Deep gratitude wells up in me for the invitation to be with you this morning. I am a continent away at Marquand Chapel at Yale Divinity School, yet feel a special kinship with you at Grace Cathedral. That is because I have visited there on many occasions, especially when my husband John and I lived in Berkeley for three years making the *Journey of the Universe* film with Brian Swimme. The Cathedral has been a beacon for so many of us yearning to weave the moral force of religion with ecology and justice. One of my visits to the Cathedral was during the Global Climate Action Summit that Governor Jerry Brown convened in September of 2018. We showed our *Journey of the Universe* film there and attended the interreligious service with 100s of others. I should also mention that Bishop Marc Andrus and his wife Sheila have been
friends for many years, as have longtime parishioners, Robert and Ellen McDermott, and Reverend Sally Bingham. My greetings to them and to you all. John and I look forward to being with you tomorrow evening in our Winter Forum conversation with Dean Malcolm Clemens Young.

On this 4th Sunday of Lent we are on the cusp of the spring equinox, leaning toward Easter. We are coming out of a long winter of upheaval on many fronts. The return of the light is a welcome feeling, isn’t it? As is the rebirth of flowering trees and plants in the city of St Francis, one of the most beautiful places on Earth. May the beauty that surrounds you sustain you going forward in these challenging times.

The readings today give us the salvation story from the Exodus of the Israelites to our redemption through Christ. As we know, this is a historical narrative of epic proportions. The first reading brings us into the challenges of the Exodus of the Chosen People wandering in the wilderness. There was little water and tasteless food, if any at all. Complaints were abundant and snakes infested the camps. At
God’s prompting, Moses devised a bronze serpent mounted on a pole – a homeopathic symbol to protect and heal the Chosen People from the cruel fate of poisonous bites.

The next reading of Psalm 107 picks up the theme of deliverance from such scourges. It invites offerings of thanksgiving and songs of joy for healing.

John’s Gospel carries this forward with the promise of salvation. This is embedded in the iconic verse: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

Ephesians completes the arc of redemption with the powerful line: “For he has made known to us… a plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on Earth.”

These readings present the well-known narrative of salvation history. It is still moving to encounter the struggle through the desert to the Promised Land. I value this story and many of us have heard it since our youth.
My question is, and I wonder if it is yours too, How can this Biblical story be expanded? What is our Exodus experience now? We are between worlds, as the poet Yeats wrote so eloquently, “one dying, the other waiting to be born.”

The pre-pandemic world of a year ago and the post pandemic world on the horizon invites us to think more expansively; to imagine more creatively; to wonder how shall we change our way of being.

Might we move, as geologian Thomas Berry called us, from a singular focus on several thousand years of salvation history to embrace Earth history? From Biblical time to ongoing creation time? From the biological and geological time of our planet’s unfolding over 4.5 billion years, to deep time of the universe’s evolution over 13.8 billion years? What does this opening to the fullness of time entail? We are being invited into the sacred continuity of cosmos, Earth, and humans. To image ourselves dwelling in evolutionary time and ecological space is the call of our Exodus moment.
This is not an impossible task. Indeed, we note many who have been leading the way over the last half century:

John Cobb and other process theologians are bringing us into evolutionary time. Matthew Fox has urged us into creation centered spirituality.

Ecofeminist theologians, such as Sallie McFague, call us to see Earth as God’s Body while Rosemary Ruether invites us to embrace both Gaia and God. Mark Wallace and Catherine Keller ask us to enter the depths of the spirit, pneuma, from the beginning of time. Liberation theologians, such as Leonardo Boff and Yvonne Gebara, are highlighting eco-justice. African-American theologians, like Melanie Harris, call for healing with the Earth and Willie Jennings, our colleague at Yale Divinity School, asks the question: Where is our Doctrine of Creation? Without it, he wonders, how can we protect the Earth and all its creatures? And there is more, for he affirm, as have indigenous peoples, that the Earth is animate and
communicative. Earth is alive and interrelated! What a marvelous challenge for Christian theology and ethics!

We have a lot to draw on here, don’t we? There is now a robust lineage of thoughtful Christian eco-theologians and ecojustice ethicists who are calling for an expansion of our tradition. They are wondering how can we embrace human suffering and redemption within the larger context of the Earth and cosmos. How can this not be part of the post pandemic world waiting to be born?

Isn’t there a widening sense of the cosmic Christ that St Paul notes and Teilhard de Chardin highlights? The Christic light shining through the universe is both spiritual and physical for Teilhard who was a Jesuit and a scientist.

And what of the Logos at the beginning of time, the inner ordering principle of all reality that we hear of in the opening of John’s Gospel? This is the sacred dimension of all matter within the evolution of the cosmos and the Earth. This is why Teilhard says that matter has a “within”, what Thomas Berry called interiority.
As Berry noted everything in the universe is differentiated, everything has subjectivity or interiority, and everything is in communion with everything else. For him this is the Trinity of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Imagine the effect of exploring this in our theology and ethics, in our liturgies and our prayers?

So, again, this is my question for us today.

As we dwell in this Exodus time – moving from late winter to early spring, from Lent to Easter we find ourselves between seasons, between worlds. Might we ask what is shifting, turning, calling us forward?

Is this not a moment to image ourselves into Earth time and Cosmic time - what Ephesians speaks of as “a plan for the fullness of time”? We are living within the seasons of nature’s life and dwelling within the great transitions of Earth’s life – from the emergence of the first cell, to the explosion of flowering plants, to the rise of amphibians, birds, and mammals. Can we imagine ourselves not
only within 2000 years of Christian history, but also rising from the savannahs of Africa some 6 million years ago to become homo sapiens 200,000 years ago? Doesn’t this perspective release new energies for the work ahead? This evolutionary context gives rise to wonder and awe, which in turn inspires commitment and action for transformation.

Here is a basis for enlarging our sense of belonging, not just to our family or friends or nation, but to the living Earth community. Within our planetary system we are surrounded by a solar system and galactic systems that broaden our identity beyond anything we could have imagined. This gives us a new zest that Teilhard hoped to evoke from humans. This zest is the human energy needed to establish transformative societies - ones that will care for the wellbeing of people and the planet. This is the invitation of the Pope’s encyclical *Laudato Si* – to embrace an **integral ecology** where the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor are truly heard.
What does this mean for our moment today as we are expanding our consciousness and our conscience? It means we are awakening simultaneously to deep time and to comprehensive compassion. As we sense ourselves belonging to something this large and this vast we also feel ourselves drawn toward a more tender love, a young love – alive with discovery and yearning for justice.

We bring this love back to Earth with a broader sense of community…

Can we imagine moving from pandemic time to after-time when live music will lift our spirits in concert halls and clubs.

When theater and arts and sculpture will explode once released from confinement

When schools will be open places of genuine learning and growth.

When nurses and doctors will be celebrated

When workers in stores and factories will be thanked

When farmers and teachers will be valued
When minorities subject to prejudice, imprisonment, and death will achieve voting rights, jobs, and health care.

When the Earth is allowed to heal and even flourish.

When the cosmos speaks to us through the luminosity of the stars, the steady movements of the planets, and the ever expanding universe.

Isn’t this all part of our new story?

How do we get there?

With poetry, prayer and imagination guiding us.

Within this broadened context our prayers and our poetry will also be wider. We have heard this in Wendell Berry, Mary Oliver, and many others. I will conclude today by sharing a prayer-poem by Catherine de Vinck. She wrote these inspiring verses just a few weeks ago when she celebrated her 99th birthday on February 20th.

On my Birthday – 99 Years
Catherine de Vinck 2/20/21

I bow to the North and to the South
to the East and to the West.

I bow to the sky enameled blue
and to the plump, traveling clouds.

I bow to the ancestors:

women tracking the bison’s herd,
men building shelters, making fire.

I bow to the children, born and unborn
holding the future hidden in their genes.

I bow to the animals, to the fox trotting
in the woods as well as to the snail
housed in its porcelain shell.

I bow to the light ascending every morning.

I bow to the night, to its dark portals
and to the pale moon ever at work
pulling the tides, mirroring the sun.

I bow to the rain dripping from the roof feeding streams released to the sea.

I bow to the stars, to their fiery tremors held in the immense vastness of space.

I bow to the plants and trees, to berries and apples.

I bow to all that is open and welcoming: the calix of flowers, the heart of lovers.

I bow to all my years, past and present.

I bow to death waiting at the corner ready to take me to a new way of being to larger territories of exploration.

I bow to the one we call God unknown to us, yet more here than what we feel and touch and smell.

I bow to life and all its history and shape.

I bow forever in thanksgiving and love.