

A banner featuring a collage of green and brown leaves. The text "Session Four" is in a white serif font, and "Captivating Metaphors" is in a larger, white script font. Below the banner, the text "BRINGING SCRIPTURE & THEOLOGY TO LIFE" is written in a black serif font.

Session Four Captivating Metaphors

BRINGING SCRIPTURE & THEOLOGY TO LIFE

“IT IS UNSURPRISING THAT SOME OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE CHRISTIAN INITIATIVES INSCRIBE ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES INTO THE HEART OF CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE AND IDENTITY BY DRAWING ON THE METAPHORS, LOGICS, AND NARRATIVES OF GRACE.”

--- Willis Jenkins, page 20

Because metaphors draw parallels between something we already know or have experience of, they are an important (and often vital) teaching tool. In our tradition, metaphor has been hugely important. The Apostle Paul is perhaps best known for his use of metaphors – legal metaphors and athletic metaphors are two of his most common. He also uses metaphors about mothering – in one case Paul compares himself to a woman in labor (Gal. 4:19)! In other places, Paul uses the metaphors of mothering and breastfeeding (I Thes. 2:7, 1 Cor. 3:1-2). By doing this, Paul is able to communicate important truths about the tenderness and care of God that are difficult impart.

The work of the church is the work of Incarnation, of redeploying our traditions to address the problems at hand. This is metaphor. If we are concerned with a living faith, with a God who interacts with our world, we must find ways to understand and communicate that address our own situation.

SESSION OBJECTIVE: To explore Biblical metaphors that provide power and motivation for living in eco-justice and in accordance with God’s plans. To consider how the idea of salvation applies to our work in caring for the earth.

Earthkeeping and the Bible

-Steven Bouma-Prediger

1. Identify similarities that Bouma-Prediger points out exist between nature and humans. What things do all creation share?
2. List things that are helpful about the metaphor of a human acting as a police officer for creation. How does this way of thinking change your ideas about how you should treat the world?
3. Read **JOHN 1:1-14** aloud together.
Share how God “tenting” among us is important and evident to you.

4. Bouma-Prediger compares our role on earth to that of a conductor. Practice this by having a member of your group move to the front or center of the group and “conduct” everyone in sharing one thing they found valuable in the article.

Reflect: What are the difficulties and benefits of conducting? What are good ways of “conducting the earth”? What are bad ways?

5. Name ways God is the great Recycler. What has he “salvaged” in your life?
6. With a partner, create your own metaphor about humans or God. Keep in mind that you want this metaphor to communicate to others. How could this help others understand God better?

Nature @ Grace:

Making Environmental Issues Matter for Christian Life

-Willis Jenkins

1. Jenkins calls nature and grace the “bedrock logic of the Christian experience.” Create a sentence using both words that relates to your own life. Using both words, create a second sentence using both words that relates to the Earth.
2. **Consider your own personal salvation. Using a piece of paper, draw a time line. On the continuum list your creation, woundedness and healing (and anything else you find important). At each major point, list the people and places involved and the events connected.**
3. If you are comfortable, share your time line with others and consider any similarities. Identify ways your spiritual life has corresponded with your physical life. Could one happen without the other?

4. **MULTIPLE CHOICE:** Have several people in the group complete the following sentence with one of the options listed. Have them defend their choices.

THE RISK OF FORGETTING LIFE ON EARTH WHEN WE TALK ABOUT GRACE IS:

1. Forgetting our moral responsibilities.
 2. Disconnecting from God’s power by creating an escape rather than true healing.
 3. Denying Christ’s Incarnation
 4. Developing immunity to loving our neighbors and those that are on the earth.
5. As a group, listen to the online audio clip from Jenkins’ sermon. Identify ways you can be a “citizen of heaven” without disconnecting and becoming homeless. What are the risks of not being a citizen of any place?

It’s Raining in Honolulu

A Poem by Joy Harjo

Have a member of the group read the poem on page 38 aloud.

1. What do you think the “breathing beneath our breathing” is?
2. Read **ISAIAH 55:12** and compare the metaphor of singing in the poem and in Isaiah. What does it mean to plant a song? How does it relate to God’s work?
3. Have one or two people from the group volunteer to *sing* a line from the poem. (Have fun!)
Then discuss the importance of singing God’s praise.



From Apocalypse to Genesis

A Sermon by Janet Parker

1. Read **Revelation 2:7**.

Talk about Parker's suggestion of reading the Bible backwards. How does the promise of the "tree of life" apply?

2. Identify the elements or principles in the Garden of Eden that are important. Are any of these elements already in your life? Draw a timeline with 10 year increments. Indicate where you are and how you have changed in relation to living in harmony with the Earth. Extend the timeline into the future. Where will you go from here?

2. In groups of two have a conversation about the following statements:

"IT'S ONLY WHEN WE ALLOW OURSELVES TO ACTUALLY *FEEL* WHAT IS GOING ON THAT WE WILL HAVE THE CAPACITY TO CHANGE IT." ---*Janet Parker, page 40*

Stay with us God and help us to stay with you. Give us the strength to live in this world and embrace all that it is. Open us to your Scriptures and the metaphors. Teach us how to find our own metaphors – how to share your truths in a way that others can understand and embrace. Teach us how our story of redemption and healing relates to the healing we need to bring to the Earth.

"CONCERN FOR THE ENVIRONMENT IS NOT MERELY AN EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION OF SUPERFICIAL OR SENTIMENTAL LOVE. IT IS A WAY OF HONORING AND DIGNIFYING OUR CREATION AND THE HAND AND WORD OF GOD." --- *His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, page 53*

Have one person take up each position and answer the following question; How important in an emotional connection to the Earth?

3. Parker's sermon ends with a consideration of baptism. Identify how running water from the earth adds to the meaning and metaphors of Baptism.

EXTRA CHALLENGE: Identify what can be done in your church to underscore the importance of this metaphor. How does local water connecting to all water relate to one person's faith connecting them to all believers?

CONCLUDING REFLECTION: Name ways the Bible and theology can help us deal with the ecological crisis of our day. Why is it important to know and use these metaphors? Are other metaphors important to think about and use?