Envisioning Shalom: Preaching for Creation

In this course, we will consider ways to bear witness to the inherent value of Earth as a living and interconnected community that teaches us profound theological and ethical truths. In discussions and preaching structured around mutual witness and deep listening, we will explore such issues as: ways in which Scripture passages testify to the intricate glories and stark vulnerabilities of creation as a site of God’s transforming work; the beauty, giftedness, intelligence, and relational sophistication of nonhuman creatures; human sin as a major vector for harms that cause suffering in creation; grace as the divine intention not just for humanity but for all living beings, Earth, and the cosmos.

Engaging contemporary homiletical theory and studying sermons from expert preachers, students will develop their homiletical skills and capacity to imagine, honor, and advocate for the whole community of Earth and its flourishing.

Together we will listen for the Gospel in sermons focused on creation; we will explore the potential of micro-homilies to build the capacity of faith communities for ecotheological reflection and creation care; and we will attend to poetry and memoir-writing as sources of wisdom.

Prerequisite: one Master’s-level homiletics course or permission of instructor.
Course objectives

1. To foster the deepening of students’ empirical wisdom about, experiential connection to, and spiritual reflection on the natural world and the living community of Earth.

2. To heighten students’ awareness of hermeneutical, theological, ethical, and cultural issues at stake in the homiletical engagement of issues of creation care for Christian communities of conviction.

3. To develop students’ proficiency in unfolding the Gospel in exegetically responsible, theologically compelling, pastorally sensitive, and homiletically effective ways.

4. To enhance students’ capacity for excellence in sermon delivery, metrics of which include deft use of appropriate and imaginative illustrations, clarity and effectiveness of verbal expression, and compelling use of the voice and other embodied dimensions of communication.

Required books

The below books will be read in their entirety in this course. They will be on Reserve in the Divinity Library, should you wish to consult them there rather than purchase them.


Please read, at your own pace throughout the semester, the Spring 2019 issue of the YDS publication *Reflections*, entitled “Crucified Creation: A Green Faith Rising.”
A homiletics bibliography has been uploaded to Canvas. Browse it for resources on particular topics or for homiletical inspiration generally.

If you do not know how to perform searches of the ATLA database for articles, essays, and books, Divinity Library staff will be glad to show you. ATLA is an essential tool for research in the theological disciplines. Google searches and general web browsing cannot possibly yield the results you need.

**Evaluative measures**

The default grading mode for this course is Credit/No Credit, but students may choose to take the course for a grade. If you hope to pursue an advanced degree in homiletics (Ph.D., Th.D., or D.Min.), I encourage you to take the course for a grade. Students choosing graded mode will need to submit a form to the registrar by the appropriate deadline. Please see the grading rubric laid out in Appendix A at the end of this syllabus.

As regards Credit/No Credit:

- Your performance must be at the level of HP minus or higher to receive Credit.
- You must complete every assignment in order to receive Credit.

Each student’s assessment of Credit/No Credit (or grade) will be determined according to the following evaluative measures:

1) **One sermon to be preached in class** (20% of your course grade). A written copy of the sermon should be emailed to the professor within 48 hours of the time when you preached it. Include a note identifying the specific context and the hearers (actual or imagined) for whom the sermon was designed. Your sermon should engage theologically with an issue related to creation care or the flourishing of Earth’s creatures.

   > If you made any asides or changed something in delivery, do your best to recall those moments and represent them accurately in the final version.

Hearers will spend 10 to 15 minutes in dialogue with the preacher on the following:

- the focal message of the sermon
- clarity of language, including metaphors & images
- strengths and “growing edges” regarding delivery
- theological claims and questions that arise for the hearers
2) **A book presentation** (20 minutes) on a book from a list provided by the professor (20% of the grade). This will involve three components:

- a **written analysis** of the book’s strengths, weaknesses, and points of usefulness for preachers (1,200–1,300 words), to be emailed to the professor after the presentation;

- a **one-page handout** distributed in hard copy to the class, with key points and quotations to guide us during your oral presentation;

- three **original images** you have created via photography or another artistic medium, which you’ll display during your presentation.

3) **Two micro-homilies**, each two to three minutes long (20% of the grade). Each micro-homily should allude to a Scripture passage, even if obliquely or fleetingly, and should engage an issue related to creation or the living community of Earth.

4) **A piece of memoir writing** (2,100–2,700 words, not including footnotes; = 7–9 pages), due via email in Microsoft Word format by **noon** on the last day of the Divinity exam period (20% of the grade). In this writing, express your connection to a particular place in creation, and interweave insights from your observations and experiences there with theological, ethical, or spiritual reflection.

Your writing need not mention congregations or preaching. This assignment is designed to deepen your capacity to integrate your lived experience and naturalist attention. That capacity will be vital for preaching that honors Earth and advocates for shalom.

- Your writing should **describe a natural site**. This may be local, such as a birch tree outside your window, or broader in scope, such as diverse segments of the Appalachian Trail you hiked over several summers.

- You are encouraged, though not required, to **do research** in order to amplify or add texture to your naturalist observations. Interested in the structure of a pine cone? Do some research and weave in what you’ve learned, footnoting the source. If you watch an osprey with a fish and wonder whether chicks would be in the nest this time of year, research it and footnote the source.

  **Note**: do not cite Wikipedia or another popular site not curated by experts. For this assignment, only official naturalist or scientific web sites may be cited as authoritative, along with published books and articles.
→ **Begin working on this piece by mid-semester.** Strive for clarity, vivid storytelling, and a compelling sense of place. You will be asked to read two pages (500 words) aloud from this work-in-progress in our final class on November 20.

5) **Informed and engaged class participation** (20% of the grade). This includes conscientious preparation and timely completion of assignments; the reading of a poem at the start of one of our classes, providing a handout for the class; attentive listening; and thoughtful engagement in our discussions.

* Yale University acknowledges that indigenous peoples and nations, including Mohegan, Mashantucket Pequot, Eastern Pequot, Schaghticoke, Golden Hill Paugussett, Niantic, and the Quinnipiac and other Algonquian-speaking peoples, have stewarded through generations the lands and waterways of what is now Connecticut. My office and the classrooms in which I teach are located on unceded land of the Quinnipiac people.

**Attendance policy:** Each student may have one absence with no consequences. (One absence during shopping period will not be counted if you communicate with me about your planned absence before the day of my next class session.) Chronic lateness may eventually be counted as an absence, at the professor’s discretion and with no prior warning to the student. If you are absent on a day you had been scheduled to lead discussion, it will count as two absences. Two absences will result in your needing to do an extra written assignment related to the second session missed. Since this course meets only twelve times, three absences normally will result in the student receiving No Credit for the course.

**Students with learning challenges:** Please speak with me early in the semester if you have demonstrable learning challenges. Note from the Divinity Bulletin: “The faculty and staff of YDS make every reasonable effort to facilitate the learning of students capable of graduate-level seminary work. Any student who has a condition that may prevent full demonstration of their abilities should contact the Resource Office on Disabilities to request disability-related accommodation or service. Students should also contact their teachers to discuss learning needs and accommodations to ensure the students’ full participation and evaluation in their courses.”

**Policy on late work:** There is no penalty for late work, but any work turned in after the due date will likely receive no feedback from me other than its grade.

All work is due on the last day of the term. Per the YDS Bulletin, “in exceptional circumstances, such as illness or family crisis, the instructor in the course may grant an extension of time” until a specified Divinity-wide date. The designation “exceptional circumstances” could be applied to many kinds of challenges. If you are facing a challenge that you believe to be exceptional (not just a time-management issue) and you’d like an extension, please ask me. You need say only, “Due to exceptional circumstances, I would like an extension.”
All written work submitted by you must be your own. If you cite, paraphrase, or in any other way rely on ideas, distinctive phrases, or argumentation from a written source, that source must be properly acknowledged. For more information, consult Appendix B at the end of this syllabus.

Papers are to be typewritten in Times New Roman 12-point font, double-spaced, and paginated, with margins between 1” and 1 1/4” on all sides. If the paper has notes, they should be footnotes (located at the bottom of the relevant page) rather than endnotes. Block quotations and footnotes should be single-spaced. A separate bibliography is not necessary if full initial citations of works are provided in the notes. For proper footnote style, consult *The SBL Handbook of Style* (2nd ed.; SBL Press, 2014) or another accepted authority such as *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

--- Schedule of class sessions and readings ---

Please bring a Bible and relevant secondary readings to class. When leading discussion, each student leader should be prepared to engage the following kinds of questions with classmates:

- What are the strengths of the arguments in the material you are presenting? What is compelling or imaginative or original about the piece?
- On which points is the argument weak, methodologically or conceptually?
- How does this piece equip us to proclaim the Gospel more effectively in Christian communities of conviction?

Each class will open with a student reading a poem that uses imagery of the natural world to powerful effect. It is the student’s job to find the poem. A list of poetry resources can be found under the Files tab on our Canvas course site.

Please bring a handout of the poem in hard copies for the class. Your handout should include the poet’s name, birth and death dates, and date of the poem if known.
**Wed. August 28  Introduction and purposes of the course**

You will be invited to introduce yourself to the class by sharing:

- your denominational or spiritual tradition(s)
- something you cherish or value about preaching

We will discuss a micro-homily by the performance artist known as Reverend Billy: “Freakstorm: Climate Changes” (2:26).

**Wed. September 4**

📖 Genesis 1

❖ Schade, *Creation-Crisis Preaching*, Introduction: “Why Creation Needs Good Preaching, and Good Preaching Needs Creation” (pp. 1–16)

❖ Habel, Rhoads, and Santmire, eds., *Season of Creation*, Chapter 1: “Introducing the Season of Creation” (pp. 3–15)

❖ Santmire, *Behold the Lilies*, Introduction and Chapter 1: “Scything with God: Ecstatic Moments in Rural Maine” (pp. 1–16)

❄ Read the ecotheology sermons below. (They are in Course Reserves on Canvas.) The three preachers were finalists in a 2010 sermon contest hosted by Earth Ministry. Bring detailed notes; be prepared to say which you’d choose as the winner and why.

- Margaret Bullitt-Jonas, “When a Leaf Needs to Speak”
- S. Emmanuel Epps, “Earth’s Answer to a Curious Journey”
- John Helmiere, “I Worship the Author of the Horrendous Space Kablooie”

**Wed. September 11**

📖 Job 28 + 38–39

❖ Schade, *Creation-Crisis Preaching*, Chapter 1: “Environmental, Theological, and Biblical Foundations” (pp. 17–37)

❖ Habel, Rhoads, and Santmire, eds., *Season of Creation*, Chapter 2: “A Theology of Liturgy in a New Key: Worshipping with Creation” (pp. 16–53)
Santmire, *Behold the Lilies*, Chapter 2: “Cutting through the Ice: Contemplating the Depths behind the Farmhouse” (pp. 17–21)

* Student preaching

**Wed. September 18**

📖 Isaiah 24 + Hosea 4:1–3

❖ Schade, *Creation-Crisis Preaching*, Chapter 2: “Flowering, Leafing, Fruiting—Strategies for Approaching Environmental Preaching” (pp. 38–61)

❖ Habel, Rhoads, and Santmire, eds., *Season of Creation*, Chapter 3: “Engaging the Bible in a New Key: Reading and Preaching with Creation” (pp. 54–66)


❖ Ellen F. Davis, sermon “Healing for Sin-Sick Hearts,” pp. 209–214 in *Preaching the Luminous Word: Biblical Sermons and Homiletical Essays* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011); in Course Reserves on our Canvas web site

* Student preaching

**Wed. September 25**

📖 Isaiah 35 + Hosea 14


❖ Habel, Rhoads, and Santmire, eds., *Season of Creation*, Year A, “Forest Sunday” and “Land Sunday” (pp. 70–99)

❖ Santmire, *Behold the Lilies*, Chapter 4: “Walking along the Charles River: Witnessing Signs of the Kingdom” (pp. 30–34)

* Student preaching

**Wed. October 2**

📖 Psalms 1, 8, 33, 65, 104, 148
Schade, *Creation-Crisis Preaching*, Chapter 4: “Ecofeminist Theology and Implications for Preaching” (pp. 92–116)

Habel, Rhoads, and Santmire, eds., *Season of Creation*, Year A, “Wilderness Sunday” and “River Sunday” (pp. 100–123)

Santmire, *Behold the Lilies*, Chapter 5: “From Lake Wobegon to the Streets of Manhattan: Behold then Follow” (pp. 35–44)

Student preaching

**Wed. October 9**

📖 Matthew 4:1–11

Schade, *Creation-Crisis Preaching*, Chapter 5: “Developing an Ecofeminist Christology for Creation-Crisis Preaching” (pp. 117–38)

Habel, Rhoads, and Santmire, eds., *Season of Creation*, Year B, “Earth Sunday” and “Humanity Sunday” (pp. 126–52)


Student preaching

**October 16**  
*no class: Divinity Convocation and Reading Week*

Consider attending the Beecher lectures on preaching,  
or watch them via Livestream!
**Wed. October 23**

- Peter Wohlleben, *The Hidden Life of Trees* (250 pp.)
- Habel, Rhoads, and Santmire, eds., *Season of Creation*, Year B, “Sky Sunday” and “Mountain Sunday” (pp. 153–77)
- Santmire, *Behold the Lilies*, Chapter 7: “Bringing the Gothic Down to Earth: Rediscovering St. Francis in Stone” (pp. 51–56)
- Student preaching

**Wed. October 30**

- John 6:1–51
- Schade, *Creation-Crisis Preaching*, Chapter 6: “Preaching a Shape-Shifter ‘Trickster’ Resurrection in the Face of the Creation Crisis” and Chapter 7: “Earth, Water, and Wind: A Trilogy of Creation-Crisis Sermons” (pp. 139–87)
- Habel, Rhoads, and Santmire, eds., *Season of Creation*, Year C, “Ocean Sunday” and “Fauna Sunday” (pp. 180–201)
- Santmire, *Behold the Lilies*, Chapter 8: “Understanding the Contemplation: An I–Ens Relationship with Nature” (pp. 57–63)
- Student preaching

**Wed. November 6**

- Mark 16:9–20
- Santmire, *Behold the Lilies*, Chapter 9: “Encountering the Beast of the Night: Beyond the Lilies of the Field” (pp. 64–71)
Anne Herbert, excerpt from 1995 piece “Handy Tips on How to Behave at the Death of the World” (in Course Reserves on Canvas)

Student preaching

Wed. November 13

Philippians 2:1–11; Colossians 1:9–23

Sy Montgomery, *The Soul of an Octopus* (244 pages)


View Leah D. Schade’s “Earth Day sermon” (21:10), preached at United in Christ Lutheran Church in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania on 24 April 2016. Bring your notes; be prepared for a lightning round on strengths and weaknesses of this sermon.

Student preaching

Wed. November 20

Revelation 22:1–5

Santmire, *Behold the Lilies*, Chapter 11: “Contemplating the Speaker: Behold the Cosmic Christ” (pp. 82–92)

Be prepared to read two pages (500 words) from your memoir writing, which will be due to the professor on the last day of the Divinity exam period.

November 27  no class: Thanksgiving recess

December 4  no class: this is for rescheduled Labor Day classes

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Please email your memoir writing to the professor in Microsoft Word format (not PDF) by noon on the last day of the Divinity exam period.