Opinion
EarthBeat



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To hope and act with creation.

That theme for this year's Season of Creation is shining forth in the diversity of activities that continue to take place around the globe: from a youth-led interfaith conference on climate change in Uganda, to activities in Ecuador connected to the International Eucharistic Congress. It is so inspiring.

While knowing how to act with creation can be clear for some, for others knowing the right thing for them to do can be fuzzy.

How many of us get paralyzed by the uncertainty of the best way to act in the midst of the global climate crisis?

As we continue our virtual forest therapy walk this Season of Creation, our invitation this week will be one of listening in the silence of creation, and to see what unexpected message we might hear.

My own pathway to my decadeslong work with the Laudato Si' Movement emerged from such silence.

It was Lent 2015. I worked in campus ministry at Barry University, a small Catholic institution in Miami. I had asked my student faith leaders and those preparing to be received into the Catholic Church that Easter to reflect on how they were going to live out the Lenten season.

I had purchased this clever booklet for my students that asked pointed questions like "What am I doing for Lent this year?" with purple lines to jot their answers. It reminded me of workbooks I used to do in elementary school where I'd print words with big penciled letters.

I decided to join my students in reflecting on what my Lent would look like. One afternoon I sat on my black meditation cushion at the base of the bed, with the white booklet on my lap. I closed my eyes as I reflected on my current state of being and how God might be calling me into renewal now.

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Different possibilities floated through my mind: attending Mass more often, giving up sweets, waking up early to meditate.

As the thoughts continued to settle, one strong call bubbled to the surface, unexpectedly. It said, quite pointedly I might add, "Go back out there into your activism."

Since college, I had been an activist for homeless and environmental issues for almost two decades. But my life then took a shift inward.

Beginning in 2002, I plunged myself into intensive retreats, spiritual formation and discerning religious life, which culminated in three years in a Cistercian monastery. After I left the monastery in 2011, I began working at Barry, supporting the campus ministry and community service departments.

By the time I was doing this Lenten exercise with my students in 2015, I had not returned to activism. I was content with the calmer rhythms of campus ministry.

The clarion call I received from the silence to "get back out there" was not the answer I had anticipated. I had thought God wanted me to pray more. Which apparently God did, but praying with my actions and words.

With the call so clear, later that day I searched online for this recently launched Catholic climate organization that I had read about in National Catholic Reporter. After a quick Google search, I found the website of the newly formed Global Catholic Climate Movement. I sent an email responding to their call for volunteers. After a brief interview with the founder Tomás Insua, I found myself a few weeks later coordinating the first Lenten Fast for Climate Justice.

Fast forward almost 10 years and I'm still here, now serving as associate director of this incredible global movement — though now with a new name, Laudato Si' Movement — engaging thousands of Catholic individuals and institutions in upward of 150 countries.

This was not the journey I had expected, but one I am grateful that emerged from the silence.

The invitation to silence

How is our Creator calling you to act today?

What might our Creator say to you in the silence?

This week's invitation for our nature therapy walk is called "Sit Spot." Often when we try to listen inward, there are louder voices nudging us to review our to-do lists or plan tonight's dinner.

As Pope Francis reminds us in his encyclical Laudato Si', "Nature is filled with words of love, but how can we listen to them amid constant noise, and interminable and nerve-wracking distractions?"

This is where nature can be a huge support to help us connect to the silence both within and around us by inviting us to connect with the natural rhythms and beauty of creation.



(Unsplash/Jieun Kwon)

This fourth invitation is simple: Just wander out somewhere outside, let your body find a place to sit and just sit there.

Give yourself permission to do nothing.

Once your mind has settled a little, gently drop the question in your heart, "Creator, how are you calling me to act with creation?"

Perhaps you want to engage in conversation with Brother Tree or Sister Flower. Allow yourself to simply relax. Then notice what emerges. And then do what you can to act.

If you are unable to go outside, you can do this by gazing outside a nearby window. Or you can even watch a YouTube video of nature landscapes, such as this forest therapy video.

The key is to intentionally allow yourself to relax into the sounds and rhythm of nature, without any particular agenda, and once settled gently pose the question of where you are called to act.

If you don't hear anything, that's OK, too. Just notice what it feels like to simply sit, with permission to do nothing. There can be a message in that as well.

From listening to action

If you get a prompt to act, then the invitation is to take some kind of action, however small in that direction.

Many years ago, I heard St. Joseph Sr. Helen Prejean speak at the Los Angeles Religious Education Congress. In a crowded hall, she described her unexpected journey of becoming an advocate against the death penalty after someone asked her to write to an inmate at the Louisiana State Penitentiary.

I can still remember sitting there 20 years ago, hanging on her every word, with my notebook on my lap, my pen poised to write.

What I remember most is how she said that if you have the urge to act for justice, you should act immediately. Too often, we aren't sure what is the right thing to do. But instead of getting paralyzed into inaction, we should trust that taking a step toward justice, however small, will be enough.

For Sister Helen, it was to write a letter. For me, it was to look up a website.

So this week, consider praying with creation in the silence. Allow yourself to relax in, and with, creation and then to listen.

Just as the 2015 Lenten season is the season that has changed my trajectory for the past decade, could the 2024 Season of Creation be the season where you heard in the silence of your prayer your own call to act in a new way?

Don't just stand there. Listen, and then act. The world is waiting.

This story appears in the **Praying With Creation** feature series. View the full series
.