

EARTH

Genesis 1: 6-10

KAIROS

The Voice of Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary Students

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AUSTIN PRESBYTERIAN
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

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Inside: poetry, reflections,
ecology, and more!

Editor

Sheth LaRue, Middler MDiv.

Sheth was born at a young age and has been introverted and under-confident for most of his life (except for a brief period from August 18 to August 23, 1997). Avid fan of pie and Led Zeppelin. The most famous person he ever met is a tie between Barry Lopez and Rich Karlis, neither of which are very famous. He wants humanity to be nicer, kinder, and more loving. And to laugh more. Fears spiders.



Designer

Reba Balint, Junior MDiv.

Combining her passions of Fine Arts and Religion, Reba is very excited to be the new designer for Kairos. She loves denim jackets and music she wasn't yet alive to originally listen to. She believes in sharing cheerfulness whenever possible. Has deep respect/fears for bees.



Kairos would like to thank all of you for reading, contributing, and offering kind words these past few months as we've been publishing. It is an honor to be able to showcase your work!

We're currently seeking submissions for the next edition – would you be willing to contribute a poem, essay, drawing, or photo that you'd like to share with your friends at seminary?

Questions and contributions should be sent to Sheth at...
sheth.larue@student.austinseminary.edu

The deadline for submissions is the first of the month.

תּוֹרַת מִדְּסֵט מֵעֶסֶס

the best part happens in the middle
that's what Rabbi told me

what's the best part when you're
in the middle
of an argument?

in the middle
where we feel lost
this is where we long for hope

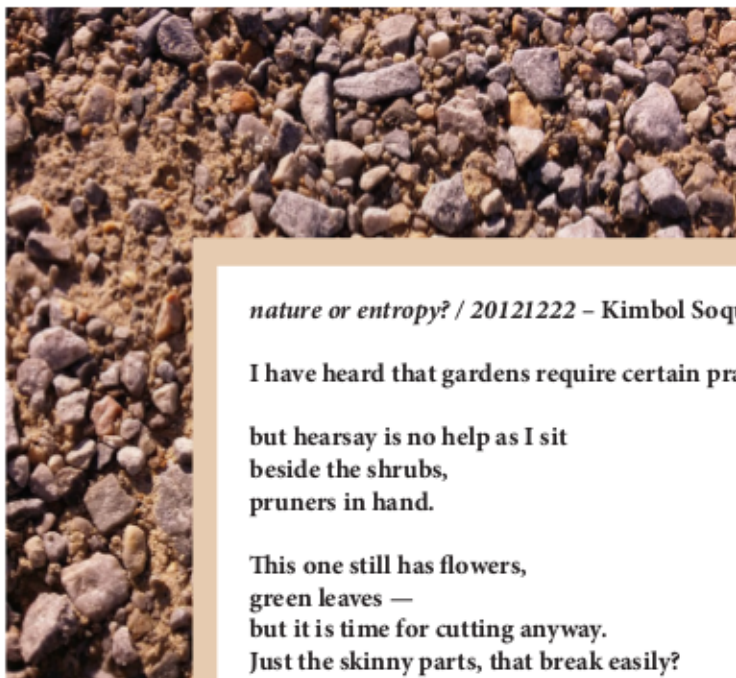
in the middle of the night
when you cannot sleep
because of anxiety

in the middle of the night
when you confess love and joy
to those around you

being called upon in the middle
of the sea
terrified in the middle
of the storm

in the middle is
where we grow
this is where we find ourselves

the best part happens in the middle
that's what Rabbi told me



nature or entropy? / 20121222 – Kimbol Soques, Junior MDiv.

I have heard that gardens require certain practices,
but hearsay is no help as I sit
beside the shrubs,
pruners in hand.

This one still has flowers,
green leaves —
but it is time for cutting anyway.
Just the skinny parts, that break easily?
All of it, to a third of current bushiness?
Is scraggly a “natural shape”?

This next looks dead.
But — nope! — the cuts show
green below grey. Bad gardener.

Still, all I see is:
Brittle. Grey. Sparse. Leaves.

Pruning is a metaphor
Without telling where to cut.



Why do I wake early
with this piercing?

Dancing sunlight
and birdsong
on an
April
morning.
A bonanza
of greenery,
and a trickle of water
are the remnants
of the recent torrents
that tumble
through the shaded
trees nearby.
A day of plain joy
in a bustling year.

Just the other day
my daughter Leah
waved back to someone
with her tiny and strong left hand,
and her passionate eyes,
all five fingers
in concert
slowly and gently
gripping the air
like a Spring breeze.
This morning she clucks,
and laughs,
and laughs more boldly,
and still is laughing.

Yet it seems a hidden chord
lingers in the shadows,
a perennial phantom
who chooses to visit
when somehow this Son's
yearly course
hits just
the right angle,
sending April light
refracting off
a spider's thread
otherwise invisibly suspended
across the understory of
that tumbling trickle.

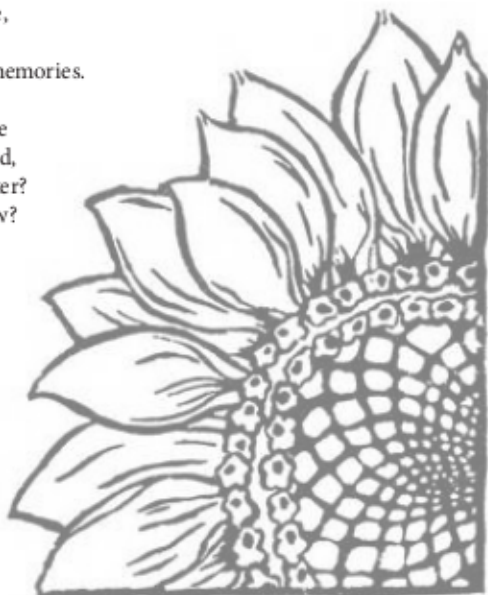
Was it there all Winter,
all Fall,
all Summer,
in the shadows
unnoticed?

For an instant
the light jumps
the windy branches
and I see it there dancing,
sparkling,
in the spring wind
(רִיחַ?)
suspended across the shaded stream
above the fratboy goldfish
dispatched in December.

Does a silver cobweb see?
I swear it looks back at me.

Blown taut by this fool's breeze,
(הֶקְדָּל?)
it becomes for an instant
visible, rigid and translucent.
And like the tip of a spear
entering tender flesh,
sharp, painful,
it strikes me deftly
in its April brilliance,
an artesian piercing
a heart's aquifer of memories.

Did I fail to keep safe
that one who laughed,
with so much laughter?
and where is she now?



Tending to the Whole – Andy Gerhart, Senior MDiv.

I'm writing on behalf of the Green Seminary Initiative, and in a publication called *Kairos*. Most of you have taken Greek; I have not. But I understand that this ancient Greek word, *καιρός*, is most accurately translated as... "green?" Ok, so maybe my Greek isn't great.

But, really, when you think about it, isn't it time?

I'm writing at a moment where a cholera outbreak (1700 cases since March 27th) is beginning in one of the most historically impoverished parts of our planet: the countries of Mozambique, Malawi, and Zimbabwe in southeast Africa. This outbreak travels on the wake of Cyclone Idai, which has directly killed 1074 people directly, and has left over 600,000 people displaced. For comparison, Hurricane Harvey, our most recent nearby analogue of climate destruction, killed 68 people directly, and displaced about 30,000.

Yet strangely, despite the enormous magnitude of this devastation, hardly anyone is talking about Idai here in the US media, or around Austin. Is it because Mozambique is on the other side of the planet, and we just can't imagine the scale of our mother Earth? When will we tend to the whole?

The first cholera fatality occurred in Beira, Mozambique last week, a seaside port in the north of the country. I remember walking through Beira in January of 1997. It was shortly after foreigners could visit Mozambique on tourist visas after decades of civil war, and I was living in South Africa that year teaching high school. I wanted to go up to the northern part of the country to see the coral reefs, so I went to Beira from Zimbabwe, a short trip by bus. However, immediately I realized I would get nowhere near those reefs by land: I'd just taken the only paved road I would see.

I'd never seen a war-torn country before: there were large holes in concrete walls from landmines; and instead of people selling food or crafts on blankets by the side of the road, the only thing I saw people selling were coals by the coal, and used underwear.

Today Beira is reporting 200 new cases of cholera a day. And at least 600,000 displaced. All from a cyclone that was extraordinarily intense (940 mbar), in an era where the rate that cyclones intensify has only increased inexplicably fast.[1]

There is a word for this: *kairos*. Perhaps you just read "chaos." But no, the word is still "*kairos*."

I'm writing a few days after the Security and Exchange Commission has ruled that Exxon is not required to allow its shareholders to vote on establishing greenhouse gas emissions targets that are in accordance with the Paris accord. Wow, our economic system has figured out a way to disenfranchise even its shareholders!

Folks, it is time. It is kairos.

See, the thing I really love about *καιρός* is that unlike *chronos*, *κρόνος*, it is expansive. *Chronos* allows us to imagine a distant future or past that need not change us, that is off in some unknown time and place. *Kairos*, rather, signifies an opportune time for action, a time that is near, so near that it is a part of our now. Somehow, *Kairos* absorbs both the future and the past into one eternal now. *Kairos* transforms us.

Christianity calls us to be stewards of wholeness. And as John Bell reminded us recently, “For God so loved the world” is about the redemption of not just *homo sapiens*, but all creation. But how do we tend to the whole?

I found it ironic to learn that *Idai*, the name of the cyclone, is the Shona word for “love”. I gave my senior sermon this year on love, and its many manifestations, its many misunderstandings, its too-often banal romantic narrowing in our consumerist, capitalist, climate-changed culture. Shakespeare’s play *Romeo and Juliet*, a good portrayal of romance penned just before either the Dutch East or Dutch West India Companies had begun establishing what we now know of global capitalism, has an oft-quoted line: “What’s in a name?”

Well, it turns out, a lot. In my sermon I preached on Jacob’s wrestling with the angel as a love story in which Jacob sees the angel face to face, and is given a blessing, his name: *Israel*, simultaneous with receiving a wound, his dislocated hip.

I then paired Jacob’s wrestling and blessing with 1 Corinthians 13:12, “For now we see in a mirror dimly...”

How do we live our local lives with our evolved psychological myopias in a changing climate? How will we combine them with a sensitivity and vision for all of creation?

I think this question is no different than “how do we love?”

It is a bitter irony that Cyclone *Idai* was named “love.”

But can we love?

Just maybe *kairos* does somehow translate to both “green” and “love.”

Or maybe I’d best take Greek someday.

[1] Bhatia, Kieran T., Gabriel A. Vecchi, et al., “Recent Increases in Tropical Cyclone Intensification Rates” *Nature Communications*, February 7, 2019. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-019-08471-z.pdf>

Want to enjoy the earth? Want to rock out to creation? Want to feel the rage from the poor treatment of the earth? Here's a small list of some songs about the earth, creation, and how we need to be better stewards.

- "The Blue Green Hills of Earth" - Kim Oler
- "All Things Bright and Beautiful" - Cecil Frances Alexander
- "Pretty Planet" - Tom Chapin
- "River" - Bill Staines
- "Where Do The Children Play" - Yusuf Islam
- "[Nothing But] Flowers" - The Talking Heads
- "Chapter of the Forest" - Trevor Hall
- "Mercy Mercy Me [the Ecology]" - Marvin Gaye
- "Children Play with Earth" - Arrested Development
- "Blackened" - Metallica
- "Mother Earth" - Neil Young
- "New World Water" - Mos Def
- "Our Trees" - Tegan and Sara
- "This Land is Your Land" - Woody Guthrie
- "The Trees" - Rush
- "Song for a Dying Planet" - Joe Walsh
- "Harakiri" - Serj Tankian
- "Amazon" - John Denver
- "It Takes Time to Build" - Beastie Boys
- "Many and Great, O God" - Joseph Renville
- "Morning Has Broken" - Eleanor Farjeon
- "For the Beauty of the Earth" - Folliott Stanford Pierpoint
- "We Plough the Fields and Scatter" - Matthias Claudius
- "Whose Garden Was This" - Tom Paxton
- "Touch the Earth Lightly" - Shirley Erena Murray

Heaven and Earth - Jonathan Freeman, Junior MDiv.

If heaven is real,
Then it's a cold wind blowing
On a less cold day.

If heaven is valuable,
Then it's a flower's shifting shadow
When the light is at its best.

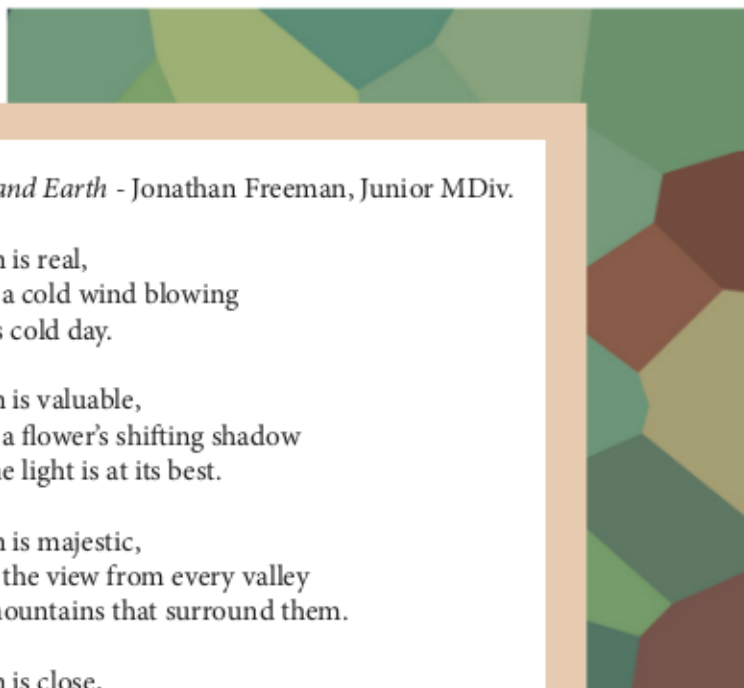
If heaven is majestic,
Then it's the view from every valley
Of the mountains that surround them.

If heaven is close,
Then it's the wet heavy air of a marsh
Seeping into us as we seep into it.

If heaven is triumphant,
Then it's the reflection of a sunset over water
And not the sun itself,

Because if heaven is God's
Then it's more than what we think it is.

But if hell is anything,
Then it's what we make of heaven.



Ecologically Informed Theological Education - Heather Zdancewicz, Vice President for Finance and Administration

I recently participated in the Southwest Symposium on Ecologically Informed Theological Education at Brite Divinity School. This conference is held about every year at a different geographical location in order to bring together faculty/staff/students primarily from seminaries to engage in topics of ecology and theology. There were 17 leaders who were invited to speak on topics that ranged from "Teaching About Animals and Religion" to "Ecological Soul Care". Many attendees were seminary professors, but there were also community organizers, foundation leaders, and environmental organization leaders. APTS's own John Everett and I led a discussion about the initiatives that this seminary has undertaken to use sustainable practices in our facilities.

You may know some, all, or none of the initiatives that we have undertaken in the past year. New bottle filling stations were installed in McCord, McMillan, and Trull (while there is also one in McCoy). Waterless urinals were installed in McMillan saving the seminary 40,000 gallons of water a year. The new waste management bin in Stotts Hall to help better define what goes to the landfill, recycle center, and compost facility. These are just some of the stories we are able to tell.

I am often amazed by the many ways seminaries are telling the story of the environment and ecology. We had plenty of time to collaborate and learn how each of us is taking on issues of justice for creation in our various roles.

When I initially read the line-up of speakers and the titles of their presentations, I have to be honest, I was not looking forward to "Farmed Animals, A Matter of Faith." I had visions of talking about the blessing of the animals liturgy. If I had read beyond the title to the parenthetical phrase "Developing Food Policies and Farmer Relationships to Benefit Everyone", I probably would have been less apprehensive. Sarah King of Creature Kind (www.becreaturekind.org) and Sarah Macias, an Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary alumnus kept my full attention. Drawing much on the theological writings of Dr. Ellen Davis from Duke Divinity School, they laid out three ways to work on a better ecological relationship with farm animals, especially those who end up on our dinner plates. They suggest: 1 - create and articulate a food policy at your organization and should be specific and include animals; 2 - include animals in community conversations; 3 - choose less and better animal products. The theology was good - being given dominion over all living things is to care and look after, rather than subdue and plunder.

In what way will your future ministry be formed with ecology in mind? What resources do you need to be effective in responding to the environmental crisis? These and so many other questions are actively being discussed by theologians around the world. Greenfaith.org, Interfaithsustain.com, and interfaithpowerandlight.org are all places to start looking for collaborative help in addressing religion and sustainability. And while you're here at APTS, continue to look for information about the Green Seminaries Initiative and our response to ecology.

the back page - Sheth LaRue, Middler MDiv.

Earth Day was dreamed up in the 1960's and came to fruition in 1970 but has had seemingly minimal success over the years. A statesman may make a speech or pose for a photo, a song may be written about change, and there may be some rally or festival, but as big and important as the earth is, it's day isn't.

39.721189, -105.105975 If you enter these coordinates into Google Maps it will take you to a tree that I helped plant in 1990. While Earth Day itself landed on a Sunday that year, my fourth grade class participated on Friday afternoon with the planting of three trees on the school's grounds. Our teachers told us it was a big deal – we were planting trees, planning for the future, and making a difference. It was such a big deal that The Denver Post sent a reporter to cover the momentous occasion.

Teachers have such high aspirations for their students. Honestly, we just were excited to be outside on a sunny day and hoped to get our picture in the newspaper. While my picture never made it, my statement to the reporter was published (and attributed to Seth Larue) and a copy resides in a boxed-up scrapbook.

I don't understand why Earth Day hasn't moved from the fringes and into the mainstream. It seems to me that the Earth – the only place we have to live – would be kind of a big priority for us all. We only have one (and we're not heading to Mars anytime soon) so it's only logical that we should do our best to take care of what we have. But we don't.

Perhaps part of our problem lies in the fact that we can't think long-term. It's difficult for many of us to imagine what we'll be doing five years from now; trying to imagine what our great-great grandchildren will be doing in fifty years is nearly impossible. For us to try and think long-term about the earth is incomprehensible.

Perhaps part of our problem lies in the fact that we just don't think about the earth. Sure, it gives us water, food, and oxygen, but we don't think about those things either - we're disconnected. We turn a faucet handle and we have clean water. We go to HEB and have all the food we could ever desire. We sit in our rooms with air purifiers and conditioners in total comfort. We don't think about where these things come from (and most of the time we don't care where they come from), as long as we have them at hand.

Perhaps part of our problem lies in the fact that it's overwhelming. When we look at the facts about climate change and the ways governments are handling it, when we witness the changes within one generation and realize that no one is doing anything helpful, we toss up our hands in frustration. Why should we recycle that aluminum can or compost that napkin when my neighbor is dumping his used motor oil in the alley behind his house? If everyone else isn't going to participate, why should I?

It's my hope the church will understand that the care of the earth isn't just an ecological issue – it's a spiritual issue. God has given us this gift to care for, to live in, to enjoy, and with this gifting we are to treat it with attention and respect. We must do all we can to be good stewards in our homes, in our congregations, and in our communities. Let's work with our denominations, families, and churches to do all we can to make every day Earth Day.

Thanks to all who attended
Queer Prom and making it
an amazing event!

See you at the next one!



2019 Calendar

APRIL 18	Maundy Thursday Service	Shelton Chapel, 11:10 AM
APRIL 19	Good Friday Service	Shelton Chapel, 11:10 AM
APRIL 20	The Paschal Vigil & Potluck	Location TBD, 8:30 PM
APRIL 22 - 25	Registration for Fall and Jan. Term	
APRIL 23	QEP Community Storytelling	Stotts, 6:00 PM
APRIL 24	SPM Orientation I	
APRIL 26	Senior Sermon, Angela Williams	Location TBD, 11:30 AM
APRIL 29	Senior Sermon, Jennifer Hallberg	Location TBD, 11:30 AM
APRIL 30	Chapel Service, Dr. Gregory Cuellar Preaching	Shelton Chapel, 11:10 AM
MAY 2 - 4	MAYM Intensive Weekend	
MAY 3	Senior Sermon, Axolile Qina	Location TBD, 11:30 AM
MAY 6	Senior Sermon, Devon Reynolds	Location TBD, 11:30 AM
MAY 7	Chapel Service, Dr. David White preaching	Shelton Chapel, 11:10 AM
MAY 10	Senior Sermon, Diana Small	Location TBD, 11:30 AM