General Synod 35: Into the Deep

Sunday Service of Word and Sacrament
"Picking Sweetgrass...Braiding Sweetgrass" | Sunday, July 13, 2025
Kansas City, Missouri

Preludes

God Is Doing A New Thing

Sweetgrass Storytelling in the Thrust: Picking Sweetgrass

Whatever It Takes
Take Us Higher

Opening Drumming

Call to Worship In Seven Voices

1: This land is not your land. This land is not my land

2: This land belongs to God, the Creator who established the skies and the stars and the seas of prairie grass.

3: This land, ancestral homelands of the Kansa/Kaw, Osage, Otoe and Missouria nations.

4: This land, refuge for the Bodwadomi upon their removal from other lands via the trail of death

5: This land, home to the Iowa, Kickapoo, Potawatomi, Sac and Fox sovereign Native nations

6: This land, acres of prairie, roots sunk deep in the soil, habitat for the birds of the air and the creatures of the fields

7: This land, now home to diverse people and prairies, farmlands and ranchlands, creatures and species

All: We gather on this land to sing, to pray, to confess, to commune
to hear a word, to receive a blessing, to go as a blessing.
Rooted, grounded, anchored for the deep work of love and justice.
This land is not your land. This land is not my land
This land belongs to God, Creator of all. Let us worship God together. All praise and glory be!

HYMN

Rooted and Grounded In Love

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Opening Prayer Rev. Dr. Bentley deBardelaben-Phillips (they/them)

Gracious God, gather us. Eternal God, we summon your presence for this ceremony and this feast. We ask your guidance, your wisdom, your blessing. We praise you with song and drum and voices and hearts. We come to this time from throughout the United Church of Christ. Bind us up in that vision of unity spoken of by Christ and embraced by our ancestors. Braid us more deeply together, that rooted and grounded in you, roots sunk deep in the soil of the gospel, we may continue toward the unity and witness to which you call us. We pray in the name of Jesus who was, and is, and is to come. Amen.

Scripture - Ps. 148 **4 Voices**

Praise God, you who are on earth ***as a Scripture echo***

Alternating between four voices: North, West, South, East as the leader can indicate.
As each portion is read, the people turn to face each direction.
All: Hallelujah!

East: Praise God from heaven,
praise God from the mountaintops;
Praise God, all angels,
praise God, all warriors,
Praise God, sun and moon,
praise God, you morning stars;
Praise God, high heaven,
praise God, heavenly rain clouds;
Praise, oh let them praise the name of God—
who spoke the word, and there they were!
All: Hallelujah!

North: God set them in place
from all time to eternity;
God gave creation's orders,
and that's it!
All: Hallelujah!

West: Praise God from earth,
you sea dragons, you fathomless ocean deeps;
Fire and hail, snow and ice,
Mountains and all hills,
apple orchards and cedar forests;
Wild beasts and herds of cattle,
snakes, and birds in flight;
All: Hallelujah!

South: Let them praise the name of God—
the only Name worth praising.
God's radiance exceeds anything in earth and sky;
God's built a monument—God's very own people!
Praise from all who love God!
All: Hallelujah!

Luke 5: 1-11 NRSVue **Into the Deep** **7 Voices**

Jesus Calls the First Disciples

1. Once while Jesus was standing beside the Lake of Gennesaret and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gotten out of them and were washing their nets.

2. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat.

3. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.”

4. Simon answered, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.”

5. When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to burst. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink.

6. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’s knees, saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!”

7. For he and all who were with him were astounded at the catch of fish that they had taken, and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.”

Sermon Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson (she/hers)

Beyond Dry Bones: Into the Deep

MUSIC

Prayers of the People

Responding to each petition with “Hear our prayer.”

From North, South, East and West we bring our prayers to you, Holy One. We braid our intentions together that we may offer them here and be accountable to what we pray for. Hear our prayers this day:

For the earth you have given, the cries of the waters and creatures, and for our good stewardship,
All: Hear our prayer.

For the people of all lands, for those who suffer, for those who hunger, for those who seek peace,
All: Hear our prayer.

For the rulers and leaders of nations, that they may be compelled by a vision of the common good,
All: Hear our prayer.

For this Synod of the United Church of Christ, that we may be compelled by your vision of unity,
All: Hear our prayer.

For our local churches, that they may be spaces of welcome, safety, and inclusion for all,
All: Hear our prayer.

For our witness beyond this place, in the public square, in public policy, in peacemaking, in ecumenical, interfaith, and environmental work,
All: Hear our prayer.

As we pray for these things, give us the courage to live for these things. We commend these intercessions to you in the name of Jesus:

O Great Spirit, we honor your name as sacred and holy. Bring your good road to us, where the beauty of your ways in the spirit-world above is reflected in the earth below. Provide for us day by day—the elk, the buffalo, and the salmon. The corn, the squash, and the wild rice. All the things we need for each day. Release us from the things we have done wrong, in the same way we release others for the things done wrong to us. Guide us away from the things that tempt us to stray from your good road and set us free from the evil one's worthless ways. May it be so. Amen.

The Offering

Rev. Dr. Lorraine Ceniceros (she/hers)
Rev. Mary Nelson (she/hers)

Offering prayer:
Receive these gifts of our bounty, our abundance, and our excess. Put them to use for others, for brothers and sisters and siblings and all served by [name of agency receiving the gifts]. May this offering be pleasing in your sight, most Holy One. Amen.

HYMN

Together

Sweetgrass Storytelling in the Thrust: Braiding Sweetgrass

Passing of Peace Rev. Shari Prestemon (she/hers)
One: The Peace of Christ be with you. **All: And also with you.**
As we prepare to come to the table, you are invited to share signs of Christ's peace with one another in the manner most comfortable to you.

HYMN

We Want To See Love

The Sacrament of Holy Communion
Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson (she/hers)
Rev. Shari Prestemon (she/hers)

Invitation
Beloved in Christ, the Gospel tells us that on the first day of the week Jesus Christ was raised from death, appeared to Mary Magdalene, on that same day sat at table with two disciples and was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.
All:
This is the joyful feast of the people of God. Men and women, youth and children, come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and gather about Christ's table.

Communion Prayer
God be with you
And also with you.
Lift up your hearts.
We lift them to God.
Let us give thanks to God Most High.
It is right to give God thanks and praise.

We give you thanks, God of majesty and mercy, for calling forth the creation and raising us from dust by the breath of your being. We bless you for the beauty and bounty of the earth and for the vision of the day when sharing by all will mean scarcity for none.

We remember the covenant you made with your people, and we give you thanks for all our ancestors in faith. We rejoice that you call us to reconciliation with you and all people everywhere and that you remain faithful to your covenant even when we are faithless.

We rejoice that you call the entire human family to this table of sacrifice and victory. We come in remembrance and celebration of the gift of Jesus Christ, whom you sent, in the fullness of time, to be the good news. Born of Mary, our sister in faith, Christ lived among us to reveal the mystery of your Word, suffered and died on the cross, was raised on the third day, and lives in glory.

We bless you, gracious God, for the presence of your Holy Spirit in the church you have gathered. With your people of faith in all places and times, we praise you with joy:

Sanctus
Holy, holy, holy God of love and majesty, the whole universe speaks of your glory, O God most high. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of our God! Hosanna in the highest!

Telling the Story
We remember that on the night of betrayal and desertion and on the eve of his death, Jesus gathered the disciples in the upper room.
Jesus took bread, gave thanks to you, broke it and gave it to the disciples, saying: “This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”
After supper, he also took the cup, saying:
This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”
Therefore we proclaim the mystery of our faith:

Memorial Acclamation
Christ’s death, O God, we proclaim.
Christ’s resurrection we declare.
Christ’s coming we await.
Glory be to you, O God.

Prayer
Eternal God, we unite in this covenant of faith, recalling Christ's suffering and death, rejoicing in Christ's resurrection and awaiting Christ's return in victory. We spread your table with these gifts of the earth and of our labor. We present to you our very lives, committed to your service in behalf of all people.

Send your Holy Spirit on this bread and cup, on these gifts and on us. Strengthen your universal church that it may be the champion of peace and justice in all the world. Restore the earth with your grace that is able to make all things new. Be present with us as we share this meal, and throughout our lives, that we may know you as the Holy One, who with Christ and the Holy Spirit lives forever. Amen.

Sharing of Gifts
The bread which we break is the communion of the body of Christ.
The cup of blessing which we bless is the communion of the blood of Christ.
These are the gifts of God for the people of God. Come, for all things are ready.

Closing Prayer
Eternal God, you have called your people from east and west and north and south to feast at the table of Jesus Christ. We thank you for the gift of our Savior's presence in the simplicity and splendor of this holy meal. Unite us with all who are fed by Christ, that whether we are gathered or scattered, we may be the servant church of the servant Christ in whose name we rejoice and pray. Amen.

MUSIC

To Be Free At Last

Blessing **Seven Voices, and All Directions**

1 Bless this land from the top of its head to the bottom of its feet

From the arctic old white head to the brown feet of tropical rain

2 Bless the eyes of this land, for they witness cruelty and kindness in this land

From sunrise light upright to falling down on your knees night

3 Bless the ears of this land, for they hear cries of heartbreak and shouts of celebration in this land

Once we heard no gunshot on these lands; the trees and stones can be heard singing

4 Bless the mouth, lips and speech of this land, for the land is a speaker, a singer, a keeper of all that happens here, on this land

Luminous forests, oceans, and rock cliff sold for the trash glut of gold, uranium, or oil bust rush yet there are new stories to be made, little ones coming up over the horizon

5 Bless the arms and hands of this land, for they remake and restore beauty in this land

We were held in the circle around these lands by song, and reminded by the knowers that not one is over the other, no human above the bird, no bird above the insect, no wind above the grass

6 Bless the heart of this land on its knees planting food beneath the eternal circle of breathing, swimming and walking this land

The heart is a poetry maker. There is one heart, said the poetry maker, one body and all poems make one poem and we do not use words to make war on this land

7 Bless the gut labyrinth of this land, for it is the center of unknowing in this land
Bless the femaleness and maleness of this land, for each holds the fluent power of becoming in this land

When it was decided to be in this manner here in this place, this land, all the birds made a birdly racket from indigo sky holds

East: Bless the two legs and two feet of this land, for the sacred always walks beside the profane in this land

These words walk the backbone of this land, massaging the tissue around the cord of life, which is the tree of life, upon which this land stands

West: Bless the destruction of this land, for new shoots will rise up from fire, floods, earthquakes and fierce winds to make new this land

We are land on turtle's back—when the weight of greed overturns us, who will recall the upright song of this land

North: Bless the creation of new land, for out of chaos we will be compelled to remember to bless this land

> *The smallest one remembered, the most humble one, the one whose voice you'd have to lean in a thousand years to hear—we will begin there*

South: Bless us, these lands, said the rememberer. These lands aren't our lands. These lands aren't your lands. We are this land.

> *And the blessing began a graceful moving through the grasses of time, from the beginning, to the circling around place of time, always moving, always*

---Joy Harjo, Mvskoke (Creek) Nation, former Poet Laureate of the United States

Benediction

GS35 Closing Worship was written by Rev. Stephanie Perdew, PhD, The Damascus Project

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Citations:

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Communion prayer adapted from Setting A, Service of Word and Sacrament I, *New Century Hymnal*, Pilgrim Press, 1995.

Joy Harjo, "Bless this Land" in *An American Sunrise: Poems* (WW Norton and Company, 2019) 106-108.

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