



‘You Can’t Let the Fear Stop You’

Good Friday Prayers in Solidarity with #StopCopCity and #DefendTheAtlantaForest

Content Note:

These prayers and reflections include content that could be harmful or retraumatizing for some, including references to physical violence, torture, murder, policing and police brutality, indigenous genocide, slavery, incarceration, gun violence and the impacts of systemic racism. Specific details regarding the murder of “Tortuguita” Paez Teran, a 26-year-old queer and non-binary forest defender are also included.

In the Christian tradition, Good Friday serves as a call to journey with Jesus into the depths of state violence and the suffering it creates. This journey with Jesus invites us to listen to the voices of all who suffer brutal oppression, who struggle to live and thrive under the threat of violence. This Good Friday the UCC’s Join the Movement toward Racial Justice initiative and Environmental Justice Ministries ask you to listen to the stories emerging from the Weelaunee Forest in Atlanta and explore connections to the struggles for racial, economic and environmental justice in your own communities. Where is God moving you past fear to connect to these struggles? How does Jesus’ journey toward the cross illuminate both the violence of our contemporary world and our responsibility to act in solidarity?

Emerging as an idea to bolster policing after the 2020 uprisings in response to the murders of George Floyd, Brianna Taylor and many others, the City of Atlanta has leased 381 acres of Weelaunee Forest to the Atlanta Police Foundation to build the largest police training facility in the US, funded by corporations. Plans include a mock city to practice urban warfare, tear gas and explosives testing, dozens of shooting ranges, and a Black Hawk helicopter landing pad. Building this facility requires the raising of a large percentage of the forest that now exists on this land.

This land already knows lineages of brutality. In the 1800s, shortly after the land was stolen from Muscogee Creek peoples, it was used as a plantation. In the early 1900s, a prison farm was opened where inmates were forced to perform unpaid agricultural labor, marking the rebranding of slavery into for profit prison labor.

Since the plans for Cop City, as it is known, have emerged, local community members, organizers and activists have been working to #DefendTheAtlantaForest and #StopCopCity. These forest defenders and community builders have been met with police violence and arrests. In January, one of the police raids in the Weelaunee Forest resulted in the killing of 26-year-old Manuel Paez Terán, known by friends and comrades as Tortuguita.

While this story is particular to Atlanta, we know that people in towns and cities across the country are engaged in connected struggles. We hope you'll take some time to learn about the movements to #StopCopCity and #DefendTheAtlantaForest and act in solidarity with these movements. We also hope these prayers will open up spaces to consider where these struggles live in your own communities and how you might act in solidarity with local organizers and movements demanding an end to police militarization, as well as ecological destruction and systemic violence rooted in legacies of genocide and enslavement.

This Good Friday, let us pray for healing, repair and flourishing for all of creation.

Cross-shouldering God,
who bore the weight of the world's violence in your flesh,
who knew the groaning of creation in your bones,
whose body felt the ravages of torture, the tenderness of touch, the stillness of death,
we come in humble reverence to listen at the foot of the cross for your voice,
calling us to bear witness, to claim one another as kin, and to act in solidarity.



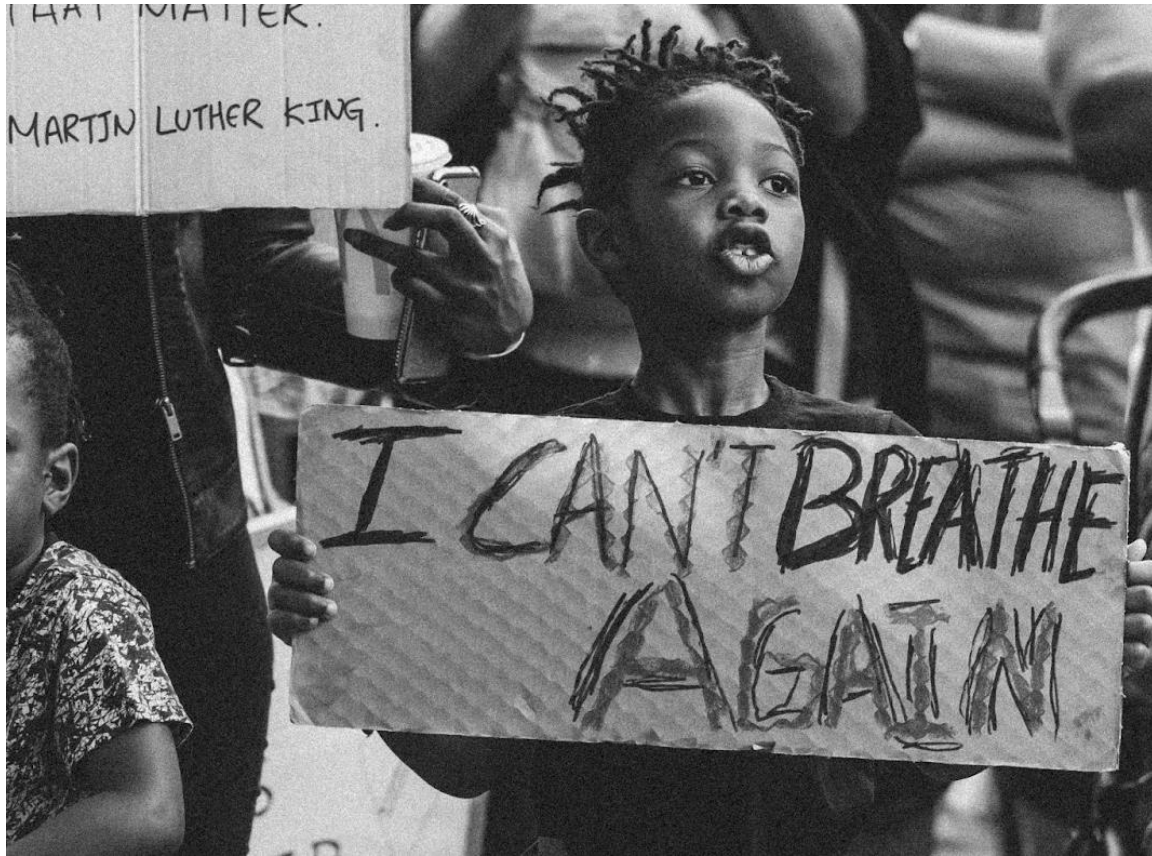
In solidarity with the Weelaunee River, its surrounding watershed and Forest,
we pray for all forests and watersheds, and the creatures who call them home,
who are put at risk by the commodification of the land and its resources.

*As we strive to follow your path,
show us how we might live so deeply in solidarity with the land
that we make real the Revelation promise of trees standing in the midst of the city
whose leaves are for the healing of the nations.*



In solidarity with the Mvskoke Creek people and those enslaved and forced to labor
at the plantation and later the Atlanta Prison Farm,
we pray for all places that hold memories of genocide and enslavement.

*As we journey on this road,
keep us paying attention to the laments crying out from ground
so that we might hear these cries for justice as the beating of our own hearts
and build legacies of healing where there has been centuries of harm.*



In solidarity with the Gresham Park, Lakewood, Thomasville Heights and other neighborhoods surrounding the Weelaunee Forest, we pray for communities that suffer historic and racialized inequities, resulting in high poverty levels, dangerous health conditions, pollution, and community divestment.

*As we seek to travel in your footsteps,
empower us to resist and interrupt racism's persistent and unrelenting violence
and become the relief that is needed to move us always closer to freedom and new life.*



In solidarity with the Mvskoke people, Black freedom fighters, working class organizers and artists, forest defenders and local Atlanta community members, we pray for all those who struggle for representation and voice in a democratic system challenged by investment in profits over people.

*As we strive to be guided by your example,
teach us to listen to and be transformed by the voices of those most impacted by our decisions
so that we might follow their leadership and leverage what privilege we have
to build a world of flourishing for all.*



In solidarity with the 42 forest defenders and participants in the Stop Cop City struggle
who have been arrested, charged with domestic terrorism,
and face at least 5 and up to 35 years in prison,
we pray for all who suffer the violence of repression and the brutality of incarceration.

*As we traverse the roads of discipleship,
keep us vigilant in our solidarity with those the powerful would see erased
so that through our witness and action
we might become proclaimers of release and bringers of freedom.*



In solidarity with all those in Atlanta and around the world who are resisting the escalation of militarization and the expansion of policing and surveillance as the primary state and community response to harm and violence, we pray for those who yearn for safety and accountability.

*As we try to journey in your ways of love and justice,
reveal to us our investment and complicity with the culture of fear
that protects the security of the few at the expense of the safety of the many
so that we might learn to divest from fear and invest in a culture of care
as we strive to create your kingdom of justice and mercy, on earth as it is in heaven.*



In solidarity with Tortuguita, beloved forest defender murdered in a police raid as they sat cross-legged with their hands up, and their family, friends and comrades, we pray for those killed by state violence.

*As we journey with you, even through the valley of the shadow of death,
still our spirits and open our hearts
so that we might pay attention and bear witness to devastating violence
and come to know its depths and contours
as we weep and mourn, watch and wait for what will emerge from this pain.*

Entombed God,
who resides between dying and rising
who knows that a shattered heart can keep beating
who dwells in the space between anguish and hope,
open our hearts to the mystery of what emerges from the dark.
As we go down with you into the depths,
keep us dreaming, keep us rising up. Amen.