

Ecological Way of the Cross

Saturday, March 23, 2019 @ 11:30 a.m.
Elisha Mitchell Bird Sanctuary, Merrimon Avenue, Asheville

Followed by a Soup & Bread Lunch at St. Eugene's Catholic Church
72 Culvern Street, Asheville

Sponsored by:
Churches of the Christian Discipleship Center
Creation Care Alliance of Mountain True
Peace & Justice and Care of Creation Ministries, St. Eugene Parish

Background: The Way of the Cross can be traced to St. Francis of Assisi, who lived at a time when Christian pilgrims could not travel safely to the Holy Land. Francis brought the experience of the Holy Land home, as we bring the Way of the Cross home to the mountains of Western North Carolina. Reflecting on the sufferings of Jesus at each station, we raise the Cross of Christ to remind us that the Earth belongs to the Creator, and we ask for strength and unity to care for God's creation.

Meditative Walking: You are invited to walk mindfully and meditatively as we move from station to station in this peaceful place. Using our physical, mental and spiritual senses, may we deepen our awareness of these surroundings—air, water, birds—as well as the sounds of humans and machines in the distance.

As we walk, we can practice quiet acts of loving kindness, radiating well-wishing in every direction—to the animals, birds, plants and people—all of God's creation that we encounter. We may smile, inwardly or outwardly, and move quietly, being aware of our footsteps as we slow down and listen.

Opening Song: The Cross of Jesus

**Come O God, renew your people; We who long to see your face.
Strengthen hearts that have grown feeble; Fill our hearts with truth and grace.
Only You can win our freedom; Only You can bring us peace.
Only in the Cross of Jesus, Will the captives find release.**

**Deep within, create a new heart; Melt away the winter chill.
Help us now to make a new start; Help us now to know Your will.
Washed in waters of forgiveness, Cleansed in waters of new birth,
Lead us to the Cross of Jesus, Bringing life to all the Earth.**

(Remain in place for the First Station of the Cross, page 2).

1st Station: Jesus is Condemned to Death (The innocent suffer for the sins of others).

Meditation (Reader): We were present in the Creator's mind and heart, even before these ancient mountains and waters were formed. We are part of the Earth itself, yet we disregard these gifts that we think of as common, ordinary and plentiful. We throw away because there is always more. We burn, discard and waste until the scarcity is before our eyes. It is only then that we recognize God's resources as gifts, and condemn ourselves to shortages, fear and inequity.

We Pray (All): Loving God, in Your generosity You gave us abundance to meet our needs. You gave Jesus as a Gift of love. Forgive us our sins of abuse and neglect. Increase our awareness of the value of your gifts, lest we destroy all that gives us life. Amen.

(Walk to 2nd Station)

2nd Station: Jesus Takes Up the Cross (We take responsibility for our Earth).

Meditation: Just as Jesus embraced His burden, those who love Him lift up our solitary world. Sister Dorothy Stang, the "Martyr of the Amazon," a few days before she was killed by people who were set on destroying the rainforest and displacing peasant farmers, said, "I look at Jesus carrying the cross, and I ask for the strength to carry the suffering of the people."

We Pray: Precious Jesus, the good Earth is like You, suffering from our sins of thoughtlessness, wastefulness and taking the easy way out. We pray for the strength to take our sins upon ourselves and to become responsible dwellers on this beautiful Planet. Amen.

(Walk to 3rd Station).

3rd Station: Jesus Falls the First Time (The fallen state of the environment causes people to emigrate from their homelands).

Meditation: To the weight of the cross, an even heavier burden is added—the powerful beatings, the lies and betrayals, abandonment by his own disciples, the cruel humiliations. Because Jesus cannot bear the pain, he falls. There are so many times that migrants fall in their journeys. Their Promised Land becomes the journey of the cross as they deal with hatred and obstacles. Only faith in an active God gives them strength.

We Pray: God of life, we pray for you to protect our brothers and sisters on their journeys, full of risks and dangers, as they escape devastation in their homelands. Help them to overcome obstacles; do not allow families to be separated or lost. Walk with them and lift them up after they fall. Amen.

(Walk to 4th Station).

4th Station: Jesus Meets His Mother (Our Mother Earth suffers).

Meditation: God created the heavens and the Earth, the cradle for every form of life. As mothers hold their babies, the Earth holds every life. Sister Dorothy Stang told people at the first Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, "Mother Earth is not able to provide anymore. Her water and air are poisoned, and her soil is dying from overuse of chemicals, all in the name of profit." Pray for all of us and for a world where we can all live in peace and harmony—plants, animals and humans.

We Pray: Loving Jesus, by the sorrow you felt in meeting Your Mother, give me a “heart of compassion” for the Mother that holds me, provides my food, water and air. May I resist choices that destroy the environment. Help me protect the Earth as I would my own Mother. Amen.
(Walk to the 5th Station).

5th Station: **Simon of Cyrene Helps Jesus Carry the Cross** (We speak out in support of marginalized people).

Meditation: “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” (Matthew 25:40). The Bible tells us that we are our brothers’ keepers, and guardians of the creation entrusted to us. Our responsibility extends to the threatened environment—the vegetation, animals, water and air—as well as our fellow humans.

We Pray: O God of compassion, help us to recognize that we are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers. Like Simon of Cyrene, who helped Jesus carry His cross, may we too work to alleviate the suffering of those crushed by the heavy cross of injustice and violence committed against them and their fellow creatures. Amen. (Walk to the 6th Station).

6th Station: **Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus** (We recognize the stains of abuse on people and the land).

Meditation: We need to slow down the hectic pace of our days, looking at the beauty around us. When we look into the faces of people, we may see their suffering, perhaps even their exploitation. Let us look into our own consciences, into the depths of our hearts and reach out to those in need, those who are victims or those who are alone.

We Pray: O God, we see the face of your Son reflected in all men and women, and in the whole universe created through him and for him. May our works of charity and justice serve to wipe the bloody face of Christ in our world, so that others may see a glimpse of the glory of God. We commit ourselves to the practice of empathy, to be present to others in their pain and to use our resources to touch and heal. Amen. (Walk to the 7th Station).

7th Station: **Jesus Falls the Second Time** (We stumble through frustration and anger).

Meditation: Some powerful people exploit resources and less powerful people under the urge for unlimited profit. Illegal loggers and corrupt ranchers in the Amazon stole land from the poor, buying off the police, the military and the government. While defending the poor, Sister Dorothy received death threats and insults, and was arrested for passing out “subversive material,” the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

We Pray: Jesus, you fall to the ground, crushed by the forces of greed, consumerism and politics without soul. Help us to recognize you in those who carry the heavy load of unjust public policies. May we not remain on the sidelines in the struggle for a just and sustainable future. Amen.
(Walk to the 8th Station).

8th Station: **Jesus Consoles the Women of Jerusalem** (We weep over the deaths of the innocent).

Meditation: Our country faces a time of trial—the conflict between a culture that affirms, cherishes and celebrates the gift of life, and one that declares entire groups of beings to be outside the boundaries of protection. To choose life involves rejecting every form of violence—poverty, hunger, armed conflicts—and mindless damage to our environment.

We Pray: Creator of all, may we resist the culture of death. Like the women of Jerusalem, we weep for our children, who will bear the brunt of global environmental destruction. May our tears purify our vision and empower us to choose life for our children, grandchildren, the powerless and all Your creatures. Amen. (Walk to the 9th Station).

9th Station: Jesus Falls the Third Time (We need courage to resist despair),

Meditation: Under the weight of the cross, as the crowds pressed in and the sun glared down, Jesus falls again. As we carry our cross of stewardship for the Earth, we, too, feel anguish as exploitation seems so daunting. Hired assassins, confronting Sister Dorothy as they blocked her way on the road to a meeting with peasant farmers, asked her, “Do you have a weapon?” Showing them her Bible, she answered, “Yes,” and began to read, “Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice. Blessed are the peacemakers...God bless you, my sons.”

We Pray: Giver of courage, we seek your guidance and ask for strength to boldly acknowledge Your creation and Your people. As Jesus found the strength to rise and fulfill your wishes, give us the resolve to care for your creation and your people, even when the challenges are daunting. Amen. (Walk to the 10th Station).

10th Station: Jesus is Stripped of His Garments (The rain forests and mountaintops are stripped of their dignity and beauty).

Meditation: As Jesus was prepared to be crucified, He was stripped of his clothing and mocked as an assault to his dignity. Today the Earth is being stripped of vegetation and nutrient rich topsoil. The Amazon rainforest, the “Lungs of the Earth,” are threatened, losing their ability to absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and release oxygen to sustain human life. Communities in our own Appalachia suffer from the loss of life-giving plants and clean water, due to mountaintop coal removal.

We Pray: Creator, help us to seek renewable energy resources and restrain our consumption, so that Your creation will not be stripped of life-giving plants and soil. Open our eyes to see the beauty of Your earth, to breathe deeply of clean air and to be mindful of precious water. Amen. (Walk to the 11th Station).

11th Station: Jesus is Nailed to the Cross (We share responsibility for Christ’s pain and the Earth’s exploitation).

Meditation: Jesus suffered the anguish of nails piercing his hands and feet as his mother and beloved disciple absorbed the scene of injustice and mockery. As we carry our cross of stewardship, we make a commitment to be anchored to the beams of justice, not of convenience. Our hands must prudently use precious resources and our feet work unceasingly for conservation.

We Pray: Creator of us all, our obliviousness to the wonder and sacred destiny of Your creation, our misguided models of progress—these are like nails with which we crucify you today. May our tears of repentance reawaken us to Your abiding presence in which everything lives and moves and has its being. Amen.

(Remain in place for the 12th Station).

12th Station: Jesus Dies on the Cross (We are often indifferent to those who die).

Meditation: After living an earthly life that began as a refugee, Jesus dies after being judged a criminal. Today refugees are dying daily from climate change-induced floods, famines and war. Many are tortured, killed, displaced within their own countries, or exploited for the gains of others. How will we respond to those who lack the basic necessities of life?

We Pray: Jesus, You died on the cross, surrendering your will to the Creator's, so that we may have life. May we surrender our moral, economic and social decisions to the Creator's guidance. For only in faith can we move beyond self interest to see the interdependence of all God's creation. Amen.

**Taize Chant: Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom,
Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom...**

(Repeat while walking to 13th Station).

13th Station: The Body of Jesus is Taken Down from the Cross (We feel discouraged, disillusioned, hopeless).

Meditation: As Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus stepped up to care for the lifeless body of Jesus, we must step forward to accept the unjustly abused Earth. We must acknowledge our responsibility to be co-creators with God in the goodness of Creation. As we listen to the birds preparing for spring, and see the bloodroot rising from the brown earth, we quiet ourselves to ponder God's beauty. We can provide the spark of faith or the seed of hope to blossom for the next generation.

We Pray: Creator who makes all things new, help us to hold on to our faith, hope and love, even when we feel overwhelmed by the challenges of the ecological crisis. Deepen our courage and use us as instruments of the peace you desire for all creation. Amen.

(Walk to the 14th Station).

14th Station: Jesus' Body is Buried (We wait with eager longing for the glory of God).

Meditation: Jesus was laid in the tomb, but it was only an interlude to the resurrection. As we pause at this cleansing wetland named for environmentalist, Dr. Ed Hauser, we think of how the Creator cares for us, even in times of sadness. We must learn to trust that God will provide our needs, not to anguish over our wants. We must trust one another and be responsible stewards of the Earth and its gifts, not consume beyond our needs.

We Pray: Creator of all, for whom nothing is impossible, help your Church be faithful to you in the midst of adversity. Empower us to bear your dream of justice, peace and harmony for all your creation. Amen.

(Walk to the 15th Station).

15th Station: Jesus Christ is Risen (Our faith gives us hope for new sources of life).

Meditation:

“Death will be no more;
Mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
For the first things have passed away.
And the One who was seated on the throne said,
See, I am making all things new.”

(Revelation 21:5)

We Pray: Source of all love, thank you for leading us from the darkness into the light. Help us to learn from the examples of environmental leaders such as Sister Dorothy Stang and Dr. Ed Hauser, the powers of love and self-discipline. May we fan into flame the gifts we have received, mindful that you gave us no cowardly spirit. Give us wisdom and strength to be a witness to the world as we take up the mission of healing and sanctifying the world, so that “God may be all in all.” (1 Corinthians 15: 28).

Final Song: Lift High the Cross

Sing Refrain Together: **Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim,
Till all the world adore His sacred name.**

Verse: Come Christians, follow where our Savior trod,
Our King victorious, Christ the Son of God.

Refrain: Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim, till all the world adore His sacred name.

Verse: O Lord once lifted on the glorious tree, Your death has brought us life eternally.

Refrain: Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim, till all the world adore His sacred name.

Thank you for walking the Way of the Cross with us today! All are welcome to gather for a simple lunch at the Parish of St. Eugene, 72 Culvern Street, immediately afterward.

Meal Blessing by Sister Dorothy Stang: “We do these things because they feel right. It may be the reason we are here—to love each other, and to eat each other’s good cooking—and to say it was good.”

Stations of the Cross adapted with permission from:

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Grilliot, J., D’Agostino, F., Maduabuchi, R. et al (2015). *Ecological Stations of the Cross*. Precious Blood Spirituality Center.

Iafrete, M., Sherman, M. & Sigmon, S. (2015). *Cross in the Mountains*. Catholic Committee of Appalachia West Virginia Chapter.

