

Autumn Equinox / Natura Divina New Life Lutheran Church of Dripping Springs, Texas

A service with prayers, scripture, and divine time of quiet in nature: On this day of equal light and dark, night and day, we quietly watch the sunset together. We end with an optional period discussion of the book *From a Limestone Ledge* by John Graves. (2019)

GATHER ~10 min. - OAK TREE CHURCH

Sit in a circle - we are all invited to participate - introductions - land acknowledgement - Hill Country, Barton Creek & Colorado River watersheds, above the Edwards Aquifer, the land of the Tonkawa people. Invitation and explanation of the service

Invitation

Today, the Autumnal Equinox, is one of the two days of the year in which the light and dark, day and night, are equal. Since the summer solstice, the axis of the earth has tipped the northern hemisphere away from the sun, causing the days to shorten. Tomorrow night will be just a few minutes longer than the day, the balance will tip us toward winter.

As an outdoor church, we are deepening into the way we mark the seasons and pay attention to nature, to God's good creation. At this time of year, and again in the Spring, it is good to think about balance. The equinoxes can be for us a time to take stock of balance, of harmony, of the weight and heft of our lives, and the rhythms of our days. Are we getting enough time with others and enough solitude? Enough movement and enough stillness? Enough work and enough rest? Enough time outdoors to balance the hours inside?

Christians, too, mark the seasons and give thanks. In the Christian church, the festival marked at near the Fall Equinox is Michaelmas - the feast day of Michael and All Angels, September 29. There are traditions of flowers, songs and rituals that mark this day. It is often associated with a harvest festival, especially in places more northern than this, when the last crops are taken in before frost. Interesting that this time of balance between night and day is also a festival of angels - those mysterious beings between human and God, between earthly and divine.

Also close to this equinox day is the feast day of 12th century Christian mystic Hildegard of Bingen, who lived in what is now Germany, near the Rhine River, and wrote about God and nature, and is considered the founder of German natural sciences.

Hildegard called the Creator "Life within Life." She talked about the greening of the earth and said:

"The Word is living, being, spirit, all verdant greening, all creativity. This Word manifests itself in every creature."

And about this season she wrote:

“But when the sun drops closer to the earth, the cold of the earth runs to it from the water and causes all green things to dry up. And because the sun has dropped closer to the earth, the days are short, and it is winter.”

Prayer from Hildegard of Bingen

Let us pray.

Holy Spirit,
Comforting fire,
Life of all creation.
Anointing the sick, cleansing body and soul,
Fill this body!

Holy Spirit,
Sacred breath, Fire of love,
Sweetest taste, Beautiful aroma,
Fill this heart!

Holy Spirit,
Filling the world,
from the heights to the deep,
Raining from clouds, filling rivers and sea,
Fill this mind!

Holy Spirit,
Forgiving and giving,
uniting strangers, reconciling enemies,
Seeking the lost, and enfolding us together,
Fill these gathered here!

Holy Spirit,
Bringing light into dark places, igniting praise,
Greatest gift, our Hope and Encourager,
Holy Spirit of Christ,
I praise you!
Amen.

– Hildebard of Bingen (1098-1179AD)

Scriptural invitation to quiet: Psalm 46:10:

“Be still and know that I am God.” [pause for a few breaths]

“Be still and know that I am.” [pause]

“Be still and know.” [pause]

"Be still." [pause]

"Be." [pause]

NATURA DIVINA - 40 min

Word

Read passage through twice, slowly (can be different voices).

From Psalm 146, from the readings for the Feast Day of Michael & All Angels

As far as sunrise is from sunset,

God has separated us from our sins.

As parents feel for their children,

God feels for those who fear him.

God knows us inside and out,

keeps in mind that we're made of mud.

Men and women don't live very long;

like wildflowers they spring up and blossom,

But a storm snuffs them out just as quickly,

leaving nothing to show they were here.

God's love, though, is ever and always,

eternally present to all who fear God,

Making everything right for them and their children

as they follow God's Covenant ways

and remember to do whatever God said.

19-22

God has set a throne in heaven;

and rules over us all as King.

So bless God, you angels,

ready and able to fly at God's bidding,

quick to hear and do what God says.

Bless God, all you armies of angels,

alert to respond to whatever God wills.

Bless God, all creatures, wherever you are—

everything and everyone made by God.

And you, O my soul, bless God!

Nature Time

"You are invited to walk into nature and notice what you notice, pray what comes to you. Listen, touch, smell - use your senses. Be in nature in silence"

Meet up at the oak trees on the hill in 20 minutes

Ring bell.

Sharing - TENT CHAPEL

snacks ~ tea

Christians, with all people, mark the Fall is with harvest festivals. In Scotland, children mark the harvest time, and give thanks in school at the equinox, not later in October or November, as we do for the Canadian and U.S. Thanksgivings.

[Amanda: sharing]

Read song together.

“We Plough the Fields and Scatter” by Matthias Claudius, 1777, music Johann A.P. Schultz, 1800, English translation Jane Montgomery Campbell, 1862

1 We plow the fields and scatter
the good seed on the land,
but it is fed and watered
by God's almighty hand.
He sends the snow in winter,
the warmth to swell the grain,
the breezes and the sunshine,
and soft refreshing rain.

Refrain:

All good gifts around us
are sent from heav'n above;
then thank the Lord, O thank the Lord
for all his love.

2 He only is the Maker
of all things near and far;
he paints the wayside flower,
he lights the evening star;
the wind and waves obey him,
by him the birds are fed;
much more to us, his children,
he gives our daily bread. [Refrain]

3 We thank you, then, O Father,
for all things bright and good:
the seed-time and the harvest,
our life, our health, our food;
no gifts have we to offer
for all your love imparts,
but that which you desire now:
our humble, thankful hearts! [Refrain]

Here, the weather is getting a little cooler at this moment of the equinox. There is the promise of a little bit of rain and a cool breeze. “What do we do here in Texas to mark the change of season?”

Part of our equinox/solstice celebrations and prayers here are to notice. Our New Life book group has been reading books about nature and about spirituality, alternating. This month, we read one about Texas, from a local naturalist, John Graves, to be conscious of this particular place in the world. I'd like to read a little from the chapter entitled “Noticing.” (reading from pp. 154-156).

“You are invited to share anything you found or thought or experienced in this season in God’s creation tonight.”

SUNSET ~ 10 min

We watch together in silence, marking this day of equal parts light and dark.

SENDING ~ 5 min

Lord's Prayer

You may pray in whatever language or version is closest to your heart, including silence.

Prayer

Let us pray.

Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work watch or weep this night, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, comfort the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all for your love's sake.

Amen.

Blessing

Receive a blessing. After the blessing, we will have a time to discuss our book a little more, particularly dwelling in the "Noticing" chapter a bit more. You may choose to stay for the discussion or not, whether you've read the book or not.

Almighty and merciful God, Creator, + Redeemer and Sustainer, bless, preserve, and keep us, this night and forevermore.

Amen.

DISCUSSION ~ 20 min

(those not discussing may leave)

Time of further discussion of "Noticing" and other passages *From a Limestone Ledge*.

What are you noticing in your life right now? What season are you in? What are you between, or balanced on the brink of?