




Let There Be Life

Commentary by [Robert Hawkins](#)

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Read by Ben Quash

This necklace threads together one hundred and seventy beads, each one made from a different fossil. The fossils span 4750 million years of the earth's history; the beads, arranged chronologically around the necklace, tell the story of life on earth. From its single-cell origins, through massive extinction events and the collision of continents, to the rise and fall of kingdoms of plants, reptiles, and mammals: aeons of life's story are excavated, smoothed, and strung together.

The fifth day of creation (Genesis 1:20–23) stresses the sheer abundance of life, its multifariousness, its complexity. The waters *swarm*; there are creatures of *every kind*. *Fossil Necklace* helps us to imagine this phenomenal proliferation extended through geological time. What Genesis renders as a sudden blossoming, the fossil record magnifies and dilates. The chronological scale is dizzying. Each bead is a capsule from a particular day in the life of

KATIE PATERSON

Fossil Necklace, 2013, 70 carved rounded fossils, strung on silk, 1473mm total length, 737mm end to end strung; Katie Paterson, *Fossil Necklace*, 2013. Photo: © Thomas Farnetti Courtesy of Wellcome Collection

“Let There Be Life” – see a beautiful necklace of beads made from fossils; listen to a fascinating commentary on the story of creation — CLICK TO ENJOY THE ABUNDANCE & COMPLEXITY OF LIFE ON EARTH.

from **The Visual Commentary on Scripture** — <https://thevcs.org/campaign/let-there-be-life>

Creation proceeds by multiplication, and by accretion, layer upon layer. Annie Dillard, in her great meditation on the complexity of nature, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, wonders at the sheer profligacy of it all, the extravagance of all these swarming things dying to make way for new things: ‘though nothing is lost, everything is spent’ (Dillard 1974: 66). Fertility and death have always been related: everything that lives stands on the shoulders of everything that has died. And



yet, nothing is ever quite lost. Things leave prints and traces; sometimes fossils of astonishing beauty. Each of Katie Paterson's beads is a swirling world in itself: lichen yellow, glowing amber, sparkling quartz. Still today, the animal, plant, and fungal kingdoms roil forward in ongoing creation. As one hymn puts it: ‘there is grace enough for thousands of new worlds as great as this.’