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As we come to the end of our Season of Creation [virtual nature therapy walk](#), we return to this year's [theme](#): to hope and act with creation.

What does it mean to hope with creation?

As I type this, lethal fires and flooding are taking place across the globe — from Ecuador to the Czech Republic, to Nigeria, to Myanmar.

Two weeks ago, Juan Antonio López, an environmentalist and Catholic lay leader in Honduras [was shot dead](#) as he was leaving Mass. He had been receiving threats from someone linked to a local mining operation that López's organization had been protesting over pollution in the Guapinol and San Pedro rivers.

According to Bishop Jenry Ruiz of the Diocese of Trujillo, López saw his work not as an environmentalist, "but a question of [his] being of Christ and of the church." López's tragic death is a reminder of the human cost in the struggle for justice.

Where do we find hope amid the growing intensity of ecological crises and the human cost for those attempting to address them?

The Season of Creation ecumenical committee [offered this reflection on hope](#):

There's a phrase commonly attributed to Saint Augustine that says: 'Hope has two beautiful daughters; their names are Anger and Courage. Anger at the way things are, and Courage to see that they do not remain as they are.' As we witness the cries and sufferings of Earth and all creatures, let holy anger move us toward the courage to be hopeful and active for justice. We believe that the incarnation of God's Son offers guidance enabling us to face the troubling world. God is with us in efforts to respond to the challenges of the world we are living in (cf. Romans 8:23).

Pope Francis reminds us in his encyclical "*Laudato Si'*, on Care for Our Common Home" that "The God who created the universe out of nothing can also intervene in this world and overcome every form of evil. Injustice is not invincible."

Despite this, often it can be difficult to visibly see or feel this hope in our midst. That is where this year's season theme — "to hope and act with creation" — might be instructive.

## **This week's invitation: Notice hope in nature**

This week, the invitation for our nature walk is to notice what nature reveals to you about hope.

A word I find helpful when meditating in nature is *linger*. It means giving yourself permission to slow down and be present with whatever catches your attention. You might bring in your senses to touch, smell or visually take in a pine tree, a babbling stream, an energetic chipmunk or another member of creation.

Like the other moments of our virtual nature therapy walk, you can do this outdoors on a long hike or a short walk down the block, or indoors meditating on a plant or gazing out the window. When lingering with a fellow member of creation you might even pose a question to this new friend, "Where is hope?" And then listen. Perhaps a message, whether through words or in the silence of your heart, might emerge.



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The more-than-human world has been a critical source of hope for me as I have faced my own anguish about the climate crisis.

An image of turkeys hopping branch to branch up a tree to safety reminded me to keep going step by step. Staring at the ocean's waves got me in touch of the realities of constant ebbs and flows and to trust it was all held in the ocean of God.

On a personal level, creation was one of the most important places for me to find hope after my husband passed away [three years ago](#).

A local retreat center, Marydell Faith and Life Center, opened their doors as a place of healing for me. With a grief book, journal and tissues in hand, I sat in an Adirondack chair at the base of Hook Mountain with its dramatic steep red cliffs. It was the end of September in New York, when the leaves showcase dazzling oranges and golds.

Within the dense fog of my grief, I felt a gentle nudge. Without words I sensed into the deeper rhythm of nature. The comings and goings. Death and life.

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I was being invited to step into this rhythm, not just be a witness. My husband too was part of this cycle. I was part of this cycle. I felt a part of me accept this invitation, to gently let go of my resistance. And for a moment I felt relief. It was the first relief that no words, cards or chicken soup could give me.

I wonder what God might reveal to you about hope as you wander in nature with this question.

"Where is hope?" Or perhaps the question will be, "What is hope?" Quoting the Japanese bishops' conference, Pope Francis [writes in \*Laudato Si'\*](#), "To sense each creature singing the hymn of its existence is to live joyfully in God's love and hope."

## **A prayer of thanks for nature in nature**

My last story of hope revealed in creation happened in June at the end of a five-day intensive forest therapy training. All 20 of us participants were sitting around a circle sharing our reflections from our time together deepening our forest therapy practice

of listening and being with nature.

All week I had been praying with "A Prayer for our Earth" from *Laudato Si'*. I had memorized the prayer and found it meaningful to meditate on phrases from the prayer as I wandered in nature. It was a way for me to integrate my Christian faith into this practice that was not grounded in any institutional religious tradition.

So when the sharing stick was handed over to me, what felt right was to recite the prayer. I was not sure how it would be received, given this was a "secular" space, but when I thought of what these last days had meant to me the best way was through prayer. Besides, the prayer was written "for all people of good will" and it was a friendly open group.

Attempting to project my normally soft voice across the blowing grasses and winds, I recited, "All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures ..."



(Unsplash/Mathew Schwartz)

As I was finishing the prayer, I noticed that Nadine, one of our leaders, was gently pointing upward. As I followed her finger, I saw the dark brown wings and body of a bald eagle floating in the sky. My heart broke open as I heard gasps and soft cries of awe from the rest of the circle.

I thought of the verse from the Gospel of Matthew, "with God all things are possible." Seeing this glorious creature on the tail end of my prayer seemed like a gift. I whispered a quick "thanks" to the Holy Spirit for this sign of love.

As we close our Season of Creation virtual nature therapy walk, I give thanks for being on this journey together and pray it has been a time of deepening with creation and our Creator. Perhaps you'd like to continue going on nature therapy walks on your own; if so, you can always [revisit the full series](#) and repeat any of the invitations.

I leave you with the words of Pope Francis at the end of his encyclical, "May our struggles and our concern for this planet never take away the joy of our hope."

This story appears in the **Praying With Creation** feature series. [View the full series](#)

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