

Book Review by Rebecca Langer

Earth Gospel: A Guide to Prayer for God's Creation

by Sam Hamilton-Poore. Published by Upper Room (2009)

From the room where I am writing, I can see the rain gently falling on the greening trees. There is just enough breeze to move the tire swing for the grandchildren, to and fro. Every once in awhile, the screech of a hawk echoes through the open window. I've only lived in Florida for a few years but this new and interesting landscape continues to deepen my wonder for the creator of it all.

So it is a delight for me to review *Earth Gospel: A Guide to Prayer for God's Creation*. I should say upfront, I am privileged to know Sam Hamilton-Poore, the writer. But if I didn't know him, I'd still say glowing things about this book. It captures for me the passion for all creation, especially the natural created order.

I used this book with a Discipleship Group for Lent. (Prior to this, I had used it as devotional reading for a couple of committees meetings.) I invited any of the folks at Riverside Presbyterian Church in Jacksonville, where I serve as Parish Associate for Global Mission and Spirituality, to join me in a weekly discussion of this book. The group talked about the delightful format of the book and how to use the book by reading it in the style of *lectio divina*. I gave them a journal to record what most attracted them and also what least attracted them during their reading. (Hamilton-Poore outlines other suggestions for using the book, too.)

In the introduction he says, "I offer this prayer book to Christians who know or suspect that there is a direct connection between loving God and loving God's creation." We only need to take seriously the mandate in Genesis to see this is true. The book is interlaced with scripture passages that reconnect the reader to this truth. Woven into this book Hamilton-Poore chooses a theme for each day of the week: Beginnings, God's Providence, Continuing Creation, Wisdom, Creation Teaches, Humankind's Vocation, Sin and Destruction of Creation, God's Recreation and Sabbath, and The Praise of Creation. Each reading begins with an Opening, followed by a creation oriented hymn that was often familiar enough to sing. For me, the section entitled "Another Voice" was intriguing; voices like Catherine of Siena from the 14th century to the present day Iona Community. The group was particularly impressed with the variety of authors and their origins. I particularly liked the piece by John Calvin since our Lenten theme was "Listening to the Body". "When we examine (the human body), even to the nails of our fingers, there is nothing which could be altered, without felt inconveniency...Where is the embroiderer who, with all his industry and ingenuity, could execute the hundredth part of

this complicated and diversified structure? We need not then wonder if God, who formed man so perfectly in the womb, should have an exact knowledge of him after he is ushered into the world.

The prayers in the book are lovely. They, too, come from a wide variety of sources. We are reminded by them to give glory to God, just as creation daily gives glory. Metropolitan Tryphon captures this sentiment fully in the prayer Hamilton-Poore includes: "I was born a weak, defenseless child, but your angel, spreading his wings, guarded my cradle. From my birth, your love has illumined my paths, and has wondrously guided me towards the light of eternity. From my first day until now, the generous gifts of your providence have been wonderfully showered upon me. I give you thanks, and with all those who have come to know you, I exclaim:

Glory to you for calling me into being,

Glory to you for spreading out before me the beauty of the universe,

Glory to you for revealing to me through heaven and earth the eternal book of wisdom,

Glory to your eternity within this fleeting world,

Glory to you for mercies, seen and unseen,

Glory to you for every sight of my sorrow,

Glory to you for every step in my life's journey, for every moment of joy.

Glory to you, O God, from age to age."

Finally, it is in the section called Blessings, at the end of the sections, Morning, Midday and Evening, we catch a glimpse of Hamilton-Poore's deep and abiding connection to the creation that he so lovingly honors and celebrates.

I recommend this book with its lovely hand drawn glimpses of nature with both excitement and gratitude.