PLUNDERED

The Tangled Roots of Racial and Environmental Injustice

DAVID W. SWANSON

ivp | InterVarsity Press
ivpress.com

Published by InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL
www.ivpress.com

CONTENTS

—1—

THE GIFT OF CREATION

I want creation to penetrate you with so much admiration that everywhere, wherever you may be, the least plant may bring you the clear remembrance of the Creator.

Basil the Great

Once, I can easily imagine, we each had a fundamental sense of well-being that grew directly out of the intimacy, our back-and-forth, with the profundity embedded in the places we occupied.

Barry Lopez

According to orthodox Christian theology, creaturely existence ensues as reciprocal gift giving where each one is given to the other and all come from and return to God.

Jonathan Tran

I take my sabbath on Tuesdays. As a pastor, Sunday, the day most Christians have historically observed for worship and rest, doesn't really work for me. Instead, at the suggestion of an experienced pastor when I first started out in ministry, I've been protecting Tuesdays from work and other forms of productivity for twenty years. I don't keep the day perfectly; sometimes I return to the omnipresent to-do list and get sucked into a task that suddenly seems urgent. At times sabbath-keeping still feels like a discipline. The adrenaline that builds up over the week and the satisfaction that comes from crossing

things from my list make it hard to stop working. But as the years have passed, I've come to experience this weekly respite as a gift that I'd be ignorant not to accept gratefully.

Did the recently freed Hebrew people also struggle to keep the Sabbath? Of the Ten Commandments, it's God's instructions about taking a day to cease work that include the most detail. It's understandable why a people who'd known generations of captivity and forced labor struggled to accept God's invitation to rest. Beliefs about personal value and dignity had been shaped by generations of mistreatment. The people had been little more than resources to be used. Their imaginations about God must have been infected by the assumptions that had justified their commodification and abuse. And now they were to set aside a weekly day to not work? It must have been a confusing command.

The Ten Commandments are found in Exodus and Deuteronomy, with slight differences between the two. In Deuteronomy the logic for keeping the Sabbath has to do with the people's new identity; they were now free people, no longer slaves in Egypt (Deuteronomy 5:15). In Exodus the focus is different. "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy" (Exodus 20:11). If the command in Deuteronomy reminded the people of their recent history, the account in Exodus pointed back much further to the beginning of everything, to creation itself.

Sabbath Walks

Most Tuesday mornings, after seeing our oldest son, Eliot, out the door for his walk to his high school and then walking our youngest, Winston, to his elementary school, I begin loading my daypack. Depending on the time of year, I might toss in a raincoat, a warm hat, some hand warmers, and sunglasses. There's always a water bottle,

a book, and my camera with an adjustable telephoto lens and some extra batteries. Stepping down the front stairs of our hundred-year-old, three-story apartment building, I walk two blocks south to Medici, a favorite neighborhood bakery. Fortified with coffee (hot or iced depending on the season) and a fresh cinnamon roll, I head east toward Lake Michigan. After walking a few minutes through our neighborhood, passing apartment buildings, restaurants, Powell's Books, a dry cleaner, and the headquarters for Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, the vista opens up to Jackson Park, a 550-acre park sprawling along the lake. I continue across busy Cornell Drive, dodging the cars and buses commuting to and from downtown, and turn first south and then east again behind the Museum of Science and Industry.

The museum is housed in a massive, columned building originally constructed in 1893 for the Chicago World's Fair commemorating Christopher Columbus's arrival in the Caribbean four hundred years earlier. It's fitting that the city's leading figures dedicated the fair to the man whose arrival profoundly altered the North American landscape; their vision, while refashioning the shape of the city, aimed to tell a story about the nation's progress and Chicago's critical place in it. Canals and lagoons were dug, hulking buildings constructed, and spectacular parkways laid throughout the fairgrounds in service to this narrative, all within living memory of the fire that had destroyed much of the city. In this telling, European Americans had come into their own on the global stage. American democracy and technological developments were proudly displayed. Our youngest son is keen to point to the place where the world's first Ferris wheel spun high above the awestruck crowds.

Alongside these exhibits to American achievement, the White City, a nickname conjured by the gleaming walls of the fair's quickly erected buildings, also showcased Indigenous people from other countries displayed as curiosities for the tourists who'd come from around the

country. African Americans had been shut out by the fair's planning committees and Black representation on the fairgrounds played to demeaning conventions. After protest and organizing led by Frederick Douglass and the journalist and anti-lynching activist Ida B. Wells, the organizers eventually conceded a "Colored Day" at which, playing to racist stereotypes, Black people were given a slice of watermelon as they entered the exposition. Understandably offended, Wells refused to attend. Douglass, ever the shrewd statesman, agreed to come and then delivered a scathing rebuttal to the so-called Negro problem. "The problem," the aging orator proclaimed, "is whether the American people have honesty enough, loyalty enough, honor enough, patriotism enough to live up to their own Constitution."[1]

I walk behind the museum, past the only historical marker to Douglass in the park, a small plaque far from the beaten path, thinking about how a fair dedicated to a man who tortured, enslaved, and killed Indigenous people advanced a narrative in service to racial exploitation and white superiority. The year after the fair concluded a fire swept through the grounds, destroying most of the impressive architecture. But on my Tuesday walks, evidence of the rubble has been mostly hidden. From the museum's shadow, I turn south again into the Bobolink Meadow, named after a bird, a sign informs me, that used to migrate through the area. Depending on the season, the meadow's grasses and flowers may be laid down under the weight of February snow or reach beyond my head for the midsummer sun.

Now I'm looking and listening for birds. In this meadow I saw my first American kestrel, a small colorful hawk whose treetop perch gives it an unobstructed view of the field mice below. On a damp and overcast spring morning I watched a juvenile red-tailed hawk unsuccessfully stalk a garter snake. After the spring migration, I listen for the warblers before catching a glimpse of their bright yellow feathers from the corner of my eye as they dart into the understory of the nearby forest.

My sabbath walks, in the vicinity of an edifice to the troubled narrative that has shaped this landscape, slow me down enough to pay attention. I imagine how the land has slowly healed in the years since the fire destroyed the fair. I see myself in relation to the living ecosystem through which I'm meandering.

Sabbath and Creation

The Exodus rationale for sabbath is rooted in creation. During the first six days of creation, God called day and night into being and then set the sun and moon to fill their expanses; the heavens were separated from the waters and filled with birds and fish; dry land was demarcated and creaturely activity echoed through its breathtaking, mind-boggling habitats. Then, having finished the work, God rested on the seventh day. So, "God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done" (Genesis 2:3).

Those of us who regularly observe sabbath might think of personal rest and worship as the day's primary purposes. But by grounding sabbath in creation, the Exodus command invites us to imagine more extensively. Having experienced the extremes of a utilitarian society, one whose human-destroying means justified its wealth-producing ends, God's liberated people were given a new, unanticipated way to live in the world. It wasn't simply that God wanted his people to rest after so many generations of toil; the purpose was larger.

Leviticus 25 fills in the vision for the newly freed people. Here, sabbath is presented as a seven-year rhythm for creation: "the land itself must observe a sabbath to the LORD" (Leviticus 25:2). In normal years, the people would sow and reap their fields, but on the seventh year the land was to rest. The fields, God promised, even as they lay fallow, would yield enough to feed the people along with their servants, visiting migrants, and domesticated animals. Even the wild creatures

who gleaned from the fields during typical years would be provided for during the year of rest. Hoarding or theft would not be necessary to survive; the people wouldn't need to wrestle life from tired ground. The land itself, as with God's people, would be honored with a rhythm of fruitful production and equally fruitful rest. Wendell Berry, the farmer and author, captures the sentiment of the sabbath year poetically when he writes, "There is a mind of such an artistry / that grass will follow it, / and heal and hold, feed beasts / who will feed us and feed the soil."[2]

The Creator's Generosity

These rhythms of rest, so embedded within creation, reveal the Creator's generosity. As the psalmist observed about his own place, "You care for the land and water it; you enrich it abundantly. The streams of God are filled with water to provide the people with grain, for so you have ordained it" (Psalm 65:9). God's generous nature is especially evident in Psalm 104. Here he makes streams flow to quench the animals' thirst, trees grow for birds to nest, grasses sprout for cattle to feed, craggy mountains stand for the wild goats' refuge, and the moon travels the sky to mark the seasons. "All creatures look to you to give them their food at the proper time. When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things" (Psalm 104:27-28).

If the gift of sabbath rest points us back to creation, we should expect to receive all of creation as a gift as well. But for reasons we'll consider, gift is not generally how we perceive the world of which we are just one part. Reflecting on the Western worldview, author and professor John Mohawk, member of the Seneca Nation, writes that it "is in the process of civilization that a region is exploited without regard to its material (ecological) limits."[3]

My sabbath walk leads me along a lakeside ecosystem that was once cared for by the Odawa, Ojibwe, and Potawatomi nations,

among others. And while Indigenous people remain throughout this region, including communities in Chicago, the last of their land was negotiated away in the late 1800s, paving the way for the civilization our city's residents know today. "Gratuitousness is present in our lives in many different forms," writes Pope Benedict XVI, but these gifts "often go unrecognized because of a purely consumerist and utilitarian view of life."[4] Our prevailing conditions seem to indicate that it's Pharaoh's oppressive tactics we most admire, not God's restorative gifts.

Even so, gift remains embedded in creation. Having finished the six days of work, God gave "every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it" (Genesis 1:29) to humanity for food. Importantly, creation's gifts are not solely for humans; to "all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it," God gave plants for their food (Genesis 1:30). All creaturely life is sustained by gift. Running through the fabric of the universe are the intertwining threads of God's grace. The act of creation was a gift and it is gift that sustains us all—people and animals, forests and oceans, today's weather and the starlight reaching our searching eyes after millions of traveling years.

This gift is given by Spirit and breath. The Spirit of God swept over the face of the waters before calling Creation into being. It was God-breathed life-giving breath that animated the humans formed from the soil. And it isn't just human beings who are filled with God's breath. The psalmist declares that by "the word of the LORD the heavens were made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth" (Psalm 33:6). All of creation is a gift breathed into existence by its Creator. There are no God-abandoned places or landscapes. Everything, everywhere, and everyone is sacred because it has all been breathed into being by the Creator.

Creation's Interdependence

Is it God's compassionate gifts we imagine when considering our world? Or is it something else, the survival of the fittest perhaps? Whatever we know or don't know about evolutionary theory, the idea that cutthroat competition is built into the world is fixed in our assumptions. And while nature is not for the squeamish—more than once I've turned away from a hawk picking apart one of Jackson Park's ubiquitous squirrels—it says more about us than the creation when we presume violence or abuse onto what are more complex and wondrous truths.

Take, for example, what is being learned about trees. As I come to the edge of the meadow, I follow the lagoon west, across a small bridge, onto the Wooded Island and the shade of rugged burr oaks, cottonwoods whose wispy seeds turn the late spring ground white, hazelnuts, and redbuds whose bright pink flowers inspire hope after an icy winter. From my vantage point, the trees that make up this small woodland stand discreetly, each looking out for itself. Somewhere in the back of my mind is a hazy memory from my college botany class about the way leaves convert sunlight along with oxygen and water to create the sugars needed for the tree's growth. Herbivores access the energy of glucose by eating plants and carnivores by eating herbivores. Each species uses what it can from another for its own survival.

More recently, scientists have learned that leaves also allow trees to communicate with each other as they release scents that are picked up by other trees.[5] These messages might communicate the threat of a certain insect. And below ground, a tree's roots use mycorrhizal fungi to transmit life-giving carbon to younger and smaller trees who might not otherwise survive in areas of dense shade. Poignantly, we're also learning that when a tree is mortally wounded it floods other trees of its same species with extra carbon, a final gift before it dies.[6]

The trees reflect what the psalmist intuited, that creation is interdependent with itself and its Creator. God's giving nature runs through everything. We each look to the Creator's generosity for our survival. Life and sustenance are given through each member of what Indigenous author, professor, and farmer Randy Woodley calls "the community of creation." The bison that used to roam this region received the gift of prairie grasses, which in turn received the gift of nutrient-rich soil. The spawning salmon I once saw while hiking through a California sequoia grove had received the gifts of their Pacific Ocean diet, and their decaying bodies would be received as a gift by the towering trees on the banks of the stream. The Lake Michigan water that flows from our tap is a gift to our family, and when we scrape our food scraps into the compost bucket that sits in a corner of our kitchen we are offering our small gift to a patch of vegetable-producing soil. "The definitive relationships in the universe," writes Berry, "are thus not competitive but interdependent."[7]

Woodley, recounting a Cherokee story about the beginnings of disease in the world, tells of a time when people began killing animals indiscriminately. To defend themselves, the animals inflicted people with diseases from which they had no defense. Seeing how the humans suffered, the plants felt compassion and revealed medicinal cures through the people's dreams. Having recovered, the people joined the plants and animals for a council during which it was agreed that, before a hunt, a hunter must pray that an animal would present itself freely. The hunters would limit themselves to the animals that gave themselves. Each time an animal or plant was received, the people were to leave a tobacco offering "to the Earth, to the animal, and to the Great Mystery, giving thanks for the food provided for his family."[8]

While I'm often distracted, there are times when I cannot help but notice this world's generous gifts. Most years, as summer turns to fall, our family drives an hour east to Pavolka Fruit Farm in Indiana.

Tended by a hospitable family, the rows of apple trees are organized into dozens of varieties whose shades and flavors can't be found in any supermarket: Northern Spy, Winter Banana, Turley Winesap, Arkansas Black, 20 Ounce Pippin. Our hands reach gingerly through the branches to grasp the fruit, before gently tugging. An apple that does not quickly release itself is left behind; those that give themselves easily are dropped into our buckets. Mouths filled with the taste of autumn cannot help but mouth a word of thanksgiving to the One who created such sweet delight.

The Cherokee story aligns with the gifted nature of creation we read about in Scripture. But when European settlers arrived in North America, on what Indigenous people call Turtle Island, many ignored these living threads of grace. Awestruck by the sheer abundance everywhere they looked, the newcomers were also confused by the way Native peoples did not take everything they could. "The settlers," writes Potawatomi author and scientist Robin Wall Kimmerer, "took this as certain evidence of laziness and lack of industry on the part of the heathens. They did not understand how Indigenous land-care practices might contribute to the wealth they encountered."[9] The habit of overlooking nature's generosity is still with us, keeping many from receiving God's good gifts.

It's not necessary to mythologize Indigenous cultures to simply notice how different they can be from this country's dominant assumptions about how the world works. Western culture can be said to value autonomy and individualism, and while there is nothing inherently wrong with these commitments, they are insufficient lenses through which to interpret and honor creation. Western individualism tends to separate us from land and place, making it difficult to see the breath of life we share in common with all of creation. I am prone to observe the muskrat swimming across the lagoon, the green heron stalking fish in the reeds, the sumac trees that blaze red in the fall, and

even the other people I pass on my walk through the park not as fellow creatures to whom I am connected and beholden but as objects who stand at a remove from my own independent life.

The Creator's Love

Now that I'm walking north on the Wooded Island, I'm beginning to head home. But first, there are a few places I want to visit. I'm still scanning for birds, and certain spots provide glimpses of the lagoon where belted kingfishers perch above the water, herons watch silently from the bank, and wood ducks and mergansers paddle shyly by. Another area provides the best chance to spot orioles building their nests and the occasional hummingbird zipping by. In the depths of winter, the chirp of a downy woodpecker reminds me that even now, with snow covering fallen leaves and the grasses bowed by wind and ice, there is still activity in the park. Across the lagoon I can hear the sounds of traffic and construction. Soon enough I'll step back into the regular reminders of our city's struggles—of inequitably distributed resources and inadequately funded schools, of de facto segregation and gun violence. But not yet. I find myself lingering here in the park, my eyes moving from tree to bird to the pollinators swarming native grasses. Creation's gifts are everywhere to be seen, and my heart answers with quiet and grateful praise.

What is it that we are responding to when confronted by nature's splendor, whether a remote mountain vista or a few house sparrows dodging commuters on a busy sidewalk? Maybe it's calm that settles over your tired body after a long morning working in the vegetable garden, dirt beneath your fingernails, sweat dripping down your back, and the summer's first harvest of tomatoes ready to be sliced on the kitchen counter. Or it could be the quiet that comes over your active children as they step toward the edge of the trail overlook, a vista of mountains and foothills at their feet. Maybe you've known the satisfaction of warming

yourself by a fire made from wood that you sawed, split, and stacked a season or two ago. Throughout our city, small community gardens dot abandoned lots and serve as neighborhood gathering spots, joyful alternatives to legacies of economic disinvestment.

If creation is God's gift and if that grace is exchanged between creatures, then at least part of the harmony we experience when immersed in nature comes from receiving God's gift to us. "The universe did not emerge," observes Pope Francis, "as the result of arbitrary omnipotence, a show of force or a desire of self-assertion. Creation is of the order of love. God's love is the fundamental moving force in all created things."[10] The experience of enjoying creation, then, is of being loved by the Creator. In the manifold gifts of creation, we are experiencing God's generous love. The monarch butterfly dancing acrobatically around flowering milkweed, the native plant that will provide safety for her eggs and food for her offspring after her perilous journey across thousands of miles, bears witness to love. The well-tended garden, planted in a small front yard, attracting pollinators and neighbors alike, is a manifestation of love. The flocks of migrating birds, passing unseen by the millions in the spring and autumn night skies, returning to habitats passed down from one generation to the next, are recipients to and testimonies of God's unending love.

One way to describe the divine love that flows through the universe is with sacramental language. Sacraments like baptism and the Eucharist have long been understood by Christians as visible signs of invisible grace imparted to those participating in them. Receiving the body and blood of Christ at Holy Communion or dipping beneath the baptismal waters is how enfleshed creatures participate in the invisible grace given by Christ. In its materiality, creation also functions sacramentally. Which is to say, it allows us to experience God's love and to see something about the loving nature of the One who created everything.

Throughout Christian history, the church mothers and fathers looked to the created world as a way to know and experience God's grace. In the fourth century, Athanasius, observing celestial order, asked, "[Who], seeing the sun rise by day and the moon shining by night, waning and waxing unchangingly according to an exactly equal number of days, and some stars crossing and variously changing their paths while others keep a fixed movement, who then would not consider that there must be a creator who governs them?"[11] Writing near the same time, Ephrem, a Syrian theologian, also believed the world bore witness to its Creator. "When He created the world, He gazed at it and adorned it with His images."[12] In the twelfth century, Hildegard of Bingen, the German nun and mystic, imagined the animating presence of God in every creature.

> I, the fiery life of divine essence, am aflame beyond the beauty of the meadows, I gleam in the waters, and I burn in the sun, moon, and stars. With every breeze, as with invisible life that contains everything, I awaken everything to life. The air lives by turning green and being in bloom. The waters flow as if they were alive. The sun lives in its light, and the moon is enkindled, after its disappearance, once again by the light of the sun so that the main is again revived. The stars, too, give a clear light with their beaming. . . . Everything burns because of me in such a way as our break constantly moves us, like the wind-tossed flame in a fire. All of this lives in its essence, and there is no death in it. For I am life.[13]

For these early theologians and mystics, creation was not the Creator, but the creation could not help but bear witness to the Creator. Creation's interdependence is a reflection of the presence of God that enlivens and gives purpose to each distinct element—every flowering plant, orbiting planet, and wondering person. To be an individual

member of creation is to belong to the whole through our shared creatureliness. "None is superfluous," writes Pope Francis. "The entire material universe speaks of God's love, his boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God."[14]

The nourishing effect that the natural world has on us, according to the saints who've tended this world before us, is the natural result of the love of a gracious God that runs through everything. So, the psalmist exclaims, "The earth is full of [God's] unfailing love" (Psalm 33:5).

Creation's Diversity

Maggie, along with other members of our congregation, tends the community garden we care for throughout Chicago's summer and autumn months. The twelve brightly painted raised beds stand on the lawn of a local elementary school our church has partnered with over the years. In contrast to the vast fields of monocultural agriculture covering the Midwest, mile upon mile of soybeans and corn, this little garden is a riot of diversity. Tomatoes and basil, carrots and radishes, parsley, greens, and sunflowers all share soil together.

The diversity of the neighbors and volunteers who converge on this city corner on harvest days reflects the vegetable varieties growing in the garden: children plant seeds with their elders, green thumbs and garden newbies harvest kale and radishes, and the racial diversity of this weekly community is notable in our segregated city. I've heard some of our older neighbors reminisce about childhoods in Mississippi or Alabama where keeping a garden, lively in its diverse abundance, was typical. But this is not what most of us have become accustomed to. Wendell Berry, pointing out our culture's tendency to mistake creation's interdependent diversity as a problem to solve, writes that "confronted with the living substance of farming—the complexly, even mysteriously interrelated lives on which it depends, from the microorganisms in the soil to the human consumers—the

agriculture specialist can think only of subjecting it to total control, of turning it into a machine."[15]

But creation cannot be controlled, not completely, and the spirited diversity in our little community garden is not accidental. For thousands of years, long before the ancestors of most of those gathered at our little community garden had arrived in North America, Indigenous people practiced a gardening style known as the Three Sisters. Each spring, generations of gardeners would plant three seeds together, carefully covered in small mounds of soil: corn, bean, and squash. The corn is the first to appear when it begins its straight and sturdy race toward the sun. Next comes the bean, which, after sprouting some leaves, twists skyward around the corn, using tendrils to pull itself up. Finally, the squash pushes through the soil and sends its vines along the ground, sheltering the base of the other plants with its wide leaves, helping to retain water in the soil while crowding out competing plants. The corn supports the beans so that they grow higher than they would on their own. The beans fix nitrogen in the soil, nourishing the squash and corn. "Acre for acre," writes Kimmerer, "a Three Sisters garden yields more food than if you grew each of the sisters alone."[16]

We might disregard the Three Sisters garden or our church's small attempts at urban agriculture as nostalgic exceptions to an otherwise industrial and efficient world. We can easily treat Indigenous farming practices and small gardens cared for by volunteers as idyllic stories but little more. Ours is a world that runs on extraction; resources are forcibly removed by drilling, fracking, mining, and blasting to reach the coal, copper, methane, and lithium hidden below. So it's necessary to remember that, far from being exceptional, these postures, in how they honor the graced and interdependent community of creation, point to an essential truth about this world: that every creaturely being is a gift to be given and received with honor. Reducing anything to a

mere object to be used in isolation is to profane both creation and our Creator. "All things dwell in God alone," wrote Gregory Nazianzus in the fourth century, "to God all things throng in haste. For God is the end of all things."[17]

If we overlook the sacramental nature of creation, our engagement with the world can drift into abstraction. Scientists study and name nature's biotic and abiotic elements, and we assume there is nothing left to learn about—or from—these fellow creatures. Perhaps even worse, the language we impose on our places is so broad that we erase the particularities of our homes. If a place is *only* farmland to be planted with mechanical precision, we are prone to overlook the insects and pollinators who've long made their homes here. We may miss their decline and extinction, collateral damage of the ever more efficient pesticides sprayed on more and more tightly packed row crops with ever less marginal space for their habitats. If a place is *only* a suburb to be developed for our children's safety and our comfort, we will grumble about the regulations requiring even the smallest bits of land reserved for wetlands. Our automatic garage doors and finely tuned climate control systems will muffle the sounds of wildlife that have adapted to our carefully manicured landscapes. If a place is *only* a wilderness to which we can occasionally retreat, we will miss how such wild places have been looked after by Native peoples; to untrained eyes, the splendor of nature can erase human culture and care. If a place is *only* a city meant for commerce and entertainment, we will miss the waterways that first fostered these urban centers, forgetting that the bustle of the city center and the subcultures thriving in the surrounding neighborhoods are rooted in a watershed that attracted the city's first settlers.

Similarly, if a group of people is known only through the crude categories of a society constructed on a racial hierarchy, we will inevitably miss the particularities of the women and men who have been lumped

into those obscuring categories. Our family lives, works, and worships on the South Side of Chicago. Along with the West Side of the city, ours is one of the two majority African American regions of Chicago. When I travel and people—non-Black people especially—find out I'm from the South Side, their reactions reveal the deforming power of abstraction. Expressions of concern, confusion, and even fear cross their faces. The gross stereotypes of violence and poverty, detached from embodied proximity, leave my hosts at the mercy of harmful fantasies. Some are bold enough to ask why, given the option, we choose to live in such a place. Others assure me of their prayers for us. Abstraction distances us from the world, leaving us vulnerable to our propensity to demean our neighbors.

A sacramental perspective does not allow such obscuring and harmful generalization. As John Mohawk writes, "The actual experiences of learning the ways of the Creation come when one learns from a real hawk, and not the image of a hawk. From a man-made image of a hawk one learns about the creator of the image, and from a real hawk one learns of the plan of the real Creator."[18] Those who understand that the Creator's love is expressed in and through each element of Creation cannot be content to only think or theorize about anything or anyone; to experience the love of God that flows through the Creation, we must be near it ourselves. The places we live cannot be reduced to abstractions that allow us to hold our fellow creatures—plants, animals, and human neighbors—at a distance. Instead, the invisible grace that manifests in rural communities and urban neighborhoods, tidal patterns and weather systems, microscopic bacteria and towering redwoods, this grace is to be lived in proximity and harmony with our fellow creatures.

Confessing, as Psalm 24:1 does, that "the earth is the LORD's, and everything in it" is not simply making a claim about God's sovereignty in the world. As those who are regularly tempted to usurp the Creator

with our own designs of control and manipulation, this basic truth must be conceded regularly. But the confession is more extensive than we're prone to realize. More than an admission of divine ownership, with these few words Israel was singing their way into a world where they were lovingly interdependent with all their God's handiworks. The logic of Pharaoh's exploitation was fading; ahead lay the promise of community and creation nourished by the rhythms of sabbath.

How purposefully do we attend to the grace running through this world, through our lives? There is much to distract us from this elemental truth; we so easily succumb to narratives about merit and transaction, earning and deserving. Yet to see the connection between the twin crises of environmental and racial injustice, as well as our way through to harmony, we need to fix the gifted nature of creation firmly in our imaginations. The way every part of creation is a grace given and received by every other part as an expression of the Creator's love is the truth warning us away from every plundering lie.

BUY THE BOOK!

ivpress.com/plundered