

Good morning and joyful greetings, my beautiful siblings in Christ! What a wonderful day to be out in God's Creation worshipping together and relishing our shared community in Jesus Christ! Let us rejoice and be glad in it!

Today is... abnormal. We're outside, yes, but today is a particularly special day for all of us gathered here and myself specifically—It is a day of spiritual renewal. Long story short, I approached Pastor Tina a few months ago and asked to be re-baptized. She was excited, but also replied with “welllllll we don’t really do that...” Undeterred, I brainstormed other ways to go about it, and together we came up with this! A collective spiritual renewal that everyone can make their own. You may have noticed the patch of sandy squiggles right over there—that is a prayer labyrinth I made this morning (apologies if it’s less than perfect!). All are welcome to walk the labyrinth whenever they feel called to do so (during worship, during the picnic, etc). For those who are unfamiliar, you should enter the opening on the outer ring and follow the labyrinth as you walk in prayer. Many folks like to pause at the center and offer up a final prayer as well. It is totally your own personal choice to walk the labyrinth, please do not feel obligated to do it! That said, I do hope at least some folks will make use of it and find it helpful in their own spiritual renewals this morning.

So, why spiritual renewal? And why now...?

Personally, this has been a long time coming. Many of you may remember, I stood before you a few years ago during Lent and shared my most honest truths about my beliefs and my journey. The things I shared that morning seemed to resonate with at least a few of you, and that is more than I could have hoped for. Along the same token, I am

reminded of a quote from her father that Robin Wall Kimmerer shared in her incredible book *Braiding Sweetgrass*. (it's one of my favorite books of all time, and is well worth the read)

Her father is speaking-- "There's a fire you must tend to every day. The hardest one to take care of is the one right here" he says, tapping his finger against his chest. "Your own fire, your spirit. We all carry a piece of that sacred fire within us. We have to honor it and care for it. You are the firekeeper."

The firekeeper... My friends, that sacred fire is the Holy Spirit. We must tend to that spiritual flame daily, but even more than that, we must recognize it as holy and treat it as such.

Ancient philosophy identified four "elements" that make up the world—Earth, Air, Fire, and Water. Today, we of course have identified 118 elements that make up God's vast and divine Lego set. The building blocks of Creation. The one thing physicists have yet to identify is the spirit, yet the spirit is like the wind... We can feel it—often acutely—but we cannot catch it in our hands, nor can we analyze it in a lab. We can't see it, but we can see its effects.

We live on the Blue Planet—a planet of water and greenery. We breathe fresh air and what we exhale is fresh air to the plant kingdom.

We are surrounded by earth, air, and water. And within us is holy fire.

But not just within us! Truly, the Holy Spirit flows between us and through us and all around us. In every living thing burns that holy fire. We live not just on a Blue Planet, but on a planet filled with wonder. There are plants that grow on bare rock, mosses that grow specifically on glaciers, animals that thrive in volcanoes of all places! God's Creation

is wild and wonderful and within every cell burns that holy and sacred fire of life and of spirit.

I could expound on that thought for hours, but in the interest of time and your collective sanity, I'll keep it short and sweet:

Tend to that holy fire. Tend to it as if it were the only thing separating you from freezing to death, because it is. God is always there, inside you and around you, and by God's grace and the ever-present Holy Spirit we are given this glorious life to live. Let your fire burn, burn, burn, and everyone who sees you will recognize the Holy Spirit.

I invite all of you right this moment to open yourselves to spiritual renewal through God's Creation.

Breathe in the air, made fresh by God's tall pine trees. Open your ears to the music of birdsong, of leaves rustling in the wind, of squirrels chattering amongst themselves. Open your eyes to the community that surrounds you and the sunlight filtering through the treetops. Feel the warmth and dampness all around us. Open your hearts and let your spirits be nourished by God's magnificent Creation and made whole in the understanding that we are all connected by the Holy Spirit flowing through us, in us, around us, and between us.

Amen.