

“Creator of All”

Valley Presbyterian Church – October 4, 2026

World Communion Sunday

Genesis 2:4b-9, 15

Rev. Dr. John Wahl

Acts 17:22-28

Introduction

The First Nations Version of the New Testament is a collaborative, interpretive effort by representatives of many different North American Indigenous tribes who, for generations before and after European settlers arrived, have resided in and shared these lands: mountains and valleys, forest and plain. This translation from Acts reflects an understanding of God – the Great Spirit – as the creator of all things and every people; and about God’s desire that each tribe or nation be connected to and tend to their land; and thus love their creator and care about the welfare of their neighbors.

Read Acts 17:22-28 (adapted from First Nations Version: an Indigenous Translation of the New Testament)

So Paul stood up in the center of Mars Hill and said, “People of Athens, I can see that in all things you are a very spiritual people. As I walked around, I saw some of your sacred objects. One altar had this message carved into it:

DEDICATED TO AN UNKNOWN POWERFUL SPIRIT

So then, the one you sacredly honor without knowing is the one I will make known to you. The Great Spirit is the one who created the universe and all things in it. Since he is the rightful ruler of the Spirit-world above and the earth below, he does not live in lodges built by human hands. Creator does not really need human beings to do things for him, since he is the one who give all people life and breath and everything we need.

Beginning with the first human being, he made all tribes and nations. He wanted people to live all over the face of the earth. He decided ahead of time when and where each tribe would live. He did this so that all people could look for him and find the trail that leads to him. Creator is not far away from any of us. It is through him that

we live, walk, and have our being. As some of your song makers have said, 'We are children of the Great Spirit.'"

The creation story of Genesis, chapter 2 offers us a vivid picture of God's hands-on creative work – that we were fashioned from the earth like a potter molds clay. We are, as Old Testament scholar Carmen Joy Imes puts it, “human from humus, *adam* from *adamah*, earthling from earth.”¹ But we are also more than dirt. We have been animated by God's own breath and placed in the garden (or forest or plain) to be co-creators with God, tending and caring for the earth, for its creatures, and for our neighbors.

Humans are meant to be gardeners and gatherers. While the first creation story, in Genesis 1, speaks of human beings having rule or dominion over the non-human creation, Genesis 2 describes the proper role of earthlings as serving the land; tending to it. This reveals that work has always been a part of the divine design for human vocation rather than a result of the disobedience of God that humans committed in Genesis 3. God is a farmer, and so are humans.

The creation of the garden is an act of God's utter grace; and caring for creation is a gracious way which God involves all tribes and nations in this divine creative activity. Humans who breathe the divine breath are called to sustain life in the natural world around them. As the theologian Walter Brueggemann says, “Work belongs to the garden; work is good, surely, to enhance the garden.”²

On this World Communion Sunday, it is appropriate that we would reflect on the ways that we live and work peacefully and cooperatively with people of all different tribes and faiths. While in Athens, the Apostle Paul finds an altar with an inscription that reads, “Dedicated to an Unknown Powerful Spirit” or, in Greek, *Agnosto Theo*. Paul sees this as an opportunity to teach the people of Athens that God – the giver of life and breath – has made each family of people on earth. Our common humanity is traced back to the single ancestor of all nations, thus challenging any one group's claim to superiority. This theology of connection and relationship is rooted in the created world. Indeed, Paul is encouraging a broadening of perspective that moves beyond our artificial human boundaries and labels to incorporate all that God has made and declared to be good.

¹ Carmen Joy Imes, *Being God's Image: Why Creation Still Matters*

² Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis from Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*.

For God, Paul argues, does not dwell in buildings, nor is the One God served by human beings, as though the creator of all might need anything from us. Rather, God has made from one *adam* all peoples for the purpose of dwelling on the earth – tilling, serving, and preserving it – and seeking after God who is never far away.

In coming to the Table this day, we recognize that God is creator and provider of all that we have: the fruits of creation and the work that we are called to do. And through the World Communion Offering, we acknowledge our shared commitment to uplifting the poor, healing the sick, hearing voices that have long been kept silent, and building bridges where walls of division have kept us apart.

As Barbara Brown Taylor, in her book *An Altar to the World*, argues, Christians have too often viewed our faith as a world-wide competition for superiority where there is one winner. Instead, we can look to other religions as fellow human beings seeking after the same God, who has made us all and is never far from any of us.³

The vastness and complexity of creation testify to God’s love for diversity: of people, thought, and interpretation of scripture. As Rev. Marta Pumroy-Cordero, co-moderator of the Presbyterian Church (USA), reminded those of us who joined in this week’s webinar on “Religious Freedom,” none of us are called primarily to *Team Red* or *Team Blue*, but to *Team Love Your Neighbor*. As children of God – in whom we live, and move, and have our being – we are tasked with calling out all types of bigotry and xenophobia as sin against neighbors. God made all people – of every nation and tribe – and therefore loves all and desires that we work cooperatively as good stewards of the good gifts we have been given.

And yet, as Christians, we are also empowered to proclaim and celebrate our own story; the unique way that God has been revealed to us; through the stories of our scriptures and the gracious gift of Jesus Christ. Therefore, as we seek to welcome and live faithfully with all our fellow human beings, we boldly claim our salvation through God’s Son who lived, died, and rose again as Jesus of Nazareth. We confess that, through him, in the Spirit of God – the creator, redeemer, and sustainer – we are given new and renewed life and are called into reconciliation with all of humanity: every nation and tribe, every common ancestor of the *adam* from *adamah*, all earthlings that have been formed from the earth; with whom we share our humanity. Thanks be to God. Amen.

³ Barbara Brown Taylor, *An Altar to the World*