

Visio Divina Prayer for Illumination

Invite your community to turn their attention to the art piece, "In Our Hands", by Lauren Wright Pittman.



Use the following script to guide worshipers through this visual meditation:

Family of faith, as we turn our hearts towards scripture, we are going to take a moment to practice in an ancient spiritual tradition called visio divina. Visio divina is the act of meditating on the divine using a piece of art. This act will help center our spirits so that we are truly able to listen to the Word of God with open and clear minds.

And so, I invite you to take a deep breath in and relax your body from the crown of your head down to your feet. Once you are relaxed and centered, turn your attention to the piece titled, "In Our Hands," by Lauren Wright Pittman.

Take another deep breath in and out, breathing comfortably as you gaze upon the image. In this moment, notice the visual qualities of what you see: colors, line, shape, form, space, and texture. Notice them.

Pause for a moment.

Now, take a deeper look.

What parts of the image are your eyes most drawn to?

What parts of the image did you quickly brush by or overlook at first glance?

Pause for a moment.

And now, observe your own emotions.

How does this image make you feel?

What does this image remind you about God?

Take another deep breath and roll your shoulders back and down. Hold onto these learnings, emotions, and reminders as we turn our listening hearts and ears to the Holy Spirit's Word for us today.

Jill reads the texts

Mary Oliver, House of Light

"Ten times a day something happens to me like this – some strengthening throb of amazement – some good sweet empathic ping and swell. This is the first, the wildest and the wisest thing I know: that the soul exists and is built entirely out of attentiveness."

Rachel Carson, The Sense of Wonder

"For most of us, knowledge of our world comes largely through sight, yet we look about with such unseeing eyes that we are partially blind. One way to open your eyes to unnoticed beauty is to ask yourself, "What if I had never seen this before? What if I knew I would never see it again?"

Job 12: 7-10

7 "But ask the animals, and they will teach you,
the birds of the air, and they will tell you;
8 ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you,
and the fish of the sea will declare to you.
9 Who among all these does not know
that the hand of the Lord has done this?
10 In (God's) hand is the life of every living thing
and the breath of every human being.

Phil – would you please project the image one more time.



Allow me to reread the last verse of the text from Job:

10 In (God's) hand is the life of every living thing
and the breath of every human being.

Here is what the artist, Lauren Wright Pittman wrote about her print.

It is titled, *In Our Hands*

In the beginning God filled the formless void with color, texture, light, flavor, time, and life. God scooped the clay and carefully molded it, breathing life into the nostrils of humanity. These are the images of a tender, imaginative God who loves Creation limitlessly.

Following the Creation narrative, humanity quickly spirals into violence, corruption, and power- hunger toward the total destruction of Creation. God becomes deeply aggrieved and even regrets creating humanity (Gen 6:6). God decides it best to return all of Creation to the chaotic void, though God finds hope in Noah's family. (The artist continues) I've struggled with this narrative, but I find myself feeling a tremendous amount of compassion. I can only imagine how painful it is to watch the work of your hands devolve into brutality.

In this image, God's hands hold various animals and plant life, and are surrounded by the bands of the rainbow, shielding Creation from the swirling waters of chaotic destruction. I chose not to image humanity because the hands are at once God's and ours. We must respond to God's covenant by protecting and keeping the earth. It is our responsibility; it is our calling. God meets us where we are—utterly dependent and bound toward self-destruction—with a promise sealed with a bow bursting with the endless spectrum of colors light holds.

Thanks, Phil.

This third Sunday in the Season of Creation, we are focusing on being attentive. It is why I wanted you to move through the practice of Visio Divina. As we practice opening our eyes to the print offered us by Lauren Wright Pittman, it comes to us as yet another invitation from God to NOTICE what is happening in the world around us right now.

Colleen offered me a beautiful observation she made recently. Around the church grounds there used to be what was once believed were beautiful ornamental plantings. They were pleasing to the way some human eyes were trained to see landscaping, but they really weren't planted to benefit more creatures than ourselves. Then the Holy Spirit got to work. John McCumber asked questions to LCPC about the non-native plants that were represented. He questioned of the use of pesticides on the grass. Then he brought to our attention this weird idea of what he has described to you today as a Tiny Forest. When we began the process of merging and decided that this campus would be the plot of land on which Lyndhurst Community of Faith Church would lay down its roots, Faith UCC brought with them the wisdom of planting native plants to create meadows, to supplant grassy spaces and ornamental gardens. And as our Creation Campus Ministry blossomed to life, then came the butterflies and the bees

and other pollinators. Throw in the hard work of the folks from Noble Road Presbyterian Church, and particularly the mastery of Karen Reinke, and then we see a proliferation of edible produce. I know Colleen isn't the only one to notice the transformation of the grounds around the church into a haven for insects and birds, and how all of it is a sight to behold for all of us. We are invited to stop and breathe deeply the fresh air that is being manufactured for the benefit of all the creatures that enjoy this Sacred Ground as recognized by the National Wildlife Federation. It may not seem like a lot to many of us who haven't tilled the ground – but this has been years in the making.

I invite those of us in the church building today to walk slowly when we depart, and notice. I invite each of you online, wherever you may be, to take time to slow down and notice – use the exercise we just did to notice something you may not normally be attentive to. And may that act of noticing help you to question what else life has trained you not to see ... or maybe even not to care about. As Mary Oliver's observation so profoundly states: "the soul exists and is built entirely out of attentiveness." Alas, there are too many things that cause us to see past what is so amazing about this world in which we live.

As I composed this sermon I tried several different ways of introducing you to a story that makes up the entire ninth chapter of John's gospel. It's a story of a blind man who is healed by Jesus. The manner in which Jesus heals the man's eyes reminds us all of the story of the creation of the first humans out of the dust of the earth and animated by the breath of God: Jesus scoops up some dirt, spits on it, forms a mud ball, and smears it over the blind man's eyes. Jesus *sends* the man to the pool where the man washes off the mud and is able to see again. HE MUST BE HIS OWN AGENT OF HEALING.

As the story unfolds, the Religious Authorities are so woefully caught up in a sour and vicious campaign to debunk the authority of Jesus, that they waste much time and energy accusing the man and his parents of sin – that their sinfulness is what resulted in the man being born blind. They are so focused on holding onto their power that they cannot see the miracle and the power of grace right before their eyes. While they are the ones castigating the blind man, the story ends with them asking themselves (and Jesus!), “Surely we are not blind are we?”

Unfortunately, the religious leaders were too bent on protecting the systems they had inherited. So much so, they had made themselves blind to the fact that God had come into their midst in the person of Jesus. They were so caught up in the perceived threat that instead of rejoicing that the blind was now able to see, they used their energy to heap more pain and shame upon the man and his parents.

That could have been where the Religious Leaders stayed ... and as John develops the arc of his gospel it is where most of them remain. HOWEVER, the writer of the Fourth Gospel gives us a glimmer of hope. That’s why John’s gospel is so cool – because in the full arc of John’s narrative there is one religious leader, named Nicodemus, who is open-minded enough to look deeper into who Jesus is, to see that Jesus is trying to help the whole People of Israel turn their hearts and minds from what they are used to – what they are captive to – and re-engage with the life God covenanted with them to live from the beginning. As we were reminded last week – to love one’s neighbor as oneself is how we express our love for God. The Pharisees as a whole had gotten lost within the systems of their day and were so hell-bent on protecting their purity system, that they could not see what they were doing to the beloved creatures of God they were harming. They could not see the forest for the trees.

When you are used to living one particular way – when the culture of which one is part is all moving in one direction it can be hard to break from those patterns. But sometimes it only takes one act of agency for a glimmer of hope to arise. Nicodemus went from meeting Jesus in the cover of darkness (not wanting to be seen as he sought to learn more) to being at the foot of the cross in broad daylight after Jesus is crucified in order to help prepare Jesus body for burial ... making way for the miracle of resurrection. One might say the resurrection of Nicodemus' heart happened when he chose to see Jesus for who he really was, hold the suffering Jesus in his arms – with his hands – and put his whole self into following Jesus' wisdom.

As we move through this Season of Creation – we are being asked to open our eyes to better see what are the consequences of humanity's impact on this suffering planet. But we're used to seeing smokestacks belch fire in the steelyards; we are used to driving cars powered by fossil fuels; heck, on Friday my son Adrian and I were walking on a trail going down to Edgewater Beach when we came to a giant portal covered by an enormous iron door – it was set off by two concrete walls that created a channel towards the beach and the lake.



On the guard rails above to it were signs in English and Spanish that read:

WARNING: SEWER OUTLET

The large round disk on the concrete
may open and discharge untreated sewage at anytime.
Stay clear of the area between the concrete walls
and the beach area from the walls to the lake.

In a quick bit of research, I discovered a Cleveland.com capsule called ["The Wake Up for Thursday, Sept. 4, 2025,"](#) which explained,

The sewage outfall dates to the 1880s and during the 1970s it experienced 40-50 overflows a year. This summer, there've been three, each of which triggered an advisory against swimming until all 10 water testing locations show E. coli bacteria are below acceptable levels.

With climate change bringing more downpours, the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District wants to fix the problem, even though it's not included in the bigger 25-year Project Clean Lake.

A \$20 million, 1,400-foot tunnel would use new technology and could be in place by 2028. That's good news for all.

What was the norm for almost 100 years, allowing stormwater and sewage to co-mingle and flow out onto a public beach and into the lake is no longer acceptable. Enough people have been agents for a clean lake, and a healthier ecosystem for all of us, that changes like these are beginning to be made, and to make a difference. But we must all SEE what's around us, and work to make a difference. To return to the quotation from Rachel Carson that Jill read earlier,

One way to open your eyes to unnoticed beauty is to ask yourself, "What if I had never seen this before? What if I knew I would never see it again?"

I will close with a poem written by Sarah Are Speed. It is an homage to what befell the first humans in the Creation story when they chose to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and were unceremonial ousted from the Garden of Eden. As the conclusion of that story (Genesis Ch 3) says,

22 Then the Lord God said, “See, the humans have become like one of us, knowing good and evil, and now they might reach out their hands and take also from the tree of life and eat and live forever”— 23 therefore the LORD God sent them forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which they were taken. 24 (God) drove out the humans, and at the east of the garden of Eden (God) placed the cherubim and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life.

Poem: *East of Eden*, By, Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

I live somewhere east of Eden.
It is beautiful, but not complete.
There are children that play and
laugh and sing,
music that moves me, sunsets that
undo me.
The spring is green, the rain is sweet,
but this is not where we're meant to be.

And we know that, but we're quick
to forget,
because well-intentioned people can
always slip.
But I don't want to forget.

I don't want to think
that daisies in the sidewalk are the
same as a garden.

I don't want to believe
a cup of tap water's the same as
the ocean.

I don't want to imagine
that this is the way,
that racism and climate change are just
part of the day.

I don't want to forget that this
somewhere-east-of-Eden
home that we've built
is not the place we are meant to be.
It's not the dream that we're meant
to dream.

So every night as I fall asleep,
I pray, "God wake me up"—
a restoration plea.
"Don't let me confuse a little bit of rain
for your downpour of grace,
or a little bit of progress
for the end of the race."

And until heaven's on earth,

that's what I'll pray.

For I live somewhere east of Eden.

Don't let me forget.

We mustn't forget, because as Pittman wrote about her image, the hands holding the earth "are at once God's and ours. We must respond to God's covenant by protecting and keeping the earth. It is our responsibility; it is our calling."

Amen.

Resources, from [A Sanctified Art](#)
[Visio Divinia](#)
[In Our Hands](#)