

I speak to you in the name of our Creator, Christ the risen one, and the Holy Spirit, the one who heals, restores, and transforms us. AMEN.

Isaiah paints a haunting picture: “The palace will be forsaken, the populous city deserted; the hill and the watchtower will become dens forever, the joy of wild asses, a pasture for flocks” (Isaiah 32:14). You can almost see it. Grand halls emptied, city streets overgrown, watchtowers abandoned. The proud places of human strength and wealth lie in ruin. Wild donkeys wander where kings once strutted. Animals graze where palaces once stood. Nature reclaims what human arrogance has abandoned. The animals rejoice, but the people are displaced. It's Creation, but not peace.

We know something of this, don't we? We've seen photos of cities during and after war, silent but for the cries of birds. Photos of the devastation of Gaza haunt me. We've seen towns emptied by fire or flood, where deer wander down the main street. Some of us remember when a favorite beach or forest was alive with life, but now it lies bare. Isaiah's vision is not so distant from us. It's a warning of what happens when justice is ignored, and relationships are broken.

The Bible's word for peace is shalom. Not just the absence of fighting, but wholeness, harmony, flourishing. A completeness in which every part is rightly related to every other part: humans with God, humans with one another, humans with the Earth, humans with their own hearts. Isaiah's lament shows what happens when shalom is shattered. Injustice poisons the soil, and peace withers. Palaces fall. Watchtowers crumble. And Creation groans under the weight of human sin.

Into Isaiah's stark vision, the psalmist enters here with a gentler word. "O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away... Where can I go from your Spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?" (Ps. 139:1–2, 7). What a contrast. If Isaiah shows us the ruin of a city, the psalmist shows us the closeness of God, who walks with us even in the ruins. God knows us so intimately that not even the deepest shadow or the thickest darkness can hide us. "Even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you" (Ps. 139:12). This psalm is profoundly pastoral. It tells us that God doesn't abandon us to our brokenness. Even when we flee, even when we despair, God's Spirit is with us. The psalmist imagines wings of the morning, the farthest seas, even the depths of Sheol, and still God is right there with us. For those overwhelmed by the climate crisis, or grief at the destruction of the Earth, Psalm 139 says: You are not alone. God has not abandoned you. You are held. The Lord is near.

Yet Psalm 139 does more than comfort. It reminds us of our place in Creation itself. "You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps. 139:13–14). The Hebrew phrase evokes reverence. Every life is a wonder. And if God has formed each human life with such care, how much more does God care for the whole Creation in which our lives are nested? You and I are fearfully and wonderfully made, yes. But so is the cedar of Lebanon. So is the salmon of the Pacific. So is our small piece of wilderness right outside our doors here at St. Mary's. So is the robin in your garden. So is the soil beneath our feet. But this psalm also warns us that God sees clearly the choices we make and the damage they cause.

<sup>1</sup> O Lord, you have searched me and known me.

<sup>2</sup> You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
you discern my thoughts from far away.

<sup>3</sup> You search out my path and my lying down  
and are acquainted with all my ways.

<sup>4</sup> Even before a word is on my tongue,  
O Lord, you know it completely.

<sup>5</sup> You hem me in, behind and before,  
and lay your hand upon me.

There's no hiding from the truth of our impact on the soil, the seas, the creatures, or our neighbors.

Isaiah's vision doesn't end in ruin. He sees something more: "Until a spirit from on high is poured upon us, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is deemed a forest" (Isaiah 32:15). That phrase "a spirit from on high" is not just vague inspiration. In Hebrew it's ruach, the breath, the wind, the Spirit of God. The same Spirit who hovered over the waters in Genesis 1. The same Spirit who breathed life into Adam's nostrils. The same Spirit who came upon the prophets, who overshadowed Mary, who descended as a dove on Jesus at his baptism, who Jesus breathed into his disciples, who filled the disciples at Pentecost. This Spirit brings transformation. The desert blooms. The fields flourish. Life surges where once there was only ruin. She is leading us into an ecological conversion, opening our eyes to see that we belong to all of creation. This calls us to a change of heart and mind, to embrace God's righteousness, and to pass on these values to the generations that follow us. What the Spirit brings is not just a return to the way things were, but something greater, something truly transformative. We're not simply patching up the old wounds or restoring the

broken patterns that caused harm in the first place. The Spirit is calling us into a new way of living, one that heals, renews, and sets us free for peace with all of Creation.

Jesus echoes Isaiah's hope when he tells his disciples, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth... you know her, because she abides with you, and she will be in you" (John 14:15–17). That word "Advocate" is better translated as comforter, helper, guide; the one who is called alongside. Jesus doesn't say the Spirit will visit us briefly and then leave. She abides with us, dwells in us, stirs in us. The Spirit of truth opens our eyes to the cries of Creation, convicts us when we've caused harm, and empowers us to live differently. She doesn't just restore the land but restores the heart, giving courage and clarity to live differently.

Isaiah insists that justice is the soil in which peace grows: "Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness abide in the fruitful field. The effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever" (Isaiah 32:16–17). The Hebrew word here for righteousness is a word that means more than personal morality. It's about right relationship, justice lived out in community, fairness in economics, equity in society, faithfulness in covenant. The Greek word used in the New Testament for this joins justice and righteousness as one reality. Wherever justice and right relationship flourish, peace follows. Without righteousness, there can be no shalom. With justice, peace comes not as a fragile ceasefire but enduring, "quietness and trust forever."

This is where the theme of this year's Season of Creation comes alive: Peace with Creation. Isaiah reminds us that peace on earth doesn't come from stronger armies or thicker walls, but from justice and righteousness. And not just justice for humans, but justice that includes the land, the water, the creatures, the whole cosmic family of God. St. Francis called the Earth our sister and mother. Pope Francis asks in *Laudato Si'*, "What is the goal of our work? What need does the Earth have of us?" The answer is not exploitation but love. If we ignore how we are all connected, we wound our very selves.

This year also happens to mark 1700 years since the Council of Nicaea first gave voice to our shared confession of faith: "We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth ... We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life." From the very beginning, the creed has tied our faith to Creation. The God we confess is the Creator of all. The Son, through whom all things were made, entered Creation in the flesh to redeem it. The Spirit is the giver of life who renews the face of the earth. To proclaim this creed in 2025 is to proclaim our call to protect life and to work for peace with Creation.

Paul's words to the Philippians show us how this takes root in our daily lives: "Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Don't worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil 4:5–7). The readings today really come together don't they. We hear again from Paul that God is near. Gentleness, prayer, thanksgiving, and trust don't seem like world-changing tools. Yet they're exactly the kind of seeds the Spirit plants in us, and

they bear the fruit of peace. They shape us into people who live in righteousness so that Creation too can share in peace. Gentleness is how we resist violence toward one another and toward the Earth. Prayer is how we stay rooted in God when despair rises. Thanksgiving is how we remember abundance when the world preaches scarcity. Trust is how we rest in God's peace even when the path seems long.

So what might this look like for us? It looks like repentance, metanoia in Greek, turning around, changing our mindset, moving away from habits of waste and indifference. It looks like solidarity, standing with those most affected by climate change and ecological destruction: Indigenous communities, island nations, farmers in drought-stricken lands. It looks like restoration: planting trees, protecting watersheds, tending gardens, teaching our children to love and respect the Earth. It looks like advocacy: raising our voices for just policies that protect the vulnerable, promote renewable energy, and honor biodiversity. These may seem small, but every act is a sign of hope, every step is a seed of peace.

Isaiah promises: "My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places" (Isaiah 32:18). This isn't just about safe homes of brick and wood. It's about dwelling in harmony with God, with each other, and with all Creation. It's about living in God's vision of shalom, not only for Israel, not only for the church, but for the whole earth.

I invite you to pay close attention to the Iona Creed when affirm our faith in just a few minutes. For it closely echoes our readings from today. It affirms that God is with us and calls us to

work for change and put ourselves on the line;  
to bear responsibility, take risks, live powerfully and face humiliation;  
to stand with those on the edge; to choose life and be used by the Spirit  
for God's new community of hope.

So may the Spirit from on high be poured upon us today. May our wilderness places become fruitful fields. May justice and righteousness take root in us, so that peace may abound for all Creation. May the God who is with us, fill us with peace, surround us with grace, and comfort us.

Amen