

“Watershed Discipleship”

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Genesis 2:4b-15 NRSV

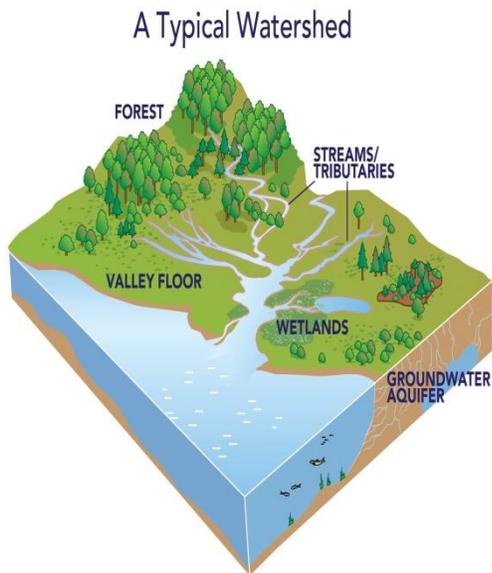
In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground— then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches. The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Cush. The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.

Wouldn't it be nice to have waterfront property? I know some of you do. Part of my growing up in this area was on the water. We had a family cottage on the shore of the St. Lawrence River just east of here, near the Blue Church. I have many wonderful memories of running around barefoot all day, rowing and bailing out the leaky old rowboat, playing Monopoly at the big oak table and cleaning my feet before bed in a basin with soap and a bit of Dettol in the water. Half of you can smell that Dettol smell now! The other half, count yourself lucky you don't know what I'm talking about! But the river, whether swimming, catching perch or rock bass, jumping into big waves after the Lakers went by faster than they're allowed to now, hauling a dead fish out into the current, or swimming in the seaweed, was so much a part of my summer life.

I don't have waterfront property now, but I feel so blessed to live all year in this community so close to the water. In a way, we are all on waterfront property, because everything we do on land is part of a watershed and connected to that larger body of water. A watershed is where the water on land drains and flows to larger bodies of water and ultimately out to the sea.



A watershed starts small and from wide area. It looks like a tree, with the tiny twigs and branches feeding the larger branches and trunk and then into the ocean of the roots in the ground.

Watersheds can be very small — like a few acres where the water drains into a pond, or they can be massive — like the Great Lakes - St. Lawrence River watershed. (I know that some of you worshipping with us online are not in this area — some of you are out in Alberta or in other countries. I encourage you to think about the watershed you are in.

What bodies of water are near you? How do they make their way to the ocean?)

The gift of that water that flows by us every day is hard to measure. The Great Lakes comprises 18% of the world's fresh surface water and 84% of North America's fresh surface water. So much life!

Let's go back to the creation of that life. The whole purpose of the Creation Story is to remind us that God is the creator, God does the creating and we humans are part of God's creation. It is not meant to be a scientific or historic account and neither is it exactly a myth, but it speaks to the truth of the relationship between the Creator and creation.

The relationship is not just an external "I see you and I will work with you". It goes right to heart of who we are: literally created from the earth, from dust, from clay — and life is breathed into us by the Author of Life. We are not just connected to all the rest of creation — we are interdependent. One of the things ecologists are helping us to understand now is just how interconnected everything is. That's an ecosystem. The environment is not just a list of things: maple tree, creek, hummingbird, pike, dandelion, but a system of incredible and complex relationships.

In the Creation story the trust, the relationship between God and the humans is broken; and, as a consequence, humans are banished from the garden and have a harder life. Life becomes marked by struggle and suffering. Life goes from a mutual relationship of recognizing the gifts

given by creation, and recognizing our call to give back, nurture and care for and tend creation to one where the relationship is strained and even severed.

For a lot of our modern history there has been an assumption that the earth and the water and the planet would just keep giving and giving. We have treated our earth like a giant Superstore where we assume that what we need will be there. This has not always been the case in every time and is not the case in every culture. Indigenous peoples maintained a strong relationship with creation, and small-scale farmers have maintained a relationship with the land. However, on the whole, particularly in modern history, we have had a consumer mindset — we keep consuming according to our need and far beyond our need. Actually it goes beyond a consumer mindset to an addict's mindset where we think we can't live without the more and more. We live as though rivers and the habitat in and around them could handle all that we want to take and all that we throw back at it — the ever-increasing pollution and garbage dumped in, the CO² added to the air. And to a certain point our world has handled it — it's amazing how resilient the earth, the air and the waters are. The earth is able to take quite a lot — **but there is a breaking point**. And we've reached it.

We are at a **watershed moment** with our planet. The effects of Climate Change directly caused by increased greenhouse gas emissions — the warming of the earth and the earth's waters is already having catastrophic effects. The devastating flooding in Pakistan, those incredible heat waves in Europe, Hurricane Fiona that lashed the Maritimes, Hurricane Ian in Florida, the droughts and fires in the U.S. and Europe — the last 7 years have been the hottest on record for our planet.



(The Po River, Italy's longest river, 2022)

Our earth, which has given us so much and taken so much of our waste, is crying out for help and it's time we cared. But how?

There are ways that we as individuals can make small changes

that will make a difference.

The smallest shift of awareness of turning towards the hurt can change everything. It can change us — and when we are willing to be open to change, the effects go far beyond us.

What can you do? Learn more about it. You can start with our own region. There is a movement called “**Watershed discipleship**”, which brings together our faith and our calling. Instead of having a consumer mindset — where I am the focus—me and my rights, the disciple is in relationship with God and has a call on their life. Those who reaffirmed their faith through transfer of membership or through baptism last week in St. Lawrence River recommitted to being disciples, to following Jesus.

1. Watershed discipleship is about following Jesus in this watershed time — a time of crisis in God’s creation.
2. But also, it speaks to being rooted in a place — this watershed region. When you drive into Brockville, you’ll see a sign that says “Welcome to the Cataraqui Watershed Region”. If you google that you will find a lot of information on our conservation efforts. <https://cataraquiconservation.ca/pages/watershed#> A few of our members like Roy Brooks and Doug Mather are active in the Friends of Mac Johnson Conservation Authority, a very important wetland in our area. Wetlands have many benefits including filtering and purifying water, recharging groundwater, and moderating droughts and floods. I heard a fascinating interview on the radio about how much beavers help with moderating floods and droughts—google <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/beavers-climate-change-drought-wildfires-1.6582915>) Wetlands also remove and store greenhouse gases, providing habitat for a host of critters.



This idea of Watershed Discipleship is not mine. Like you, I have enough on my plate without figuring out how to save a planet, but there are people out there who are called to help guide us to meaningful action. Let’s learn from them. I subscribe to a newsletter from the Rev. Dr. Jessica Hetherington who is a UCC minister in this area and an “ecoth theologian”. She says that an ecoth theologian is: “One trained to look at and respond to the ecological crisis through the lens of faith.”

<https://jessicahetherington.ca/> I encourage you to subscribe.

It is possible to make changes. You know the waterfront has not always been so desirable. My mother remembers growing up in the 40’s and 50’s

when the river was pretty stinky and had a lot more algae. The river was a dumping ground for factories and mills along the water's edge. Cities and towns all along the Great Lakes and the river dumped their raw sewage into the water. A lot has changed. We changed our thinking. But it wasn't just individuals — it took communities, cities and governments at the provincial and federal levels, and in the case of the St. Lawrence it took cooperation with 2 countries to make massive changes to the river. Large industrial companies like Invista can't dump waste into the river, and cities can't dump raw sewage into the river. There are rules that sometimes drive developers and even home owners crazy, but they make a difference. Some of you have seen that difference in your lifetime!

The river is not as clean as it was 200 years ago, but it's cleaner than it was in the 1950's. That's incredible. That's hopeful.

I encourage you to think both bigger and smaller.

Think bigger: Bringing healing to the world is not just about us getting better at buying second-hand — we need to lobby and encourage and get behind government and inter-government action that makes a difference. Last week I was at the store and bought a package of 3 cucumbers, and for the first time instead of 3 individual cucumbers wrapped in plastic and then wrapped again altogether in plastic, there was no plastic at all! Instead, they were held together by a simple biodegradable band. Why did they do this? Not because the store thought it was a good idea, but because government has warned that the days of single use-plastics are over. Government action — which comes from public pressure — makes a difference. Be part of the pressure put on government and industries.

Think smaller: I want to challenge you to do something in nature and connect with nature, be aware of it and give thanks to God for it. Feel God's presence in that place. When we fall in love with a place, with a river, with a garden, with the forest, then we naturally want to care for it and do something about it. So, prayerfully connect to a part of nature. For some of you that might mean connecting through your window. Lily Jean isn't able to get out as much as she would like, but she often comments on some beautiful part of nature that she sees from her window. You don't have to go on a 10K hike to have this experience — though if you can, take a hike — the fall is your season! As you do so, pray. Pray for that place and for how you are called to care for it. Pray for God to heal and lead us to restore

creation. And as you do this, you'll find your soul restored. When our soul is refreshed and filled then God's life flows through us. Healing flows through us. Jesus said: 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'
John 7:38

Let's go back to the garden, back to the One who planted the garden. The first image of God is as Creator and Gardener. Interesting. Maybe Mary wasn't mistaken on that first Easter morning when she saw Jesus risen from the dead and thought he was the gardener. Jesus is the author of life — not just his own but life for all.

In the Creation story a river is mentioned. It's a little bit odd because the mention of the river that becomes 4 rivers is just randomly stuck in the middle of the story. Indeed, commentators think it was added in later and it's such an odd addition that commentators hardly make reference to it. It's not part of the main story that people think about but I couldn't help but notice it. Maybe I'm on a river kick as last Sunday I highlighted for you the river that flows through Zion in Psalm 46. In the middle of the chaos a river brings peace and promise.

In the Creation story, do you notice that the river that starts in Eden goes beyond the garden? The river in the garden is like a reverse watershed. It comes from the source and flows into the garden and then flows out and splits into big rivers and then into smaller rivers and creeks, all coming from the source. *Even before the break of relationship with God and with the rest of creation, the river flowed out and was a gift to the whole world.* Since the break in the relationship that river continues to flow and bring life and water the earth. Even if we break faith, God is always faithful. I pray that you have experienced the source of life in the Creator who loves you.

Do you remember the we used to sing with the children at church "Like a Rock?"

Like a Rock, like a Rock God is under our feet.

Like the starry night Sky God is over our head.

Like the sun on the horizon God is ever before.

Like a river runs to ocean our home is in God evermore.

God is always giving life to you and to me and to this hurting world God created. May we connect to God's watershed of life and so be transformed to bring more of God's life to the world.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

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