes it to the 13.5 million household facing food insecurity. That same study found that while most food waste in our food systems occurs within households, 17 percent of food

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[1] FDA. 2020. "Food Loss and Waste." *FDA*, March (March). https://www.fda.gov/food/consumers/food-loss-and-waste.

[2] "MITRE-Gallup Survey Finds U.S. Households Waste 6.2 Cups of Edible Food Every Week on Average." 2023. MITRE. MITRE. November 14, 2023. https://www.mitre.org/news-insights/news-release/mitre-gallup-survey-finds-us-households-waste-62-cups-edible-food-every.

[3] Kirsten Jaglo, Shannon Kenny, and Jenny Stephenson, "From Farm to kitchen: The Environmental Impact of U.S. Food Waste," epa.gov, accessed April 18, 2024, https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2021-11/from-farm-to-kitchen-the-environmental-impacts-of-u.s.-food-waste_508-tagged.pdf

waste occurs at the places where food is grown. Waste in any form is a spiritual issue, but the issue of food waste can be addressed at least in part through gleaning.

Scripture

Gleaning as described in Scriptures was an intentional act of justice. While current-day gleaning still functions to help meet the nutritional needs of people facing food insecurity, many of these gleaning efforts are not only intentional acts of feeding but also efforts to reduce food waste. While the motivations for gleaning may vary, the act of gleaning leftover produce is still a spiritual practice of justice and connection. The practice of gleaning is described at multiple points in both the Hebrew and Christian bibles.

In the Hebrew Bible food producers were to leave the edges of their fields unharvested; food producers were not to go through a field twice to gather what was not harvested the first time nor were food producers to gather food that had fallen on the ground; olive trees and vineyards were not to be stripped bare, and some grapes were to be left in the vineyard after harvest. This was done so that the alien, orphan, and the widow – the most vulnerable members of society – might have access to this remaining food.[4] Ruth depicts the sustaining nature of gleaning. She was a widow, an alien, and impoverished when she goes out to the field to glean grain.[5]

Davis describes Israel's wilderness experience following the exodus from Egypt as gleaning.[6] She argues that the exodus was a rejection of food as a business, food as power, and

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[4] Leviticus 19:9-10, 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:19-24.

[5] Ruth 2:2.

[6] Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 74-75.

food as a weapon. Instead, Israel's departure from Egypt demonstrates that food is "an expression of God's sovereignty over creation and generosity toward humankind."[7] As the Israelites begin their journey through the wilderness they are in the position of the most dependent, vulnerable members of the society they will form in the Promised Land. In other words, the Israelites as a whole find themselves in the position of gleaners. Gleaning manna in the wilderness ensures that everyone has enough to eat, no one has surplus, and hoarding – which can threaten the viability of future generations – is banned.[8] Thus, gleaning is a model for how to order society, how to relate to food and God, and how to insure a livable future.

In the Christian Bible Jesus' disciples may have been gleaning grain on the sabbath because they were hungry.[9] Carter notes that it is significant that this occurs on the sabbath because sabbath celebrates Israel's deliverance from Egypt, recalls God's covenant with Israel, and celebrates creation by recognizing God's ownership of the land. Thus, the sabbath was meant to recognize God's work of liberating people and providing them with sufficient food. This act of gleaning on the sabbath raises issues of justice and food access since the hungry were entitled to food as a gift or from gleaning. In this scene Jesus sets aside one practice of sabbath observance in favor of providing basic resources which sustain life.[10] In other words, Jesus' disciples' act of gleaning grain on the sabbath is an opportunity to proclaim equal access to life-

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[7] Davis, *Scripture*, *Culture, and Agriculture,* 75.

[8] Davis, *Scripture, Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture,* 76-77.

[9] Mathew 12:1 (note that Mark 2:23 and Luke 6:1 do not mention the disciples' hunger.)

[10] Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Socio-Political and Religious Reading* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001), 263-265.

giving food resources and God's reign over creation. Acts of gleaning can still proclaim and enact these values.

Later in the gospel of Matthew Jesus feeds crowds of more than 5,000 and a crowd of more than 4,000. At the end of each of these miraculous meals, the disciples collect basketfuls of leftovers. In these acts of feeding Jesus enacts a system of compassion, sufficiency, and shared resources that imitates God's feeding the Israelites in the wilderness. The collection of leftovers indicates that God is still able to meet people's needs, and the disciples' participation in meeting these needs was a primary act for Christian communities.[11] This is a sign of God's abundance and it is an act of gleaning. Scripture doesn't reveal what happened to those basketfuls of leftovers, but surely they did not go to waste; surely they continued to feed people well after the first meals were completed. These feeding miracles are another example of gleaning. These miracles also call communities of faith to meet people's food needs by participating in alternative systems of compassion and resource sharing.

Tradition

Wesley's understanding of sanctification can help one understand the spiritual practice of gleaning from a Wesleyan perspective. In the sermon "The Scripture Way of Salvation" Wesley described sanctification as one of the two parts of salvation in which a person feels the love of God which in turn produces love to all humankind. Sanctification produces works of piety and works of mercy. Works of mercy include, among other practices, feeding the hungry.[12]

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[11] Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 305, 308, 328.

[12] Wesley, *Works of John Wesley, vol. 2, 158,* 164, 166.

Furthermore, Wesley considered these works an essential part of the Christian faith writing in the sermon "Upon the Lord's Sermon on the Mount Discourse IV":

> Christianity is essentially a social religion, and that to turn it into a solitary one is to destroy it … it is not only impossible to conceal true Christianity, but likewise absolutely contrary to the design of the great Author of it.[13]

In that same sermon Wesley later writes that it is still incumbent upon people of Christian faith to feed the hungry regardless of whether the person receiving food will be lost or saved. While God alone changes people's hearts, it is often through the works of people that this change is accomplished.[14] Wesley is arguing that works of mercy are an essential response to the grace of God. Works of mercy include feeding whomever has need. In this Wesley echoes the biblical call to ensure that everyone has enough food to eat and that everyone has equal access to life-giving food. Gleaning is a spiritual practice that can fulfill both these biblical mandates and Wesley's call to a Christian faith that includes works of mercy. These works of mercy not only connect us to people but also to our places.

Reason

In her call for people of faith to become ecological inhabitants Ayers describes ecological literacy as the comprehension of interrelatedness and an attitude of care and stewardship. She writes:

> Such literacy gives rise to more than atomistic individual choices and compels persons in a society to see their lives intertwined with one another and, importantly, with the life of the planet. Ecological literacy certainly includes an understanding of climate science and

[13] Wesley, *Works of John Wesley, vol. 1,* 533, 540.

[14] Wesley, *Works of John Wesley, vol. 1,* 545-546.

> even personal practices like household waste reduction, but it stretches far deeper than that: it transforms both worldview and human affection.[15]

In other words, as we grow in our understanding of our world, the foods we eat, and the places we live, our actions, our opinions, and our commitments change. One step in the growth process is to analyze and change our actions as we foster our connections with our ecosystems. Ayers calls this an ecological homecoming. She uses the Parable of the Prodigal Son who lived extravagantly and wastefully only to return home as an image of how changed behaviors and commitments can lead us to reconnect with our ecosystems. Gleaning is one spiritual practice that can help reduce food waste, enact food justice, and return people to responsible, faithful connection with their ecosystems.

Gleaning is a spiritual practice that can also challenge people to consider how they handle abundance. The MITRE-Gallop study on food waste states, "By reducing our waste, we can work towards a future where our abundance of food is distributed to those who need it."[16] How people of faith handle abundance is an important spiritual issue. Gary VanderPol created Lazarus at the Gate,[17] a Christian financial literacy curriculum in which "participants are taught to live gratefully, live justly, live simply, and live generously. The first two pillars draw from the Old Testament, where abundance is taught as a good to be justly distributed among the people. VanderPol uses the "law of gleaning" to teach living gratefully and justly. "If you take (food at the edge of the field or that has fallen to the ground), you're actually stealing from the poor; it's

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[15] Ayers, *Inhabitance, 46.*

[16] "Food Waste." n.d. Household Food Waste. Accessed April 18, 2024. https://sites.mitre.org/household-food-waste/food-waste/.

[17] "Lazarus at the Gate." Boston Faith & Justice Network. Accessed April 18, 2024. https://www.bostonfaithjustice.org/learn-titles-old/lazarus-at-the-gate/?gf_protect_submission=1.

part of the system. It's not optional. It's justice, not charity."[18] The practice of gleaning help assure access to the abundance of farms and fields.

Bahnson describes our current food system of cheap, abundant, yet *irrevocably* unsustainable food as an abundant mirage. He contrasts this mirage with the abundant kingdom in which eating is a radical trust that God's abundance is enough. When there is enough the hungry can be invited to the feast, the church pursues alternative economies, and food is recognized as a matter of justice. "Following the example of our Lord, any food practice in the abundant kingdom must offer the outcast and marginalized seats of honor. Jesus told us that when we feed the hungry, we're really feeding him." Jesus deserves better than a "spiritually tepid 'food drive'" and "the dregs of the abundant mirage" when fresh, organic vegetables could be served instead.[19] Gleaning is one spiritual practice that can help extend the abundant kingdom to all people in a dignified manner. Ensuring that people who rely on hunger relief operations have a dignified food experience requires extra care when harvesting, packing, and transporting gleaned food.[20] Sharing the abundant kingdom sometimes mean gleaning smaller quantities of high-demand foods such as raspberries.[21] Sharing abundance often means gleaning undamaged food, but can also mean distributing nutritious food that have cosmetic defects that prevented

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[18] Mitchell Atencio,"Does Progressive Christian Financial Advice Exist?" *Sojourners*, March 11, 2021, https://sojo.net/articles/does-progressive-christian-financial-advice-exist?fbclid=IwAR3KDepyq-XVXOwB39ydQ25N4X51FmxoXOsCf7Nm-NTtbkc7SIPqX-eAr6w.

[19] Bahnson and Wirzba, *Making Peace with the Land*, 86-87, 94-95, 101-103.

[20] Uproot Colorado, Facebook, November 16, 2023, https://www.facebook.com/NothingLeftOver/posts/pfbid02NUqtTn77HYejFsLvbGNPJSgcfVZ4sznqxgmHb98viEUHEM3szAXbyBRp5cYo4EWQl.

[21] Uproot Colorado, Facebook, September 13, 2023, https://www.facebook.com/NothingLeftOver/posts/pfbid02uXieM1KowcVCFHDpZV2sjK22XLaP3ssNYQB8QPGG3zhWmhFWkvKRMCgX4GfyXa3ol.

them from going to market.[22] Organizations like UpRoot Colorado help make gleaning and sharing the abundant kingdom available to more people.

Experience

UpRoot Colorado, an organization that coordinates gleanings in 23 Colorado counties including Delta County where the North Fork Valley of the Gunnison River is located, works to foster these forms of waste reduction, justice and connection. UpRoot Colorado estimates that food left unharvested in fields is equal to 12 to 143 percent of the food that was actually harvested, and of the food left in fields 65 percent is edible. This means that farmers could be leaving enormous amounts of fresh produce in their fields which if reduced could increase the amount of food in the supply chain without requiring additional land be used for food production, putting pressure on farmers to increase crop yields, or increasing resource inputs.[23] UpRoot Colorado's Gleaning Initiative coordinates a Volunteer Gleaning Corp to harvest surplus fruit and vegetables from local farms as well as backyard trees and urban gardens and distribute that food to food pantries. [24] In 2023, 87 volunteers gleaned 25,874 pounds of food from 15 farms and two backyard fruit tree stewards. This gleaned produce was distributed through 12

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[22] Uproot Colorado, Facebook, January 31, 2024, https://www.facebook.com/NothingLeftOver/posts/pfbid0uGsEKRwXGxhLSFNn6KchdQSGwmu6boQfhUUNxGdQr3VcXHey8nT7kKrC5soEutsbl

[23] Anna Hermes, Nathan Lee-Ammons, John Brett, and David Laskarzewski, "RESEARCH_Study of On-Farm Agricultural Surplus in Colorado_Final_2019(1).Pdf." n.d. Google Docs. Accessed April 18, 2024. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1BPNnSdua1Nfhkc8Utm08YWhf-diTiFi3/view.

[24] Rita Mary Hennigan and David Laskarzewski, "UpRoot-Colorado_Program-Initiatives_4.20.23.Pdf." n.d. Google Docs. Accessed April 18, 2024. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1OHtX2pi1NCxhkr0P91g3A7Wq9XTlGRCL/view.

hunger relief organizations. This is an act of providing the best of the abundant kingdom to people facing food security.

Gleaning helps reduce food waste and helps provide fresh nutrient-dense food to people who face food insecurity. Gleaning also opens pathways for people to understand food systems and connect with their places. UpRoot Colorado has three areas of work: gleaning, experiential education, and advocacy. They describe experiential education as fostering "food wisdom." UpRoot Colorado describes food wisdom in the following manner:

> Food wisdom is knowing where your food comes from and how much blood, sweat, tears and toil it took to get it from seed to your spoon. There is a significant gap today between producers (i.e., farmers) and many community members. This disconnect from where our food comes from—the time, labor, and inputs that are required by farmers to feed you and the rest of us—is one of the root causes of the amount of food loss and food waste that we are witnessing today (40 percent of all food produced annually in the U.S. is never eaten) … We are promoting and working to increase food wisdom by organizing year-round, on-farm educational events—seeding and planting events and farm tours as well as numerous gleaning events—to encourage community members to step onto farms and rekindle their natural relationship with food and their knowledge of where food originates.[25]

Gleaning puts people in direct contact with their local food systems and their local ecosystems.

Ayers recognizes farm visits as one method of helping people arriving in a new area learn to love their new places. Ayers cites immigrants' visits to the Angelic Organics Learning Center in Illinois where participants in educational programs encounter livestock, harvest produce, and glean leftovers. These farms visits connect participants with their place, their food, and their desires to make quality food more accessible.[26] Ayers mentions gleaning as one aspect of these

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[25] "UpRoot Colorado." n.d. UpRoot Colorado. Accessed April 18, 2024. https://www.uprootcolorado.org.

[26] Ayers, *Inhabitance,* 99-100.

educational farm visits. The practice of gleaning is still relevant today as spiritual practice that connects us with our places, our sources of food and the needs of our communities.

Food, Faith, and Place
A Wesleyan Practice of Place
Session Six: Gleaning

Scripture

Leviticus 19:9-10; 23:22 and Deuteronomy 24:19-24

Refection: In these two passages what are the reasons for having produce left over to glean? Who are the beneficiaries of gleaned produce?

Exodus 16:12-21

Reflection: Davis describes Israel's exodus experience as gleaning. In what ways is the collection of manna an act of gleaning? How does gleaning manna reject the dominant food systems of Egypt? How is gleaning manna a reflection of God's desires for Israel's life in the Promised Land?

Matthew 12:1-8

Reflection: When did the disciples glean grain? Why is this day significant (see Deuteronomy 5:12-16)? Why did the disciples glean grain? What does this act of gleaning reveal about God?

Matthew 14:13-21 and Matthew 15:32-39

Reflection: In what ways is Jesus' feeding of the crowds a gleaning? What does this reveal about God and about discipleship?

Tradition

"The Scripture Way of Salvation"

Wesley defined sanctification as having two parts: the love of God and the love of all humankind. Sanctification produces works of piety and works of mercy the latter of which includes feeding the hungry. How might gleaning be a work of mercy?

“The Use of Money”

Reflection: Thinking back to the previous session on composting and Wesley’s sermon “The Use of Money.” One aspect of practicing good stewardship of resources is reducing waste. In what ways does gleaning help persons and communities steward resources by reducing waste?

Reason

Ayers describes connecting with our places as part of an “ecological homecoming” in which attitudes, actions, and worldviews are changed. She likens this to the Parable of the Prodigal Son who lived extravagantly and wastefully only to return and reconnect with home. How might the act of gleaning draw us away from wastefulness and help us connect with our local ecosystems? If you have ever participated in a glean, what impact did it have on your attitudes, actions, and worldview?

VanderPol teaches that “the law of gleaning” guides people to live gratefully and justly. Gleaning also helps us to recognize and properly use or distribute abundance. How do you define “abundance?” Write out your definition. Where and how have you experienced abundance in your life? What did you do with or how did you utilize that abundance?

In what ways are food waste and gleaning spiritual issues? Bahnson argues that abundance must be offered to the outcast and the marginalized. When feeding people in the name of Jesus, the very best must be offered. How can gleaning help people live within God’s abundant kingdom? In what ways does gleaning share abundance? Brainstorm different types of gleaning in which you and your community can engage. Put one of these ideas into practice.

Experience

Food waste occurs at multiple points in our food system. One point is at the household level. Some surveys estimate that the average American household disposes of 6.2 cups of edible food every week. Continue the practice of collecting food scraps started in the previous session on composting. You may need to set up at least two collection points for this session: one for compostable food and another for non-composable food. Measure and record the volume of food collected each day. At the end of the week total up the volume of collected food waste. Are you above or below average? Why? What was the largest contributor to food waste in your household? Brainstorm actions to reduce your food waste. Give at least one of your ideas a try next week. What impact did your actions have on your food waste production?

Food waste also occurs at the points where food is grown. If you are able to join a gleaning group, spend a few moments taking with the farmers about the reasons there is extra produce to glean in their fields or orchards. What does this tell you about our food system? What actions can you take to help reduce food waste at the point of food production?

Site Visit: UpRoot Colorado – sign up to participate in one of the seasonal produce gleans with UpRoot Colorado. During your gleaning visit speak with the farmers about the reasons they have produce to glean. What challenge do food producers face?

After the glean volunteer to help deliver gleaned produce to local food pantries. What other foods are available at the food pantry? How was the gleaned produced received at the food pantry? What does this tell you about food needs and food availability in the community?

If there is abundance enough after gleaning, take some of the gleaned produce and use it to prepare a meal or a food item. Reflect on what you have learned about food waste, food systems, and abundance.

CONCLUSION: The Practice of Food, Faith, and Place

Several years ago my son, Atticus, attended a birthday party. It was the night before the Oklahoma State University versus Oklahoma University football game. At the party attendees were having their faces painted with the colors and logos of their preferred school in this intra-state rivalry. Atticus, then seven-years old, decided that he wanted an image of the globe painted on his cheek and the world "EARTH" painted across his forehead instead. He explained, "Sometimes my friends get really mean about which team you're for. But we are all from earth, so if we are all for earth, then we can just be nice to each other." I thought this was a wonderful description and practical application of the planetary love and ever-expanding circles of inclusion that cosmopolitan theology seeks to embody. Here is a child recognizing the affiliations and labels that we attach to ourselves and others. Atticus recognized that once labels are attached to a person, hierarchies are formed; one team is assumed to be superior to the other. Then people enact these hierarchies in the ways that they interact with and treat one another. Far preferable to Atticus was the cosmopolitan position that we are all global citizens who deserve to be treated nicely. Without really knowing it Atticus embodied what I understand to be the heart of cosmopolitan perspectives and practice.

But upon further reflection I want to push this planetary love for the world further by pushing it to be smaller, more local, increasingly place-based. McFague writes about experiences with particular places and parks in comparison with the images of planet earth taken from space:

> Shouldn't Christians love nature in terms of the global picture – be concerned about the ozone layer, the rainforests, and the greenhouse effect? Shouldn't we love the 'whole earth' rather than Jericho Park? Yes, surely, but there is a connection here; in fact, a critical one. No one, I believe, loves the whole earth except as she or he loves a particular bit of it. It is more likely, I suspect, that loving Ellery or Jericho Park – appreciating, respecting, and caring for them – will move one to care for the whole earth, than

> admiring the NASA image will generate the energy and concern to save Ellery and Jericho Park.[1]

We get to the love of the world by first loving particular places. We love particular places by being connected to them. We can connect to particular places through spiritual practices that "develop in people the habits that will enable them to live a more measured, reflective, free, attentive, available, and responsible life."[2] The spiritual practices of paying attention to place, facing human and more-than-human creation, giving thanks, eating locally-produced foods, composting, and gleaning offer ways of making deeper connections to our places. In these preceding chapters I have used the four elements of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral – scripture, tradition, reason, and experience – to provide descriptions of these six spiritual practices. In the process, I hope that I have opened pathways to experiencing what has been called the Wesleyan Pentalateral which recognizes that creation forms an additional aspect of faith in the Wesleyan tradition. Additionally, I have drawn from some of the principles of cosmopolitan theology to demonstrate the importance of expanding circles of inclusion to include the human and the more-than-human.

The spiritual practices explored in this project also provide opportunities to connect with local environments by connecting with local food producers. To aid in the development of these spiritual practices and to help facilitate connection to place, I have presented a teaching outline meant to guide learners through the six spiritual practices by turning attention to each aspect of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. In this way these spiritual practices are rooted in creation, the cultivation and consumption of foods, local places, and the Wesleyan tradition. The exploration

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[1] McFague, *Super, Natural Christians,* 43-44.

[2] Wirzba, *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating*, 28.

of these practices here offers the basis for preaching, continued study, and service-learning experiences that help people connect food, faith, and place. I believe that it is possible for each faith community to adopt at least one of the spiritual practices in this project as a means of moving people of faith toward the practice of "inhabitance" in which they know and love one particular place and honor that place's rhythm, limits and possibilities.

Appendix A
A Placed-Based Great Thanksgiving for the North Fork Valley

It is right, and a good a joyful thing,

always and everywhere to give thanks to you,

Almighty God, creator of heaven and earth.*

We give thanks to you for forming us humans out of dust of the earth and breathing your Spirit into us:

for the people who have traveled across the North Fork Valley of the Gunnison River, leaving their homes, their ranches, their farms, and their business to be gathered here to join in praising you, we give thanks.

We give thanks to you for the earth which you called into being:

for the sandy shale of the Adobe Hills, the granite outcropping of the West Elk Mountains, the igneous intrusions of Needle Rock and Castle Rock, and the long- dormant volcano that forms Mount Lamborn in the east.

We give thanks to you for the waters that nourish life, that cleanse us, and quench our thirst:

for the snows on Mount Gunnison that hold moisture through these cold winter months only to release it in the spring when fields are being planted and the thick ice that we drill through on Crawford Reservoir so that we might drop our ice fishing lines into the black waters below in hopes of catching a black crappie.

We give thanks to you for the plants that feed us:

for the grasses and dried alfalfa that feed our livestock through the winter, the wheat berries being brought in from the fields to await grinding into flour, and the apple, cherry, and peach trees that now go dormant after a frost-shortened growing season.

We give thanks to you for the animals of this earth:

for the cows, the lambs, and the yaks raised and nurtured in this valley that have given their lives to become our food, the deer and elk harvested during our hunting seasons and those that are food

for bears, cougars, and coyotes, and the cats and dogs that offer us companionship through long winter nights.

We thank you for the trees:

for dropping their leaves so that the sunlight may fall upon and warm our homes, the trees we have harvested and now burn for warmth, the evergreens we cut from the Grand Mesa National Forest and place in our homes to remind us of the eternal life of Christ.

We give thanks for the birds:

for the black-capped chickadees and house finches that sing to us each morning, the stellar jays that show up unexpectedly at our bird feeders, and the turkey vultures that soar overhead reminding us to lift our gaze to the sky.

We give thanks for the air we breathe and the winds that blow:

for the gusts that blow down Grand Mesa and into the valley, the gentle breezes that cleanse the air and help make it safer for us to gather outside even in times of pandemics, and for the clouds that gather around Saddleback Mountain bringing the hopes of more snowfall.

We give thanks for the sun, moon, and stars:

for warming our skin even when the temperatures dip into the 20s, the full moon which greeted us on the First Sunday of Advent lighting our nights so we can snowshoe along County Line Trail long after sunset, and the stars which make up the arms of the Milky Way over the Black Canyon of the Gunnison.

We give thanks for our ancestors:

for the Ute peoples who lived here before us, for the settlers who moved into this valley, for the people of faith who built this church and created a place for our faith to flourish.

We give thanks to you, God:

For being with all of your creation, for being here in this valley, for the gift of your spirit, and for the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ and the grace, peace, and pardon that he brought just to us but to all your creation.

And so,

with your people on earth and all the company of heaven

we praise your name and join in their unending hymn …

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