



Now the Green Blade Rises: The Easter Gospel for the Whole Creation

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*If putting the future of life at the heart of everything we do
is not central to our purpose and destiny, why are we here?*
Paul Hawkin, *Regeneration: Ending the Climate Crisis in
One Generation*

Creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the
children of God.—Romans 8:19

Now the green blade rises from the buried grain. ELW #379

*The movement to care for creation and address climate change
needs the participation of people of faith; indeed their talents
and understanding of God's resurrecting gospel are critical to the
work of creation care. In this task the Church, the people of God,
need to contribute what they do best, to point to the transforming
love of God for this world, and claim it.*

I staggered from the movie theater, barely breathing. When the alarm bells of our Earth in crisis began ringing in my ears at full volume, I was in the thick of three decades of parish ministry at Messiah Lutheran Church on Minnesota's Iron Range. Al Gore's documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, had hit major theaters around the country, and I had just seen it. I was already disturbed by inaction on global warming, but the movie brought home the crisis. The accumulation of CO₂ and other heat trapping emissions were rapidly altering the climate, setting up positive feedback loops which would become more and more difficult to reverse. Without drastic action at multiple levels, we were careening toward an uninhabitable planet. An economy based on extraction was creating a new geological epoch. We were leaving the relatively stable climate of the Holocene to the unpredictable, human dominated, increasingly destructive climate of the Anthropocene.¹ Wake up, the movie shouted. We are in an emergency that requires a unified, all-out, World War II level response. This is Pearl Harbor for the whole Earth creation, with the enemy our own collective way of life.

Jesus was knocking me breathless too. *Leave your nets*, I heard. *Come and follow me*.

But what could this mean in the thick of parish ministry, or simply the thick of life? Does one just get up and *leave*? What was required of me? Of us? Of congregations like the one where I was serving?

The year of the release of *An Inconvenient Truth* was 2005, twenty years ago. Then the level of CO₂ in the atmosphere was 379.98 parts per million. Now it is 424.61 ppm and still climbing.² Last year was the hottest year on record, passing the dangerous red line of 1.5 degrees

¹ Andreas Malm, *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming* (London: Verso, 2016), 391. Malm contends that the Anthropocene should actually be called the Capitalocene because it is capitalism, not human beings in general, that is responsible for this new geological era. I tend to agree, but am using the more familiar term Anthropocene.

² Ian Tiseo, "Average carbon dioxide (CO₂) levels in the atmosphere worldwide from 1959 to 2024," *Statista*, January 15, 2025, [statista.com/statistics/1091926/atmospheric-concentration-of-CO2-historic/](https://www.statista.com/statistics/1091926/atmospheric-concentration-of-CO2-historic/).

centigrade above pre-industrial levels.³ If the climate crisis was an emergency screaming to be addressed in 2005, what about now? All the feedback loops are intensifying. Island nations are drowning. Hurricanes and wildfires, droughts and floods, insect infestations and die-offs, micro-plastics in breastmilk and brains, pollinators poisoned, bird populations plummeting, aquifers draining. Still the ocean absorbs about 31 percent of our CO₂ emissions, at the cost of sea level rise, ocean acidification, and marine life.⁴ People in marginalized communities in the path of weather disasters (and some affluent ones) lose their homes or livelihoods or lives. Indigenous peoples are pressed to the brink. Yet still we drill and frack. Still we convert rainforests into agricultural lands. And now, with the new presidential administration?

It is not 2005 anymore. It is 2025, halfway through the last decade for drastic action to avoid the worst impacts of climate breakdown. The window for holding off the worst impacts of global heating is closing: some would say it already has. We are heading toward the collapse of the systems that make life possible, and those who profit from it do not seem to care.

Do you ever feel trapped in a waking nightmare?

In this accelerating vortex of climate chaos and biodiversity collapse, propelled by dominating economic and political powers, where is the church? What is our contribution to the Great Turning that we need? What is our truth to tell, and do we have the courage to preach it?⁵ Do we have any credible hope to offer? What, if anything, can communities of faith DO?

Everything I have written so far about the civilizational crisis manifesting in climate and ecosystem collapse can be understood

³ Matt Wright, Nick Leach, Shirin Ermis “2024: Year global temperatures passed critical 1.5°C milestone,” *The Independent*, January 21, 2025.

⁴ “Global ocean is absorbing more carbon from fossil fuel emissions,” National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, March 14, 2019, noaa.gov/news/global-ocean-is-absorbing-more-carbon-from-fossil-fuel-emissions.

⁵ Preachers need to tell the truth about our situation, to “preach the Law”. People who already know and feel the crisis want to hear it named. The convicting word actually encourages these people because they feel less alone. They do not want preachers to be soft peddling what alarms them. And for those who are masking their alarm through a fog of denial, there are ways to speak tough truth (Law) that may help the fog to clear. For those who are deep into false narratives that deny facts, telling the truth may not penetrate. “Whether they hear or refuse to hear” (Ezekiel 2:5).

in our theological tradition as Law. Law is not a theological abstraction or a set of rules or principles, nor a neatly defined morality for well-meaning people. Law is the weight and weave of God's gift of our interdependent created being. As Robin Wall Kimmerer says, "All flourishing is mutual."⁶ As Paul Hawkins writes, "Nature and humanity are composed of exquisitely complex networks of relationships"⁷ By severing these networks of relationship, we break the Law of mutual flourishing. The Earth is alive. Creation is not inert object, but a living subject. Objectifying nature and other people to turn them into resources and capital, we break God's commands to live in the Gift, to be stewards of Creation, to act toward others with justice and mercy. When we do so, the Law convicts us. The gathering storm of the climate-biodiversity crisis is its death sentence, the end result of power as domination.⁸ As our liturgy of confession reminds us, we are "in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves," captive to the powers, patterns, systems which trap us collectively and individually. This is not new news—but it is awful news. Much of the time, it looks like the Law may have the last word.

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⁶ Robin Wall Kimmerer, *The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World* (New York: Scribner, 2024). The phrase "All flourishing is mutual" appears at the beginning of this book which explores how economics could be modeled on the natural world.

⁷ Paul Hawkins, *Regeneration: Ending the Climate Crisis in One Generation* (New York: Penguin Books, 2021), 9.

⁸ Throughout known human history, power is exercised from above. History is a record of the power to dominate. It is the driving force behind every empire, every caste system, every army, every destruction of habitat, and most economic systems. The climate and biodiversity crisis is the planetary result of the power of domination. In raw and flagrant forms, this power in our new administration is now actively bent on levels of domination that aim to dominate and subjugate media, the courts, education, reproduction, gender definitions of our humanity, human rights—and to strip from living Earth its life (our life). Their level of arrogant impunity to our shared reality and legal structures is breathtaking. (And delusional. Some day if we or our offspring cannot breathe, they or their offspring will not be able to breathe either).

Where is real power for change? We cannot free ourselves. In Lutheran confessional tradition, we teach that the Law which convicts us is not God's last word, but drives us to the last word, the Gospel. But is there Gospel commensurate to our imperiled existential moment? Does the Gospel have power to *do anything* in the face of our peril, in the face of the powers of domination? Or is it as powerless as we feel? Is there an Easter Gospel for a dying planet? And how do we participate in it?

Here's a story. In 2008, less than three years after I stumbled from the theater gasping for breath, I was in Saint Paul, Minnesota, having just missed a flight to Chicago for a party for my father (longer story). I was disconsolate. I stopped at a grocery store. Someone in the parking lot, noticing my Prius, asked if I knew about the Green Expo taking place that weekend. Living on the Iron Range I had never heard of it. You should go, he said. Why not?

As I wandered around the Green Expo in wonder, I thought, *the Iron Range needs its own uniquely Iron Range version of the Green Expo.*

Six months later, that November, the social action committee of my congregation was discussing how we could integrate the care of creation in our ministry. *What about a festival that includes the whole community*, we wondered. *We could bring together people and groups who value our local environment under one big tent in a celebration of local traditions and practical resources for sustainable living.* One coincidence, one idea, one person led to another. In the spring of 2009, just a year after I stumbled into the Green Expo, five hundred people showed up at our church and the adjacent community center for the first Iron Range Earth Fest. The annual Iron Range Earth Fest has been happening ever since, along with numerous ventures of the Iron Range Partnership for Sustainability, the grassroots organization that began with a missed plane and a conversation at our congregation's social action committee.⁹ The congregation's new creation care team also went on to catalyze a community garden and orchard, a community kitchen, an annual Season of Creation, and a 100 Mile Harvest Meal.

⁹ Iron Range Partnership for Sustainability, host of the Iron Range Earth Fest. See www.irpsmn.org.

Here's another story. Fast forward to the Fall of 2019. At a retreat of the Northeastern Minnesota Synod's EcoFaith Network leadership team, we were discussing the theme of our synod's fourth annual EcoFaith Summit. The Easter hymn, *Now the Green Blade Rises*, captured our attention. We sang it, singing resurrection not as a triumphant victory, but as the haunting melody of the green blade rising from grain buried in the earth, the Resurrection hidden in Creation. *Now the Green Blade Rises: The Easter Gospel for the Whole Creation* would be our Summit theme. A musician at the retreat offered to write environmentally focused stanzas to add to the traditional ones.¹⁰ We plunged into planning a day of worship and workshops and invited young climate activists to speak.

But it was the spring of 2020. With the pandemic shutting down the world, we had to cancel the summit.

But the music would not stop singing. *Now the green blade rises*. Over the coming months, we developed a series of short videos, *Moments of Arising*,¹¹ featuring an arrangement of each of the eight stanzas of the hymn (the newly composed environmentally focused ones along with the original ones). We started an on-line newsletter called *Green Blades Rising*¹² and a weekly *Green Blades Preaching Roundtable*,¹³ in which we invited pastors and others to wrestle with the ecological and ecojustice implications of the weekly lectionary. With our synod's Together Here Ministries and the Care of Creation Work Group of the St. Paul Area Synod, we hosted a series of zoom workshops, *Called to Arise: Standing at the Intersection of Racism, Inequality, and the Environment*. The following year, we hosted a Creation Care Training series for congregations in and beyond our synod. As we planned for an on-line EcoFaith Summit in 2021, we gathered people around the healing

¹⁰ The hymn with the four environmentally focused verses by composer Paul Jacobson can be found at ecofaithnetwork.org/green-blade-rises-hymn. He has continued to compose hymns for EcoFaith Summits.

¹¹ "Moments of Arising Videos," *The EcoFaith Network*, ecofaithnetwork.org/moments-of-arising-videos. Paul Jacobson, composer of the new stanzas, also composed and directed the arrangements for each stanza in the eight videos.

¹² "Subscribe," *The EcoFaith Network*, ecofaithnetwork.org/subscribe.

¹³ "Green Blades Preaching Roundtable," *The EcoFaith Network*, ecofaithnetwork.org/preaching-roundtable.

power of story and music. *Now the Green Blade Rises: Storytelling for the Healing of Creation* was our theme.

New relationships were forming. When our synod EcoFaith leadership team invited the Saint Paul Area Synod's Care of Creation Work Group to join us at our annual leadership retreat that summer, being together in person overwhelmed us with joy.

Now the green blade rises from the buried grain. People keep hearing the music and entering the story: bird watchers, biologists, biblical theologians, farmers, gardeners, graphic designers, liturgical scholars, accountants and biologists, musicians, miners, pastors, advocates, teachers, social workers, grandparents, and grandchildren. In congregations and their communities, campuses and camps, something is germinating. When we bend our ear to the holy ground of earth, we hear its music, feel the beating heart of an animating impulse that is among us, within us, yet clearly beyond us. It is rising up, everywhere. Something is afoot.

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What if the gospel is afoot? What if the gospel is a plot, God's resurrection plot, and we get to be participants? The plot is happening everywhere. It grows like mycelium running, like music humming. It inhabits the gifted yearning of people everywhere. It can take place in whatever plot of this earth where we live. It is God's power not from above, but below.¹⁴ It is not the power of domination, but the power of pollination; not of exploitation, but liberation; not the power of the mighty, but the power of the miniscule.¹⁵ It does

¹⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: Collier Books, 1972), 17. The phrase "power from below" alludes to the phrase "view from below" toward the end of his letter to three of his co-conspirators, "After Ten Years." "There remains an experience of incomparable value. We have learnt to see the great events of world history from below, from the perspective of the outcast, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled".

¹⁵ "How much oxygen comes from the ocean?" June 16, 2016, *National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration*, oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/ocean-oxygen.html. For example, one particular species of oceanic plankton, *Prochlorococcus*, is the smallest photosynthetic

not out-dominate the powers holding us captive, yet its power cannot be held captive and will not be overpowered.¹⁶

Let's just say, this is "the Holy Spirit's subversive plot to pollinate an alternative way of being human for the sake of Life."¹⁷

Then how do we as church participate?

Over the years of working together in and among our synod teams, we have developed certain core practices that ground us, enliven us, and nurture participation in the plot. Most of these practices come from universal, ancestral practices of the church, familiar in most congregations: a rhythm of gathering, the singing of music, centering in worship and prayer, listening to the Word. These practices enable us to live as anticipatory community even in a time of dread.¹⁸

Through consistent rhythms of gathering people can anticipate, the spring EcoFaith Summit, annual overnight retreats, regular meetings, and ongoing conversation, we form and foster anticipatory community. Relationships form and deepen, trust develops, hope awakens, gifts are shared, grief expressed, and shared directions birthed. Worship and prayer access a unitive

organism on Earth. But this little bacteria produces up to 20 percent of the oxygen in our entire biosphere.

¹⁶ Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, the keynote speaker at the 2025 EcoFaith Summit of the Upper Midwest, calls this "a sacred and healing journey to new ways of being human together on this Earth, ways that will hoist us back from the precipice of peril on which we hover", on which we will "walk with a host of marvelous companions, far and near, most of whom you will never meet in person. You walk with courage – the courage to recognize hidden horror and to choose life, freedom and healing instead." Moe-Lobeda, *Building a Moral Economy: Pathways for People of Courage* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2024), 73.

¹⁷ The theme of the 2023 EcoFaith Summit was *The Pollinator Plot: Cross+Pollination in a Time of Ecological Crisis*. This phrase comes from that Summit's theme (ecofaithnetwork.org/ecofaith-summit-2023-1). That same spring, the Northeastern Minnesota Synod voted to become a Pollinator Synod, committing to pollinating the care of creation, and encouraging all congregations to become demonstration plots by creating pollinator friendly habitat (ecofaithnetwork.org/pollinator-plot).

¹⁸ Larry Rasmussen, *The Planet You Inherit: Letters to My Grandchildren When Uncertainty's a Sure Thing* (Minneapolis: Broadleaf Books, 2022), 53. describes anticipatory community this way: "Anticipatory communities are home places where it's possible to reimagine worlds and reorder possibilities for a better way of life. You get up in the morning to practice a different future. These societies in the making, which usually start with local communities, vary widely because they form in different places with different peoples of different cultures, traditions, and resources. Yet they share distinctive marks. They are havens... You feel at home at the same time you feel part of a great adventure together, even when that adventure does not know where it ends or what it will meet along the way."

wellspring that grounds us in God. Music taps into a cosmic source deeper than words, where we hear the call of Creator and Creation. We listen to the Word as a living Word for the whole Creation, and wrestle weekly with its call to us in this Kairos time.¹⁹

We also share stories, stories of our ancestors and of our contemporaries, companions in the plot. Storytelling brings us together, enlarges our awareness of green blades springing up everywhere, and stir us to active hope. We also practice biblical storytelling. The story of Noah and the flood inspired the 2024 Eco-Faith Summit, *Cross Currents in the Flood: Building Arcs Together for a Livable Planet*. The story of Shiphrah and Puah, the two midwives to the Hebrews creatively defying the Pharaoh's order to kill Hebrew babies, shapes the 2025 Summit, *Earth's Cries, Earth's Call: Becoming Midwives of Hope for the Healing of Creation*.

Now the Green Blade Rises sings of Resurrection in the language of seed buried and germinating in the earth. The more we notice and learn from Nature, the more we see new life coming from the least of these, arising even from death. Nature perhaps is the original demonstration plot, inspiring our own demonstration plots. As we respond to the cries and call of Creation, the language of Creation as metaphor and model. We speak of our efforts in the language of fertility, germination, pollination, cross-pollination, conception, gestation, pregnancy, labor pangs, birthing, and midwifery.

These core practices—music, storytelling, worship and prayer, rhythms of gathering, and weekly shared wrestling with the Word, and nature as metaphor and model—shape us as anticipatory community for the paradoxical, animating power of the Gospel plot.

The world in climate crisis needs the church. And the church cannot be the church without participating in the plot. There are countless local, national and global organizations doing remarkable environmental work, building an environmental movement. The

¹⁹ Preachers do not need to be alone in wrestling with the ecological and justice intersections of the weekly texts for our world and their congregations. That wrestling bears more fruit when shared, which is what we do each week in the Green Blades Preaching Roundtable, most of writers are preaching weekly in their own congregations. These ordinary amazing preachers offer hard truth and potent gospel week after week. The power of preaching for the whole Creation grows through sharing this wrestling, www.ecofaithnetwork.org/preaching-roundtable.

church is not called to do what they do. However, in this life imperiling crisis, the world needs the church to be what it is, an anticipatory community drawing from our ancestral well; in particular faith communities in particular places, yet bearing God's universal, boundless love; as a community intimate with death which does not need to deny death in any form (including climate denialism), because we do not see death as the end.

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Over the last twenty years I have asked, "What good is the Resurrection for an imperiled planet?" Does the gospel have power *do anything*? Do we? People feel so powerless, just as the dominators want. Does the gospel offer us participation in an alternative power?

The answer trembles in its budding. *Yes.*

Creation is crying out. Creation is calling. The elements, the land and air, sea creatures and land creatures, glaciers and rainforests, join with our human kin in these cries, this call. The Savior does not save from our own deaths. If we continue killing the living Earth, it will die. Now powers have arisen in the highest places in our country, elected ones and non-elected ones, who are not only deaf to these cries, but bent in malicious fury of unchecked domination. No one in the business of delivering life can expect to be immune.

Who are the midwives, the Shiphrahs and Puahs, who will subvert the Pharoah's edicts of death and keep on delivering life

(Exodus 1)?²⁰ Who are the arc builders in this flood?²¹ Who are the pollinators? Will the church arise?

Now the green blade rises. Call it an Easter uprising. The gospel plot is afoot, here, everywhere. Green blades are rising, pollinators are pollinating, arc builders are building, midwives of hope are defying the Pharaoh. And the church with all the Earth is plotting resurrection. You can hear it singing under the rib cage of your holy, gifted yearning. ⊕

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²⁰ "Earth's Cries, Earth's Calls: Becoming Midwives of Hope for the Healing of Creation, the 2025 EcoFaith Summit of the Upper Midwest," *The EcoFaith Network*, ecofaithnetwork.org/ecofaith-summit-2025.

²¹ "Cross+Currents in the Flood: Building Arcs Together for a Livable Planet, the 2024 EcoFaith Summit," *The EcoFaith Network*, ecofaithnetwork.org/ecofaith-summit-2024.