



Spring

Gathering (20 minutes)

Welcome

Acknowledgement

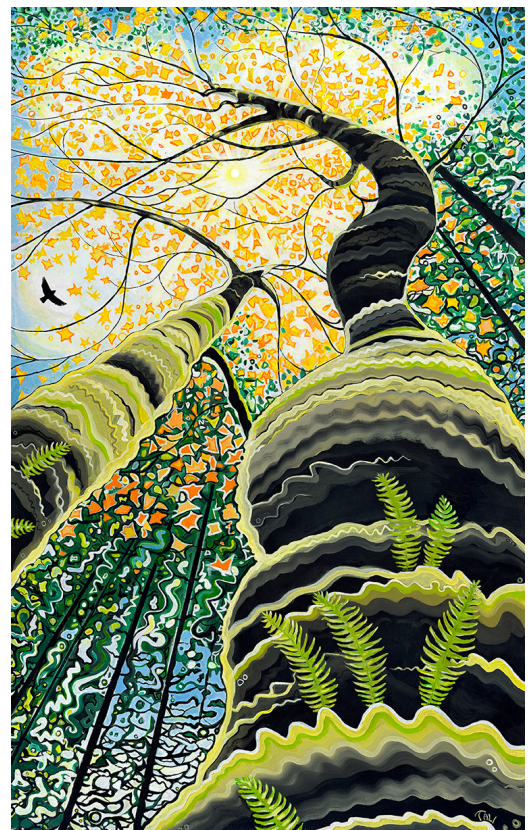
Prayer

Watch - *Renew Our World*

Listening for God's Voice (40 minutes)

Read: Acts 17:22-28

²² Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, 'Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. ²³For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, "To an unknown god." What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, ²⁵nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. ²⁶From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, ²⁷so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. ²⁸For "In him we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your own poets have said, "For we too are his offspring."



Visio Divina

Center yourself by taking a deep breath and relaxing your body as best you can. Allow your shoulders to lower away from your ears. Let your arms rest in your lap and let your feet be fully supported by the floor. Feel the weight of your body held by the chair. Spend this time in quiet. Open yourself up to God's voice. (*pause*)

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Seasons of the Spirit™ P1 2023.

Take a deep breath in and out. Continue breathing deeply as you read the image. In this moment, simply notice the visual qualities of what you see: colours, line, shape, form, space, and texture.

(pause)

Now, take a deeper look.

What parts of the image are your eyes most drawn to?

What parts of the image did you quickly brush by or overlook?

(pause)

And now, use your imagination. Imagine yourself in this piece.

Where would you be and how would you interact with what surrounds you?

(pause)

And now, read the artist's notes (below).

What new insights do you discover?

(pause)

Finally, observe your own emotions.

How does this image make you feel?

(pause)

Reflect: what have you discovered about God, yourself, the world around you?

Notes

As creative dreamers, our imaginations are our greatest tools for healing the world.

~ Andrew Talbot

We are living in a culture of consumerism, insufficiency, and celebrity. These are profane narratives, not sacred ones. They promise security while deepening our collective exile. More critically, these cultural narratives distract us from taking up what Thomas Berry calls the "Great Work," the vocation of repairing our planet.

~ Bruce Sanguin, *Darwin, Divinity, and the Dance of the Cosmos: An Ecological Christianity*, Wood Lake Publishing, 2007, p. 243

Andrew Talbot grew up exploring and photographing the far corners of Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada, from an early age. Inspired by years of surf trips, hikes and kayaking along the West Coast, his canvases offer a glimpse into the sacred places that connect us with nature and our inner being. Andrew writes:

I've always felt a deep connection to the ocean, mountains and forests surrounding the island. There's a raw, wild, and vibrant energy that constantly fuels me and shapes my flow. It's a force that has always called me back over the years, and I'm so grateful to be living locally again and pursuing visual art full time. The medium I use is acrylic on canvas and wood, applied with brushes, paint pens and airbrush.

About *Release*

Andrew's painting is based on a grove of broad-leaved maple trees near Port Alberni, BC, that are protected from logging and sustainably tapped for sugar syrup production by the Hupacasaph First Nations. When he was painting *Release*, Andrew was going through difficult changes in his life. The painting symbolised letting go of all that was inauthentic. The trees seemed to be "shaking off the past, moving forward, and soaring high through all life's struggles." Seeing the trees from a "bug's eye" view at ground level and looking up through tree trunks and branches to the sky high above returned him to a sense of awe, wonder, and mystery.

Responding (40 minutes)

Choose one of the following to explore - more, if you have time!

Rooted and reaching skyward

Recall a time when you walked in a forest and looked up through the tree canopy to the sky - or go outside and find a tree... How did it make you feel? Imagine you are a tree with your roots reaching deep into the ground. Imagine other trees beside you. Read Andrew's quote from his website (the first in the Notes above) and wonder how our creative imaginations could be "tools" to heal our world. Andrew Talbot also reveals that being in nature among the trees helped him when he was going through difficult times in his life. Recollect a time when trees and nature attributed towards giving you healing or hope.

Photographing or plein air drawing of trees

Take a walk outside and find trees that fill you with a sense of wonder and awe. What is it about them that gives you these feelings? Look at their colours, textures, shapes, age, size, and location. What kind of wildlife, plant life, or other nature surrounds the tree(s)? Take photographs or make drawings of these trees. You may want to hang the photos or drawings where they can offer you inspiration about living life in community.

Family tree

Trees are a symbol of history in that their roots go deep into the earth. Each year of their growth is recorded as a ring in their trunk. Trees can live a very long time (<https://www.oldest.org/nature/trees>). The stories from Genesis are part of our Judeo-Christian history. The people who populate these stories (Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Esau and their families) are not perfect and struggle with many emotions. "They are like us! All the while, God is with them. God is beside them despite every ill-thought-through decision or selfish thing they do and in every noble and dignified thing they do." Consider your family history. Is it well-known, or will it take research to learn about your roots? Andrew calls his art *Release* in that he wanted to shake off all that was inauthentic and live a more authentic life growing into the light. The Sanguin quote in the Notes (above) also exhorts people to live authentic, connected, purposeful lives. What is it that you hope to "shake off," and how will your life evolve? Consider what is most important and what will bring joy, hope, peace, and love to your life.

Prayer

The work of forgiveness and reconciliation – and all the emotions that come with it – requires quiet space for contemplation and meditation.

Reflect again on Andrew Talbot's image, *Release*.

You might like to pray this prayer...

We have wandered through the branches of our ancestors' stories, wondering where we are grounded and what these old, old stories might say to us now. We glimpse the dappled light of connection in the family squabbles, the broken promises, and the love that continues to bring God's people together. Here, today, our prayers climb this family tree asking for what we need: forgiveness, grace, generosity, hope, love, along with all the wandering of your heart.

Find a branch to rest in God's love in this artwork and find release from what hinders growth.

If it helps to centre yourself in words, use a mantra in your silent prayer such as "Release this from me, O God" or "Grow with me, O God."

Seasons of the Spirit - resources for 20 August 2023, p.150

Re-engaging with the World (15 minutes)

Sharing

Listen - Called By Earth and Sky

*Called by earth and sky,
promise of hope held high.
This is our sacred living trust,
treasure of life sanctified,
called by earth and sky.*

Precious these mountains, ancient sands,
vast, fragile land.
Seeds of our wak'ning, rooted and strong,
creation's faithful song.
Called by earth and sky...

Precious these waters, endless seas,
deep ocean's dreams.
Waters of healing, rivers of rain,
the wash of love again.
Called by earth and sky...

Precious the fire that lights the way,
bright the dawning day.
Fire of passion, sorrows undone,
our faith and justice one.
Called by earth and sky...

Precious this gift, the air we breathe,
wind born and free.
Breath of the Spirit blow through this place,
our gathering, and our grace.
Called by earth and sky...

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Prayer and Blessing

Resources: *Connecting With the Art*, Seasons of the Spirit™
SeasonsFusion Pentecost 1 2023

Next Retreat and Reflection: Saturday 11 November 2023 - Remembering
