

THE BIRTH of HOPE

Advent Meditations on Women
and Climate Change

2022

Written by Dr. Sylvia Keesmaat



PWRDF

The Primate's World Relief
and Development Fund

The Anglican Church of Canada

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Introduction

Whenever a baby is born, hope is renewed – hope for this new life, hope for the mother who birthed this new life, hope for the future and for the world.

As we enter the season when we live and wait, in hope, for the birth of one woman's child, we are invited by biblical scholar, Dr. Sylvia Keesmaat, to journey with her through time, from the birthing of creational hope to the time of climate grief experienced by the women of the flood, to the embodied hope of women climate refugees, and finally to creational hope as it is lived out by women.

In so doing, Dr. Keesmaat helps us make the connections between the women of the biblical texts, and our own hopes and griefs in this time of climate crisis.

Designed for use individually, or in a group, online or in-person, each day offers a scripture passage, a reflection, a prayer, and a related story from PWRDF's partners. And each week contains a brief reflection and questions for bible study.

This series of Advent devotions is part of PWRDF's Education Focus on Creation Care: Climate Action. Now in its second year, the initiative explores the intersections between Climate Change and Gender. Further information and learning resources can be found at pwrdf.org/climate-change-and-gender.

May your journey through Advent and through this resource be hope-filled.

– Suzanne Rumsey, PWRDF Public Engagement Coordinator

About the author



Dr. Sylvia Keesmaat is the co-chair of the Bishop's Committee on Creation Care for the Diocese of Toronto. She teaches online at Bible Remixed (<https://www.bibleremixed.ca/>) and part-time at Trinity College, Toronto School of Theology. Sylvia is the co-author, with Brian Walsh, of *Romans Disarmed: Resisting Empire, Demanding Justice*. She speaks frequently on topics related to the Bible and economic justice, climate catastrophe, gender justice, and Indigenous justice.

Dr. Keesmaat lives at Russet House Farm (<https://www.russethousefarm.ca/>), an off-grid permaculture farm in the Kawartha Lakes on the traditional territory of the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg, with her husband, Brian Walsh, and a fluctuating number of people and animals.

How to read this resource

ON PAPER

Print the PDF. "PWRDF Stories" are included in full where possible, with the URLs beneath them to read the entire story online.

ON A SCREEN

PWRDF Story links are also embedded within the text of the digital PDF and will take you directly to our website.

IN AN EMAIL

Subscribe at <https://pwrdf.org/advent2022/> to receive an email every morning. Story links are provided in the email.



WEEK ONE

The Creator: Birthing Creational Hope

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 27

A Nurturing Creator

READ

Colossians 1:15-20

Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, for in Jesus all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. Jesus is before all things, and in him all things hold together. Jesus is the head of the body, the church, the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that Jesus might come to have first place in everything. For in Jesus all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Jesus God was pleased to reconcile to God's very self all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of the cross.

REFLECT

Advent is usually described as a time of waiting. Waiting for God to act. Waiting for newness. But what if the place we find ourselves is too complicated, difficult, and hopeless for us to wait any longer? What if the climate crisis is so dire that waiting doesn't seem like an option any more?

Over the next four weeks, we will explore the stories of women in the biblical text. Some of these women found themselves in hopeless places. For some, waiting was not an option. What do their stories teach us about the climate crisis and our response to it?

Waiting was also not an option for the One who created all things. As we shall see, the Creator is deeply committed to the flourishing of creation. The Creator works with unfailing love to create renewal out of ruin, to bring healing out of brokenness, to reconcile all things in heaven and on earth, to birth hope.

PRAY

*Creator God,
Whose patience is earth deep and ocean wide,
you do not wait to bring healing and hope
in the midst of loss.
Give us a vision to not only see your healing work,
but also make it our own.
For the sake of your creation,
Amen.*

The women in the stories were following this Creator God. They saw themselves in God's story, for they were the image-bearers of the Creator, a Creator who brought the world into being, held it together in love, and went the limit to bring reconciliation to all of creation. Like these women, the Creator God had nourished life, nurtured both a people and the creation itself, and grieved when violence and pain had ended the possibility of flourishing peace. Could it be that the hope that the women in the story carried was rooted in their deep identification with the God who brought all life into being?

In this first week we will explore the neglected images of the Creator God as nurturing, nourishing Life-Giver, images that intimately bind the story of the Creator with the women who grappled with climate change both in biblical times and today.



**PWRDF
STORY**

Lighting the way to safer births in Mozambique

Moms and babies in rural Mozambique will get a better chance at a healthy birth, thanks to a PWRDF campaign that ran last year from May 1 until October 31, 2021. The Light For Every Birth project reunited PWRDF with the Mozambican health organization EHALE, and We Care Solar in California to bring solar electricity to 50 healthcare clinics. After several months aboard a container ship from California due to COVID-related delays, across the Pacific to Mozambique, the suitcases finally arrived in Nampula at the end of December. They are being distributed and installed.

The success of this project started in 2016. PWRDF was embarking on a historic four-year maternal, newborn and child health program funded by donors and the Government of Canada with a 6:1 match. One of the successes in year one of the program, known as All Mothers and Children Count, was the installation of 30 "solar suitcases" in rural health clinics in Mozambique. The hard plastic boxes open like a suitcase, are installed on the wall of a clinic, then connected to a solar panel mounted to the roof. Bright, plentiful sunshine flows into the panel and the suitcase, powering a headlamp, a ceiling light, phone charging ports and a fetal Doppler.

Over the years since these suitcases were installed, PWRDF's Mozambique partners saw a dramatic increase in healthy births during the night, and greater acceptance of going to the clinics to have a trained birth attendant. The suitcases are still in perfect working condition. Any repairs that were required were easily made by those who had been trained in 2016.

People, after they see what the solar suitcases

have done to other communities and their impact, they call me and say 'you have to protect us, you have to bring a solar suitcase to us,' said Olinda Magaia, Executive Director at EHALE. Magaia joined PWRDF for a Zoom celebration of the program's success, and with former Director of Development Partnerships Zaida Bastos translating, she spoke about the excitement for the new suitcases to be installed.

The video supporting our campaign was viewed on YouTube and Facebook more than 2,500 times.

As there was no government match for this program, PWRDF had to be more creative in its approach to fundraising. The cost of each solar suitcase, including shipping and taxes, was roughly \$5,800, for a total project budget of \$290,000. The fact that it was the middle of the pandemic even added to the challenge.

Many supporters took advantage of a new crowd funding feature offered by PWRDF. On the occasion of her 70th birthday, the president of the Board, Valerie Maier, raised more than enough for one suitcase. A couple from Hamilton, John and Deborah Bowen, marked their 50th wedding anniversary by encouraging friends and family to donate to the cause. They raised enough to buy two solar suitcases.

A matching grant of \$100,000 from an anonymous donor encouraged many others to support the campaign knowing that their contributions would be doubled. The Diocese of Toronto, a big supporter for the original All Mothers and Children Count program, came to the table again, this time with a grant from FaithWorks for \$10,000.

Read the entire story at <https://pwrdf.org/lighting-the-way-to-safer-births-in-mozambique/>

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 28

The Dream of the Spirit

READ

Genesis 1.1-2, 24-25; 2:7-9a

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. ... And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind." And it was so. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind and the cattle of every kind and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good. ... Then the Lord God formed the earth creature from the dust of the earth and breathed into their nostrils the breath of life, and the earth creature became a living being. And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there God put the earth creature whom God had formed. Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food.

REFLECT

In the beginning, the Spirit of the Creator hovered over the waters and dreamed. The Spirit imagined beauty: colours and patterns that would evoke joy and laughter; rich satisfying smells that would lure insects and animals to food; sounds that would exhilarate and provoke song and play; textures that would challenge and comfort.

The Creator called those dreams into being, called earth and water to partner in birthing creatures that would delight and inspire. The Creator knelt in the earth to form the earth creature (adam) from the earth (adamah), the human creature that at first was neither male or female, but rather the one who was a marriage of the soil and the breath of God. The Creator then planted a food forest around them to feed, nourish, provide shelter and shade, and surround them with scent and beauty.

PRAY

*Spirit of Creation,
you long for us to be surrounded
by the diversity, joy, and beauty of your creatures.
Plant your dreams within us,
that we might not only long for this creational joy,
but also bring those dreams into being.
Amen.*

All of creation was a gift to the rest of creation: the trees and plants were to be food and habitation for the earth-creature and the animals; the animals were to serve the plants by pollinating, pruning and fertilizing them; the earth creatures were to observe and serve the earth and the other creatures. All of creation a harmonious whole of service and love.

This dream of the Spirit permeates the whole of the biblical story. This vision of a creation where all creatures live in harmony, and where every part of creation serves and is nurtured by the whole animates all that the Creator God does. Everything in this story is directed to restoring the harmony, beauty and diversity of creation as a home for all creatures and for God. In Advent, we join with the longing of the Spirit. In Advent, we too long for creation to be a home for all creatures.



**PWRDF
STORY**

PWRDF supports Partners In Health in improving maternal health in Lesotho

Lesotho, the tiny land-locked country surrounded by South Africa, was hard hit by the HIV epidemic in the early 2000s. As of 2016, it had the second highest rate of infection in the world, with 340,000 people, or 25% of its population, living with HIV.

Partners In Health (PIH) began working in Lesotho in 2006 during the height of the epidemic, at the invitation of the country's Ministry of Health, supporting HIV care and treatment in seven health clinics. Since then, PIH Lesotho has worked to revitalize primary healthcare delivery by increasing the number and capacity of staff, improving infrastructure and working to upgrade community health workers.

In July 2020 PWRDF will begin a three-year partnership with PIH Lesotho to provide maternal and newborn care in the catchment area of the Bobete Health Centre to prevent maternal and infant death. The total budget for the project is \$320,000 Cdn, and PWRDF is contributing \$180,000. PIH has shifted its focus on HIV case identification and treatment to a comprehensive primary healthcare approach, including maternal and child health and the Government of Lesotho has based its National Health Care Reform initiative on PIH Lesotho's model of care. PIH is a partner and a technical advisor at the community, district and national levels to reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, and combat HIV and TB through the progressive realization of universal health coverage for comprehensive primary care services. PWRDF and PIH have built a strong relationship over the years, working together in Haiti, Rwanda and Malawi.

"PIH has an excellent reputation and is known to deliver quality programming. I am confident PWRDF will have a similar experience implementing this project in Lesotho," says PWRDF Development Program Coordinator Jeanine Cudmore.

Mountainous terrain, limited transportation infrastructure and a largely rural population make the delivery of health services extremely challenging in Lesotho, especially maternal and newborn care. Lesotho's maternal mortality rate is 487 per 100,000 live births, and one in 61 women face a lifetime risk of dying during childbirth. In rural Thaba-Tseka district, 68% of births occur in health facilities, compared to the national rate of 77%. Although antenatal care rates are relatively high at 74%, it is essential that this reach be increased and that all women receive at least four antenatal care visits, especially given the high HIV prevalence rate and the importance of providing prevention of mother to child transmission.

The project will provide maternal and newborn care in the catchment area of the Bobete Health Centre to prevent maternal and infant mortality and includes at least four antenatal care sessions with each pregnant woman and postnatal care for the mothers and their newborns.

Pregnant women will be encouraged to stay at the maternal waiting home in the lead-up to their due date to ensure they deliver safely at the health centre. Moms-to-be will also be tested for HIV. Transmission of the virus from mother to child will be prevented in women who test positive, and newborns who test positive will receive appropriate treatments.

Read the entire story at

<https://pwrdf-supports-partners-in-health-in-improving-maternal-health-in-lesotho>

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 29

From Delight to Grief

READ

Genesis 6:5-8

The Lord saw that the wickedness of humans was great in the earth and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry for making humans on the earth, and it grieved God to the heart. So the Lord said, "I will blot out from the earth the humans I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air—for I am sorry that I have made them." But Noah found favour in the sight of the Lord.

REFLECT

It unraveled rather quickly: from delight to grief in the blink of an eye. The Creator's heart now full of sorrow—the world that had so beautifully sprung to life now full of violence.

How could healing come again? How could the toxic waters be cleansed, the barren landscapes reforested? How could salmon return to the rivers and the wild rice return to the lakes?

Could cleansing bring restoration? Would destroying those who enact violence on the earth bring healing? Could the ruin and violence simply be washed away so that creation could begin anew? And how would newness come? Perhaps the family of Noah: wife, sons and their wives, could be the new image-bearers, the ones who would observe and serve creation during the judgement of the waters, so that they would know how to live in harmony with the other creatures.

A plan of judgement, yes, but also a plan to birth newness out of destruction.

At what point did the Creator realize that the

destruction was too much to bear? Was it when the first insects floated by, caught in the eddies from which they couldn't escape? Was it when the last child, sank, gulping under the water? Was it when the last trees disappeared from view, or when the last bird, with no place to land, dropped, exhausted, under the waves? Was it then that the Creator realized that the overwhelming grief for the vibrant, colourful, chattering, singing, aromatic richness of the earth was not soothed, but that anguish had intensified? Did the promise of "never again" arise out of anguished grief?

We do not know. But we do know this: that for the Creator, the grief of the violence done to the earth was not healed with earth's destruction. We do know this: the Creator has promised that from now on, even in the midst of violence, the flourishing of the creatures, the flourishing of creation will be where God's best efforts will be directed. With this promise, as a mother commits to the care of her child, the Creator commits to creation forever.

PRAY

*Grieving Creator,
when joy turned to sorrow
you did not abandon the world you so lovingly created.
May our sorrow over creation's destruction
be held in your loving hand,
our hope for newness be strengthened by your promises.
For the sake of creation,
Amen.*



PWRDF
STORY

A heartfelt thanks for "love for God's work"

Kasenga, Zambia is home to more than 8,000 people, many of whom are retired civil servants and army personnel. While it is located about 65 kilometres from the capital city, Lusaka, the closest health facility was 16 kilometres away. Expectant mothers had to give birth in their homes, leading to an increase in maternal deaths with no trained health care providers at the time of delivery. People were also dying from malaria, diarrhea, HIV and AIDS because of the lack of access to health services.

In 2007, the Anglican Diocese of Lusaka embarked on a project to construct a maternity clinic in Kasenga to improve social and health impacts. The Diocese started planning the construction of the health centre with the District Health officer in Chongwe, where it is located. Anglicans in Kasenga identified three plots of land which had been donated to the Diocese. The Diocese made an agreement with the government to provide the building infrastructure while the government would provide the staff, medicines, drugs and specialized equipment. The final plan included the construction of a church, a retreat centre, a health clinic and a youth centre and will serve as the Mission Centre for the Diocese.

The health facility is commissioned by the Bishop.

Over the years, the Diocese built the clinic, staff housing, facilities for washing and toilets (ablu-

tion block), a water reticulation system and provided some basic furniture. All of this was done with the help of partners. In 2019, PWRDF partnered with the Diocese to fund the construction of an incinerator (\$12,000) and complete construction of the washing facilities and toilets (ablu-tion block). These parts of the facility were required to make it operational. St. John the Baptist Church in Cobble Hill, B.C. also donated \$7,665 towards the project.

On May 27, 2021 the health facility was commissioned. Since then, staff have helped women deliver more than 70 healthy babies. The centre also provides Mother to Child services, COVID-19 testing and vaccinations, and malaria testing and treatment. Given the size of the outpatient area and the demand for services, plans to extend it are in place. The centre is very busy and staff often fill dual roles; one staff member is working in the labour ward as well as the outpatient clinic. The community will build another staff house and hire more health workers to meet the needs.

"PWRDF has helped us considerably in the fostering of health quality services in the area by the construction of the incinerator and ablu-tion block," writes Canon Grace N. Luwewa, Diocesan Administrator. "Thank you PWRDF for your love for God's work."

Read this story at <https://pwrdf.org/a-heartfelt-thanks-to-pwrdf-for-love-for-gods-work/>

Midwives of Resistance

READ

Exodus 1:13-21

The Egyptians subjected the Israelites to hard servitude and made their lives bitter with hard servitude in mortar and bricks and in every kind of field labour. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them.

The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, "When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live." But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this and allowed the boys to live?" The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them." So God dealt well with the midwives, and the people multiplied and became very strong. And because the midwives were God-fearing, God gave them families.

REFLECT

The midwives were named Shiphrah and Puah. They knew about life. And they knew that life was being destroyed. They knew that the storehouses of Egypt were full only because of the work of slaves. They knew that the people were groaning and that the earth was groaning under Pharaoh's imperial agricultural regime, a system of growing that was destroying the earth.

When Pharaoh became afraid of a slave uprising and ordered the children of the slaves killed, the midwives knew that they could not murder baby boys; they could not use their birthing skills as instruments of death. For they knew the Creator. So they began to resist. No death on their watch. No betrayal of their calling to bring life. They refused to sacrifice the children to the abusive reign of Pharaoh.

PRAY

*Creator of life,
you called Shiphrah and Puah to bring forth life,
as you call us all.
Give us discernment,
to see where the powers of death are destroying creation
and strength to resist them.
That the earth might be set free from violence,
and flourish once again.
Amen.*

Lacking any obvious power, the midwives subverted imperial death in their own way. As did a mother and daughter who later hid their baby in a basket in the river. As did Pharaoh's own daughter when she saved that baby and named him Moses, and handed him the unique tools that would enable him to lead his people to freedom.

It was the women that the Creator blessed. Those who set the resistance in motion, those who continued it in their own subversive way. And, as the story continues, it was creation that continued the resistance in the plagues: the water turning to blood, the animals out of control, the hail and the darkness. Women and creation together resisting the powers that would destroy them. (See Exodus 1-12 for the entire story.)



**PWRDF
STORY**

This Int'l Day of the World's Indigenous People, PWRDF celebrates midwives

The International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples is observed on August 9 every year to raise awareness and protect the rights of the world's Indigenous peoples. This day also recognizes the achievements and contributions that Indigenous people make to improve world issues, such as protecting the environment. The theme for this year is "leaving no one behind, a call for a new social contract, highlighting rights, diversity, participation and inclusion."

PWRDF acknowledges and recognizes our many Indigenous partners, who since 1997, have carried out initiatives aimed to restore and preserve Indigenous languages, culture and traditional knowledge, as well as healing and health for women, youth programs and providing appropriate counselling on suicide prevention, and access to safe water. All these partners' programs and projects are aimed to ensure the wellbeing for today and future generations.

PWRDF has also supported Inter-Indigenous partnerships and Indigenous cultural and knowledge exchange between Indigenous communities from Canada and Latin America. During these activities, the participating Indigenous groups have identified one key concern: the challenges faced by Indigenous midwives.

In 2017, in response to the request from Indigenous women's organizations in the Americas, PWRDF funded the Indigenous Maternal Health and Midwifery Practices Program. This program is led by

KINAL Antzetik from Mexico, CHIRAPAQ from Peru and Ryerson University's Aboriginal Initiatives from Canada. It has helped improve maternal health of Indigenous women in the Americas by empowering Indigenous midwives to design, develop and implement strategies and best practices.

In 2018, representatives of CHIRAPAQ, KINAL and Ryerson participated at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), and put the issue of Indigenous midwifery firmly on the UN agenda. Their recommendations on Indigenous midwifery were submitted and included in the corresponding final reports, specifically regarding:

- access to health systems with cultural relevance
- strengthening of Indigenous health systems
- exercising sexual and reproductive rights
- recognition of the knowledge of Indigenous peoples in health matters.

Indigenous midwifery knowledge and practice are critical to preserving Indigenous culture. Language, food cultivation, medicinal plant use and practices are combined in rituals of a deep spiritual significance. Indigenous midwifery is not limited to delivering babies; it is directly related to the preservation of knowledge, cosmology and the physical territory of Indigenous people and its future generations. PWRDF staff were honoured to witness the international Indigenous exchanges of traditional midwifery knowledge carried out by CHIRAPAQ, KINAL and Ryerson.

Read the entire story at

<https://pwrdf.org/this-international-day-of-the-worlds-indigenous-people-pwrdf-celebrates-midwives/>

A Mother's Grief

READ

Jeremiah 9:10 & Hosea 4:2-3

I will take up weeping and wailing for the mountains and a lamentation for the pastures of the wilderness, because they are laid waste so that no one passes through, and the lowing of cattle is not heard; both the birds of the air and the animals have fled and are gone.

Swearing, lying, and murder, and stealing and adultery break out; bloodshed follows bloodshed. Therefore the land mourns, and all who live in it languish; together with the wild animals and the birds of the air, even the fish of the sea are perishing.

REFLECT

“You are only as happy as your saddest child.” Words of wisdom from one mother to another. Perhaps, in relation to the story of the Creator, we could amend them: “The Creator is only as happy as the saddest part of creation.” Jeremiah describes the deep despair that the Creator feels over the destruction of creation. The Creator is keening in sorrow over the mining of the mountains, the loss of the places where the badgers and goats no longer find home. The One who brought rich life into being is loudly lamenting the barrenness of the wilderness pastures, where wild animals and the flocks of the shepherds no longer find food. The One who conceived of wild and glorious living things is overcome with sorrow that the sound of the cattle is silent, that the birds and animals have been pushed to extinction.

Solastalgia is a word that describes grief for the places you love that have been lost. The Creator

is experiencing this grief, intensely mourning the loss of the places that were so tenderly created, and lamenting the loss of so many deeply loved creatures.

But it goes deeper than that, for the mourning of the Creator mirrors the mourning of creation. Like a mother lying awake at night, the Creator is entering into the grief of the saddest child: the insects who can no longer find food, the birds whose nesting grounds have been destroyed, the turtles who starve to death on plastic. The bringer of life is bearing the sorrow of the world. And in giving voice to this grief, to the pain of creation, the Creator makes space for something new. For the sorrowing creation is held in the arms of the One who dreams ceaselessly of healing, even when weighted down with grief.

PRAY

*Grieving Creator,
you carry the sorrow of the creatures,
you bear the grief of the earth,
you are weighed down by the mourning in the waters,
yet still you dream of restoration and newness.
Help us to lift up your lament for creation,
that our cry might become the cry of the earth.
Amen.*



PWRDF
STORY

The water keepers of Colombia

Four years ago, community members in the small town of Tasco, Colombia occupied the road to the iron mine pit for a year. They were blocking trucks from moving iron from the mine to the plant. Edilma Chia, a mother of four grown children, says they were looking for reparations for personal and environmental damages and the end of mining activities. Iron exploitation pollutes the small water reservoirs nearby and weakens the soil causing the water to filter through, and not accumulate to feed the streams, creeks, lakes and rivers. Lack of water also destroys surrounding vegetation. Edilma's work also contributed to water access to the communal aqueduct built by piping the water from a small river for distribution to the 325 members. The community does most of the aqueduct work and administration. The plumber who takes care of the pipe system is the only person paid for this work.

As members of local women's groups supported by PWRDF partner ILSA (Instituto Latinoamericano para una Sociedad y un derecho Alternativos), Edilma is one of many women learning how to participate in municipal public affairs and policy development. Women want to have a say in the socioeconomic and environmental agendas of their local governments in Tasco, Pisba and Gameza.

It's crucial in Colombia. The country is home to half of the world's moorlands, which provide 70% of its potable water and feeds the subsidiary rivers that sustain the Amazon and Orinoco rivers as they meet the Atlantic Ocean.

Local and foreign multinationals are pressing communities to leave the land they have protected for generations in the Páramos region, where they live and farm, in their quest for minerals such as iron and coal. ILSA, a rights focused organization created in 1978, is helping women become stronger leaders, to protect the environment and to develop income

alternatives. By supporting this work, PWRDF contributes to improving the lives of 75 rural women and 1,375 community members including families.

Group members recently organized and promoted community discussions with electoral candidates for the Municipal Council, something that has never been done before. Community members in various towns listened to the candidates' platforms and to the proposals that women brought to the table. One of their principle requests was that elected candidates develop a public budget with a gender perspective. The Municipal Council is expected to present a budget report within six months and follow up with further discussions on gender. A "Good Will Agreement" containing two of the main commitments made was sealed with the prospective candidates' handprints.

Elizabeth Vargas is the head of her family and a rural leader. She works at a butchery and lives with her sons, a teenager and a six-year-old boy. At home, she raises rabbits, chickens and hens, and farms on communal land. She is also active in advocating for gender empowerment and the environment. Last year Elizabeth ran in the Municipal Council elections. Although she was not elected, she is passing along her experience with this process to other peasant women, for the future.

Karen Maldonado, 25, is from Pisba municipality. She started her own coffee production business in December 2019 on one hectare of land that her mother gave her. As a future leader, her goal is to learn leadership skills and to produce enough coffee to support herself and her toddler daughter. After training with ILSA, she became a key figure in the creation of the Alianza of Pisba entrepreneur and agroecologist women, ASOPISBA. She is also a water protector and therefore a protector of life in the Páramos.

Read the entire story at <https://pwrdf.org/meet-the-water-keepers-of-colombia/>

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 2

The Spirit's Dream Fulfilled

READ

Revelation 21.1-4; 22.1-3

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“See, the home of God is among mortals. God will dwell with them; they will be God’s peoples, and God will be with them and be their God; God will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.”

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month, and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

REFLECT

In the beginning, the Spirit hovered over the waters and dreamed. As the story unfolded, the Spirit repeatedly gave voice to that dream in new circumstances. Even in the midst of grief over the violence done on the earth, the destruction of creation by empires, and the mourning of the creatures, the Spirit refused to stop dreaming of a world of beauty and diversity, of a place where the Creator could be at home, of a place where all creatures flourished.

The book of Revelation outlines some of the most atrocious destruction one can imagine on the earth: the empires of the world have destroyed the beauty and diversity of the Creator’s work by means of war, consumption and greed. The future of the earth seems hopeless indeed.

And in the midst of this destruction, our breath is taken away by this vision of hope—a new heaven and new earth, a city with a river running through

it, and a food forest surrounding the river. All the death and mourning inflicted on creation will cease, and the Creator will gently wipe away all the tears of all the creatures.

The Bringer of Life so loved the world that she was unable to abandon it. As the story unfolds, the Creator God works over and over to bring newness and abundant life, flourishing and fertility. This vision at the end of the story draws us into that same work, that same narrative.

This vision stands like a beacon before us, drawing us forward, feeding our imagination as we ask, “what can we do to find ourselves in that place of newness?” The women whose stories we will be exploring in the following weeks were, like the Creator, rooted in a deep love for creation, for their places, and a deep hope for restoration. That is what draws them forward to hope, even in the midst of crisis.

PRAY

*Bringer of hope,
we can hardly imagine
a world without mourning,
without tears,
without pain.*

*Enable us to see and live into a future overflowing
with fruitful abundance and joy for all.*

Amen.



**PWRDF
STORY**

The women of ILSA stay connected to water



Members of ILSA gather on Zoom during the pandemic and share their challenges of protecting the Páramos in Colombia, followed by documentary footage of the land. Subtitles provided.

Watch the video at <https://youtu.be/hcSnANsLzvA>

Week One Bible Study Guide

The Creator: Birthing Creational Hope

Pondering God's nurturing care for creation allows us to explore all the ways the text speaks about God in relation to creation: the Spirit hovering over the water; the Creator, kneeling in the earth, sculpting a human being from the earth (an earth-creature); God, designing and planting a garden for the earth-creature to live in. This brief glimpse of God's deep engagement with creation enables us to realize the depth of the grief the Creator feels when everything devolves into violence and destruction. Like a mother mourning the loss of a child, so God mourns the loss of this beautiful and diverse creation. Like a mother who aches with the suffering of her children, the Creator laments alongside the lament of the earth. And, like a mother who refuses to abandon the children that she has nurtured and cared for, so God commits to creation, to the earth-creatures, dreaming of a day when resurrection will renew all things.

1. Reflect on how the passages this week change or deepen how you think about and experience God. How does the depth of both God's love and God's grief for creation shape your response to the destruction of the earth and her creatures?
2. Share with each other a place that you love that no longer exists. Imagine the lament and grief of that place as it began to disappear. What other creatures might mourn its disappearance? Reflect on how we could begin to respond to that mourning.
3. One way to describe the biblical story is to say that "God's original plan was to hang out by a river, in a garden, with a whole bunch of animals, birds, bugs and frogs, and a couple of naked vegetarians." When we reach the book of Revelation we see that God's new creation reminds us of that vision: God has created a river running through a food forest, where we can hang out together into the ages. Reflect on how this vision might shape our actions now, as we wrestle with what faithful living looks like in creation.

Reflect on the connections you made between this week's PWRDF stories and Sylvia's reflections.



WEEK TWO

The Women of the Flood: Climate Grief

Male Violence and the Destruction of the Earth

READ

Genesis 6.1-6

When people began to spread over the earth, and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that they were fair, and they seized wives for themselves of all that they chose. Then the Lord said, “My spirit shall not live in mortals forever, for they are flesh; their days shall be one hundred twenty years.” The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went in to the daughters of humans, who bore children to them. These were the heroes of old, warriors of renown.

The Lord saw that the wickedness of humans was great in the earth and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually.

REFLECT

These verses at the start of Genesis 6 tell us about the sons of God, who took the women they wanted and had children who became “the heroes of old, the warriors of renown.”

For those raised on stories of male saviours, phrases like the “heroes” and “warriors” are thrilling, evoking knights and battles, honour and bravery, daring deeds and quests for valour.

For others, the “heroes” and “warriors” are more complicated. They are the ones whose language is violence, whose default is war. They are the ones for whom women were the prize, to be taken at will, as the text tells us, “as many as they chose” (v. 2).

It is clear that for the Creator, these heroes and warriors are the problem. Their presence meant that “the Lord saw that the injustice of humankind was great in the earth, and that the inclination of their

hearts was only evil continually.”

It is no coincidence that the warlords whose currency was violence and power created violence on the earth. The linking of war, violence and creational destruction is one that is still present today.

This week we will explore the story of the first climate catastrophe, the flood that resulted from the violence of the warlords. We will not focus on the perspective of Noah, but rather look at the story through the eyes of the women mentioned repeatedly in the narrative: his wife and daughters-in-law. How do these women inhabit the story? And, situated as they are in the overlap of male violence and creational destruction, do they have something to teach us about hope?

PRAY

*We love the stories, Creator,
of heroes and defenders
whose daring deeds rescue the world.
Free us from our fascination
with power rooted in violence.
Show us your more excellent way,
For the sake of your love,
Amen.*



PWRDF
STORY

PWRDF partners with Nobel Prize winner

The co-winner of the Nobel Peace Prize for 2018, Dr. Denis Mukwege, is the founder of Panzi Foundation and Maison Dorcas, a project supported by PWRDF.

When Dr. Mukwege created the Panzi Foundation in 2008, the goal was to support the work of the Panzi Hospital and improve outreach to people in hard-to-reach rural communities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. But the foundation has done so much more, becoming a voice for gender equality, helping women rebuild their lives after rape and other forms of assault.

“As PWRDF doubles its efforts to address gender inequality and empower women, working with partners whose mandate is to eliminate gender-based violence has become our priority,” says Zaida Bastos, Director of Development Partnership Program. “The silent war waged on women in the DRC, away from the limelight, is a tragedy that PWRDF couldn’t ignore. Supporting the Panzi Foundation and Maison Dorcas was the right thing to do.”

Panzi Hospital is known as the place where women who survive gruesome sexual violence go to be treated, and Dr. Mukwege is known as the “Doctor that repairs women.”

“For a woman victim of sexual assault and violence, the medical care is the first step in a long road to recovery,” Dr. Mukwege told Bastos and Richard Librock, External Funding Program Manager on a recent visit to the DRC. “We can, and should do better by accompanying her until she can stand on her own.”

After discharge from the Panzi Hospital, women are brought to Maison Dorcas where they can openly speak about their experiences with other women who have faced similar violence and help to build up the

self-esteem and earn skills they need to return home.

Recently, Netflix produced a documentary called City of Joy. Many of the women that are cared for at Maison Dorcas also participated in the City of Joy project.

At Maison Dorcas, women are provided with psychosocial support, legal assistance, literacy training and education as well as re-integration services to help the women readjust into their communities, as smoothly as possible. The 2018 World of Gifts guide invites PWRDF supporters to purchase women’s livelihood kits to support women at Panzi House.

Maison Dorcas is located in the South Kivu province of the DRC, the third worst province in the country in terms of gender-based violence. Victims rarely report these crimes because of fear of repercussions or because of the shame and stigma. Violence is inflicted on women by armed rebel groups, soldiers and also civilians, and after the women are raped they are often expelled from their homes and their communities. The perpetrators of these crimes rarely face justice and continue to offend as the women suffer in silence.

PWRDF staff were lucky to meet Dr. Mukwege and see first-hand the amazing work the Panzi Foundation does for victims of gender-based violence. Dr. Mukwege, who is also a pastor, preaches every Sunday about the importance of fighting gender-based violence. He made an impression with his passion and determination to fight for rights of victims.

“Meeting him was the experience of a lifetime,” said Bastos. “When I learned he won the Nobel Prize I was so happy not only for him, but for all victims of gender-based violence everywhere in the world.”

Read the entire story at

<https://pwrdf.org/pwrdf-proud-to-partner-with-nobel-prize-winner-dr-denis-mukwege/>

An End to the Violence

READ

Genesis 6:11-14; 17-19

Now the earth was ruined in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw that the earth was ruined, for all flesh had corrupted its ways upon the earth. And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence because of them; now I am going to ruin them along with the earth. Make yourself an ark of cypress wood. For my part, I am going to bring a flood of waters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. And of every living thing, of all flesh, you shall bring two of every kind into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female.

REFLECT

Violence and ruin. The women knew the story well. They had seen how the warlords enslaved people and their lands. They had seen how the land, severed from the care and affection of those who cared for it, was abused. How the trees were cut down for palisades and forts; how whole forests were chopped and burned to heat the metal for weapons. How the earth, untethered from the trees, washed away and muddied the waterways. How the mines turned their water to poison. How, without trees, fertility decreased, animals were scarce, the soil dried up.

The women walked further each day for water, each step taken in fear, knowing that at this time, at this place, they could be "taken" like so many women had been before them.

The women planted seeds with songs and prayers, hoping the rains would fall gently and not wash away their seedlings. Hoping that hungry animals would not eat their crops. Hoping in vain.

PRAY

*We don't need to imagine
violence and ruin in our cities and wilderness, Creator God.
Give us words for our lament,
that we might hold the sorrow of the earth,
and the sorrow of the creatures,
always before you.
Amen.*

The women watched their fruit and nut trees flower and prayed without hope for the pollinators to return and do their life-giving dance for fruitfulness.

The women watched their children die from poisoned water, their eyes growing large from hunger.

When the "heroes" of old turned their energy to the making of weapons and the fighting of wars rather than the care of the land, who paid the price?

Perhaps when God announced the "ruin" of all flesh as the penalty for the ways that the earth had already been ruined, the women breathed a sigh of relief. For the earth was in crisis—ruin resulted in ruin. And the warlords who filled the earth with violence, who took women for their own, who destroyed the forest, the streams, the feeding places? The women were glad that they would reap what they had sown.



**PWRDF
STORY**

New life for women after violence

In the Book of Acts, Dorcas was a woman of great charity who helped widows and may have even been a widow herself. In those days, widows were often poor and isolated. When Dorcas died, she was so mourned by her beneficiaries that the Apostle Peter came to where her body was laid out for burial and raised her from the dead.

And so it is at the home named for her in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Maison Dorcas, that women recover and find new life after being traumatized by sexual or gender-based violence. In the DRC, women who are victims of violence rarely, if ever report these crimes because of fear of repercussions or because of the stigma and shame that come with being a victim. The perpetrators of violence rarely face consequences there. Instead the victims suffer in silence as they are shunned by their families and communities.

Maison Dorcas is part of the Panzi Foundation, established in 2008 by Nobel Peace Prize winner Dr. Denis Mukwege in South Kivu, where the rate of sexual and gender-based violence is the third highest among 25 provinces of the DRC.

Maison Dorcas was created after the startling realization that 40% to 60% of women treated at Panzi Hospital are unable to return to their homes after medical treatment. This may be because of the extent of their injuries, risk of ongoing violence or the deep stigma attached to victims of sexual and gender-based violence.

"For a woman victim of sexual assault and violence, the medical care is the first step in a long road to recovery," Dr. Mukwege told PWRDF staff on a recent visit to the DRC. "We can, and should do better by accompanying her until she can stand on her own."

Maison Dorcas acts as a transit and safety house for victims of violence and those needing extended medical care. Women at Maison Dorcas continue

their healing journey along with other vulnerable women from their communities in a setting where they are safe and heard. They actively participate in their own decision-making, empowering them and building up their self-esteem.

Mwavita Malinga Cécile, 47, came to Maison Dorcas on the encouragement of a friend. She once ran a successful business and was able to care for her husband and family of seven children. But one night, all her property and money was stolen. The trauma of the robbery rocked her, and she began to find life very difficult. She isolated herself and did not have the courage to leave her house. She could not meet her children's needs or even eat. The concerned friend had been trained in basketry at Maison Dorcas and convinced her to join the training session. Cécile was skeptical, but agreed to give it a try. When she started the training activities, everything seemed to be difficult. But with other women who survived similar situations around her, she gradually realized that despite the difficult situation, she had to make an effort. While learning basketry and business skills, Cécile also had sessions with a psychologist and social worker. They helped her understand she was responsible for creating her own income-generating business. She began by selling soaps produced by the women of Maison Dorcas with her small capital of \$3. A month later, she had saved \$10 US dollars and decided to buy and market more baskets. She plans to diversify her business activities even further.

PWRDF supports Maison Dorcas in providing women with essential skills such as literacy, numeracy and small business training. The aim of this training is to empower victims of gender-based and sexual violence and to ensure that their livelihoods improve and they have the skills they need to reintegrate into their communities and their families.

Read the entire story at <https://pwrdf.org/new-life-for-women-after-violence/>

Seeds of Hope

READ

Genesis 6:21; 7:11-16

God said, “Also take with you every kind of food that is eaten, and store it up, and it shall serve as food for you and for them.”

In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened. The rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights. On the very same day Noah with his sons, Shem and Ham and Japheth, and Noah’s wife and the three wives of his sons entered the ark, they and every wild animal of every kind and all domestic animals of every kind and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth and every bird of every kind. They went into the ark with Noah, two and two of all flesh in which there was the breath of life. And those that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him, and the Lord shut them in.

REFLECT

Black farmer and activist, Leah Penniman, tells the story of the African women who secretly braided the seeds of their land into their hair before being loaded onto the slave ships. It was an act of incredible hope, that one day they would be rooted once more, able to plant and nurture and grow.

The women braiding seeds into their hair were saying, in effect, “one day the power of the slave traders, the war lords, the conquerors, will be broken and we will grow a feast to celebrate.”

Did the women at the time of the flood have the same hope? As they attempted to gather two of every living thing—did they worry that this would not be enough? They had raised enough goats and sheep to know that a genetic pool of two was not really viable. Did their task fill them with despair or did they carry a stubborn hope?

As they dried the grasses for hay, gathered grain

PRAY

*Creator of all living things,
you gave us seeds
to grow abundance from the earth,
and to grow hope for renewal in the face of death.
Nourish and water our seeds we pray,
that the green growth of new life
might surround us once again.
Amen.*



**PWRDF
STORY**

Row by row: Women in the DRC heal from violence while learning to farm

Near the southeast corner of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, among the steep green mountains, sits the town of Kaziba. On five hectares of farmland, women are learning how to make compost and plant seeds in rows. Eggplant, cabbage, beans, corn and plum seedlings are neatly spaced and sprouting up.

The project is one of three farmer field schools established in 2019 by Maison Dorcas, part of the Panzi Foundation. The Dorcas Rurale program in Kaziba supports 100 survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. PWRDF is funding the three-year program now in its final year.

Mostly women but also a few men are working together in what is called Mutuelle de Solidarité, or solidarity groups. This community-integrated approach empowers women and challenges long held beliefs that women are weak. The solidarity group approach and agro-pastoral activities have enabled several women and households to get out of precarious situations and regain their livelihoods. PWRDF funded 14 out of the 57 solidarity groups, with each group averaging 25 members. PWRDF also funded 17 business plans developed by the groups.

Barhasima Karhambwa, a pastor and counsellor in one of the Kaziba groups, says this approach has brought more benefits to the community. Families have seen their socio-economic situation improve.

Read this story at

<https://pwrdf.org/row-by-row-women-in-the-drc-heal-from-violence-while-learning-to-farm/>

Matumaini Espérance, a resident of nearby Bwegera, says that the group has helped her learn what it means to contribute, but even more so, it has promoted social cohesion between the members of the different communities living in Bwegera.

Louise Safi M'Sanvura agrees. Beyond social cohesion, through the solidarity group she has learned several agricultural techniques and was able to build her own house, thanks to income earned through her agricultural activities and the loan received from the group. The beneficiaries saw their standard of living improve, which encouraged other people to either join the project or emulate the beneficiaries in order to achieve the same result.

PWRDF has been supporting other activities at Maison Dorcas that improve the standard of living for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. Through training in income-generating activities such as basketry, soap making, carpentry and sewing, women are successfully re-integrating into their families and communities. More than half of the women started income-generating projects with the skills they gained and the reintegration kits with which they were provided. They produce, display and sell their products at covered structures known as Nobela centres. Survivors continue to strengthen social ties by helping each other and selling their wares together under the same shelter.

The Unspoken Sorrow of Loss

READ

Genesis 7:17-23

The flood continued forty days on the earth, and the waters increased and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth. The waters swelled and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the face of the waters. The waters rose so high on the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered; the waters rose above the mountains, covering them 250 feet deep. And all flesh died that moved on the earth, birds, domestic animals, wild animals, all swarming creatures that swarm on the earth, and all human beings; everything on dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. Every living thing that was on the face of the ground was destroyed, human beings and animals and creeping things and birds of the air; they were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah and those with him in the ark survived.

REFLECT

At first, as violence spread on the earth, the women had been so consumed with the effort of survival that they had little time to grieve what was being lost.

Then the overwhelming nature of the task ahead of them pushed aside any attempt to think about who or what would be left behind.

But now that the rain was falling, grief and longing flooded into their minds. The older woman remembered when the meadows had been alive with butterflies and bees, the bright-winged movement of birds darting in the trees. She remembered waking to the thrilling choir of birdsong and falling into dreams held by the deep chorus of frogs and crickets.

She remembered the rich earthy smell that gushed around her after a rainstorm, the scent of the cedars as she walked in the forests, the heady perfume of the almond and apricot blossoms as she

planted her seeds. All the fullness of sight, sound, and scent moved in her dreams, creating a longing, a deep sorrow for all that was now lost. Many of these losses were not new; the ruin of the creatures had been the unspoken sorrow of her days.

These sorrows had now been joined by the losses brought by the floodwaters: the loss of her parents, the cousins she had played with in the forest, the neighbours who had helped her give birth. The tapestry of community and kinship that had held her, now drowned in the waters of judgement.

How does one bear the loss of home? For so many in our world, the land has been ruined by agriculture, by industry, by war, by colonization. This loss has been the unspoken sorrow of our time. Everything that tethered us to our home, all the sights and sounds and tastes, all the relationships that held us safe are already, or are soon to be, lost.

How do we stay afloat, in this flood of sorrow?

PRAY

*Grieving Creator,
we hold up before you
all those who have lost their creational home:
Indigenous peoples around the world,
climate refugees,
those whose land is being mined,
or drilled for oil or gas.
You know our grief for the
trees, fields, rivers and forests being destroyed.
You carry our sorrow.
Hold us, we pray.
Amen.*



PWRDF
STORY

Ugandan partner empowers women with new skills and educates community

In 2020, PWRDF started a partnership with Rape Hurts Foundation in Uganda. Despite the pandemic – as well as recent political turmoil – RHF has been pushing ahead on this important work to hold workshops and training sessions to prevent gender-based violence and more.

Irene Atim, 28, has been working at RHF since 2015 and is currently a trainer and Case Manager. She is experienced and passionate about the needs of girls and women. “Addressing the problems faced by women is important as a contribution towards the overall UN Sustainable Development Goals,” says Atim.

Atim has “given her all” to the PWRDF-supported project called Reviving Lives and Livelihoods of Women and Youth in Busoga Region in Eastern Uganda, despite the hard times we have been through, writes RHF founder Hellen Lunkuse Tanyinga.

RHF programs confront the many socio-economic cultural problems that women face with the intention of improving their wellbeing, but also the wellbeing of

people under their care, especially children. Unless socio-cultural problems such as sexual and gender-based violence, female genital mutilation, human trafficking and modern day slavery are addressed, women’s empowerment shall remain elusive, says Tanyinga. Atim has upheld this guiding statement and hasn’t wavered from her commitment to it. As one of the trainers, she has reached out to hundreds of women and girls in the last three years.

The RHF team has imparted entrepreneurial skills to women and girls. At the RHF Vocational and Skills Centre in Kamuli, women are learning how to tailor, knit and sew. One of their first projects were face masks, complete with the PWRDF logo! They have kept some face masks for the trainers and participants, but have also sold some at the local market to bring in extra income for RHF.

“These skills not only help them improve their household incomes but also gain financial independence, so that they can live independent of their would-be abusers,” says Tanyinga.

Read this story at

<https://pwrdf.org/ugandan-partner-empowers-women-with-new-skills-and-educates-community/>

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 8

Daily Rhythms that Nurture Life

READ

Genesis 7:24

And the waters swelled on the earth for one hundred fifty days.

REFLECT

In the midst of their grief, their sorrow, their deep longing for the places and people they had lost, the women knew that being rooted in the earth meant caring for the creatures of the earth. In the midst of their own pain, they immersed themselves in the task at hand. Here they were united in feeding the hungry and binding up the broken creatures, cleaning out the spaces that had become home for the winged ones and the four-legged ones, seeking the lost and escaped before they were devoured by another creature. In this place all were vulnerable, all needed to be served.

Gradually their sorrow was pierced by moments of joy. Death lay outside their walls, but birth soon began within: shrill open mouths; small furry bodies; knock-kneed creatures stumbling for an

udder. Life exploding all around. With birth came knowledge: this is what each creature needs, this is what happens in the secret places of the forest, the edges of the meadow, the tops of the trees. This is what we lose when the forest disappears, when the hedgerows are cut down.

Each day their grief was held in acts of service and hope, in the deep daily rhythm of ensuring that life continued. They were fulfilling the ancient call to observe and serve creation (Gen 2:15), being called back to their true role as the servants of creation.

The ark, then, was not only the place of safety and nurture that would make resurrection possible. The ark was also the place of learning, to find out who we really were called to be.

PRAY

*When sorrow weighs us down,
give us new life to nurture.*

*When mourning shapes our days,
entrust us with creatures to tend.*

*When lament threatens to overwhelm,
provide us with earth to nourish.*

*Allow us to see the needs of creation, Creator God
that we might be the servants we were called to be
even as we grieve.*

Amen.



**PWRDF
STORY**

Partner empowers women against rape

Hellen Lunkuse W. Tanyinga says she didn't have a childhood at all. "I had to learn keen survivor skills as early as five years because my father was a serial abuser, beater and polygamous, having fathered way over 30 children." At 11, her father wanted to marry her off to the man who had raped her. "I had nobody to stand up for me, till my mother risked her marriage and everything to save me."

In 2008, Tanyinga founded Rape Hurts Foundation (RHF) as a community-based organization in Jinja District, Uganda. Though Uganda ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1985, Ugandan women – 51% of the population – do not enjoy the same opportunities as men. One quarter of women ages 15 to 49 have experienced physical intimate partner violence with less than 15% of cases being reported. Rape affects children and young women:

- 40% of all survivors are under 18
- 16% are under 12

PWRDF is partnering with RHF to support its work of empowering women to manage their social-economic development through strengthening human rights awareness, healthcare, community participation and advocacy. Addressing women's

rights and sexual and gender-based violence is at the core of their work.

Together, RHF and PWRDF will focus on women and youth in Eastern Uganda and provide education and awareness about gender-based violence, female genital mutilation, human trafficking and modern day slavery, human rights abuses and social-economic exploitation.

The budget allocated to RHF is \$25,000 over a one-year period. During that time RHF will engage 8,000 women and 5,000 youth, mostly victims and survivors or caretakers of victims and survivors, and some males in a series of awareness activities, events and sessions. The project will also include:

- linking 6,000 women and 3,000 youth to legal aid and court services
- producing two educational manuals
- increasing income in 80% of participants

"In the worldwide effort for gender equity, this women's empowerment and reduction of GBV project will go a long way by receiving PWRDF support," says Zaida Bastos, PWRDF's Director, Development Partnership Program. "RHF is one of those community-based organizations that usually obtains great results with small amounts of funds."

Read this story at <https://pwrdf.org/partner-empowers-women-against-rape/>

Calling us to Actions of Hope

READ

Genesis 8.13-14; 18-22

In the six hundred first year, in the first month, on the first day of the month, the waters were dried up from the earth, and Noah removed the covering of the ark and looked and saw that the face of the ground was drying. In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry. So Noah went out with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives. And every animal, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out of the ark by families.

Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And when the Lord smelled the pleasing odour, the Lord said, "I will never again curse the ground because of humans, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.

As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease."

REFLECT

What they noticed first was the stench, the sulphur reek of the mudflats as the water receded. What they noticed next was the silence and the lack of colour. Everywhere, as far as they could see, mud.

It was a relief after the first long look to turn back to the comfort and sound of the ark.

Except that they all—creature and human alike—longed to be free.

When the women finally placed their feet upon the earth once again, joy burst forth in gratitude. The women helped choose the stones for the altar, helped choose the animals for sacrifice, murmured the words of the prayers of thanksgiving, lifted up the song of gratitude.

The women, too, heard the words of promise to all the creatures that came out of the ark—the promise of God's covenantal faithfulness to all of creation.

How do we hear those promises today? For in some ways, we are still living out the earlier part

of the story. We are still watching the heroes and warlords, the generals and the politicians, the mining companies and the corporations destroy the earth. We are still enmeshed in systems that create destruction.

We are still struggling with drought, with wildfires, and with the floods that wash away our land. We are watching the animals forced out of their homes, the bird and insect populations plummeting.

Does this story show us how improbable acts of hope can be the seed of resurrection? Does it call us into a story where creating those arks of habitat, those places of biodiversity and safety, shapes our imagination and actions? Does it remind us that serving and observing the creatures is our first calling, that ensuring the continuation of the creation is where all of our efforts should be directed? For this is the story of the first climate crisis. And it is, improbably, a story of hope.

PRAY

*Creator of resurrection,
we do not presume to come before you,
trusting that our own actions
will bring newness.
But we confess that you will take
our stumbling steps toward reconciliation and restoration
and create something new.
Give us strength to begin the journey.
Amen.*



**PWRDF
STORY**

Praying with PWRDF and Hellen Lunkuse Tanyinga



Hellen Lunkuse
Executive Director, Rape Hurts Foundation, Uganda

Hellen Lunkuse Tanyinga is the Director of Rape Hurts Foundation Uganda. She joined Praying with PWRDF on Zoom in March 2022 as a guest reflector and shared her experiences working with survivors of violence. Watch the video at <https://youtu.be/15hG6DbEypo>

Week Two Bible Study Guide

The Women of the Flood: Climate Grief

The story of the flood mirrors all of the dynamics of our current climate crisis. A militaristic society that has destroyed the fruitfulness and fertility of creation; women who are relieved that the violence that has been inflicted by the warlords is coming to an end; a deep sense of loss for all that has been lost to violence, and a mourning for all that is still being lost; and small acts of hope and resistance that feed resilience and create new patterns of joy and rebirth. These dynamics have been playing out on the earth for centuries and are still being played out in our world today.

1. We don't often talk about the flood story in relation to the military violence of the warlords. In the world today, some wars have erupted in response to the climate crisis (Syria, for instance), and others are hastening the climate crisis (Ukraine, for instance). Reflect on how this connection might change how you think about the judgement that God brings in the flood.
2. Before the flood, the women were engaged in a massive effort not only to collect two of every animal, insect, bird, and amphibian for preservation on the ark, they also collected food for these animals, and seeds so that they could plant food for themselves and the animals once the flood was over. Discuss what kind of knowledge would have been needed to successfully gather all of this seed. Reflect on whether most of us would have enough knowledge to engage in a similar task in the midst of our own climate crisis.
3. We have suggested that the daily rhythms of caring for the creatures on the ark not only connected the women to their calling to serve and observe creation, but also helped the women to find joy and hope again. What daily rhythms connect you to creation in ways that remind you of our calling to serve and observe creation? What daily rhythms connect you to creation in a way that nurtures hope and joy?

Reflect on the connections you made between this week's PWRDF stories and Sylvia's reflections.



WEEK THREE

Ruth and Naomi: Climate Refugees

Hospitality for the Refugee

READ

Ruth 1.1-5

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion; they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. When they had lived there about ten years, both Mahlon and Chilion also died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

REFLECT

“In the days when the judges ruled.” These are words to strike terror into the hearts of women, for the Book of Judges described the rule of the judges as a time of terror and violence against women. The book of Ruth follows the Book of Judges in the Christian Bible, and evokes that violence in the very first sentence.

This book also begins in a time of hunger and famine, a time of drought. Creation is no longer fertile, the rains are no longer falling.

A certain man left Bethlehem for Moab with his wife, Naomi and his two sons. Bethlehem, which literally means “house of bread,” was no longer a place of plenty. The family is what would now be termed “climate refugees,” and they have moved to a

land that does not have a reputation for hospitality.

We don’t know how hard it was in this new land, with their odd accents and strange religion. We do know that they must have experienced some welcome, for eventually the two boys marry Orpah and Ruth, two of the women of Moab. The climate refugees have been welcomed not just by the women, but by their families, who would have negotiated the marriages. The welcome offered to the climate refugees at the start of the book of Ruth is a theme that characterizes the faithful community that God is forming throughout the scriptures. In this case, it is an unexpected people who provide welcome. As we shall see, such unexpected faithfulness characterizes this story.

PRAY

*Pilgrimage God,
in a world of climate displacement,
drought and flood,
hurricane and wildfire,
form us into a people
who give and receive hospitality,
so the lines that divide us
might transform into bonds of affection.
Amen.*



PWRDF
STORY

Outpouring from donors for Ukraine fuels PWRDF’s wide-ranging relief responses

May 24 marks the three-month anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. It’s not the sort of milestone one likes to note, yet we must. Since February 24, more than 8 million Ukrainians – women, children and elderly – have been forced to leave their homes and find safety within Ukraine, and 6.5 million people have left the country, some living in crowded refugee camps or in cities, vulnerable to other stressors. According to the United Nations, 3,778 civilians have been killed and 4,186 wounded. The Ukrainian government estimates 2,500 to 3,000 soldiers have been killed, and 10,000 wounded. The Russian government has recorded 1,351 soldier deaths, and 3,825 wounded.

Canada is home to the third largest population of Ukrainians in the world (second only to Ukraine and Russia). One of those Ukrainian Canadians is Patricia Maruschak, PWRDF’s [then] Director of Partnerships and Programs, who started with us four days after the invasion began.

“The first weeks of the war were so upsetting,” Maruschak told the Winnipeg Free Press. Besides

having Ukrainian heritage, Maruschak has also lived and worked in Ukraine for many years. “I still have friends and former colleagues in that country, and some relatives. It’s heartbreaking to hear how their lives have been shattered.”

The response from Canadians grew quickly.

Anglican churches have launched fundraising campaigns, held countless events and organized benefit concerts to show their solidarity. To date, PWRDF has received more than \$800,000 in donations from individuals and parishes.

Maruschak has been working closely with PWRDF’s Humanitarian Relief Coordinator, Naba Gurung, to effectively disburse these funds. So far, we are supporting responses of two international organizations and three local organizations. PWRDF is making a concerted effort to partner with local organizations because we believe Ukrainians are best positioned to understand local needs. They are invested in helping their fellow citizens and rebuilding Ukraine once the war ends.

Read the entire story at

<https://pwrdf.org/outpouring-from-donors-for-ukraine-fuels-pwrdfs-wide-ranging-relief-responses/>

Fragmented Families

READ

Ruth 1.6-7, 11-14

Then Naomi started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the Lord had considered his people and given them food. So she set out from the place where she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law, and they went on their way to go back to the land of Judah. But Naomi said, “Turn back, my daughters. Why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons, would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the Lord has turned against me.” Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.

REFLECT

In biblical times, all people belonged first and foremost to a household, which could include parents, children, children’s spouses, grandchildren and servants. The household was closely embedded in an extended family, that in turn was nested within a tribe. Both men and women found their place of responsibility and meaning within this extended community.

In travelling to Moab, Naomi, her husband and their sons became a fragment of a household. Then her husband and her sons died, and Naomi was cut adrift, no longer embedded in her immediate household, cut off from her extended family by distance.

Just as famine and the death of her husband and sons meant that Naomi was cut from the networks that had sustained her, so the climate crisis today tears families apart as people leave homes where starvation lurks, for bread in other lands.

PRAY

*God of welcome,
we are fragmented,
torn from our lands,
cut adrift from our communities,
severed from our families.
Fulfil your promises of welcome and embrace
for all those lost and alone.
Amen.*

However, Naomi had an additional challenge. She lived in an agrarian society, where men were the traditional landowners. Without a father, husband or son to literally ground her, she was unable to survive. Belonging to a household headed by a man meant stability and safety for Naomi. Being on her own did not mean freedom. It meant death.

Returning to the place of her extended family was the only path of hope. Ironically, Naomi’s return meant that Ruth would be cut off from her household, her extended family, her people. But for the sake of her love for Naomi, Ruth was willing to make this sacrifice.

The book of Ruth highlights the sacrifices that women make frequently for the sake of their loved ones. Naomi left her home and family to accompany her husband to a strange land; Ruth left her home and family to accompany Naomi. In some ways, their stories are the same.



PWRDF
STORY

Refugees find growth opportunities in Tanzania

Laliya Atondo is a Congolese refugee living in Nyarugusu refugee camp Tanzania. The 42-year-old mother of eight has faced a lot of challenges. There’s never enough food, and her husband sometimes berates her in front of the community as she is not able to contribute financially to her household.

Refugees in Nyarugusu rely mainly on World Food Programme (WFP) food rations to access food. However, rations contain only staple items and are regularly reduced due to WFP’s limited resources. Some refugees have begun planting vegetables in the vacant land around the camp, but many lack the necessary skills and resources to sustainably grow a diversity of crops.

“We don’t have knowledge to think out of box,” says Atondo. “We had not thought that we can be of help to our families. I relied on my husband, and it had never crossed my mind that I can make money from farming. I did not have any technical know-how to do agriculture activities, so we highly depend on the distribution ration we receive from WFP. Sometimes we exchange with beans so as to diversify food as we only eat peas and ugali.”

In May 2021 PWRDF began supporting a three-year project with Church World Service (CWS) providing seeds, agricultural inputs as well as training to sustainably grow vegetables. CWS reached 300 households in the first year and a further 510 households are being targeted in the second year. By the third year, all 810 households will continue to be supported with follow-up and monitoring. The budget is approximately \$520,000, with half coming from a 1:1 match from the Canadian Foodgrains Bank account.

Atondo joined the CWS project and received a package of tools and seeds for growing vegetables. “At the beginning I was afraid. How will I manage to provide assistance to my community, as we always think that leadership is for men.” Due to her passion

and commitment in her work, her group members selected her as a lead farmer. Through training, Atondo has emerged as one of the champion lead farmers.

Initially her husband thought the program was a waste of time, however he became very supportive after seeing the gains, including availability of vegetables for his family and income from vegetable sales. On average, Atondo earns \$17US selling surplus vegetables at the local market. “I bought some clothes for my children, and one time I bought a shirt for my husband. It was a real good day as he was very happy and has no objection for me going to agriculture trainings.”

Lead farmers are learning sustainable vegetable growing, integrated pest management, seed selection and storage, nutrition and gender equity. They are then responsible to train other refugees in the camps. The aim is for vegetable production to provide important nutritional diversity in the diets of refugee women and children, as well as an opportunity to earn some income through sales of surplus vegetables.

Now Atondo manages 25 farmers and provides support and materials such as vegetable seedling and watering cans. “Through gender training we received, I explained what we learned to my husband and convinced him on how we can develop our family. Now we are planning some issues together which was not happening before.

“Now they are calling me Mama Maua (mother of flowers) due to the attractiveness of my small garden.”

Apart from growing vegetables, Atondo also set aside some seedlings for seed production, which she expects to harvest and store for future use. This is one of the practices farmers are learning to promote self-reliance for seeds.

Read this story at <https://pwrdf.org/congolese-refugees-find-growth-opportunities-in-tanzania/>

The Threat of Violence

READ

Ruth 2.8-13

Then Boaz said to Ruth, “Now listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. Keep your eyes on the field that is being reaped and follow behind them. I have ordered the young men not to bother you. If you get thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn.” Then she fell prostrate, with her face to the ground, and said to him, “Why have I found favour in your sight, that you should take notice of me, when I am a foreigner?” But Boaz answered her, “All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me, how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. May the Lord reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!” Then she said, “May I continue to find favour in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, even though I am not one of your servants.”

REFLECT

Naomi has returned to her home with her daughter-in-law Ruth. Although Naomi is back among her people, the repercussions of the famine that caused her to flee years before are still felt. She now has no male protector; she now has no land.

So she sends Ruth out to the fields to glean some grain so that they might eat. In the fields women and men were working together to bring in the harvest. For the young women who belong to a household, this is their place, their meaningful work alongside their brothers and fathers, husbands and sons. Their safety is ensured.

But for a strange young woman, this is not a place of safety. This is not her place and not her work. While the other women are contributing to the household economy, she is the outsider, gathering the leftovers. The men will guard the status of their own women, but who will guard the status of the stranger?

PRAY

*God of the vulnerable,
we lament the violence faced by women
throughout all times and places,
especially as climate change erodes the safety of community.
Help us lift up these stories,
that this pain might trigger justice.
Amen.*

In this case, the owner of the field instructs his men “not to bother” Ruth. He offers the safety of his own young women. Ruth’s care and love for her mother-in-law have evoked his care and protection for her.

It is a hopeful tale of protection in the face of violence. But it begs the question: were there other women not afforded the protection offered to Ruth; other women whom the men were permitted to “bother”?

This isn’t just a historical question. Because climate change has threatened their land and livelihood, many women today leave their homes to work in factories or as nannies in order to send money home to family members. For many, their safety is compromised. The threats Ruth faced are not unique. They may have been recorded during the days of the judges, but they are still present today.



PWRDF
STORY

South Sudanese refugees returning home get much needed food relief

Since 2013, civil conflict and violence have forced thousands of South Sudanese to flee their homes. Recently, some have been able to return home, but with little resources to feed their families or earn any income. Partnering with the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, PWRDF aims to accompany refugees and host communities as they return home by providing necessary food relief and livelihood support.

The project is part of a \$10-million grant from the Canadian government to the Foodgrains Bank, who will work with its members to address the impact of COVID-19 on food security in vulnerable populations in six sub-Saharan African countries: Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Nigeria, South Sudan and Zimbabwe. Within this grant, PWRDF has been allocated \$717,000 and will work with Finn Church Aid South Sudan as its partner on the ground. FCA is an experienced and trusted partner holistically implementing food and livelihood assistance, education, and peacebuilding interventions in South Sudan since 2010. In 2014, FCA implemented a PWRDF food for work project that supported over 10,000 internally displaced people in Mundry county of South Sudan.

“We are looking forward to working with FCA on this very necessary response,” says Naba Gurung, PWRDF’s Humanitarian Response Coordinator. “The populations in this area are extremely stressed and vulnerable.”

The work will take place in Yei county in Central Equatoria just south of the capital of Juba, and just north of the confluence of Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where so many South Sudanese have fled. The project aims to reduce hunger, improve nutrition and contribute to resilience for people affected by conflict and

COVID-19. Over the next 18 months, 2,800 households will be supported in learning resilient livelihood strategies that they will be able to sustain beyond the life of this response.

Project highlights:

- 600 returnee households will be given cash, vegetable seeds, and tools, including necessary training and technical skills.
- 70% of the beneficiaries will be women. With the cash (given without conditions) they will be able to buy nutritious food from local markets. They will also have access to vegetable seeds, tools and technical training to grow vegetables year-round, including during the dry seasons.
- 2,600 households (made up of the 600 returnee households who received food assistance, and 2,000 host community households) will receive crop seeds, agricultural tools, training and technical support, and will be grouped and supported by lead farmers.
- 400 lead farmers will be trained, and they will reach out to their cluster members along with the community mobilizers and extension workers. This will be done in close partnership with the county agricultural office with whom FCA has an excellent ongoing relationship.
- 200 small-scale entrepreneurs, including young women and men from both the returnee and host communities, will participate in a three-month training session to support them as they re-establish their local businesses. These include tailoring, hairdressing, catering and carpentry for youth. After the training, participants will receive tools, materials and mentorship.

Read the entire story at <https://pwrdf.org/food-relief-for-south-sudanese-refugees-returning-home/>

The Bodies of Women

READ

Ruth 3.1-13

Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, “My daughter, I need to seek some security for you, so that it may be well with you. Now here is our kinsman Boaz, with whose young women you have been working. See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. Now wash and anoint yourself, and put on your best clothes and go down to the threshing floor, but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, observe the place where he lies; then go and uncover his feet and lie down, and he will tell you what to do.” She said to her, “All that you say I will do.”

At midnight the man was startled and turned over, and there, lying at his feet, was a woman! He said, “Who are you?” And she answered, “I am Ruth, your servant; spread your cloak over your servant, for you are next-of-kin.” He said, “May you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter; this last instance of your loyalty is better than the first; you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich. And now, my daughter, do not be afraid, I will do for you all that you ask, for all the assembly of my people know that you are a worthy woman. But now, though it is true that I am a near kinsman, there is another kinsman more closely related than I. Remain this night, and in the morning, if he will act as next-of-kin for you, good; let him do it. But if he is not willing to act as next-of-kin for you, then, as the Lord lives, I will act as next-of-kin for you. Lie down until the morning.”

REFLECT

Sometimes the parents don't know what they have done. A man shows up in their village, offering money and work in the city for their daughter. Drought has made the family desperate and here is opportunity. When he takes their daughter, they never see her again. She has been trafficked.

Sometimes floods mean the parents can no longer afford to feed all their children. Their daughter will fetch a good marriage price. He may be elderly. She may be a child. Her parents may be consumed with grief. But at least she—and they—will not starve.

Naomi was feeling some panic. The harvests were over and hunger was imminent. So she hatched a plan using Ruth's washed, perfumed, and dressed-up body. This was not a case, however, of a child being married off to an old man. Ruth was a widow, with a maturity and will of her own.

PRAY

How long, God of the oppressed?

How long must the bodies of women be sacrificed?

How long before the covenantal love and faithfulness of Ruth and Boaz permeates the places

where our children are sacrificed?

Come quickly, we pray, and bring justice for these your children.

Amen.



PWRDF
STORY

Tigray support will build on past appeals

As announced April 14, 2022, PWRDF has allocated \$90,000 from its reserves to an ACT Alliance appeal supporting the people of Ethiopia, in particular the residents of Tigray.

For the past two years, as conflict and violence has continued, the people of Tigray have been denied foreign aid due to a government enforced blockade. COVID restrictions have worsened supply chain and food security issues. In January 2021, PWRDF supported an ACT Alliance appeal with \$35,000. This new allocation will build on past work of Lutheran World Federation, through the ACT Alliance. It will support safe water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) for those who are most vulnerable, especially people who have been displaced as they have fled to safety.

LWF Ethiopia will be working in the newly

established Seba Care IDP camp in Mekelle, prioritizing WASH and protection services in “Block M.” The funds will be used to extend the pipeline that LWF is laying to the existing and new water points in Block M, benefitting approximately 1,500 people, plus the host community living nearby which is estimated to be around 300,000 households.

Using funds from the ACT appeal, LWF has drilled a deep borehole in Seba Care which will be the main ground water source for the entire camp. LWF is currently working with the Tigray Electric Utility to install a transformer and connect the water supply system to the grid system. PWRDF's contribution builds on and will complete work that had been started last year.

LWF is also planning to use PWRDF funds to set up a child-friendly facility in Block M.

Read this story at <https://pwrdf.org/tigray-support-will-build-on-past-appeals/>

Grounded

READ

Ruth 4.1-6

Boaz then said to the next-of-kin, “Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, is selling the parcel of land that belonged to our kinsman Elimelech. So I thought I would tell you of it and say: Buy it in the presence of those sitting here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, redeem it; but if you will not, tell me, so that I may know; for there is no one prior to you to redeem it, and I come after you.” So he said, “I will redeem it.” Then Boaz said, “The day you acquire the field from the hand of Naomi, you are also acquiring Ruth the Moabite, the widow of the dead man, to maintain the dead man’s name on his inheritance.” At this, the next-of-kin said, “I cannot redeem it for myself without damaging my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot redeem it.” (Ruth 4.1-6)

REFLECT

The casual linking of Ruth and a field often alarms readers of this story, who suggest that Ruth is reduced to a piece of property, just like a field.

That is too simplistic a reading. Remember that the land that farmers nurtured and cared for in Judea was considered to be an inheritance from God, to be passed down through the generations. The land was not property, not a commodity. It was the place where one practiced faithful living in community with God, with care and affection for the earth.

Boaz does not consider Ruth a piece of property tied to another piece of property. Boaz has given this story an unusual twist in two ways. First, he insists that Naomi is the one selling the land, even though women could not own land in ancient Israel. Second, he insists that Ruth’s future is bound up

with the future of this land, even though it could have legally been sold without her. For Boaz, Ruth is joined to this field because she is the link between the man who once nurtured this land with care and affection, and the child who will carry on that inheritance, who will enable the land to flourish.

Oddly enough, the linking of Ruth with this field demonstrates exactly the kind of worldview that is needed to counter the exploitation of land as a commodity that permeates modern western culture. Evidence shows that when women are given the tools, knowledge and opportunity to nurture and farm their land well, communities flourish and the land is transformed. Ruth’s groundedness in the land of her husband is a story of flourishing—both for Ruth and for the field that her new household will tend.

PRAY

*Homecoming God,
we long to be grounded in a place of flourishing.
Some of us long for the land of our peoples,
taken from us by colonialism.
Some of us were forced to a new land,
and we long to be rooted anew.
Some of us settled here,
and long to right the wrongs our people have inflicted on the land and others.
Bind us together in care and affection,
for each other and the land.
That all your creatures might flourish in our places.
Amen.*



PWRDF
STORY

How young mothers are coping in Ethiopian camps

In January 2021, PWRDF responded to an ACT Alliance appeal for Ethiopia’s Tigray region with \$35,000 to support the work of Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Ethiopia. Since the appeal began in January, the situation has descended into chaos and further violence. The level of civilian casualties is extremely high, and 2.2 million people have been displaced to Tigray. Starvation looms for 4.5 million people in need of humanitarian assistance, yet only 77,000 people (less than 2%) have received any type of aid. People in Hitsas and Shimelba are in need of protection and access to food and other basic services. There has not been any food distribution from the government, the UN or any NGOs.

Sophie Gebreyes, Country Representative for LWF Ethiopia, files this report:

I visited the city of Mekelle in early February. There were eight makeshift Internally Displaced People (IDP) settlements in schools and colleges. When I returned one month later, there were 11, with IDPs arriving every day. Ayder, the ninth camp to open, is already overflowing. There are close to 900 IDPs in the camp, with more than 50% being women and children under five.

I was struck by the number of displaced young mothers, carrying their babies and toddlers on their backs. Neguesti Hagos Wolde Mariam, 32, arrived at Ayder from Sheglil near Humera in Western Tigray a month ago with her husband Halefom Wolde Gebriel, 34, and their four children, Helen, 15, Zebib, 8, Mekdes, 4, and baby Tse’are, just two months old.

Neguesti and her family had lived in Sheglil all their lives, and were determined to stay there. Then a month after the troubles began they were told that they had to leave the region and go back to Tigray, as Humera and surrounding area ‘reverted’ to Amhara Regional State. Most people went to Shire, across the Tekeze River, but Neguesti and her family

preferred to travel as far away as possible to Mekelle, some 512 km away. At the time, Neguesti was eight months pregnant. When they reached Terkani, a town not far from Humera, she began to feel the pangs of labour and soon gave birth to Tse’are, prematurely. Neguesti believes that it is a miracle that Tse’are, born under horrendous conditions, survived the ordeal of travel and made it to Mekelle at all.

LWF Ethiopia has been providing emergency distribution of food and cash to displaced families and vulnerable host communities. They have also been advocating for the government to resume delivery of subsidized commodities, prioritizing nutrition of pregnant and lactating women. Neguesti has been receiving direct cash assistance, as well as nutritional supplements as a lactating mom through the ACT appeal.

Neguesti and Halefom used to be farmers. They worked two hectares of land growing sorghum and sesame. In a good year, they could harvest 40 to 50 quintals of sorghum and 10 to 11 quintals of sesame seeds, earning an average annual income of ETB 150,000, (\$4,545 Cdn), a decent income in these parts. The night they decided to leave, their house and their crops were burnt to the ground. They fled only with the clothes on their backs.

Cradling Tse’are in her arms, her sombre face still bearing the markings of the tragedy she lived through, Neguesti tries to breastfeed. But because she does not have enough to eat, she is not producing sufficient amounts of milk to nurse her baby. She worries what impact this will have on Tse’are’s development. One month after arriving in Ayder, food had not been distributed by the Government, the UN or NGOs. They must live off the generosity of the people of Mekelle and the local churches who continue to carry the brunt of the emergency response.

Read the entire story at

<https://pwrdf.org/born-an-idp-how-young-mothers-are-coping-in-ethiopian-settlements/>

From Loss to Abundance

READ

Ruth 4.13-17

So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. When they came together, the Lord made her conceive, and she bore a son. Then the women said to Naomi, “Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without next-of-kin, and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him.” Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her bosom and became his nurse. The women of the neighbourhood gave him a name, saying, “A son has been born to Naomi.” They named him Obed; he became the father of Jesse, the father of David.

REFLECT

When Naomi returned to Bethlehem, she said to the women who welcomed her “Call me no longer Naomi (pleasant), call me Mara (bitter), for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me. I went away full but the Lord has brought me back empty; why call me Naomi when the Lord has dealt harshly with me, and the Almighty has brought calamity on me.” (Ruth 1:20-21)

Even though Naomi has returned with Ruth, she describes herself as returning “empty.” Her husband gone, the sons that she had rocked to sleep, played with, sang to, and took pride in, both dead. No possibility of bearing more children. It is no wonder that bitterness shapes who she is.

Naomi’s story is one of continual loss: famine, loss of land, loss of spouse and children. But as the story unfolds, we see increasing fullness.

From a barley harvest with enough food for them

PRAY

*Bringer of hope,
we can hardly imagine
abundance in the midst of emptiness,
welcome in the face of loss,
gentleness in the face of violence.
Yet such gentleness and generosity
draw us into your story again and again.
Enable us to dare to step into this story
and make it our own.
Amen.*



PWRDF
STORY

Praying with PWRDF and Sophie Gebreyes



Sophie Gebreyes is the Country Representative for Lutheran World Federation Ethiopia. She joined Praying with PWRDF on Zoom in June 2022 and shared her experiences supporting refugees in the Tigray region. **Watch the video at <https://youtu.be/kqNNXDC5q4g>**

Week Three Bible Study Guide

Ruth and Naomi: Climate Refugees

Many of us love the book of Ruth because of its deeply satisfying conclusion, where the vulnerable women find protection and love, not to mention joy in the birth of a child. However, as we have seen, the book grapples with a number of harsh realities: the struggles of those who become climate refugees because of drought or famine; the way that families are torn apart when some become refugees; the threat of violence against women who are separated from their familial structures; and the violence that girls potentially face when families are forced to give up their daughters or face starvation. The book of Ruth provides a model of what happens when hospitality and welcome counter these realities, when loving-kindness and faithfulness shape a community where the most vulnerable are welcomed.

1. If you are able, reflect on whether your family story, or the family story of anyone close to you, has familial fragmentation or immigration in it. If so, what caused families to be separated from one another and their land? Was it by choice? And what might the long-term effects of such separation be?
2. The book of Ruth doesn't just contain welcome for the refugee, but extravagant and enormous generosity. The Moabites arrange to welcome Naomi and Elimelech's sons into their families. Boaz sends Ruth home with grain that is the equivalent of half a month's pay for one of his labourers. What would be some comparable actions if we welcomed climate refugees with such enormous and extravagant generosity in our own time and place?
3. Our story reflects the reality of how climate change disproportionately affects women, both by disconnecting them from the land that they know how to survive on, and by exposing them to violence and exploitation. Our story also demonstrates that when men and women work together to creatively challenge cultural norms, vulnerable women can find safety. Reflect on some of the ways that current cultural assumptions create a lack of safety for women who find themselves vulnerable due to climate change. What are some ways that the church could challenge those assumptions?

Reflect on the connections you made between this week's PWRDF stories and Sylvia's reflections.



WEEK FOUR

Living Creational Hope

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 18

Walking Long and Often

READ

Luke 1.39-40, 46-55

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth ... And Mary said, O God, my soul proclaims your greatness, and my Spirit rejoices in you, my Saviour. For you have looked with favour upon your lowly servant, and from this day forward all generations will call me blessed. For you, the Almighty, have done great things for me, and holy is your Name. Your mercy reaches from age to age for those who fear you. You have shown strength with your arm; you have scattered the proud in their conceit; you have deposed the mighty from their thrones and raised the lowly to high places. You have filled the hungry with good things, while you have sent the rich away empty. You have come to the aid of Israel your servant, mindful of your mercy—the promise you made to our ancestors—to Sarah and Abraham and their descendants forever.

REFLECT

What do you do when your whole life has been turned upside down? When you find yourself called to a task much larger than you had ever anticipated?

Maybe you take a walk. Maybe you remember the stories of your grandmothers. Maybe you sing.

After saying “yes” to God’s request that she carry redemption, Mary took a walk along dusty roadways through villages and fields. She saw fields worn out after centuries of war and occupation, and small farms surrounded by trees heavy with fruit. In the fields lilies were dressed more beautifully than kings, and swallows were held by the love of the Creator.

As she walked, she remembered the women who came before her: Hagar the slave girl, whose cry was heard by God, and Deborah, the judge, fighting to defend her people. She remembered Hannah, whose son saved the people from the injustices of their day.

And she remembered Hannah’s song, about

PRAY

*Spirit of the living God,
the rhythm of your breath
matches our steps,
the care you lavish on creation,
nourishes our vision,
the songs you craft in our hearts,
feed us and make us whole.
Amen.*

how God breaks the bows of the mighty, and gives strength to the weak. The song that talks about reversals: the well-fed having to sell their bodies so they can eat, and the hungry growing fat on good food; the song where the poor are lifted from the dust and seated with the princes, and those who practice injustice are cut off when the mighty will lose their power.

Did Hannah’s words match the rhythm of her steps? Did they merge with the words of the angel until a new song gradually began to grow that pushed out her anxiety and began to shape hope?

As we grapple with the enormity of the crisis we face, may we walk long and often in the fields and forests both to witness the pain of creation, and so that creation can strengthen us. May we remember the stories that nourish imagination. May we sing the songs that feed our hope.



PWRDF
STORY

From a war zone to safety, for now

Irina, 31, is a nurse, who with her two children lives with 90 other refugees in the Batiovo refugee shelter in Transcarpathia, near the Hungarian/Ukrainian border. The shelter is heated and equipped with hot and cold running water, as well as mattresses and blankets. It is one of more than 120 refugee centres and shelters that Hungarian Interchurch Aid supplies with food, water, hygiene products and household appliances with the support of PWRDF and other fellow members of the ACT Alliance. In Transcarpathia alone, HIA volunteers were able to help thousands of people.

Irina and her children arrived here late in the evening on March 13 after a long and exhausting journey. Their home used to be Novohryhorivka, near Volnovakha in the Donetsk region. The intense fighting continues there.

Their story is not unique among Ukrainian refugees. The family was torn apart by war, with Irina’s husband – a history teacher – joining the territorial defence in the first days of the conflict. In the beginning Irina and her children moved in with her parents. As the house lacked a basement, they built a makeshift shelter out of sofas and furniture. This gave them a sense of security – which would soon prove to be an illusion. They realized they needed to go when a couple of days later a bomb exploded in the neighbourhood.

“During the first days [of the war] we tried to tell the children it was thunder. But when the active bombing started and the missiles fell near the house, the children started screaming. They didn’t want to leave the shelter [of furniture] so they ate there, they went to the toilet there. They were really very, very scared. That is why I realized that there was no time to wait and it was time to evacuate somewhere.”

Her parents did not want to leave. Her father being born there, Irina believes he would have had to be forcibly removed to abandon the house. Ultimately Irina and the children left them there, and started walking to the evacuation point near the hospital on March 1. Halfway there they were forced to take cover as Russian forces started shelling the settlement.

“We saw a tank at the end of the street and we hoped that they [the army] would cover us while we got to the place from where the evacuation would start. Then we saw a convoy of cars with white flags passing. In one car we found three places so we decided to go in that car without knowing where it was going because there was no time to decide, so we just got in the car.”

It ran out of gas so only took them as far as a nearby town. When five days later that village was about to be taken by the Russians, they needed to leave again. This time they went to an acquaintance’s home, but were forced to relocate to the local kindergarten once relatives of the hosts arrived. War had caught up with them again, with the sound of shelling coming nearer and nearer every day. After consulting with Irina’s husband, they finally decided to move to the western border regions of Ukraine.

Finally, they were able to catch a train to western Lviv – the train journey lasted 20 hours. According to Irina, there were 12 people for every seat. Her son Mathou, 5, was sleeping on the feet of another woman, while daughter Tapolina, 8, slept in her lap. In Lviv they contacted shelters, and were assured that there was space for them in Batiovo, Transcarpathia. They arrived in the village after another exhausting five-hour train ride.

Read this entire story at <https://pwrdf.org/from-a-war-zone-to-safety-for-now/>

Living Water

READ

John 4.7, 9-15; 28-30

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” The woman said to him, “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?” Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.” ... Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” They left the city and were on their way to him.

REFLECT

The Samaritan woman was not the first to struggle with Jesus’ elusive speech. Before her, a teacher of Israel had come to Jesus by night. A wealthy man, respectable and powerful. A man who was puzzled by Jesus’ words about needing to be born again.

This powerless woman, an outcast not even named, also encounters Jesus in a conversation rich with double meanings. She persists, sees beyond the range of normal sight, and has her thirst quenched. Then she shares the living water with her whole village.

It is no coincidence that Jesus met a woman at the well. Around the world, it is the women who walk for water, women who know that living water is disappearing. And, in Canada at least, it is Indigenous women who are the water walkers, raising up the needs of our waterways.

When Jesus spoke to the woman about the need

for living water, did she hear the echoes of the story? The four rivers of Eden that watered all of the earth? The vision of Ezekiel 47, where the polluted waters are healed? The promise of Isaiah 35 where fresh water shall run again in the desert? Throughout the biblical story, water is bound up with the redemption of all of creation’s groaning.

All the evidence is that the woman knew this, for her fellow villagers go to meet Jesus after she calls them. They host him in their village for a couple of days and finally confess “we know this is the saviour of the world.” The Greek word for “world” (cosmos) means the whole of the heavens and the earth. The woman not only drank of the water Jesus offered, she shared it with her village, and all knew that it was for the healing of creation.

PRAY

*Jesus, you are the Living Water,
who fills us with life.*

*We grieve for the waters,
rivers polluted,
lakes now toxic,
an over-heating ocean,
waters too little or overwhelming.*

*Bring healing for the waters, we pray,
that they might become springs of healing
and homes for many creatures once more.
Amen.*



**PWRDF
STORY**

Connecting the dots between residential schools and boil water advisories

When Bill Morris was seven years old, he and his cousin were out hunting in their Northern Ontario community. They heard a plane land and went to investigate the commotion, as curious children might do. Instead, they were both loaded onto the plane and flown to Pelican Lake Indian Residential school. His parents were left to wonder why he didn’t come back from hunting.

Bill shared his story with me as we sat on another plane, bound for Sioux Lookout, where he is working in team ministry as a newly ordained Anglican priest. He is fondly known as “the voice of the North” for his years in radio broadcasting and wears a hearing aid because of the damage done by the blows to the head he received as part of his “schooling.”

From there, we continued north to Pikangikum First Nation. For the past 10 years, PWRDF has partnered with the Pikangikum band council and other organizations to secure clean, running water for the community. As a member of the board, I was invited by PWRDF to visit the community with Will Postma, Executive Director of PWRDF, the Rev. David Franks of Pimatiwizin Nipi and the Rev. Ophelia Kaminawatamin of Bearskin Lake First Nation, PWRDF Representative for the Spiritual Ministry of Mishamikoweesh. We arrived in Pikangikum on August 16, ready to meet community members, to see the impact of the water systems, to listen and learn. The trip was about water, and it was also about much more than water.

Water is life – our bodies, the food we eat, the

composition of our planet, all of it is mostly water. Water connects us, and the bodies of water that dot our landscape are connected, too. Access to water defines the kind of society we can build; it affects physical, mental and spiritual health; it affects everything from hygiene to education. Water is dignity. Water is wellness. Water is opportunity. Water is connection. Water is reconciliation. Water is justice.

It’s easy to connect the dots between lives shattered by residential schools years ago, to the injustice of so many Indigenous communities living under boil-water advisories and without running water today. There’s a straight line between the injustice of this racialized reality and the astronomically high suicide rates among these communities.

It wasn’t long ago that Pikangikum was shoved onto the world’s radar for having the highest suicide rate per capita on the planet. A group of concerned professionals in southern Ontario had formed the Pikangikum Working Group and began meeting with Pikangikum leadership in order to identify priorities in responding to this tragic situation. Running water was at the top of the list identified by Pikangikum’s leaders for increasing the community’s wellbeing. If families could shower, use the bathroom, wash clothes and pour a glass of water from the sink, this would go a long way in building a more solid foundation for physical and mental health.

– the Rev. Canon Martha Tatarinic

Read the entire story at

<https://pwrdf.org/connecting-the-dots-between-residential-schools-and-boil-water-advisories/>

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 20

Reaching for Healing

READ

Mark 5.25-34

Now there was a woman who had been suffering from a flow of blood for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians and had spent all that she had, and she was no better but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, "If I but touch his cloak, I will be made well." Immediately her flow of blood stopped, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my cloak?" And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" He looked all around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

REFLECT

How long does it take to lose hope? At first she had thought that it was just a monthly aberration. But as the bleeding continued beyond the first week, she began to worry. Bleeding meant impurity. And impurity meant no cooking, no serving, no participating in the work that gave her life meaning. Then she began to feel dizzy and weak. She no longer had the strength to even lift her water jug or walk outside of the village. Impurity was no longer her main concern.

Desperately she began begging the doctors to stop the bleeding, but they had no healing for her. The months dragged into years. She was unable to have children. She was unable to participate in caring for the household. She was so weak that she was often unable to stand. All she could do was pray, her laments filling the night.

PRAY

*God of hope,
there is no hope in us
when we see how much has been lost,
when we realize that "normal" life
is unlikely ever to return.
There is no hope in us.
And yet we reach for the hem of your garment.
Restore your earth once again, Giver of Life.
Restore our place in healthy community with creation.
We pray to you in the name of the healer, Jesus.
Amen.*



PWRDF
STORY

Curbing the pandemic in Mali

PWRDF is supporting a pandemic response in the West African country of Mali, partnering with Global Affairs Canada and non-governmental organization Muso. The program aims to administer 40,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccine and to increase the percentage of fully vaccinated people in the program area to 40% from 26%. The Government of Canada is the lead funder of the project and PWRDF is providing \$47,000. Muso is the implementing partner and has been operating in Mali since 2008.

Landlocked and with a population of 19 million, Mali is the eighth-largest country in Africa in terms of land mass. Mali's interim authorities' have cancelled democratic elections to be held in February, and in response, the country is facing sanctions from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Several NGOs working in the country have warned that these sanctions will be devastating and threaten to cut off much needed humanitarian aid. According to Relief Web, 70% of Mali's food is imported and 1.2 million Malians are facing a food crisis.

As of January 21, 2022, there have been 29,360 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with 704 deaths, reported to the World Health Organization. As of January 24, 2022, a total of 1,409,266 vaccine doses have been administered. Two thirds of COVID cases were identified in the capital city of Bamako, where the six-month vaccine rollout will operate.

Despite improvements in the health system over the last 20 years, women in Mali continue to encounter numerous barriers when accessing health for themselves and their families. As a result of COVID-19, existing barriers to health services have increased. Mali's health system is struggling

to respond to the pandemic; vaccine hesitancy and poor contact tracing and monitoring are worsening the situation.

The project will remove barriers to care such as cost, distance and gender inequality. It will equip frontline workers with the tools needed to provide care safely, for both infected and non-infected people, and allow regular healthcare operations to continue. The project design is informed by Mali's National COVID-19 plan and the World Health Organization, as well as the lessons learned from Muso's 15 years of community response and outreach in Mali.

Muso will deploy three mobile vaccination teams from each of the 12 community health centres in Commune VI. Each team will have three vaccinators for a total of 114 vaccinators across all facilities. All vaccinators will participate in a one-day training session on the new vaccine, how to communicate its efficacy and what those receiving the shots can expect. These teams will then travel outside their health facilities to markets and other locations in the catchment area to reach people in the community. Supervision teams from the district will provide quality control through periodic visits to the mobile outreach sites.

To underline and reinforce this campaign, Muso will also train health personnel at vaccination facilities to support inputting vaccination information into database systems.

Since the start of the pandemic, PWRDF and the Government of Canada have been supporting partners coping with COVID-19 in four East Africa countries – Tanzania, Burundi, Rwanda and Mozambique.

Read the entire story at

<https://pwrdf.org/pwrdf-govt-of-canada-and-muso-aim-to-curb-pandemic-in-mali/>

In the Borderlands

READ

Mark 7.24-30

From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. Now the woman was a gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter." And when she went home, she found the child lying on the bed and the demon gone.

REFLECT

They met in the borderlands. A travelling preacher, who fed those who were hungry, healed those who were sick, spent his time amongst the poor villagers of Galilee, and a Syrophenician woman from the wealthy district of Tyre and Sidon, a Greek woman, cultured, well-heeled.

Her people had the power that mattered: access to the seaports, a hand in all the trade that passed to and from his land. His people provided the power that had no status: supplies, labour, and cheap food. His people kept in poverty by her people.

They met in the borderlands, as he sought respite from the relentless needs of his people: needs heightened by the exploitation caused by her people: sickness caused by the lack of nutritious food, mental illness caused by the uncertainties and violence of poverty.

They met in the borderlands, as she sought healing for her daughter. A woman of high status

PRAY

*Boundary-breaking God,
You call us to the borderlands,
to meet those who have oppressed us,
to see those whom we have exploited.
You call us together to form a new community
of healing and welcome for all peoples, all creatures, and the earth.
Help us to meet in that place of forgiveness,
round your table,
and in your world.
Amen.*



**PWRDF
STORY**

Breadfruit yields results for Haitian women

During the pandemic, PWRDF supported several COVID emergency responses in Haiti. One was with Rayjon Share Care Haiti (RSCH), a Sarnia, Ont.-based charity. The partnership has since grown to support a food security project cultivating breadfruit to be milled into flour, which was featured on the cover of the 2021 World of Gifts guide. Breadfruit flour is high in carbohydrates and a good source of energy, protein and dietary fibre. It is used to make bread and other baking.

Working with the Haitian Women's Federation, RSCH aims to increase food security for families of the 4th and 6th sections of rural Haut de St. Marc, to train and support leaders within the Haitian Women's Federation and to combat the negative effects of deforestation and climate change through sustainable agriculture. PWRDF is supporting the project with \$20,000.

Project lead Renaud Thomas has been working with RSCH since September 2018. He is a qualified agronomist with a specialization in the cultivation of breadfruit. The project included restoring and securing mills that had been used for rice and corn. There have also been many, many trips up the rocky mountain path to deliver construction supplies to build two cement cisterns. These will serve as reservoirs to both supply the mills' equipment with a constant supply of water, as well as irrigate the tree nursery.

Thomas reports that a key part of the success has been empowering the women from the Haitian Women's Federation. For example, in April 2021, 36 participants received preliminary financial training. This training needed to be extended into the federation, because it was essential that leaders from each zone knew how to manage project funds, track and report expenses, and create their

own plans for financial management within their respective organizations. The leaders were very motivated to train the other women, but it was a new experience for many of them, so they needed additional preparation to teach others. Thomas and his staff saw this as an opportunity to strengthen the leadership of the federation for the long-term. By the end of June 2021, the training had been extended to all seven member associations in the seven different villages.

In September 2021, the tree nursery foundation was constructed, along with a shade covering. In November 2021, women with specialized training in harvesting collected the roots and stems that are used to cultivate breadfruit saplings.

Thomas trained 14 members of the women's federation and 11 additional community members. Together they planted one complete bed. (By June 2022, they plan to have 1,000 saplings.) Ready to apply their new skills the women surprised Thomas by planting another bed on their own.

The women also applied chicken manure from a nearby farm to fertilize the breadfruit nursery. Local volunteers also supported the project by digging a latrine. This was no easy feat, as the terrain is solid rock and the volunteers dug by hand with only a pickaxe! As Rayjon Share Care noted, "they are supportive friends of the women's federation leaders, believing in what they are doing and proud to be part of this initiative they know will help their whole community."

Remaining work includes building a perimeter fence to keep livestock out, and to ensure a plan is in place for the long-term. Eventually the saplings will be transplanted from the tree nursery and into local fields owned by farmers who are collaborating with the federation.

Read the entire story at <https://pwrdf.org/breadfruit-cultivation-yields-results-for-haitian-women/>

Anointing Death with Love

READ

Matthew 26.6-13

Now while Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment, and she poured it on his head as he sat at the table. But when the disciples saw it, they were angry and said, "Why this waste? For this ointment could have been sold for a large sum and the money given to the poor." But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you trouble the woman? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. By pouring this ointment on my body she has prepared me for burial. Truly I tell you, wherever this good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her."

REFLECT

How do we live when we know that death is imminent? How do we live in creation as we watch the insects disappear, the birds fall out of the sky in hunger, the children starve as once fertile farms turn into dust or drown under water? How do we anticipate death not with despair but with hope?

I have friends who share community with those who are homeless. They are practiced at grief.

Grief that so many members of the community have been unloved, neglected and abused. Grief that the gifts of community members have been ignored, belittled, and buried. Grief at the loss of potential when a life ended far too soon. Grief at the continuing violence and injustices that feed these losses.

How does this community handle all of the grief and walk with those who are close to death? By anointing community members with love. By

PRAY

*Grieving God,
teach us the practice of grief,
that in the midst of our lament,
we might celebrate the gifts that creation offers us,
that in the midst of our sorrow,
we might offer creation our best resources,
that with broken hearts
we might offer creation our love.
In the name of the Suffering One,
Amen.*

valuing their gifts. By seeing beauty instead of shame.

The woman who anointed Jesus was covering the shame of his death at the hands of Rome with love. She was countering the betrayal of his gifts with the most expensive gift she could manage, anointing the stench of violence with the aromatic power of a beautiful scent.

Creation and her creatures have been neglected, unloved and abused. The gifts that creation has held out to us have been ignored, belittled and buried. The lives of many creatures are ending too soon.

How do we live when the death of creation is imminent? Perhaps we hold this creation of ours and celebrate the gifts that the earth and her creatures hold out for us. Perhaps we offer creation our best and most expensive resources. Perhaps we honour creation with our anointing of love.



PWRDF
STORY

PWRDF supports Northern Ontario Indigenous communities with \$15K for food and PPE

Last Friday, a long-anticipated shipment of PPE arrived in Kingfisher Lake First Nation via airplane. It was the end of a busy seven days for the parish of St. Paul's, Thunder Bay and its incumbent, Archdeacon Deborah Kraft, who stepped up to get emergency supplies to Bearskin Lake and Kingfisher Lake First Nations on behalf of PWRDF.

PWRDF gave \$15,000 to the Diocese of Algoma to support a COVID response in the Spiritual Ministry of Mishamikoweesh in the far north of Ontario. The Omicron variant has had a devastating impact on the community.

"On a very cold morning, I am happy to report that all the PPE for Kingfisher Lake First Nation went up north by an Air Bravo charter this morning, January 28, 2022," wrote Archdeacon Deborah after watching the supplies get loaded on to the plane. "I am very grateful to PWRDF for providing \$5,000 for the purchase of PPE and for paying for the Air Bravo Charter, and to Titus Semple of Semple Enterprises for donating \$6,000 worth of additional PPE."

By noon Friday, Semple had confirmation from the Chief of Kingfisher Lake that the plane had landed. Bishop Lydia Mamakwa, unable to travel to the airport because she was self-isolating, shared photos of the PPE being unloaded.

A week before, on January 20, a huge truck carrying \$10,000 worth of food and sundries was being loaded at Westfort Foods in Thunder Bay. Archdeacon Deborah consulted with Sharon Angeconeb, a band member of Bearskin Lake First Nation who lives in Thunder Bay. Angeconeb arranged a list of needed supplies and helped coordinate the response with Westfort Foods. The truck set out on the ice roads to Bearskin Lake and arrived 16 hours later at the Michikan Lake School, where it was unloaded into the gym and distributed to those in need.

This \$15,000 is part of a larger response to support Indigenous communities in Northern Ontario and Manitoba coping with the pandemic. PWRDF has allocated \$50,000 to Indigenous People's Alliance of Manitoba-North (IPAM-N) to provide cleaning supplies to 12 communities in Northern Manitoba: Sherridon, Pikwitonei, Thicket Portage, Grand Rapids, Wabowden, Cormorant, Easterville, Leaf Rapids, Lynn Lake, Moose Lake, Brochet and Thompson. Another \$15,000 has been allocated to the Diocese of Rupert's Land to provide supplies to Tataskweyak First Nation in Northern Manitoba, also part of the Spiritual Ministry of Mishamikoweesh.

Read this story at

<https://pwrdf.org/pwrdf-supports-northern-ontario-indigenous-communities-with-15k-for-food-and-ppe/>

Hearing our Name

READ

John 20.11-16, 18

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb, and she saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord,” and she told them that he had said these things to her.

REFLECT

In the beginning the Spirit dreamed a world into being—a world where we lived and moved in the trees, surrounded by the other creatures. A world where the Creator could call our name amongst the trees, and we would answer.

Mary Magdalene knew something about restoration. She had been tormented by demons before Jesus had come and freed her. She had followed him through his whole ministry. She had seen life come where death seemed to have total control. She had seen abundance and flourishing, where there had been only hunger, want and violence. Because she knew Jesus, she knew something about resurrection.

Even so, her grief made it difficult to see that new life had come. Her sorrow had ended her hope, her tears had blurred her sight.

And then she heard her name. In the garden, where the Creator had hoped to live with us, she

heard her name and realized that new life had come, that death was not the final word. When Mary answered, the Creator’s hopes were fulfilled.

Perhaps this week’s stories show us the true secret of Emmanuel—Creator with us. The defiant song of a young girl in response to the Creator’s call. A request for living water in response to the Creator’s offer. The trusting touch for restoration in response to the Creator’s healing promise. The persistent begging for healing from a Creator who crosses boundaries. The extravagant offering of love in response to the Creator’s sacrifice. The glad recognition of new life when the Creator calls our name.

These women saw the dreams of the Creator for creation, heard their name called, and answered. May those dreams fill our hopes for creation, as we, too, listen for our name.

PRAY

*Life-bearer,
we can scarcely imagine
hearing our name in the garden,
and resurrection life for all of creation.
So plant your dream in us,
that resurrection hope will shape our lives,
and beckon us into your story.
In the name of the Resurrected One,
Amen.*



**PWRDF
STORY**

Climate change and women with Josephine Kizza Aliddeki



Josephine Kizza Aliddeki is the Director of St. Jude Family Projects in Uganda. She recently joined PWRDF’s National Gathering of volunteers in Toronto and shared her experience supporting women farmers. **Watch the video at https://youtu.be/XAttr_PYkP8**

Week Four Bible Study

Living Creational Hope

The last week of our study explores stories that reflect the hopes and struggles of women throughout the gospels, from the beginning of Jesus's life to the resurrection account. These are women grappling with an unexpected pregnancy, the experience of being an outsider, debilitating illness, the need for healing for an oppressor, and the anger of men in response to extravagant love. Many of these struggles are unique to women, some are not. All of them demonstrate the unique ways that women in the gospel accounts have met the challenges that they face with creativity, with resistance, and with unexpected hope.

1. After her three or four-day journey to her cousin Elizabeth's house, Mary sang a song that echoed the song of her ancestor Hannah; a song about justice for the oppressed, food for the hungry, and an upending of the lives of the powerful. We have suggested that the injustices that she saw on her walk would have shaped this song, and that the beauty of the lilies of the field, and God's care for the birds of the air (Luke 12.24-28 ; Matthew 6.25-32) would have quelled her anxiety about the future. Imagine a walk in your community (or take a walk in your community). Reflect on what injustices would shape a song of hope about God's new community. Reflect on what in creation you would see that would provide deep confidence in God's care for you.
2. Monday's reflection focuses on water in the biblical story. Is there a body of water near you that is no longer living water due to pollution, development or the climate crisis? What creatures or people are grieving the loss of this living water? What would be necessary to preserve it and restore it from these threats?
3. The meeting between Jesus and the Syrophenician woman is one between the exploiter and the oppressed. In this story, the powerful oppressor needs something that is only available from a member of the community she has oppressed. Both Jesus and the woman recognize that the relationship of oppressor and oppressed needs to be undermined and changed in order for healing to come. We live in a context where such relationships seem deeply ingrained: colonialism pits white settlers against Indigenous peoples; municipal laws pit those who are housed against those who are homeless; white supremacy pits those with light skin against those who are Black, Indigenous or People of Colour; increasing corporate profits pit those with wealth against those who live in poverty. Reflect on how these oppositions shape the community in which you live. How could healing come in the midst of this?
4. Thursday's devotion ends with the suggestion that we offer creation our best and most expensive resources. This suggestion ties in with the story of the flood from two weeks ago, where it is clear that all of the efforts of the women were directed to preparing for climate catastrophe. Reflect on how our lives might change if all of our efforts, all of our best resources, all of our cunning and creativity, were devoted to mitigating and preparing for the climate crisis.

Reflect on the connections you made between this week's PWRDF stories and Sylvia's reflections.

Advent 2022



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