

April 26, 2026 Creation Care Sunday

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Revelation 21:1-6, 22:1-2

Tending the Garden

Revelation 21:1-6

¹Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ²And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

‘See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; ⁴he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.’

⁵And the one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new.’ Also he said, ‘Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.’ ⁶Then he said to me, ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.’

Revelation 22:1-2

¹Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ²through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

This is the word of God for the People of God. Thanks be to God. “Hold out your hands and let me lay upon them a sheaf of freshly picked sweetgrass, loose and flowing, like newly washed hair. Golden green and glossy above, the stems are braided with purple and white where they meet the ground. Hold the bundle up to your nose. Find the fragrance of honeyed vanilla over the scent of river water and black earth and you will understand its scientific name: *Hierochloe odorata*, meaning the fragrant, holy grass. Breathe it in and you start to remember things you didn’t know you’d forgotten”

This is a passage taken from the Preface of “Braiding Sweetgrass”, by Robin Wall Kimmerer. **Kimmerer** is a Potawatomi botanist, author, and the former director of the *Center for Native Peoples and the Environment* at the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry. In Braiding Sweetgrass, she speaks to her heritage as a Native American and of their deep connections to the Earth.

In the Book of Genesis, we hear a story of creation, where God set the heavens in place. He separated the water from the land and placed upon each “swarms of living creatures, birds to fly across the dome of the sky and all creeping things and wild animals of the earth.” He

placed “plants yielding seed and fruit trees of every kind” into his garden. And into this garden, He also placed US, to tend to all these living things and to have dominion over them.

We know this story well. And Genesis 2:15 says “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.” To till it and keep it. God has given us this garden. It is our responsibility to keep it.

In the passage of Revelation that I read, we hear that the author is showed the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God.

Water, bright as crystal. Think about water “bright as crystal”. This has happened after the old heaven, and the old earth have passed away. God has renewed the earth. He has renewed the garden that he has given us.

I want you again to think about “Water, bright as crystal”. Water is a recurring theme throughout the entirety of the Bible. It is used to purify uncleanness. It is used to restore parched land. It is turned to wine at a wedding ceremony in Cana. Jesus walked on the water, was Baptized in the River Jordan and offered the everlasting water of life to the Samaritan woman at the well.

As the wandering Israelites made their way in the desert, water must have been a precious resource. God even caused water to flow from a rock at the strike of Moses’ staff. That must have come at a significant relief to the thirsty throngs wandering through a parched land. Here in Michigan, we don’t think a lot about the need for water. After all, three of the four largest bodies of fresh water on earth border on Michigan.

But consider, available fresh water makes up less than 1% of the water on the planet. According to an [August 2025 World Health Organization report](#), 1 in 4 people worldwide lack safe water at home. The Israelites, wandering in the desert must have had to think about water a lot.

Our state borders on four of the five Great Lakes, including the largest freshwater lake on earth, Lake Superior. These provide Michiganders with all the fresh water we need to sustain us. But as vast as these sources are, they still remain under threat from both natural and man-made intrusion. Despite regulation, industrial pollution and runoff from agriculture, especially livestock farms, continue to make their way into the watershed.

And a phenomenon called Cultural Eutrophication, which is an Excess of phosphorus from sewage and detergents, triggers rapid, massive algae blooms that deplete oxygen, producing “dead zones” that result in massive fish die-offs.

Contaminants are introduced primarily into the lake water from the surrounding landmass. The Lansing area is almost entirely in the Lake Michigan watershed, meaning contaminants, rainwater runoff and eroded topsoil eventually end up in Lake Michigan. Agriculture and Industry are both primarily responsible for this. However, industry and agriculture are not the only sources.

Runoff from landfills carries multiple contaminants downstream. Grass clippings that are often dumped or blown into the streets make their way into storm drains. Excessive fertilizer meant to green our lawns is a significant contributor. Laundry detergent containing phosphorous contributes to algae blooms. And deforestation means less rainwater is absorbed into the fauna, resulting in greater runoff.

These intrusions are happening to all of the five Great Lakes, but none have been as dramatically affected as Lake Erie.

The fourth largest of the five Great Lakes by area, Lake Erie is the warmest and shallowest of the five, containing only 4% of the water volume of Lake Superior (and less than 10% of the water volume of Lake Michigan), yet it is surrounded by the greatest density of population of its neighbor lakes, as well as by several large metropolitan areas including Cleveland, Detroit, Toledo and Buffalo, NY. Lake Erie has been under heavy industrial, agricultural and population pressures for decades. Nearly one third of the entire Great Lakes population resides in the Lake Erie watershed. In the 1960's, several organizations had declared Lake Erie "dead".

Impacts on drinking and potable water systems prompted communities that relied on Lake Erie water to raise concerns. Impacts on the fishing industry affected the livelihoods of thousands of residents. Beach closures caused by elevated bacteria levels chased away tourists and residents alike. The level of disruptions on commerce, health, employment and living conditions resulted in pressures on local and state authorities to act.

According to EBSCO, an Information Services company: "In response to public concern over the lake's poor condition, collaborative efforts between the United States and Canada began in the 1960s. In 1965, an interstate conference involving governors from five surrounding states, and the federal government, addressed these urgent issues. The conference resulted in a landmark agreement aimed at reducing pollution from municipal and industrial sources, including recommendations for better waste treatment and agricultural runoff management. This collaborative effort helped establish a framework for cooperative action across state and federal levels.

Following these initiatives, Lake Erie showed signs of recovery, with improvements in water quality noted as early as the 1970s.

Although there have been improvements in water treatment and fish populations, challenges remain, with toxic algae blooms reported as a continuing threat to both human health and the ecosystem.”

According to Sandy Bihn, executive director of the “Waterkeeper Alliance”: “In the 1980s and 1990s, we got really spoiled because the lake was in great and improving condition. The walleye weren’t here years ago. And they are back now. So that’s wonderful. The fisheries have come back.”

However, beginning in the late 1990s, people around Lake Erie started to notice green algae. The Lake Erie water quality got progressively worse every year.”

In 2014 a toxic algae bloom caused a water service interruption for almost half a million people in Ohio and Michigan. Drinking water remained a threatened resource as the summers of 2020 through 2024 saw record algae blooms.

Isaiah 40:31. ... ³¹ but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

Throughout Scripture, God continually promises us renewal. In Revelation, God promised a New Jerusalem, after the old heaven and the old earth had passed away.

With God’s help and faith in his grace, we are renewed again and again in mind, body and spirit. We need only to trust God to see this renewal in ourselves, our communities and our world. But renewal is not a one-and-done. It requires a sustained effort. If we are to mount up with wings like eagles, we must run and not be weary. We must walk and not faint.

In The Book of Genesis, we hear that God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden to tend it. It was a literal paradise, but we all know what happened next. God’s garden, our little blue planet, was a wonderous gift, given to us by God’s grace and entrusted to us to be its tenders. But lately, that garden has been showing its age. We have often been poor tenders, indeed. But God’s creation has a great capacity for renewal, and we have a great capacity to renew. The story of Lake Erie clearly shows us what can be done when we act. But again, renewal is not a one-time deal. In the 60’s much energy and cooperation came together to address a serious and growing environmental catastrophe. Lake Erie was once dead, but it sprang back to life when the people of God responded. But even that renewal now needs a renewal. The battle is not over. It is ongoing.

Ezekiel 36:25-26 from the Common English version: ²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be cleansed of all your pollution. I will cleanse you of all your idols. ²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you. I will remove your stony heart from your body and replace it with a living one.

We here at PCO truly have a living heart for our green earth. We have added our voices, our hands and feet to the efforts aimed at renewing God's natural kingdom. We have engaged in a number of ongoing projects of renewal. Solar panels gleam in the sunlight right outside. Compost bins reduce waste and are preparing natural fertilizer for our landscaping. Reusable or compostable dishes serve our gatherings. A cross-generational project has generated a prayer path to help us engage with the natural world that God has given us, battery and pill bottle recycling help to keep contaminants out of our environment. We have planted trees and native plants to absorb CO2 and to help restore a more natural habitat. As an Earth Care Congregation, we have worked to heed the call to be stewards of God's garden. Renewal is our hope, renewal is our goal, and renewal is in our actions.

And we are not alone. Yesterday, PCO hosted a gathering to participate via livestream, in the National Faith + Climate Action forum, joining more than 2,000 participants across 88 in-person host locations, representing more than 550 congregations and 30 faith traditions, engaged in actions aimed at restoring the garden.

Young people spreading the seeds of environmental justice, projects taking root, congregations branching out into their communities, hands and hearts bearing the fruits of eco-friendly renewal across the country and beyond.

We have faith in our Creator, and that faith propels us onward. There is much work to be done, and many hands already doing it. We can be proud of the work that we are doing here at PCO. Take a look at those around you. Together, with God's help, we can make a difference.

There's a song by Black Sabbath that has been running through my head recently. It has the following line: "Won't you help me Mr. Jesus, won't you tell me if you can? When you see this world we live in, do you still believe in man?" from the song "[The Thrill of It All](#)" by [Black Sabbath](#), released on their 1973 album *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath*

It is a striking question. The songwriter is asking God, after looking at what we have done to this world, if he still believes in us. God's answer, of course, is that he sent his son to walk among us, and to die on the cross for our redemption. The ultimate act of renewal. The least we can do is to tend his garden.
