

## A Sermon for DaySpring

By Eric Howell

*Reconciling Relationships*

Jeremiah 4

The Season of Creation

September 14, 2025

After a week like this one, another one when it seems everyone is pondering the crisis of our nation, if not the whole world, I would love to launch into a Season of Creation with psalms and songs of delight, that celebrate God for the beauty of creation and the ways we meet God in the loveliness of the world. We'd pile in together into the ecclesial family wagon and take a liturgical version of a vacation into a national park. We need a vacation. And there's so much to sing about and so many good songs to sing...

*For the beauty of the earth, for the glory of the skies...*

*This is my Father's world, and to my listening ears,  
all nature sings, around me rings the music of the spheres...*

*All creatures of our God and king, lift up your voice and with us sing, Alleluia!*

We absolutely should sing those hymns and so many others like them. For one, they are bangers. For another, they praise God for the gift of a creation which isn't just functional for our caloric intake or our oxygen needs or our recreational desires—it's not just a system to serve the needs and wants of humankind, then to be discarded when we're done with it—but a creation, lovely in form and sanctified in purpose. All creation is the cradle for Christ's incarnation. St. Francis, even with failing eyesight, near the end of his life, saw this and roused all creatures as brothers and sisters to give praise to God. And so let us do the same, in the Season of Creation and always—that God may be praised, people may be blessed, and all creation may fulfill its purpose of bearing witness to God's goodness.

All of this is at the heart of the reading today from Jeremiah 4, even as disturbing as it is. That's important to keep in mind. But here with Jeremiah, there's no vacation from the reality of the world, as it is, as we make it, and as it must be redeemed.

Jeremiah says, "Have you forgotten who you are? You're God's people, the people of God's covenant. You know you should worship God and God alone for all God has done and who God is. Enough with your idols! You know you should be in solidarity with other people for their good as much as your own and practice justice in your communities. Enough with your injustices! You know you should value the land and sea and heavens and care for the gifts God has given to all creation. You know this, but you've done none of it. And the consequences are dire."

And that's how we begin the Season of Creation. Jeremiah is like a nail in your flattened tire before you leave the driveway. Where do you think you're going off to?

The Season of Creation theme is “Peace with Creation.” Jeremiah preaches anything but. This is not a picture of peace of or with creation. Jeremiah paints a picture of a crisis so serious, a crisis of heart and spirit and community, it is as if creation is being undone. “My anguish, my anguish. I writhe in pain. Oh the walls of my heart,” he writes. He is heartbroken.

Jeremiah launches a prophetic attack on apathy, cosmic in scope. Whereas in the beginning, the Spirit hovered over the waters and brought order from chaos, now a hot wind blows—not a breeze but a desert wind. Whereas in the beginning, God looked upon the sun and moon, land and sea, plants and animals and people, and God saw that it was good, so now, God looks upon the same and sees more and more of creation being nullified, regressing to the murky conditions of chaos, wildness, and waste. The creation bears witness, yes, it bears witness to the condition of the human heart. Its condition is a mirror to the unfaithfulness of the people of God to the covenant.

There is no peace with creation in Jeremiah because there is no honoring of God or justice among the people. This all is the scope of the problem that he is pointing to: a people who have turned from God, turned from one another, turned from the land, and turned inward on themselves.

“Don’t say ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace.”

The consequences are staggering. In chapter 4, Jeremiah’s dystopian poem describes a step-by-step “rhetorical dismantling of creation,” in which nothing is spared. There is loss of light; the mountains and hills become unstable; humanity disappears; birds are absent, fertile land is ended, cities cease to function. The biblical scholar Walter Brueggeman writes, “The verdict of initial creation was, ‘It is very good.’ Here, the verdict is, ‘It is very evil.’ ... “We may ask about the function of this dangerous poem. We must stress that it is a poem... It is a rhetorical attempt to engage this numbed, unaware community in an imaginative embrace of what is happening. The world is becoming unglued.” (Jeremiah, 61)

That’s the ancient message. Did we need Jeremiah’s poem to feel that the world is becoming unglued? It feels like that some days, right?

I don’t know that we need a poem to express the ungluing of a world in which icebergs are literally becoming disengaged from ice sheets in the warming North Atlantic. Or species are displaced from their homes because we need more subdivisions or soybean fields. Or a plastic island twice the size of Texas is bobbing in the Pacific. If we do need one, Hopkins gives it to us:

*Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;  
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil...<sup>1</sup>*

If we need another one, the psalmist gives it to us:

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<sup>1</sup> [\*God’s Grandeur\*, Gerard Manley Hopkins](#)

*The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."  
They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds;  
there is none who does good.<sup>2</sup>*

And Wendell Berry, seeking the peace of wild things, awakens in the middle of the night in despair about the world his children and grandchildren will inherit. Do we need such a poem?

As troublesome as all of this is, the ungluing of the world isn't just measured in microplastics or board-feet of timber or Co2 in the atmosphere, and most days, most of us aren't even thinking about those problems. Rather, it's measured for most of us, most days in broken families and minds and hearts and fragmented communities and human bodies brought down from violence and hatred and a nation on the edge. Do we need a poem for that? Or a psalm? Or a song? We have the video.

We do not have peace with creation; increasingly, we hardly have it with ourselves. To say we are in an ecological crisis rightly describes the scope because ecology is simply the study of relationships. From the creation story of Genesis, through the prophetic warnings of Jeremiah, through the ministry of Jesus, until today, the life and story of humanity is a story about relationships treasured and relationships shattered. We are in relationship crisis—biblically put, a covenantal crisis—with God, with each another, with creation. If everything is about relationships, how are we doing these days?

Though are always people and institutions who promote the dismantling, even weaponization of these broken relationships for their own benefit, there are also people who call us back and remind us who we are as beloved creatures bound with one another and all creation in a web of relationships that can give honor to God and bless one another. One of those this week, rising above the chaos, is the governor of Utah.

I admit: I'm not sure I expected to be quoting the Governor of Utah in a sermon, but when you've earned it, you've earned it. After the murder of conservative activist Charlie Kirk, Utah Governor Spencer Cox said he believes this is a watershed moment in American history, but that it remains to be seen what kind. "Is this the end of a dark chapter in our history, or the beginning of a darker chapter in our history?" he asks. "The choice, it seems, is upon us, with no less urgency than it was in the days of the prophet. When it feels like everything is coming apart in the world, what do you do?"

Cox addressed the young, politically active fans of Charlie Kirk, "You are inheriting a country where politics feels like rage. It feels like rage is the only option." "Your generation has an opportunity to build a culture that is very different than what we are suffering through right now." He says, "I desperately call on every American — Republican, Democrat, liberal, progressive, conservative, MAGA, all of us." Log off, touch grass, hug a family member, go out and do good in your community.

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<sup>2</sup> Psalm 14:1

There's a deep well of wisdom he's drawing from. In the circus and carnival of American politics and the clowns that are running around in it, here is somebody who is drawing on a deep well. The crisis of our politics is the crisis of our spirituality is the crisis of the environment because it's all the same thing. Or at least, it all meets in the same place: the heart. And so there's where healing begins, too. Jeremiah, in his own day, in his own unguarded, dystopian poetic way, understood this, too. So do we, really. It goes down deep, deeper than tweets or rifle shots or carbon, both the problem and the solution are in the human heart in relationship with God and with one another and to the grass and soil, the *adamah* from which *adam* comes to life by the grace of God.

In a world becoming unglued, how do we find true peace with creation and one another and God? This is exactly the church's mission in the world. We are ambassadors of Christ; we have the ministry of reconciliation. You are the glue of the world. If God is the MacGuyver of the world, you are the duct tape or paper clip of the world.

The crisis is not just in its parts—climate, oceans, habitats—the crisis is in the relationships and the politics, and the crisis is, we must acknowledge, an interior crisis of a church culture that has lost its contemplative orientation and turned away from the way of Jesus. As I was reminded this week in the wisdom of Dallas Willard about discipleship, “Jesus is the way, the truth, the life. The Jesus *truth* only when it is wedded to the Jesus *way* produces the Jesus *life*.”

The parables of Jesus are always about the way, truth, and life of the kingdom of God, each, in one way or another, highlighting the actions of a character who does something in the parable that makes no sense at all in the world as we know it, the world that has come to be.

A shepherd who searches for one lost sheep? In the world as we know it, the shepherd would hunker down, calculating that one lost sheep is the unfortunate price you pay for the security and freedom of all the others. The shepherd would make peace with the unglueing of his flock.

But this is not the way of the Good Shepherd. Something lost has become dislocated from its place and its purpose, and so the thing to do is to find it, restore it, and redeem it. A lost sheep cannot be sheared. A lost coin cannot be spent. Lostness in the parable isn't a moral judgment on that which is lost; it is a recognition that something has become dislodged out of place, and it's time to go get it. The shepherd will not rest until he puts back in place what's out of place, because if the sheep is lost it's not just the one that's lost but the purpose and good of the whole flock. If one is lost, all are diminished.

Something has gone out of us as a people. But Jesus Christ is still the Good Shepherd, and he's still on the hunt to restore us at the broken places. Something may have gone out of you—some faith, some hope, some love that feels like it has come unglued and just floating around in the ocean of despair somewhere. But Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, is on the loose, finding what seems like is forever lost and bringing it home.

Christ will not abide until every lost sheep is restored to the flock. Every one of us, and everything in us that is God's, even that which has turned to evil or despair or apathy, everything can and will be restored. We serve a God who took flesh and came to us, walked among us, taught and led us, died for us on a cross. We serve a God whose love for all creation, even that creation that not just wandered away but actively rejected and scorned him, a God who would give his life for the good and lives of others. Let us worship him, and let our lives live out from this worship into our care for this good gift of creation, this good community and our neighbors, that all may be redeemed and all may have hope and all that is lost may be found.

Do not forget, when it seems all is falling apart, and it seems like hope is lost or anything good with it or even within yourself, on the longest night, the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it. And you are not just duct tape or a paper clip—you are the light of the world.

Amen.