***Creation-Crisis Preaching: Ecology, Theology, and the Pulpit***

**STUDY GUIDE**

**Introduction – Why Creation Needs Good Preaching, and Good Preaching Needs Creation**

1. Page 1 begins with a list of the kinds of stories related to environmental issues found in her local newspaper. What are environmental problems specific to *your* area?

2. For clergy: Take a look back at the sermons you have preached in the last 12 months. How often did you address environmental issues?

3. For laity: Think back to the sermons you have heard in the last six months. Do you recall any in which environmental concerns were mentioned?

4. Page 3 touches on the feeling of being overwhelmed by the numerous environmental problems our world faces. Which one(s) break your heart or cause you to feel anger the most? At the end of this study guide is a general list of issues.

5. The terms “eco-crucifixion” and “eco-resurrection” are introduced on page 4. What comes to mind when you see or hear those terms?

6. Some people contend that we need to “de-center” humanity and get away from anthropocentrism. However, the author quotes Wendy Lynne Lee’s assertion that “human-centeredness is not the enemy of environmental responsibility, but its most vital ally” (9). In what ways can our human-centeredness actually help us to address the Creation-crisis? And what aspects of that could be roadblocks?

7. The author is grounded in a Lutheran theology that informs her preaching. Where is your theological groundedness? How have your values and denominational commitments shaped your engagement with Creation-care?

**Chapter One – Environmental, Theological, and Biblical Foundations**

1. The Susquehanna River in Central Pennsylvania figures prominently both as a metaphor and an actual site of protest and protection throughout the book. What are the local waterways that make up your ecological context? How have they been used and/or abused by humans? What is their symbolic meaning? How have they flowed through the history of your area?

2. On pages 24-26, the author discusses Lynn Townsend White’s 1967 essay “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” which contends that Judeo-Christian thought and its ramifications for human civilization bear the brunt of blame for the current state of our planet. At the same time, there are profound resources within those traditions for correcting the problems. Discuss the fraught relationship between Judeo-Christian history and God’s Creation. What biblical, theological and spiritual resources can you identify that may be helpful in constructing a more Creation-friendly religious tradition?

3. On pages 28-30, the author recounts the Lutheran church’s history with environmental issues. Do some research about your own denomination. When did ecological awareness first begin to bud? How has it developed in your tradition?

4. On pages 30-35, the principles of scriptural eco-hermeneutics are listed and explained. Try the following exercise: Look at the biblical texts assigned for the coming Sunday (or from that past Sunday). Read each of the pericopes (portions of biblical text) using this “green lens.” How does this alter your perspective? What images, ideas, or “voices” come to the foreground? How might you begin to think about a sermon that addresses these texts from an ecotheological perspective?

**Chapter Two - Flower, Leafing, Fruiting – Strategies for Approaching Environmental Preaching**

1. On page 38, the author cites Margaret Swedish’s contention that “the human heart is not changed by facts alone but by engaging visions and empowering values. Humans need to see the larger picture and feel they can act to make a difference.” If you are a preacher, think of some sermons where you attempted to paint this larger picture and, based on the feedback you received from your congregation, your preaching encouraged people to act to make a difference. If you are a lay person, describe a sermon you’ve heard where this kind of vision and empowerment inspired you to action.

2. “Flowering” helps to create a “buzz” about an issue to raise awareness and get people talking. Flowering can take the form of a conversation between people, leading a Bible study on Creation-care issues, writing a letter to the editor, sharing a post on social media, etc. What kinds of “flowering” have you done regarding Creation-care issues in the past? What responses do you normally encounter, both positive and “push-back”?

3. Taking action (leafing) can take many forms, including signing a petition, making a phone call to an elected official, attending a protest, testifying at a hearing, to name a few. What actions have you taken in the past to make a difference in the midst of the Creation-crisis? What have you found to be most effective? What frustrations and/or roadblocks have you encountered?

4. Fruiting is the deeper change that happens for us and others at a theological, spiritual, and emotional level. In what way has your engagement with Creation-crisis issues, your study of “green” theology and biblical interpretation, and your work with others with Creation-care changed you on a deeper level? Give specific examples.

**Chapter Three – Who Is My Neighbor? Mapping a Preaching’s Eco-Location**

1. Pages 73-75 give many concrete suggestions for “mapping” our other-than-human neighbors within our specific contexts. If you are a preacher reading this book on your own or with colleagues, choose three or four to do together and compare what you learn. How might this inform the contextualization of your preaching?

2. Page 75 describes a “Council of All Beings” ritual in which participants go to a place outdoors and choose a nonhuman member of the surrounding eco-community to speak for and with. This is an activity that can be done with youth, adventurous Bible study participants, or with friends and family. What different perspectives and insights are shared? How might this exercise be different if it were done in an area threatened with pollution, “development,” or extreme energy extraction?

3. Pages 76-77 give some creative ideas for ecological preaching. If you have other suggestions or ideas that have worked for you, please email them to creationcrisispreaching@gmail.com. As we collect them, we will post them on the website.

**Chapter Four – Ecofeminist Theology and Implications for Preaching**

1. This chapter discusses both the positive and negative aspects of the association between women and nature. Where have you seen examples of this (both positive and negative)? What impact do you think this has had on the way we view both nature and women?

2. In thinking about initial implications of ecofeminist theology for preaching (106-11), look back on some of your sermons, if you are a preacher, and notice how the language you use in preaching either critiques or inadvertently assents to the oppression of women and/or Creation.

3. If you are a lay person who listens to sermons, begin noticing the language used by the preacher. What pronouns, images, symbols and stories are used that gender God in a specific way? When you think about the notion of God either in feminine or non-gender ways, what responses and emotions are evoked for you?

4. On page 108, the author encourages preachers to “tell Earth’s story,” Both the sermon “A Resurrection Sermon for an Earth-Kin Congregation” (83-89) and the sermon “Earth Speaks: What’s Next?” (168-172) give examples of what it could look like to tell the biblical story from Earth’s perspective. What other narratives in the Bible would lend themselves to an Earth-retelling? Try experimenting with creating a sermon that includes Earth’s perspective.

**Chapter Five – Developing an Ecofeminist Christology for Creation-Crisis Preaching**

1. Chapter Five begins with a description of a work of art the author dubs “Sophia-Mer-Christ” which she sees as capturing the kind of ecofeminist Christology she envisions for Creation-crisis preaching. What are works of art that have had a profound effect on your conceptualizing of the Divine, especially as it relates to Creation? In what ways can art inform our preaching?

2. This chapter wrestles with the “tense discomfiture” between traditional Christology and ecofeminist values and commitments, especially regarding the maleness of Jesus Christ, and the resurrection’s disruption of the natural laws of Creation. Of the three theologians discussed in response to this apparent impasse – Sallie McFague, Mary Solberg and Celia Deane-Drummond – which ideas resonate with you? Who are other theologians who have helped you articulate Christological themes in the pulpit?

3. Sallie McFague’s metaphorical theology seeks to expand our notions of God beyond the traditional patriarchal renderings. What are other models for framing our understanding of God? If you have preached or heard a sermon that has challenged the listener to conceive of God in new ways, what has been the response from listeners?

4. Mary Solberg proposes a three-part process for living a life of accountability in response to the current crucifixions of our world: 1) Seeing or coming to know what is going on (or *that* something is going on); 2) Recognizing and comprehend one’s own relation to or involvement in what is going on; and 3) Doing something about what is going on (129). What is an environmental justice issue, or any justice issue, that is important to you that you could address in your preaching using this process?

5. Drawing on Deane-Drummond’s notion of *theodrama,* the author makes the case that Creation is sometimes the victim of the same forces that crucified Christ, and that evolved beings are worthy of our consideration when preaching about the cross and resurrection. If you are a lectionary preacher, take a look at the pericopes coming up in the next season. What Sundays would lend themselves to including the topic of justice for other-than-human beings in your proclamation? If you plan your own sermon series or topics, how could you address the plight of, say, endangered animals or habitats from a biblical perspective?

**Chapter Six – Preaching a Shape-Shifting “Trickster” Resurrection in the Face of the Creation Crisis**

1. This chapter seeks to highlight the “witty agency” of Creation in order to move beyond the notion of nature as being a “victim” of human beings. What are examples you’ve seen or heard of that have demonstrated nature as “trickster”?

2. Both sermons in this chapter emphasize the “surprise” of the resurrection. When are times in you own life that you have been joyously surprised by God’s grace or a resurrection moment? What difference, if any, has that made in your life?

3. Drawing on Charles L. Campbell and Johan H. Cilliers’ book *Preaching Fools: The Gospel as a Rhetoric of Folly*, the author explores the challenges and risks that accompany entering the “liminal space” of proclamation. If you are a preacher, when is a time you took a risk in the pulpit (recognizing that every sermon entails some level of risk!)? Or if you are a lay person, when was a time you felt your minister boldly enter that prophetic place? What were responses from the congregation?

4. On pages 159-161, the author shares an experience of receiving push-back from a parishioner after preaching a sermon about a local instance of “crucifixion” and “resurrection” regarding the displacement of residents from a mobile home park by the fracking industry. What are times you have received negative feedback in response to a sermon? How did you handle it? What did you learn? What would you do differently in the future?

**Chapter Seven – Earth, Water, and Wind: A Trilogy of Creation-Crisis Sermons**

1. On pages 166-7, the author lists 12 values and commitments for an ecofeminist homiletic. Which of these resonates mostly strongly for you? If you are in a clergy colleague group, read through these together and share sermons with each other to evaluate using these values and commitments.

2. The three sermons in this chapter are all “preached” as a dramatic monologue as one of the other-than-human characters in the biblical narrative. What are the risks and possible benefits of speaking as a nonhuman character in the biblical text? How might each of the sermon’s impact shift if it were preached by a male? What are other creative performance-based strategies for preaching about controversial issues that challenge listeners without alienating them?

3. One of the reasons for preaching the sermons as other-than-human characters from the biblical narrative is to help create a relationship between the listener and Creation, as least on a rhetorical level. What are other strategies for helping to reconnect listeners with the “horizon” (in the Gadamerian sense, see pages 30-32) of Creation?

4. Extreme energy extraction and the climate crisis are the focal points of these three sermons. What environmental crises call to you to be voiced and addressed in your preaching? What is your plan for including them in your proclamation?

5. The author repeatedly emphasizes what *God* is doing to effect a resurrection even as Creation is undergoing repeated crucifixion. The book ends on a note of hope and joyful surprise. What gives you hope when doing this work of addressing the Creation-crisis? How do you see God at work in and through you, your community of believers, and the world around you?

**A Brief List of Environmental Issues**

This list can be helpful to spark ideas for students writing papers, church groups discerning what justice issues to address, and community groups identifying specific problems in their area.

Agriculture (monoculture)

Air pollution/asthma

Animals/animal rights/animals for food

Brownfields

Chemicals

Clean energy

Climate disruption

Deforestation

Development (see Vandana Shiva’s concept of maldevelopment)

Eco-racism

Electricity production

Extinction

Extreme energy extraction

Farming/agriculture/factory farms/fertilizer

Fishing, fish farms

Food justice

Fossil fuels (coal, oil, gas)

Fracking

Garbage (on land or in waterways)

Habitat disruption, elimination

Incinerators (medical waste, tires, municipal waste, etc.)

Landfills

Land/nature preserves

Methane gas

Mountaintop removal

Oil spills

Pipelines

Sex-slave trade (women’s bodies/Earth’s body)

Solar energy

Superfund sites

Sustainability

Waste production and disposal

Wind power