

INTERFAITH INSIGHT

# Earth, God's creation, deserves our respect



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Important days are ahead, for religious holidays as well as opportunities to focus on "healing our Earth."

Passover or Pesach began last Saturday evening with the traditional Seder meal. This primarily family event is built around telling the story of the Exodus from slavery in Egypt to eventual freedom in the promised land. Often forgotten is the 40 years of wilderness that took place in between.

This week for Christians, known as Holy Week, began with Palm Sunday and continues with Maundy Thursday commemorating Jesus' observance of the Passover meal with his disciples, known as the Last Supper. Friday represents the day of Jesus' Crucifixion and then Sunday is the Easter celebration. The day between Good Friday and Easter is Holy Saturday, the traditional end of Lent. Many traditions barely recognize this day, but in some ways it mirrors the time in the wilderness prior to the ancient Hebrews attaining freedom.

Muslims will soon begin the month of Ramadan, fasting from dawn to dusk. It is a time of reflection and repentance, in some ways similar to what Christians do during Lent. Ramadan begins on April 12 and goes to May 12, when that evening and the next day the feast of Eid al-Fitr takes place. It is a festive celebration of breaking the fast and brings families, friends and communities together.

While the separate narratives are important, it is of interest to note the similarities in the rhythm of these annual celebrations from the various faith traditions.

Later this month, on April 22, is the 51st anniversary of Earth Day, often referred to as the beginning of the modern environmental movement. Our religious traditions have, however, stressed the importance of caring for the creation in their sacred writings and teachings for hundreds, even thousands, of years.

In recent years, this agreement among the religions is reflected in the documents that came from a meeting in Assisi of five faith traditions called together by Prince Philip of the United Kingdom. In 1986, representatives from Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism met to discuss how their faiths could come together to help save the natural world. Out of their efforts, the Alliance of Religions and Conservation was formed and other traditions joined, each presenting their declarations relating their teaching to the need to preserve the environment.

Jewish tradition and Scripture recognize the world as a creation from God, and that it is good. Adam was created to tend the garden and be steward of Earth. Psalm 24 affirms again "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." Hence any act that damages our planet and natural order is an offense against God's creation.

In the Talmud one reads about Choni, a very pious man who was walking near a field where an old man was planting a carob tree. He asked the old man how long before the tree would bear fruit. The man responded that carob trees bear fruit only after 70 years. Choni then asked if he planned to eat the fruit from the tree, to which the old man replied: "Just as my ancestors saw to it that when I came into the world I found fruit trees that I could eat from, so, too, I am making sure my descendants will have fruit trees available when they come into the world."

Thus, Jewish teaching is that each generation must preserve the Earth so that future generations will have an environment that will meet their needs and enable them to thrive.

Muslims believe that the natural resources of the Earth are a blessing from the creator and that they will be asked on the day of judgment how they used, protected and conserved these resources. As khalifahs, or guardians, of the planet we have responsibility for its care and preservation. The misuse of our resources is a corruption which will destroy God's creation for which we will be responsible.

The Quran says: "Corruption has appeared on land and sea. Because of what people's own hands have wrought, so that they may taste something of what they have done; So that hopefully they will turn back." (30:41)

The environment is a topic on which all Christians, from progressive to evangelical, can and should agree. When asked about care for the environment, Billy Graham in 2008 responded by praising the churches and denominations that had urged their members to be more active on environmental issues. He noted the dangers faced from pollution and climate change. He wrote, "When we fail to see the world as God's creation, we will end up abusing it. Selfishness and greed take over, and we end up not caring about the environment or the problems we're creating for future generations."

More recently Dr. Katharine Hayhoe, a climate scientist and evangelical, has received acclaim for her scientific work as well as for her speaking out about the importance of this issue. She was featured this year in Calvin University's January Series and her talk is available on their website. Her TED talk in 2018 is also recommended and can be found at [ted.com](http://ted.com) by searching for Katharine Hayhoe.

The Grand Dialogue in Science and Religion, a program

## IF YOU GO

### Webinars on Earth Care

- April 11 from 2-4 p.m., "Christian Imperatives"
- April 18 from 2-4 p.m., "Interfaith Imperatives"
- April 19-21 workshops at noon and 5 p.m.

**Information and registration at:** [InterfaithUnderstanding.org](http://InterfaithUnderstanding.org)

of the Kaufman Interfaith Institute, will offer an upcoming series of webinars and workshops on the topic "Healing Our Earth." They begin with webinars on April 11 and 18, followed by workshops on the days leading up to Earth Day on April 22. See the accompanying box for further information and free registration.

Centuries ago, the rabbis told the story of two men in a row boat out in the water. One of them started to drill a hole in the floor of the boat, saying it was his right to do so. The other pleaded for him to stop since they were together in the rowboat and that hole would make them both sink. The lesson is that we are all responsible for what we do and its impact on others, both now and for future generations. We are all passengers together on this row boat called planet Earth. We must safeguard the boat and row together.

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