
EARTH ENCOUNTER
HEAVEN AND EARTH EMBRACE IN YOUR PLACE



ONLINE RETREAT:
JUNE 6-11, 2021

Introduction

These resources accompany the online conversations and reflections for our retreat: *Earth Encounter: Heaven and Earth Embrace in Your Place*. We are exploring a framework for a theologically informed ecospirituality in the Christian tradition.

This booklet gives a summary of those principles, and additional reflective material that could help you integrate the material into your heart, head, hands and feet. A more extended treatment of the principles can be found in my book, *When Heaven and Earth Embrace: How Do We Engage Spiritually in an Emerging Universe?*

The material was prepared on the east coast of Australia, and references appropriate to your location may need to be sourced.

Generally I encourage you to become as familiar as possible with your environment, its ecosystems, its weather, its seasons, its flora and fauna, its geological and social history, as an accompaniment to this reflective process. We cannot know what we are being taught if we do not know how to read the signs.

Every blessing on your journey.

Mary Tinney

Acknowledgment of Country

This ancient land was here

In its silences and its sounds of life

Long before history was written,

Held carefully in its dreaming.

We acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of the land and water of this area.

We pay our respects to them and honour their links with all of creation

May we walk gently on this land.

Acknowledgment of one another

Augustine's Love Letter to God

Augustine wrote this love letter to God. In the course of this retreat, you might like to progressively write your own love letter to God

"Late have I loved you, Beauty so ancient and so new,
late have I loved you!

Lo, you were within,

but I outside, seeking there for you,

and upon the shapely things you have made I rushed headlong,
I, misshapen.

You were with me, but I was not with you.

They held me back far from you,

those things which would have no being
were they not in you.

You called, shouted, broke through my deafness;

you flared, blazed, banished my blindness;

you lavished your fragrance, I gasped, and now I pant for you;

I tasted you, and I hunger and thirst;

you touched me, and I burned for your peace." (St Augustine, 4th Century).

RITUAL OF ENCOUNTER

Leader: We gather on the land of the traditional owners, the ----- people, carers of the land over many generations. We gather to acknowledge and encounter the Wisdom of Earth, and the presence of our awesome God, and so we sing in the words of Chris Skinner: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f7aROCvQSBA>

Look to the mountains

Look to the sea

Look in the eyes of a tiny baby

Watch the sun rising

Watch it go down

Glimmering stars in the sky all around. Awesome God...

We call to mind the words of Elizabeth Johnson from her book, *Ask the Beasts*. She speaks of the natural world, which includes you and me, as God's dwelling place and she says,

Instead of being distant from what is holy, the natural world bears the mark of the sacred, being itself imbued with a spiritual presence. This is not to say that it is divine.the doctrine of continuous creation sees the natural world in its own integrity as the dwelling place of God....Earth is a physical place of extravagant dynamism that bodies forth the gracious presence of God. In its own way it is a sacrament and a revelation....It is pervaded and encircled by the Creator Spirit.

In order to focus on this reality we will go outside and, in turn, face the four directions which are traditionally associated with Water, Wind, Earth, and Fire. We will then come back together and be consciously in the presence of the Spirit.

WATER

Reader: We begin by facing east, to the eastern coastline, to the place of the rising sun, of morning, of new beginnings. Imagine God present in the sea and in the rivers, and in the cleansing and renewing of baptism.

Become conscious of the element of water. Without it life is not sustained. Be grateful for water easily available to us while scarce in many places.

Notice in your body where you feel the gift and flow of water. Up to 60% of our adult bodies are water. Feel the gift of tears, of your emotions, of the delight of a new day. Where are you being invited into a deeper surrender to the flow of life? PAUSE

In the words of Isaiah, 58, 11, we say:

God will guide you continually,
And satisfy your needs in parched places,
And make your bones strong;
And you shall be like a watered garden,
Like a spring of water,
Whose waters never fail.

And our response is: Sacred is Water; Water is Sacred.

EARTH

Reader: Let us face south towards the South Pole.

Become conscious of the element of earth, and of the ground beneath your feet. Rest grounded in this, your everyday place on Earth.

Our bodies are made of earth and will one day return to earth. Imagine God as the potter and you as the clay being formed. Let us take a few moments for quiet, listening to our inner wisdom and reflecting on the wisdom of those who have gone before us. PAUSE

With the psalmist we say: "The earth is full of your goodness" (Ps 33)

And our response is: Sacred is Earth; Earth is Sacred.

FIRE

Turn towards the west, the place of the setting sun, the westerly winds, and magnificent sunsets.

Become conscious of the element of fire. Feel the warmth in your own body, the energising and expanding fire that sustains your life. Imagine the fiery presence of the Spirit resting on the disciples at Pentecost, and welcome God's fire and passion into your life this day.

Notice in your body where you feel the gift of fire, play, warmth, and creativity burning alive. Reflect on the presence of the fire of the Sun in your own cells and organs giving you energy, purpose and possibility for the new life ahead. Ponder where in your life you feel the gift of fire. Where are you being called to a more passionate response? What sets you afire with love?
PAUSE

Through the words of John the Evangelist (John 8, 12) we hear the message of Jesus: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

And our response is: Sacred is Fire; Fire is Sacred.

WIND/AIR

Let us face north, towards the tropics and many of the troubled places and dispossessed peoples. Become conscious of the element of wind. Breathe in its gift of air. Remember that the Hebrew word, Ruah, is the same word for both breath and spirit. Imagine the breath of God breathing into you at the very moment of your creation. Welcome God's life-giving breath into your life. Remember that you will be united with God's breath even as you take your last breath.

Notice where in your body you feel the gifts of air, breath, lightness and the invitation to express your voice. Ponder where in your life you feel these same gifts. What song are you being called to sing? PAUSE

With the writer of the Song of Songs (4, 16), we call out

Awake, O north wind,
And come, O south wind
Blow upon my garden,
Let its fragrance be wafted abroad.
Let my beloved come to this garden
And eat its choicest fruits.

And our response is: Sacred is Wind; Wind is Sacred.

SPIRIT

As we come back together, we centre ourselves, heighten our consciousness of Mystery around and within. In *Anam Cara*, John O'Donahue writes about honouring the voice and rhythms of the deep self. In an adaptation of his words we remind ourselves:

Spirituality is the art of transfiguration. We should not force ourselves to change by hammering our lives into any pre-determined shape....Rather we need to practice a new art of attention to the inner rhythms of our days and our lives....If you work with this different rhythm, you will come easily and naturally home to yourself.If you attend to yourself and seek to come into your presence, you will find exactly the right rhythm for your life.

And our response is: Sacred are We; We are Sacred.

In conclusion, we will listen to the words of a song by Jeremy Geffen that remind us of the presence of Mystery in all that is. Please join in when you feel ready.

It lives, in the seed of a tree as it grows.
You hear it if you listen to the wind as it blows.
It is there in a river as it flows into the sea.
It's the sound in the search of someone becoming free.

And it lives in the laughter of children at play,
And in the blazing sun that gives light to the day,
In the moon, the planets, and the stars in the sky.
It's been the mover of mountains since the beginning of time.

**O Mystery, you are alive! I feel you all around.
You are the fire in my heart; you are the holy sound,
You are all of life; it is to you that I sing.
Grant that I may feel you-always, in everything.**

And it lives in the waves as they crash upon the beach.
I've seen it in the dance that people try to teach.
I feel it in the love that I know we need so much.
I know it in your smile, my love, when our hearts do touch.

But when I listen deep inside, I feel best of all
Like a moon that glowing white- and I listen to your call,
And I know that you will guide me. I feel like the tide
Rushing through the ocean of my heart that's open wide.

MUSIC HERE: <https://paulwinter.bandcamp.com/track/mystery>

[How To From Here](#)

Resources will be uploaded to the website: <https://www.earth-link.org.au/links.html>

Morning Session

Touch base

Brief reflection

Conversation about the five principles, one on each day. These key words capture something of each principle:

- 1 Dynamic, interconnected
- 2 Open, attentive and aware
- 3 Indwelling presence
- 4 Solidarity/Accompaniment
- 5 Right Relations

Introduce additional resources for your consideration

Afternoon Session: Sharing circle unless negotiated otherwise.