

PART ONE - SESSION TWO

Water & Our Baptismal Covenant

Ashley Hubbard

At the conclusion of this session participants will:

- Be able to connect the work of creation care to our baptismal covenant.
- Understand what a watershed is and how the health of our waterways impacts individual and community health.
- Have explored the connection between Christian discipleship and water stewardship.

Please review the primary resources, guiding Scripture, and reflection and discussion questions prior to the small group gathering. Optional resources are available for a deeper dive.

PRE-GATHERING PREPARATION

Find these resources online at <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/ministries/creation-care/love-god-love-gods-world-curriculum/session-two/>.

Primary Resources:

- Film: “Triple Divide” [Redacted] (52 min)
- Kimmerer, Robin Wall. “Braiding Sweetgrass.” Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2013. “The Sacred and the Superfund,” pp. 310-340.

Optional Resources:

- “Green Dreamer” podcast with Kamea Chayne, Episode 258 – “Judith D. Schwartz: Healing the Water Cycle to Restore Climate and Ecological Balance” (50 min).

GUIDING SCRIPTURE

John 7:37-38 (NRSV)

On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’”

SMALL GROUP GATHERING

Facilitator or volunteer can use the prayer below to open your time together.

OPENING PRAYER

We thank you, Almighty God, for the gift of water.

Over it the Holy Spirit moved in the beginning of creation.

Through it you led the children of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt into the land of promise.

In it your Son Jesus received the baptism of John

and was anointed by the Holy Spirit as the Messiah, the Christ,

to lead us, through his death and resurrection,

from the bondage of sin into everlasting life.

We thank you, God, for the water of baptism.

In it we are buried with Christ in his death.

By it we share in his resurrection and through it we are reborn by the Holy Spirit.

We thank you, Creator, that we are called to a life of discipleship

and that you give us everything we need for our visit within your creation.

We pray for guidance as we seek to hear creation's song of belonging, becoming, and belovedness.

Amen.

* Adapted from the Book of Common Prayer, pp. 306-307.

CHECK-IN

Facilitator leads the group through brief check-ins from each participant.

REFLECTION

Group can choose to read the reflection out loud together or go directly to discussion questions depending on timing and how many participants were able to do the reading prior to the gathering.

When I was in the third grade, I began to learn about Earth's renewable and non-renewable resources. To make this learning fun, my teacher had the class play a game where she held up pictures of resources, and students were to shout out a response. Sun—renewable! Fossil fuels—non-renewable! I thought this was such an easy game until she held up a photo of a river. Non-renewable, I shouted! To my surprise, the answer was wrong. I remember expressing my concern to the teacher about labeling water as a renewable resource. Although I could not articulate a scenario in which water would be completely used up, I wanted to hold space for the possibility that water could run out.

In my third-grade mind, I understood that water—and fresh water in particular—was not guaranteed. Many decades later, my concern for water remains. I believe water should be stewarded with the utmost care, respecting its restorative nature. We live in a time where we understand more and more about the complexities of the hydrologic cycle; however, we refuse to seek the balance that creation needs to flourish. Water projects prevent rivers from reaching the ocean, and we pump water miles from their natural spaces to irrigate arid deserts as farmland. Water has become a commodity instead of the gift that God intends.

God has a dream for the world that God has made—an interconnected, interdependent, interrelated creation. That dream is a vision of harmony and renewed life where humanity and the more-than-human parts of creation thrive together in community through mutual respect. God's dream includes you, me, and all of humanity living together as anointed people carrying on God's good work of creation and preservation of the world. In the words of Cherokee writer the Rev. Randy Woodley, God's dream is a community of creation living in Shalom (<https://www.randywoodley.com/>).

The Christian relationship with water finds sacramental expression in baptism. In baptism, water is the outward and visible sign of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which is an inward and spiritual grace. Baptism is a story of becoming: Through it we become new life and join the (re)newed community in Christ. In the waters of baptism, we enter into a covenant—a promise—to follow Christ and to serve God and each other. Christians are born of water and the Spirit (John 3:5), and without water there is no baptism.

As Christians, our relationship with water is not transactional, nor do we view water as a commodity. Water is a symbol of renewed life. As we gather at the font, or in the living waters of our own ecosystems,

Christians are reminded that both baptism and water are gifts we receive from the Creator. We do not create them or build them or control them. We honor them through a life of discipleship, proclaiming by word and example the Good News of God in Christ (Book of Common Prayer, p. 305). We follow Jesus' example of living a truly human life through neighborly love and being good ancestors through kinship and responsibility to all who precede and follow us in our journey through creation. Through our baptismal covenant, we commit to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves. We commit to strive for justice and peace among all people, and with God's help we commit to not wasting or destroying all the goodness that God has given by striving for the preservation of the world.

The water of baptism reminds us whose we are: members of a covenant relationship with God and all of creation. Humanity lives into this covenant relationship through water stewardship, the careful and responsible management of the water that God has entrusted to our care. As disciples of Christ, we steward water because we recognize it as the primal element present before the foundations of the world were laid. Water is the life force that links humanity to the Creator and to the entire community of creation.

Robin Wall Kimmerer, in her chapter "The Sacred and The Superfund," lays out the instructions, or sacred purpose, of the Haudenosaunee: to express gratitude to the life-sustaining beings of the world and to care for them. As Christians, we find our sacred purpose in living a hope-filled life, believing in the power of resurrection, and working toward the peaceful renewal of the world. Baptismal language is covenantal language that reveals a covenantal relationship—the relationship between God, God's people, and creation.

With every sip and splash of water, humanity is invited to remember its connection with creation and the divine. God's dream for humanity is that we will actively participate in the physical and spiritual renewal of all of creation, as members within the community of creation. By activating our faith in God through the baptismal covenant, we affirm that water is not only a resource for human consumption but is the sacred bond that links all of creation. Water stewardship—practiced as Christian discipleship—proclaims water is the foundation for renewed life in Christ and embodies God's desire for humanity to be in right relationship with God and creation.

Discussion Questions

Facilitator guides the group through the discussion questions.

1. This session's film and readings invite us to consider different sources of water, where our water comes from, and how it impacts both human and non-human life. Where does your water source originate from? Where does the water you drink come from?
2. As Robin Wall Kimmerer states in "Braiding Sweetgrass," water is faithful to its responsibilities for sustaining the world. Christian discipleship must include the responsibility of water stewardship—without water, there would be no baptism. How are you participating in the renewal of your baptismal covenant through water stewardship (continue, persevere, proclaim, seek, serve, strive)?
3. "Braiding Sweetgrass" highlights how industrial development turned the sacred Onondaga Lake in present-day Syracuse, New York, into a Superfund site. Are there Superfund sites in your area? If so, share what you know about the sites.
4. In "Triple Divide," we learn about the negative impact on individuals' health due to the unhealth of their water source. How does the health of a watershed affect communities in different ways?
5. "Triple Divide" references being a "good neighbor" several times. What does "being a good neighbor" to human and non-human creation look like?

CLOSING CHECK-OUT & PRAYER

What word describes how you feel right now? After you've shared, please invite another person to go.

After all have offered a word, the facilitator or volunteer can pray a simple prayer bringing together the hopes and prayers of the whole group.

ACTION OPPORTUNITIES

These are activities and engagement opportunities to explore different ways to get involved and learn more.

- Map your watershed and explore other watersheds using the U.S. Geological Survey watershed mapping tool: (https://water.usgs.gov/wsc/map_index.html)
- Discover your personal water footprint calculator: <https://www.waterfootprint.org/resources/interactive-tools/extended-water-footprint-calculator/> or your household water footprint: <https://www.watercalculator.org/wfc2/q/household/> (Spanish option available)
- Participate in or organize a World Water Day (March 22) activity: <https://www.worldwaterday.org/share-2023#activationkit> (available in six languages)
- Participate in a local watershed cleanup or habitat restoration project (check NOAA, local watershed groups and universities).
- Make personal commitments to solve sanitation and water crisis (<https://www.unwater.org/bethechange/>).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



***Ashley Hubbard** (enrolled, Cherokee Nation) was born and raised outside of Montgomery, Alabama. She is the canon for formation for the Episcopal Diocese of South Dakota and serves The Episcopal Church as the secretary of the Task Force on Indigenous Liturgy and as a member of the Executive Council Committee for Indigenous Boarding Schools and Advocacy. As a former microbiologist, high school science teacher, and recent Virginia Theological Seminary graduate, Hubbard is passionate about ecotheology, environmental justice, and exploring the implications of God's call for humanity to be in covenant relationship with creation. In her time off, she enjoys spending time outdoors with her husband of 20 years, the Rev. Joe Hubbard; their three children, Hill, Hattie, and Hannah; and two family dogs, Bubba and Bella.*