

# Creation at the Edge – Prayers and Readings for election season 2024

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## Note to Pastors

It strikes terror into the hearts of the most stalwart pastor.

At its coming, even the most dedicated minister will want to crawl back into bed until December, at least.

And no matter how many juggling courses you may have taken in seminary in your “Recreational Ministry” classes, the juggling act it brings will challenge even the most nimble.

What, may you ask, is “it”?

## Election 2024!

It rears its ugly head and you may very well be wondering how to hold it all together in your congregation – and in your own life, as well.

While promising no easy answers, I’ve put together a small collection of resources for your use that may help you move with your congregation through these times. It is my hope that they will give voice to what so many church folks are feeling right now.

This is simply a collection of individual resources, and not intended to be an entire service of worship. Just use these pieces separately (or one or two together). They can be used in worship, integrated into your sermons, read/prayed at meetings or retreats – however you see fit. They are meant to be used in community – we lament together, we give thanks together, we laugh together, and we cry together.

And, the Advent resources which I will be posting soon have some resonance with the materials here, so you may want to consider using the Advent liturgy, as well, this year. It is my hope the Advent pieces will be up on the website early this fall.

“It” is not going away, but through action, prayer, ritual, and community, we can move through this time creatively and hopefully, and with the strength to work for justice and inclusion in these days and in the days to come.

Best to you in your ministry!

--Allyson Sawtell

## **Creation at the Edge – Prayers and Readings for election season 2024**

### **The Edge**

*Note to Pastors – read this to your congregation before you dive in and use the rest of the resources. It sets the theme.*

It is said that when people stand at the edge of things – the rim of the Grand Canyon, for example, or the top of a tall, tall building, many sometimes experience a pull from the depths, a terror that holds all attention; what researchers have come to label “the call of the void.”

Even as hardly anyone actually physically leaps into that void, the call is still there for many of us many times. Even if we are, in reality, safely on solid ground, or behind strong panes of glass.

Standing at the edge. The call of the void. That yawning abyss of hopelessness, or fear, or non-constructive rage.

In this season of elections, of vitriolic rhetoric, white supremacy, violence perpetrated on people, groups and planet, we stand at the edge.

In this season of hurricanes, wildfires, floods, droughts, poisoned air and water, poisoned souls, we stand at the edge.

As community splinters under the onslaught of runaway individualism, greed, division, and hate (splinters but does not shatter), we stand at the edge.

As our children and grandchildren of ALL species watch us and ask us “Why?”, we stand at the edge.

It will take a huge community effort, splintered though we may be, to pull ourselves back from the edge. To hold each other until the trembling stops and we can lead each other back to paths that are life-giving.

And it will take a huge community effort to realize that this dream of holding, healing, leading, can be a reality for us. For our children and our grandchildren. Of all species.

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### The Bowl

The simple wooden bowl sat  
solitary  
in a mountain town art museum.  
The artist had carved it from beetle-kill pine.  
Don't you love how people keep striving for transformation?

And how God makes a way out of no way.

And how God can maybe, just maybe, take a beetle-kill people/community/nation – hollowed out, left for dead – and proclaim something new.

Isn't that something worth getting out of bed for in the morning?

Isn't that something worth working for?

Isn't that something worth our time and efforts and soulful struggles?

And what marvels of love and justice, joy and community, might we then hold?

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**Breathe – A Blessing of sorts**

What do we do in these times? When the future is either uncertain, or way too certain and does not look good?

You get up and keep fighting. Non-violently, of course, but powerfully. Keep working in whatever way you are able. Reach out in whatever way you are able.

You get up and keep fighting.

After a devastating election, you get up and keep fighting.

After a devastating diagnosis, you get up and keep fighting.

After a devastating environmental disaster or setback, you get up and keep fighting.

After, of course, you grieve, rage, and breathe. And maybe your only way to fight back at the moment is simply to breathe. And hold onto what you love.

You get up and keep fighting.

And, if you are able, you help the person next to you to rise as well.

And when all you can do is simply breathe, remember that Creation began with the breath of God moving over the deep. All that is good and life-giving starts with a simple breath. And perhaps, right now, that's what you can offer yourself and the world. And that is good.

Bless the work. Bless the breath.

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**Here – Our Prayer: A Cry of Anguish**

*This is a prayer for times when all we can do is offer our cry, when all we can do is just say,  
“Here it is, we can say no more, but only pour out our anguish”*

*Read by one or two worship leaders*

Creation stands at the edge  
Our nation stands at the edge  
Democracy stands at the edge  
It just piles on, one after another:  
Division after division  
Hateful legislation after hateful legislation  
Hurricane after hurricane  
Wildfire after wildfire  
Heat wave after heat wave.  
And each one worse than the last.  
Another recorded “hottest month ever.”

God – here – our prayer:  
Here – all we can offer now:  
Fear, hopeless rage, beating our fists against the cold concrete walls of greed, white supremacy,  
denial, injustice.

God! Here – our prayer!  
Moaning, tattered people and planet  
Enough!

God! Here – our prayer!  
All we can offer here and now:  
Anguish  
Anxiety  
Fear

Transformation is beyond us right now, God.

Holy One – here – our prayer  
Whoever and wherever you are, by whatever name we call you – Holy One! Here – our prayer!  
Let our cry come unto you.  
For all we have to offer right now is our cry. Born of deep love for your good Creation. Born of  
deep grief for the wrenching violence done to all your children.

God – here – our prayer!  
God – here!  
God!

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### A Psalm of Anguish. Or a Statement of Faith. Or both. For when times are truly wrenching

We can't give up. We can't give up.  
The heart wants to give up.  
The soul wants to distance and hide, quiver and weep.

The head says we can't give up.

And we keep working until the heart and soul catch up with the head.

We go through the motions.  
We fake it til we make it.  
Whatever it takes, without losing our humanity and decency, whatever it takes.

Right now, we may not believe what we are doing matters.  
Right now, we may not think a better day will ever get here.  
Right now, we may not be able to see a new and better world.  
Right now, we may not believe in the promises that God is with us.  
Right now, we may feel and see ourselves in the wilderness. Lost in the vast expanse of scorching sand. Or trapped and strangled in the vines and undergrowth of the wild forest.

Right now, we may never see a way out. The bridge has snapped and dangles over the chasm.

The edge is crumbling.

Right now, we may not see a way over, a way out. Right now, we may not be able to hope in a future.

And we will keep going because...  
...we are still alive.

While we have breath and mind and heart, we keep going. We figure this out.  
That's why we need community, because we can't keep going or figuring this out by ourselves.

What do we do right now, then?  
Right now, this moment, is not the time for strategy. Soon, but not now.  
Now *is* the time for grief. Anger. Lament. Singing together in the darkness. Committing to not giving up. Whatever that looks like.

Now *is* the time for vision, if not for sight.  
For proclamation, if not for answers.  
For simply saying "Yes, by God! We will keep working" even if we don't really know what that means at the moment.

It is the time for simply saying those words. Together.

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### A Prayer of Awe and Gratitude

*One way we move away from the edge, the abyss of despair, is to celebrate the gifts in our lives, and to say “Thanks!” A prayer of gratitude is a celebration, and an affirmation that goodness is still a reality!*

*This prayer will include asking members of the congregation to call out what they stand in awe of, and/or what they are grateful for. If this sort of “called out” prayer is not in your tradition, or for whatever reason does not work for your congregation, take a few moments in the service (or the week before), hand out small slips of blank paper, and ask folks to write down their awe/gratitude statements. Then collect them and read them aloud during this prayer time.*

Leader:

God – here – our prayer!

Bathed in awe at your mighty works, all we can do is pour it back to you.

Bathed in awe at the not-quite-so mighty works that we humans do but are nonetheless pretty darn good, all we can do is pour it back to you.

People: God – here! – our prayer:

*Here members of the congregation call out or the worship leader/pastor reads out the previously written statements.*

Leader: Holy One, Source of awe, we give you thanks.

Just thanks.

And more thanks.

All: Amen!

## **Creation at the Edge – Prayers and Readings for election season 2024**

### **A Prayer of Thanksgiving**

Leader: O God, our God, for all your mighty works, we give you thanks!  
For air, earth, water, life, love, breath,

People: We give you thanks!

Leader: For all your human children (even the ones who are jerks) we give you our thanks (for even the jerks have something to teach us and are not – probably – beyond redemption. At any event, we leave them to you, O God.).

People: God, we give you thanks for most of the above mentioned. On our better days, we will give you thanks for it all!

Leader: For all your other-than-human children – your animal children – dogs and cats, whales, spiders, sharks, ravens, microbes and maybe even mosquitos, to name just a few, we give you thanks. For your green growing plant children, your mighty mountains and plains; meteors and stars, we give you thanks.

People: We're not too sure about the microbes and the mosquitos...

Leader: For being a God with whom we can be totally honest, even to the point of irreverence,

People: We definitely give you thanks! And we're really counting on you having a good sense of humor, God.

Leader: O God, our God, for all –

People – Most!

Leader – *All* your mighty works,

ALL – We give you thanks! Amen!



## Creation at the Edge – Prayers and Readings for election season 2024

### Questions and Conversations

#### An exercise for your congregation – Introduction

Anxiety, even fear, gnaws at us:

What happens if *he* is elected? What happens if *he* isn't elected?

Either way, and whoever the *he* is in your mind, there will undoubtedly be continuing division within our nation, even amid calls for unity. There will undoubtedly be violence, even amid calls for peace. There will undoubtedly be chaos (and not of the creative sort). The forces of evil and destruction thrive on this sort of chaos. People – all people, but especially those who have been already marginalized – will bear the brunt. All Creation – air, water, species, earth, humans and critters – will bear the brunt. All will swirl in this chaos that is a dance of death.

Well, that was cheery.

But very real.

So also is hope. So also is the fact that we can push back against the forces of inhospitable chaos.

Churches cannot – and should not – support one candidate over another in any election. No matter how crystal clear the options may be in our minds.

But Church absolutely can – and must – support and proclaim its core values over other values. The basic valuing of “love your neighbor.” The core promise that love is stronger than hate, goodness stronger than evil. That the universe, as has been said so frequently, bends towards justice. That another world is possible – one of justice and compassion, where *all* belong (yes, even Them!). And that we are called to work for that world, that realm of sacred ground and holy being. For all Creation.

These are values on which the Church was founded and is based. They are our guiding values. They are not only Christian values. They are also Jewish values. And Muslim values. And Sikh values. And Indigenous values. And Pagan values. And values pretty much of every major faith tradition and among people of no faith tradition.

*These* values are what need to be posted – and taught – in the classrooms of our nation's schools!

The Church can, in humility and knowing our own flaws, still challenge candidates to hold to those values.

Can you imagine a Candidate Town Hall or some such event, where questions are encouraged, and church people stood up and asked questions like: “What are you doing, Candidate X, to have goodness triumph over evil? What are you doing to ensure that love – active love that wills the good of the other – triumphs over hate and apathy? Who stands to gain by your plans? What will be the cost of your plans and who will bear that cost? Set aside politics and rhetoric, Candidate X, and tell us what you're going to do to help heal this planet and make it a better world for *all*?”

Hopefully you can get this all said before Security hauls you away...

But if we can make the conversation about the core values an overarching framework of what makes us human, what brings justice and healing to our world, wouldn't that be something!

Many of you have probably already done something like this. And more of us need to join in.

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### Questions and Conversations

#### An exercise for your congregation

(If you're not already doing something like this!)

You could call this exercise *A Statement of Faith and Action during Election 2024*  
*Church Name, Town, State*

#### Conversations

Create conversation groups of around eight people each, to meet for a couple of hours some evening or after church on a Sunday (even one group of eight is great!). By way of starting, have the pastor or leader of the session read “The Edge” (from this resource collection). Remind folks that the work they do here is an important way to help pull folks away from the edge, that pit of despair.

Talk about what your church's foundational values are.  
*It does not need to be a long, long list. Be concise.*

Talk about how your congregation might live out these values. What are you already doing?  
(Yay! Celebrate that)

#### Brainstorming

Now, during this election season, how might your congregation live out its values even more? Enter into a time of some creative brainstorming – no judgment or discussion or strategizing – just ideas thrown out, no matter how wild sounding, as long as they reflect your foundational values. Use the two questions below if you find them helpful:

*What new thing might we do in this political season of fear, division, anxiety, hate and injustice?*  
*What are things we don't think are possible, but we want to try them anyway?*

Bring the conversation groups together afterwards (at the same time or a different time than the initial conversations) and share their responses. Decide on one or two actions.

#### Where do you go from here?

Put your words into action of some sort and let people know about it. For example, put your statement and plans in your newsletter and share it in a worship service (you could do a ritual of blessing of the actions that will take place). Send an action statement to the media, or your denominational offices.