

## **Justice Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) 2015 Reflections** **Joyce Wilding, JPIC Animator**

These twelve monthly reflections are adapted from Nancy Roth's\* book, *Grounded In Love: Ecology, Faith, and Action*. I hope these monthly readings will expand your attention to Justice Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC). Please discern how you can use these readings and reflections each week of each month. Seek ways to use these in your daily office and with your fellowship and/or parish groups. Please contact Joyce Wilding ([joycewilding@comcast.net](mailto:joycewilding@comcast.net) – 615-952-5812) if you would like suggestions for using these with groups.

\* Nancy Roth is a musician, writer, dancer, and a priest in the Episcopal Church. She has written powerfully and eloquently about the intersection of prayer and the world of gardening, music, and everyday living. In *Grounded in Love* Roth summons us to a profound transformation, but one rooted in the ordinary which makes it both accessible and revolutionary. Like the writer of Deuteronomy, Rev. Roth calls us to life and helps us know how to make that choice daily in ways simple, profound, and reverent.

As you read these reflections, pray that these readings and your prayers will bear fruit - decisions to undertake some action for JPIC. Ponder the meaning of your experience in terms of “theology of creation.” Roth writes that from this theology flows the idea of an ethical code, dynamic actions and sources of hope.

### **JANUARY**

I pray that...God may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through the Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. (Ephesians 3;16-17)

How do we "ground in love" our relationship to the earth which is our home? It begins with tending the "inner being" of which the writer of the Epistle to the Ephesians speaks. This requires taking time to truly see, whether we are looking at an infant cradled in our arms, the starry night sky, a bright snow-scape, or iridescent body of a beetle. As we lose ourselves in such contemplation, we find ourselves as well, for we are coming home - both to our childhood as creatures of earth, and to our Origin: the Creator of that which we gaze upon.

#### Ponder and Pray

Take a few moments to relax and notice your breathing. Then visualize one or more of the young people you love. Picture them at the present time, full of life and promise. “Watch” them at play, and as they sleep.

Now see them in your mind’s eye as they grow into adulthood. What kind of a world do you hope

for them? Take some time to picture that world. “Choose life.”

What kind of a world might they live in if the planet becomes less habitable? “Entertain the possibility of death.” How does this possibility make you feel?

Now picture yourself converting the resulting discomfort into action, fueled by your desire to contribute to the future well-being of these children you love. Hold these children before God, as you inhale and exhale. As you inhale, welcome God’s gift of life. As you exhale, picture yourself breathing forth God’s healing upon the world these children will inherit from you.

## **FEBRUARY**

Haunted Forever by the Eternal Mind

I am the one whose praise echoes on high.

I adorn all the earth.

I am the breeze that nurtures all things green.

I encourage blossoms to flourish with ripening fruits.

I am led by the spirit to feed the purest streams.

I am the rain coming from the dew

that causes the grasses to laugh with the joy of life.

I am the yearning for good.

-Hildegard of Bingen

### Ponder and Pray

Find a quiet, comfortable place in which to spend some time praying Psalm 104. Read each verse of the psalm slowly. Pause and close your eyes after each verse. Try to picture the image that you have just read, as if you were actually seeing it. “See” God wrapped with light as with a cloak, the mountain goats on the high hills, the lions roaring after their prey, the Leviathan “made for the sport of it.” Note: you can find Psalm 104 illustrated with nature photographs from around the world on TSSF website.

*O God, how excellent is your greatness;  
you are clothed with majesty and splendor.*

*You wrap yourself with light as with a cloak;  
you spread out the heavens like a curtain.  
You lay the beams of your chambers in the waters above;  
you make the clouds your chariot;  
you ride on the wings of the wind.  
You make the winds your messengers  
and flames of fire your servants.*

*You have set the earth upon its foundations,  
so that it never shall move at any time.  
You covered it with the Deep as with a mantle;  
the waters stood higher than the mountains.  
At your rebuke they fled;  
at the voice of your thunder they hastened away.  
They went up into the hills and down to the valleys beneath,  
to the places you had appointed for them.  
You set the limits that they should not pass;  
they shall not again cover the earth.  
You sent the springs into the valleys;  
they flow between the mountains.  
All the beasts of the field drink their fill from them,  
and the wild asses quench their thirst.  
Beside them the birds of the air make their nests*

*and sing among the branches.  
You water the mountains from your dwelling on high;  
the earth is fully satisfied by the fruit of your works.  
You make the grass grow for flocks and herds  
and plants to serve all people;  
That they may bring forth food from the earth,  
and wine to gladden our hearts.  
Oil to make a cheerful countenance,  
and bread to strengthen the heart.  
The trees of the Holy One are full of sap,  
the cedars of Lebanon which God planted,  
In which the birds build their nests,  
and in whose tops the storks make their dwellings.  
The high hills are a refuge for the mountain goats,  
and the stony cliffs for the rock badgers.  
You appointed the moon to mark the seasons,  
and the sun knows the time of its setting.  
You make darkness that it may be night,  
in which all the beasts of the forest prowl.  
The lions roar after their prey  
and seek their food from God.  
The sun rises, and they slip away*

*and lay themselves down in their dens.  
We go forth to our work  
and to our labor until the evening.  
O Holy One, how manifold are your works;  
in wisdom you have made them all;*

*the earth is full of your creatures.  
 Yonder is the great and wide sea  
 with its living things too many to number,  
 creatures both small and great.  
 There move the ships,  
 and there is that Leviathan,  
 which you have made for the sport of it.  
 All of them look to you  
 to give them their food in due season.  
 You give it to them; they gather it;  
 you open your hand, and they are filled with good things.  
 You hide your face, and they are terrified;  
 you take away their breath,  
 and they die and return to their dust.  
 You send forth your Spirit, and they are created  
 and so you renew the face of the earth.  
 May the glory of God endure forever.*

*May the Holy One rejoice in all creation.  
 God looks at the earth and it trembles;  
 God touches the mountains and they smoke.  
 I will sing to God as long as I live;  
 I will praise my God while I have my being.*

If you have time, go outdoors – or, if the weather does not cooperate, look out your window to the world outside. (Even in a city, there is the sky. And you can include the people you see, for we are also a part of the natural world: “We go forth to our work and to our labor until the evening”!) Either silently or aloud, say the Psalm in your own way, naming what you see. For example, “O Holy One, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. There is the soft-falling snow, creating a blanket for the garden. Yonder is the small grey squirrel, leaping from branch to branch of the oak. There is the faithful mail deliverer, making his daily visit to our house in every kind of weather.....”

## **MARCH**

*Answer me when I call, O God, defender of my cause;  
 you set me free when I am hard pressed;  
 have mercy on me and hear my prayer.*

*Many are saying,  
 "Oh, that we might see better times!"*

*Lift up the light of your countenance upon us, O God.* - Psalm 4:1,6 The Saint Helena Psalter

A relationship grounded in love has capacity to give us pain. Caring and compassion cause us to become vulnerable: hence both love's blessing and love's danger. When we love God's creation, we cannot help but mourn nature's losses. When we recognize that we are implicated merely because we live in a society that has too long ignored the well-being of the natural world, we can become burdened with guilt. But God calls us to cast off the burden of guilt and to move forward. We take our sorrow and our repentance before God, ask forgiveness and seek to lead a new life. We do this both as individuals and communities. And, indeed, like good compost, our sorrows and repentance can be transformed into new life for ourselves and for the world in which we live.

### Ponder and Pray

Do you have any examples from your life in which discomfort has been a symptom of God's calling you to something new?

Is your personal difficulty or concern mirrored in our society - for example: global warming and world poverty?

## **APRIL**

The wisdom of the spiritual tradition guides us to seek what is called "amendment of life" after a prayer of contrition. Rather than wallowing in guilt, we are advised to accept the invitation to change. Pray the following prayer now, on behalf of yourself and of all humanity.

*O Holy God,  
 May we love and respect all your creation,  
 all the earth and every grain of sand in it.  
 May we love every leaf,  
 every ray of your light.  
 May we love the animals:  
 you have given them the rudiments of thought and joy untroubled.  
 Let us not trouble them;  
 let us not harass them,  
 let us not deprive them of their happiness,  
 let us not work against your intentions.  
 For we acknowledge that to withhold any measure of love from  
 anything in the universe  
 is to withhold that same measure from you. - Fyodor Dostoyevsky*

### Ponder and Pray

It is difficult to deal with the pain of environmental loss. We all contribute to its causes, simply by

living in an affluent society in the 21st century. Sit quietly with your feelings. Then, on behalf of humanity as a whole, and with a sense of your unwitting involvement in nature's predicament, offer to God this prayer of contrition

*We have forgotten who we are.*

*We have alienated ourselves from the unfolding of the cosmos  
We have become estranged from the movements of the earth  
We have turned our backs on the cycles of life.*

*We have forgotten who we are*

*We have sought only our own security  
We have exploited simply for our own ends  
We have distorted our knowledge  
We have abused our power*

*We have forgotten who we are*

*Now the land is barren  
And the waters are poisoned  
And the air is polluted*

*We have forgotten who we are*

*Now the forests are dying  
And the creatures are disappearing  
And humans are despairing*

*We have forgotten who we are*

*We ask forgiveness  
We ask for the gift of remembering  
We ask for the strength to change.*

*We have forgotten who we are -* U. N. Environmental Sabbath Program

## **MAY**

Let love be genuine, hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good, love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another, do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do no claim to be wiser than you are. Do no repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. - Romans 12:9-18

### Ponder and Pray

Nurturing the new life we seek requires new knowledge, because we face issues unheard of in times when our moral code was first recorded. People of many faith traditions give us insights about how traditional ethics taught in churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples can be expanded to include our relationship to nature. All have one goal: to discover how love of God and neighbor can be embodied in ordinary life in this world. Thus, our moral decisions themselves -- whether they concern how we vote, what we buy, how we treat one another, or what our attitude is toward a forest, a river, or an ocean -- are grounded in love.

The wolf shall live with the lamb,  
 the leopard shall lie down with the kid,  
 the calf and the lion and the fatling together,  
 and a little child shall lead them.  
 The cow and the bear shall graze,  
 their young shall lie down together;  
 and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.  
 The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,  
 and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.  
 They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain;  
 for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord  
 as the waters cover the sea. - Isaiah 11:6-9

Read the Isaiah passage again, and sit quietly for a few minutes with the sense of shalom that it conveys. Then pray the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi:

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.  
 Where there is hatred, let us sow love;  
 where there is injury, pardon;  
 where there is discord, union;  
 where there is doubt, faith;  
 where there is sadness, joy.  
 Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;  
 to be understood as to understand;  
 to be loved as to love.  
 For it is in giving that we receive;  
 it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
 and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

## JUNE

You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor. - Exodus 20:17

The word "covet" is not used lightly here, the way we might say to a friend, "I covet that dress," for the word "house" didn't mean merely your nomadic neighbor's tent, but everything he owned, from wives to slaves to livestock. Coveting meant that you hoped to dispossess your neighbor. But you hadn't necessarily done it yet; you had just thought about it. Of all the commandments, this is the most inward, directed to the heart.

Coveting does not make our hearts comfortable; it fills them with dissatisfaction. The propaganda of marketers is expensive; an obscene amount of money is spent on generating a demand for products, as compared to the amount spent on health care and education. Advertising can be a subtle form of brainwashing, making us want things that it may never have occurred to us to desire. As our ecological footprint grows larger through this accumulation of possessions, our hearts grow smaller, for we inevitably discover that the material things we thought would satisfy us fail to do so.

### Ponder and Pray

The great antidote to covetousness is gratitude. One can use a beloved traditional prayer from the 17th century, such as "The General Thanksgiving":

Almighty God, Father of all mercies,  
 we your unworthy servants give you humble thanks  
 for all your goodness and loving-kindness  
 to us and to all whom you have made.  
 We bless you for our creation, preservation,  
 and all the blessings of this life;  
 but above all for your immeasurable love  
 in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ;  
 for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.  
 And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies,  
 that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise,  
 not only with our lips, but in our lives,  
 by giving up ourselves to your service,  
 and by walking before you  
 in holiness and righteousness all our days;  
 through Jesus Christ our lord,  
 to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit,  
 be honor and glory throughout all ages. Amen

## JULY

What good is it my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. -James 1:14-17.

How do we practice what we preach? How do we live what we believe? Learning about ecological design helps us find common threads of sustainable actions. Promoting, supporting food sheds and eating local, healthy, affordable food can become sacramental expressions of our inner belief.

### Blessing Our Food:

As bread that was scattered on the hillside,  
was gathered together and made one,  
so too, we, your people,  
scattered throughout the world,  
are gathered around your table  
and become one.

As grapes grown in the field  
are gathered together and pressed into wine,  
so too are we drawn together  
and pressed by our times to share a common lot  
and are transformed into your life-blood  
for all.

-Adapted from The Didache, ca. 110

“O God, bless this food to our use, and us to your love and service, and make us ever mindful of the needs of others. Amen.” These are loaded words. In the process of expressing gratitude to the ultimate Source of all our nourishment, we are asking God also to make us uncomfortable. We’re often told that our food choices affect our health. This prayer reminds us that our eating habits also affect the health of the world around us. Meals have so long been understood as more than simply the act of eating that it is relatively easy to make that connection.

The Christian Eucharist brings us the presence of “Christ our Passover” as we remember the supper Jesus shared with his disciples on the night before he was handed over to suffering and death. We gather with families or friends for holiday meals that have meaning far beyond the mere food on the table. Food is also something over which most of us have some control. We can choose to eat responsibly, and we can also be grateful that we are in a position to do so, unlike some people across the world.

### Ponder and Pray

Eat a meal mindfully, saying first this portion of a prayer similar to the one recited by the priest during the Eucharist:

“Blessed are you, God of all Creation; through your goodness we have this bread which earth has given and human hands have made...it will become for us the bread of life.”

Focus on every bite you take, chewing it slowly and tasting it attentively. Everything in the meal is given to you by the earth. Most of it has also come to you through the labor of other human beings, who have raised, harvested, transported, and often even prepared what you are eating. It becomes the bread of life, because, in essence, it becomes your own body: it provides your energy, builds your bones and muscles, and enhances your immune system. Meals provide the closest daily connection some people have with the earth, and, for all of us, meals can be times of blessing, gratitude, and pleasure.

### AUGUST

*Therefore we praise you, joining our voices with Angels and Archangels and with all the company of heaven, who for ever sing this hymn to proclaim the glory of your Name:*

*Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,  
heaven and earth are full of your glory.*

The Holy Eucharist, Rite Two, *The Book of Common Prayer*

We are not on this journey alone there are many voices that, support us. We have allies not only in the Biblical tradition, but in generations of saints, monastics, and theologians who have expressed a deep connection with nature in their own time. We also are joined by those who, in our own era, are calling humanity to a new paradigm and to a manner of life that expresses this vision.

For timely guidance about environmental justice, we can look to the prophets:

*Ah, you who join house to house, who add field to field until there is room for no one but you, and you are left to live alone in the midst of the land! (Is.5:8) The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers; the heavens languish together with the earth. The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants.... (Is. 24: 4-5) Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, but you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pasture?*

We are not alone. We are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses like the ones I have named, and also by innumerable others. One of the best ways we can feed our souls and gather courage at the same time is to get to know them.

### Ponder and Pray

The contemporary theologian Sally McFague is a companion worth getting to know. She takes an

old idea – that all creation is a revelation of God – and gives it new meaning in the light of our behavior toward the physical world:

*The world is our meeting place with God...as the body of God, it is wondrously, awesomely, divinely mysterious... McFague focuses on embodiment, inviting us to do something that Christians have seldom done: think about God and bodies.*

*What would it mean, for instance, to share the basic necessities of survival with other bodies? To see Jesus of Nazareth as paradigmatic of God's love for bodies? To interpret creation as all the myriad forms of matter bodied forth from God and empowered with the breath of life, the spirit of God? To consider ourselves as inspirited bodies profoundly interrelated with all other such bodies and yet having the special distinction of shared responsibility with God for the well-being of our planet? Such a focus causes us to see differently, to see dimensions of the relation of God and the world that we have not seen before.*

Take some time to notice your own “embodiment” – your weight (your *adamah*) and your breath (the gift of God's *ruach*). Become aware of God's presence with you, then read the passage above again, very slowly, taking as much time as you wish in between sentences to let the words reverberate in your spirit. Take at least ten minutes with this meditation. Jot down some thoughts or phrases that have come to you as a result.

## SEPTEMBER

*O joy! That in our embers  
Is something that doth live,  
That nature yet remembers  
What was so fugitive!*

*The thought of our past years in me doth breed  
Perpetual benediction: not indeed  
For that which is most worthy to be blest –  
Delight and liberty, the simple creed  
Of Childhood, whether busy or at rest,  
With new-fledged hope still fluttering in his breast. - William Wordsworth*

The creation stories in Genesis give us insight into the understandings of their inventors. In the Hebrew story, the greater part of the first six “days” of creation was given to preparing the environment in which humanity was to live and multiply. Although the descendants of the first “earthlings” are eventually warned not to fall prey to the seduction of worshipping as gods the various aspects of nature, the Hebrew prayer book – the Psalter – always takes for granted that the heavens declare God's glory and that the firmament proclaims God's handiwork:

*Praise God, sun and moon; sing praise, all you shining stars....  
Praise God from the earth, you sea-monsters and all deeps;  
Fire and hail, snow and fog, tempestuous wind, doing God's will;  
Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars;*

*Wild beasts and all cattle, creeping things and winged birds....  
Let them praise your Name, O God, for your Name only is exalted;  
your splendor is over earth and heaven.*

### Ponder and Pray

Do you have a young child, grandchild, or neighbor? Invite them to go for a “nature walk,” which could be as simple as an exploration of their back yard. If you can go to a nature center, woods, or beach, better still. Have them close their eyes and ask “what do you hear?” Suggest things that they might look for, as if they were on a treasure hunt. Listen to what they say.

Ponder the words of Sofia Cavalletti, the great Italian pedagogue, disciple of Maria Montessori, and catechist: “Children will help the adult to recover certain aspects of the message [of God] and to keep awakened certain vital wellsprings within.”

## **OCTOBER**

*Prayer the Churches banquet, Angels age,  
God's breath in man returning to his birth,  
The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,  
The Christian plummet sounding heav'n and earth.<sup>i</sup>  
George Herbert*

### Ponder and Pray

Find a natural object, such as a leaf, a blossom, an acorn or a pine cone, and set aside at least fifteen or twenty minutes for this prayer that moves from verbal prayer, to reflective prayer, to contemplative prayer. Begin by thanking God in your own words for this time that you will be spending with the object, asking God to be with you as you use it as a focus for prayer.

Now, observe the object in your hand. Close your eyes and notice its weight and feel its shape and texture. Does it make any sound when you move it or brush against it? Does it have a fragrance? Open your eyes and look at it closely. Notice its color and its pattern.

Is there anything that strikes you about this object? Does anything about it remind you of your life? Does it speak to you of the Creator?

Use your imagination to reflect upon what it might be “saying” to you.

Next, quiet your mind, and simply gaze at it silently, focusing on breathing in God’s gift of life and your awareness of God’s love for you and for all Creation.

## NOVEMBER & DECEMBER

**Note: since we celebrate First Sunday of Advent in November as well as Thanksgiving it seems fitting to use the same reflections/readings in these two months. The simplicity theme of the "art as meditation" is a good way to start our church new year and end the calendar year.**

### Simple Gifts

'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free,  
'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,  
And when we find ourselves in the place that's right,  
We'll be in the valley of love and delight.

When true simplicity is gained,  
To bow and to bend we shan't be ashamed;  
To turn, turn will be our delight,  
Till by turning, turning, we come round right.

This song and dance summarize the theme of being grounded in love, and living a life that expresses that love. Its tune inevitably sets our feet to tapping, and its text is more relevant today than ever. So let us join in the dance, a reconstruction by dance historians that illuminates the words.

The Shakers believed that the physical motion of "scooping" up the air in front of you with palms upward was effective in gathering up the blessings showered upon us by God. Just as our book began with noting the wonderful beauty and complexity of the natural world, the dance begins with welcoming such blessings.

***'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free:* Take four steps forward, your hands held in front of you, hands cupped with palms upward, making two small scooping motions with each step.**

In order for that beauty to remain, however, we must shake off old habits and ideas that lead to destruction of our planet's well-being.

***'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be:* Take four steps backward, with two vigorous shakes of the hands with each step, palms downward and wrists relaxed and loose.**

These first motions can remind us to open our hands and hearts to the world around us – God's gifts of air, water, forest, meadow, other species, other human beings – rather than letting them trickle through our fingers unrecognized and unseen. Because of the inevitable flaws of human nature, however, there are some things we need to shake off in order to preserve these blessings in the health God intends for them.

***And when we find ourselves in the place that's right, We'll be in the valley of love and delight: Repeat the pattern.***

Shaker communities were dedicated to simple living, gratitude to God, and service to others; they produced beautiful crafts, architecture, and many practical inventions (such as the clothespin) along the way. Their communities were meant to be small "heavens on earth," valleys of love and delight.

***When true simplicity is gained: step sideways to the right on the right foot, opening the arms to the side with elbows bent and palms facing one another. Then bring the left foot beside the right, as you bring the hands together, with palms touching, and bow forward, in a posture reminiscent of the Asian greeting that conveys mutual respect between two people. To bow and to bend we shan't be ashamed: Repeat the movement to the left side.***

In our middle chapters, we discovered that, rather than clinging rigidly to out-of-date attitudes and knowledge, we need to discover a new flexibility. We need to welcome the new insights given us by scientists and theologians, and to respect the integrity and intrinsic worth of each part of creation.

The conclusion is an invitation to hope.

***To turn, turn, will be our delight, till by turning, turning we come round right: Turn in a small circle clockwise to the right, with the arms lifted up to the sides, the elbows bent, and the hands about shoulder height with palms facing one another. Then repeat the movements in a similar circle counterclockwise.***

### Ponder

When we are flexible enough to change our ways, we have a chance at halting the course toward environmental disaster. Can we change people's hearts and minds in time? Can we learn a new attitude toward the created universe? Can we ourselves change our wasteful and selfish ways? With God's grace, the answer is "Yes!"

This hope is a gift to us, if we cooperate with the power of our God who has a long history of bringing hope out of despair and life out of death. From the legend of new beginnings after the great flood in the tale of Noah and the ark, through the great exodus of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt into the promised land, right up to the death and resurrection of Jesus, this is God's pattern.

Thomas Merton: "For the world and time are the dance of the Lord in emptiness. The silence of the spheres is the music of a wedding feast. The more we persist in misunderstanding the phenomena of life, the more we analyze them out into strange finalities and complex purposes of our own, the more we involve ourselves in sadness, absurdity and despair. But it does not matter much, because no despair of ours can alter the reality of things, or stain the joy of the cosmic dance which is always there."

When we become discouraged because we hear yet another dismaying piece of news and the message of hope seems silent, we need to remember the cosmic dance that is always there. Rather than turn in upon ourselves in sadness, we need to step forward, with our hands cupped, ready to embrace all the blessings of life on earth. We need to reassure ourselves that even our smallest actions, done along with the actions of others – while they may seem a mere shake of the wrist -- can produce change when we do them together.

We need to be reminded that this great work is not a somber one, but a sacrament of joy that grows out of our love both for the Ground of our Being and for the ground of our *oikos*, our earthly home. We need to turn, turn, and turn again in this dance of love, knowing that our movement can expand into a great wave of compassion and action that encircles our planet Earth.

This is coming down “where we ought to be,” so let us all join in the dance.

#### Ponder and Pray

Dance “Simple Gifts” and teach it to another person, or to a whole group of people.