

COME GROW SERVE

ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2026

Season of Creation: Wilderness Sunday

Welcome to St. Paul's Lutheran Church!

We worship this Sunday with the wilderness. When we protect the mountains and trees, the waters and tidepools, the soil and stones, we enable Creation to join us in praise of the Creator.

Those places which humans consider harsh or barren are filled with wondrous life, joining together to give witness to the Creator with their very being. May we worship as one within the sanctuary of Earth itself. May God be praised this day!

In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord – Isaiah 40:3

*Words printed in **bold** are spoken by all. Visitors are invited to sign the guest registry in the Narthex or fill out a pew card and place it in the offering plate.*

THIS SERVICE IS LIVE STREAMED. TELL YOUR FRIENDS!

GATHERING

WELCOME

PRELUDE

Solitary Traveler

Edvard Grieg

The assembly is invited to stand.

CALL TO WORSHIP

P: In the name of the Creator, the fountain of life, in the name of Christ ✠, the pulse of life, and in the name of the Spirit, the breath of life.

All: **Amen. Holy! Holy! Holy! Earth is filled with God's presence.**

P: Christ, we come to into your presence today to worship in this sanctuary called Earth,

All: **A planet filled with your presence: majestic in the forests, potent in the land, pulsing through the wilderness, shimmering with the rivers.**

P: God, reveal yourself to us in this place, and show us your face in all creation.

All: **Holy! Holy! Holy! Earth is filled with God's presence.**

P: We invite the land to worship with us:

All: **wildflowers and groundcovers, swirling grasses and goldenrods.**

P: We invite the farmlands to sing with us:

All: **wheat fields, orchards, and vineyards, corn fields, gardens, and wetlands.**

P: We join with all the fauna of the fields in praising God:

All: **horses, sheep, and cattle, grass snakes and grasshoppers, eagles and crows.**

P: We invite the ground to stir deep below:

All: life-giving microbes restoring the soil, beetles and worms preparing our food.

P: We celebrate the song of the soil!

All: Sing, soil, sing!

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

P: Blessed be the holy Trinity, ♃, one God, who so loves the world and all who live in it.

All: Amen.

P: Let us confess our sin in the presence of God, Creation, and one another.

Silence is kept for reflection.

P: Reconciling God,

All: we expect nature to serve our needs, and we have damaged it in the process. We trample every wild place and pollute your waters. We abuse your good Earth until it cries out in pain. Forgive us, loving God. Remind us of the covenant you made with the whole Earth. Nourish us so we can restore your awe-inspiring Creation. Amen.

P: Christ, the one who was buried into the heart of the Earth and then raised up to new life, forgives you all your sins. Freed from your burdens, be led by the Spirit to do God's healing work in the world. Amen.

All: Shalom! Shalom! Within us and all creation, shalom!

GATHERING HYMN

God, the Sculptor of the Mountains

ELW 736

GREETING

P: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy spirit be with you all.

All: And also with you.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

A: Let us pray.

God, our creator, your glory fills our planet. Help us discern your vibrant presence among us, especially in the wonders of the wild in wilderness areas. Free us from our destructive ambitions. Lift our spirits to rejoice with the fearsome and beautiful wilderness. Stir us to respect and protect your wild places, caring for all that you have made. We ask this in the name of Christ, who reconciles and renews all things in creation.

All: Amen.

The assembly is invited to be seated.

FIRST READING: Joel 1:2-3, 17-20

A reading from the Prophet Joel.

- ² Hear this, O elders;
 give ear, all inhabitants of the land!
Has such a thing happened in your days
 or in the days of your ancestors?
- ³ Tell your children of it,
 and let your children tell their children,
 and their children another generation.
- ¹⁷ The seed shrivels under the clods;
 the storehouses are desolate;
the granaries are ruined
 because the grain has withered.
- ¹⁸ How the animals groan!
 The herds of cattle wander about
because there is no pasture for them;
 even the flocks of sheep are perishing.
- ¹⁹ To you, O Lord, I cry,
for fire has devoured
 the pastures of the wilderness,
and flames have burned
 all the trees of the field.
- ²⁰ Even the wild animals cry to you
 because the watercourses are dried up,
and fire has devoured
 the pastures of the wilderness.

Word of God. Word of Life.

All: Thanks be to God.

PSALM 18:6-19 [Read responsively; congregation in bold]

- ⁶ In my distress I called upon the Lord;
 to my God I cried for help.
From his temple he heard my voice,
 and my cry to him reached his ears.
- ⁷ Then the earth reeled and rocked;
 the foundations also of the mountains trembled
 and reeled because he was angry.
- ⁸ **Smoke went up from his nostrils**
 and devouring fire from his mouth;
 glowing coals flamed forth from him.

- ⁹ He bowed the heavens and came down;
thick darkness was under his feet.
- ¹⁰ **He rode on a cherub and flew;
he came swiftly upon the wings of the wind.**
- ¹¹ He made darkness his covering around him,
his canopy thick clouds dark with water.
- ¹² **Out of the brightness before him
there broke through his clouds
hailstones and coals of fire.**
- ¹³ The Lord also thundered in the heavens,
and the Most High uttered his voice.
- ¹⁴ **And he sent out his arrows and scattered them;
he flashed forth lightnings and routed them.**
- ¹⁵ Then the channels of the sea were seen,
and the foundations of the world were laid bare
at your rebuke, O Lord,
at the blast of the breath of your nostrils.
- ¹⁶ **He reached down from on high; he took me;
he drew me out of mighty waters.**
- ¹⁷ He delivered me from my strong enemy
and from those who hated me,
for they were too mighty for me.
- ¹⁸ **They confronted me in the day of my calamity,
but the Lord was my support.**
- ¹⁹ He brought me out into a broad place;
he delivered me because he delighted in me.

SECOND READING: Romans 8:18-27

A reading from Paul's letter to the Romans.

¹⁸ I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God, ²⁰ for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its enslavement to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning together as it suffers together the pains of labor, ²³ and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what one already sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

²⁶ Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with groanings too deep for words. ²⁷ And God, who

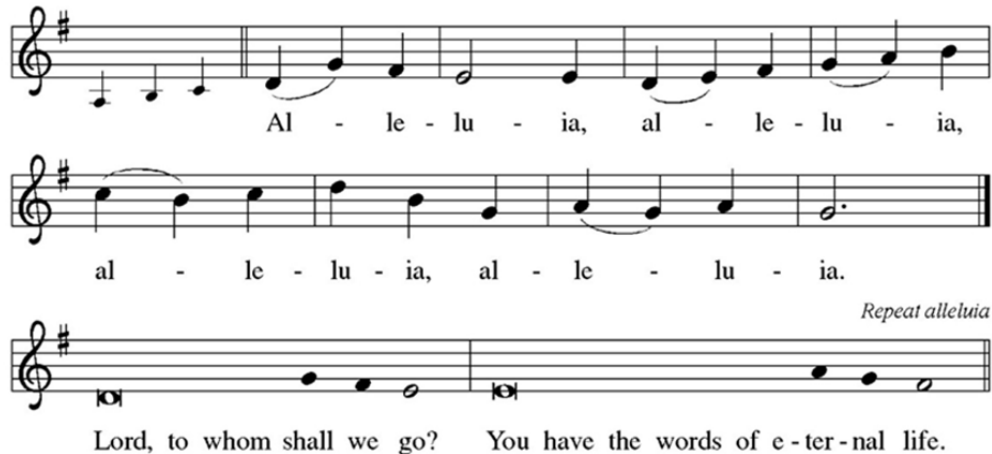
searches hearts, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Word of God. Word of Life.

All: Thanks be to God.

The assembly is invited to stand for the reading of the Gospel.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION



GOSPEL: Matthew 12:38-40

The Holy Gospel according to Matthew.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

¹³Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” ¹⁵But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. ¹⁶And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw God’s Spirit descending like a dove and alighting on him. ¹⁷And a voice from the heavens said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

¹In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, ²“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, O Christ.

Please be seated.

SERMON

Pr. Peg Otte

Please stand as you are able

HYMN OF THE DAY

Creating God, Your Fingers Trace

ELW 684

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

P: Let us affirm our faith together:

All: We believe that God creates all things, renews all things and celebrates all things. We believe Earth is a sanctuary, a sacred planet filled with God's presence, a home for us to share with our kin.

We believe that God became flesh and blood, became a part of Earth, a human being called Jesus the Christ, who lived and breathed and spoke among us, suffered and died on a cross, for all human beings and for all creation.

We believe that the risen Jesus is the Christ at the core of creation, reconciling all things to God, renewing all creation and filling the universe.

We believe the Spirit renews life in creation, groans in empathy with a suffering creation, and waits with us for the rebirth of creation.

We believe that with Christ we will rise, and with Christ we will celebrate a new creation.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

A: Remembering the caring and generous works of God, we pray for the church, creation, and the needs of our neighbors.

A period of silence is kept

A: Reveal your miracles to us, O God. Move us to cherish you as we behold the wonders of creation. Renew the seas and the soil, the forests and the creatures that live in them. Turn us to ways of living that seek Earth's thriving. Merciful God,

All: receive our prayer.

PM: Trusting your goodness, we pray for all caregivers and people who are sick or suffering in any way, especially those on our prayer list and those we name now, either silently or aloud (*pause*). Give them encouragement and consolation in your presence. Merciful God,

All: receive our prayer.

A: Teach us your paths as we pray for this congregation. Be present with us this day as we give thanks for and celebrate 125 years of ministry. Continue your work in us and through us, and unite us in your love as we labor together for the sake of the gospel and throughout your creation. Merciful God,

All: receive our prayer.

PM: Be our hope, O God. We remember with thanksgiving your disciples who died in faith. May their trust in your promise be our protection and our hope. Merciful God,

All: receive our prayer.

A: Remember us according to your steadfast love as we offer these and the prayers of our heart, trusting in your compassion made known through Jesus Christ.

All: Amen.

PEACE

PM: The God of heaven has made a home on earth.

All: Christ dwells among us and is one with us.

PM: The peace of Christ be always with you.

All: And also with you.

The assembly is invited to be seated.

MEAL

THE OFFERING

An offering is gathered and the Table is set.

MUSICAL OFFERING

Jesus Is a Rock in a Weary Land

arr. Kurt Westerberg

Rachel Blaustein, soprano; Nicholas Marotta, mezzo-soprano

The assembly is invited to stand as able.

OFFERING PRAYER

A: Let us pray.

Loving God, we offer at your table the gifts of our hearts. Help us take heart in you and share freely of your love, so that all creation can taste your abundance. We ask this in the name of Jesus, through the Spirit abiding with us now and forever.

All: Amen.

GREAT THANKSGIVING

P: The Lord be with you.

All: And also with you.

P: Lift up your hearts.

All: We lift them to the Lord.

P: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

P: It is indeed right, our duty and our joy, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God, through your eternal Word, the Wisdom from on high by whom you created all things: our Savior, Jesus Christ. You laid the foundations of the world and enclosed the sea when it burst out of the womb. You brought forth all creatures of the earth and gave breath to humankind.

Wondrous are you, Holy One of Blessing; all you create is a sign of hope for our journey. And so as the morning stars sing your praises, with the heavenly beings and all creation, we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY



EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER

P: O God, how majestic is your name in all the earth. Over the eons your merciful might evolved our home, a fragile tree of life. Here by your wisdom are both life and death, growth and decay, the nest and the hunt, sunshine and storm, darkness and light. Sustained by these wonders, we creatures of dust join in the ancient song: The earth is full of your glory.

All: The earth is full of your glory.

P: O God, you took on our flesh in Jesus our healer. In Christ you bring life from death; we remember his cross, we laud his resurrection. Broken like bread, he enlivens our body. Outpoured like wine, he fills the earth with goodness. Receiving this mystery, we mortals sing our song: The earth is full of your glory.

All: The earth is full of your glory.

P: We praise you for the heart of Jesus, so filled with your love for this earth. In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks; broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:

Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.
Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying:
This cup is the new covenant in my blood,
shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.
Do this for the remembrance of me.

Gathered around this table, we your children unite in this song: The earth is full of your glory.

All: The earth is full of your glory.

P: O God triune, you create the worlds, you uphold the living, you embrace the dead. Send forth your Spirit and renew the face of the earth. Strengthen us for our journey with this meal, the body and blood of Christ. Give us a future that trusts in you and cares for your earth. Empowered by your promises, we rise from our deaths to praise you again: The earth is full of your glory.

All: **The earth is full of your glory.**

P: Amen, and amen.

All: **Amen, and amen.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

P: Together as one body, we pray the prayer Jesus taught us.

All: **Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen**

INVITATION TO COMMUNE

P: The gifts of creation for God's beloved creatures. Come and share.



DISTRIBUTION OF HOLY COMMUNION

We will commune one side of the church at a time. Please come forward to receive the bread first. Gluten free wafers are available.

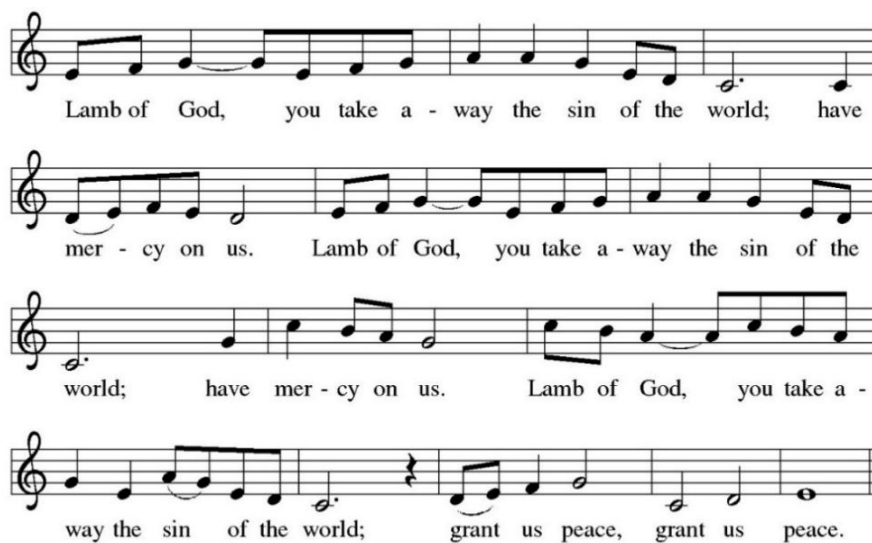
You may choose a cup of red wine or white grape juice.

Move to the side eat and drink.

Place your empty cup in the tray provided.

All are welcome at Christ's Table. We believe Jesus is the host and the gifts of God are for everyone. Child-ren will be offered communion unless otherwise indicated by parents. The wine is red and grape juice is white.

LAMB OF GOD



Lamb of God, you take a - way the sin of the world; have
mer - cy on us. Lamb of God, you take a - way the sin of the
world; have mer - cy on us. Lamb of God, you take a -
way the sin of the world; grant us peace, grant us peace.

Please stand as you are able.

TABLE BLESSING

P: Now may the power of Christ's body and blood reach deep into your heart, your mind, and your body to heal your wounds and, through your healing to all the earth. In Jesus' name,

All: Amen.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

A: Let us pray.

God of our salvation, we give you thanks for this meal that restores our souls, reconciles us to you, and strengthens us for the journey. Through the body and blood of your Son, may we become Christ's body in the world, bearing witness to your love for all creation, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

All: Amen.

SENDING

Please be seated for the announcements.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The assembly is invited to stand.

SENDING BLESSING

P: God of the galaxies, God of the starburst and sunlit morning, God of the forest and ocean, God of the blooming desert and rolling grasslands, shine on us today and bless us ☩ with your presence.

All: Amen.

SENDING HYMN

Guide Me Ever, Great Redeemer

ELW 618

The congregation will recess out during the sending hymn.

DISMISSAL

A: Go in peace. Flourish with creation.

All: Thanks be to God.

WILD GEESE

.....Meanwhile, the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting—
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things. ~*Mary Oliver*

THANK YOU

To our musicians, Rachel Blaustein soprano and Nicholas Marotta, mezzo-soprano.
To Kris Westerberg for donating flowers for the glories of creation in order to beautify our
sanctuary.

PRAYER REQUESTS

For Joan Brandt.
For Jan Rock, as she recovers from stenoses.
For Bill Kastilahn, recovering from eye interaction with medication.
For Joe Berube, husband of Sue Murphy (director of Interfaith Action), as he
undergoes cancer treatment.
For Deborah Green, friend of LuAnne Origer, as she recovers from brain surgery.
For the family of Sue Salisbury as they mourn the death of her uncle, Gernard
“Bud” Drayer.
For the family of Diane DiFrancesco, as they mourn the death of her cousin, Vince
Della Sola.



To donate via Zelle, aim your device's camera at the
code on the left, click on the link and follow the
instructions. Or you can go to your bank's website,
go to Zelle payments and look for
“office@stpaulvanston.org.”



WELCOME BACK
PASTOR PEG OTTE

PASTORAL FELLOW: PEG OTTE

We are thrilled to have Pastor Peg return a second time to St. Paul's this year as Pastoral Fellow. She will lead us through the Season of Creation (some new twists this year!) and be with us from September 13 through October 11.

Pr. Peg is well-known and greatly loved at St. Paul's, having led us as pastoral fellow multiple times over the years. Most recently, she led us through the Epiphany season. She has previously led us as fellow for Lent-Easter (2025), Eastertide (2024), and for Season of Creation (2023). Prior to that, she served as our interim pastor during 2019 after Pr. Tim McKenzie moved to North Carolina.

Pr. Peg and her husband Randy are long-time Evanston residents who raised their three now-adult children here. Pr. Peg previously served at Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd in Prospect Heights and St. John's Lutheran Church in Wilmette, has served as an interim minister in this synod, and for many years, served during winter at Shepherd by the Sea. She is delighted to return to St. Paul's this year for the beloved Season of Creation.