

**Creation Calls Us to Care!**  
**Service for an Earth Day Celebration**  
**Second Sunday of Easter**  
**April 23, 2017**  
**(Or any other Sunday of the year)**

Developed by Rev. David Huber and Kathy Bartilson, members of The Green Group, Wisconsin Conference UCC

**Theme: Environmental action as Christian service**

*“Work-ship:” Protecting and restoring the earth is doing God’s work in the world.*

*Genesis: 1:1-31 and 2:1-3; Job 38&39 (and also 40 and 41); Psalm 24:1-6; Psalm 148; Ezekiel 34:17-19; John 1:1 Romans 8: 18-25; Rev. 21:1-5*

**Call to Worship**

Leader: In the beginning, the Spirit of God moved over the waters,

**People: and God said “Unbind creation and let her out!” and God declared it to be Good.**

Leader: God said, “let there be light” and called the light “Day” and the darkness “Night.”

**People: God spoke the word to call the land from the water, pulling Green Lake down to the depths and raising Timms Hill above the waters, and in God’s eyes they were Good.**

Leader: God’s word called to life the soybean and the milking cow, the robin and the earthworm,

**People: the honey bee and the gray wolf, the microbe and the muskellunge, and God’s heart saw them to be Good.**

Leader: Then God spoke a final time, making creatures who carry the divine image: us.

**People: Forming humans by holy word, male and female together, to tend and steward all that God had made.**

Leader: And God saw that it was all Very Good.

**People: And God declared that it is all Very Good.**

Leader: On the seventh day, God rested.

**People: And on this seventh day, we come to worship and remember our role as partners in creation.**

## Opening Prayer

Great Creator and Sustainer, we love to hear the story of how you created the universe. We thank you for the beauty of our part of the earth\*, and especially for animals you have helped us bring back from the brink of extinction to fill our landscape again in recent decades: the wild turkey, bald eagle, trumpeter swan, fisher, timber wolf, peregrine falcon, and sandhill crane. As Christ arose on Easter, help us resurrect the harmony you intended for all you have made. **Amen.**

[\*note to worship planners: one could include anything specific to your city or county here, as in “our part of the earth: fishing and boating on Lake NAME, skiing the trails of NAME, the many gardens and fields that supply our cannery and fill our farmer’s market...”]

## Opening Hymn

See “*Stewardship and Creation*” hymns in the *New Century Hymnal*, numbers 556 to 569

(New Century Hymnal numbers below)

- 28 For the Beauty of the Earth
- 17 To You O God, All Creatures Sing (All Creatures of our God and King)
- 31 All Things Bright and Beautiful
- 4 Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee

## Prayer of Confession

**Our beautiful blue and green home is an awesome, awesome gift. Yet we trade clean air for the power of convenience, clean water for easy waste disposal, and wilderness for elbowroom. We marvel more at our inventions than over your creations. Share your wisdom and teach us how to protect the best, and restore the rest of your rivers and mountains, seas and prairies, wetlands and forests. Guide us in living sustainably, being satisfied that “enough” is enough of a feast, and not consuming more than we need. Guide us to repair and replace your Very Good: our habitat, climate, and food web. Send your spirit over the waters again; stir us to action, justice, and wise choices. We pray we can be a part of bringing back creation to glory and peace. Amen.**

## Words of Assurance

In Revelation, we hear of a new heaven and new earth. Every tear will be wiped away, and God will make all things new. This day, you are made new! In Jesus’ name, you are forgiven! **Amen.**

**Scripture:** possibilities include Genesis: 1:1-31 and 2:1-3; Job 38-39 (and also 40-41); Psalm 24:1-6; Psalm 148; Ezekiel 34:17-19; John 1:1 Romans 8: 18-25; Rev. 21:1-5. *See the final pages of this document for sermon and ritual suggestions on these scripture passages.*

## Sermon

## **Hymn**

- 556 God, Who Stretched the Spangled Heavens  
557 Pray for the Wilderness  
569 Touch the Earth Lightly

## **Call for Offering**

We are surrounded by Earth's gifts of beauty, diversity, and power. We are called to be stewards and caretakers of our amazing and fragile pale blue dot. Let us offer back our gifts of money, skills, and service to our ongoing shared work with our Creator.

## **Offertory Prayer**

Every part of nature is connected. Every gift we receive comes from you. Every moment of time is pregnant with new creation. We return this offering to you in wonder and gratitude. **Amen.**

## **Prayers of the People**

### **The Lord's Prayer** (Special version from the NEW ZEALAND PRAYER BOOK)

Eternal Spirit

Earth-Maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,  
source of all that is and that shall be,  
Father and Mother of us all.

Loving God, in whom is heaven.

The hallowing of your name echoes through  
the universe!

The way of your justice be followed by the peoples  
of the earth!

Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!

Your commonwealth of peace and freedom  
sustain our hope and come on earth.

With the bread we need for today, feed us.

In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.

In times of temptation and test, spare us.

From the grip of all that is evil, free us.

For you reign in the glory of the power that is love,  
now and forever.

Amen.

## **Closing hymn**

- 32 God of the Sparrow, God of the Whale  
586 Come to Tend God's Garden

## **Benediction**

Leader: May the Spirit move us to protect the Very Good that God has made.

**People: May our Creator show us the way to live more gently, and restore our home.**

Leader: Cherish all creatures of earth, sea, and sky

**People: We will work to make a healthy space for all, until our Risen Savior returns and makes all things new.**

**All: And let God again say: “It is Very Good!”**

### Suggestions:

Have a gifted storyteller in your congregation tell the Creation story, including the names of many Wisconsin plants, animals, and places.

Put a space on the worship bulletin for people (especially children) to write their favorite land animal, sea animal, tree, flower, and bird. Celebrate the Genesis 1 Creation story by calling on people randomly to say their favorite creature at appropriate places in the reading. For example: In Genesis 20 “And God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, the muskie, the manatee, the otter, and the whale! *The underlined words are where people are invited to share their favorites. It would also be fun to see if the congregation can name all the planets!*

Make clipart cutouts of sun, stars, moon, planets, animals, plants, place at random seats in the sanctuary, and invite the people that sit by them to hold them up during the call to worship.

Share stories of Wisconsin’s “Environmental Prophets” in the Message, such as John Muir, Aldo Leopold, Sigurd Olson, and Gaylord Nelson. This DNR page has information about Muir, Leopold, and Olson: <http://dnr.wi.gov/wnrmag/2015/04/celebrate.htm>. This one has information on Gaylord Nelson: <http://dnr.wi.gov/org/caer/ce/eeek/nature/gaylord.htm>.

While you are advertising for this worship on April 23 (or whenever you do it in your congregation), you may also wish to let them know of any local Marches For Science that are happening in conjunction with the ones in DC and around the world. In Wisconsin (at the time of publishing this) marches are planned for Appleton, Eau Claire, Green Bay, La Crosse, Madison, Marshfield, Milwaukee, Minocqua, Oshkosh, Rice Lake, and Stevens Point. Check the current status of marches here: <https://www.marchforscience.com/satellite-marches/?state=Wisconsin> The Eau Claire march also includes the Peoples Climate Movement, which is holding marches around the world on April 29, but Eau Claire decided to roll them into one. Other communities may be doing similar.

And of course, make sure your congregations know of whatever local Earth Day celebrations are happening on April 22 or whenever your community is officially celebrating it.

Organizations your people might be interested in checking out and joining (note: some of these do more than eco-justice): Citizens Climate Lobby; Peoples Climate Movement; Sierra Club; World Wildlife Fund; Greenpeace; Audubon Society; Citizens Action Wisconsin (with co-ops centered in Milwaukee, Eau Claire, Green Bay, and Wausau, and continuing to grow); WISDOM and local affiliates (interfaith/ecumenical social justice faith-based groups); Western Wisconsin Rail Coalition; WisARP (Wisconsin Association of Railroad Passengers); Clean Wisconsin; Alliance for the Great Lakes; wisconsinenvironment.org; Trout Unlimited; Ducks Unlimited; League of Conservation Voters; The Nature Conservancy; environmental groups on our University and Technical College campuses; and many, many more. And for us in the Wisconsin Conference, our Moon Beach Camp in St. Germain has been working for a number of years with the DNR on shore reclamation - invite someone from there to come talk to your congregation about that work (and to promote our beautiful camps, too!).

There are many other creation and stewardship songs in the Chalice Hymnal (688 – 698):

- 696 For Beauty of Meadows
- 688 When in Awe of God's Creation
- 697 Creative God, You Spread the Earth
- 690 Mountain Brook with Rushing Waters

Also Lowell Mason's "The Earth O Lord Belongs to Thee"

#### **Notes/Ideas and possible sermons or rituals for use in this worship service:**

**Genesis: 1:1-31 and 2:1-3:** The first creation story, the day by day one, with God speaking creation into existence calling it good during the process and ending with the claim that what has been made is very good. This is the basis of the Call to Worship in this liturgy. This text could become a very dramatic reading (or retelling) done by a storyteller (and made place specific by naming local landmarks, native plants and animals). A sermon could explore the relation between that which is made and One who made it; or the relation between those things that were made - earth and star, plant and human, animals and water... Another avenue in these texts is to explore the use of the Hebrew verb *bara*, a word that means "create". The Hebrew in the Bible has numerous words for the verbs creating, making, forming, etc. (such as making pottery, linen, food preparation), but the first verb in the Bible is exclusive to God: the word "bara". *Bara* is never used in the Old Testament except for God's creative acts. God "baras" heaven and earth, sea creatures and birds, and then the human male and female. For the other things made in this story, the word "asah" is used for making/creating. *Asah* is a word that can be used when humans make things. Only God can *bara*. What does it mean when we attempt to *asah* (or *un-asah*) what God has *baras*-ed? How might we help further *asah* what has God *asah*-ed and *baras*-ed? What are we deconstructing in Wisconsin, and what could we be constructing? [and please forgive our poetic anglicizing those Hebrew words]

**Job 38-41:** The liturgy writing team particularly enjoys this long rant of God responding to Job out of a whirlwind asking great questions like "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who provides for the raven its prey? Can you pull in Leviathan with a fishhook?" These are humbling chapters, reminding us of God's sovereignty and of our impotence. Our technological progress since the time of Job, however, has increased such that we are not so impotent any

more - we have great destructive potential, and have reached a point that with our machines we can move more earth every year than geologic forces move earth - and our hubris at assuming we should take on a godly role (or that by right of power, we have an ethical carte blanche to do so) would be an interesting exploration for a sermon. For those who use the Revised Common Lectionary, very little of these four chapters will have ever been used in your worship. The first eleven verses of chapter 38 shows up in Year B Proper 7, and Year B Proper 24 has the first seven verses along with an optional use of verses 34-31. Having multiple readers, stationed around the sanctuary, reading a verse at a time could be a powerful experience of being surrounded by God's words in a kind of whirlwind, coming from every direction. Parts of this could be used in a Wisconsin-specific way: "Did you set the limits of the Mississippi, of Lakes Superior and Michigan, saying 'here you may go, but no further?' Do you give prey for the bald eagle or the wolf? Do you know when the white-tailed deer or the bear give birth? Did you put the iron ore in the ground or create the driftless area?" and so on.

**Psalm 24:1-6:** While not a specifically creation-centric or creation-care Psalm, it does begin with "The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it". It then moves to "Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD? Those of a pure heart." One might explore the holiness or sacredness of the ground/earth. In the context of the Psalm, the mountain of the LORD is a holy place - and so only one with a pure heart may ascend. What if we considered all of the earth to be holy/sacred? We are quite often good at treating our own property as holy - whether the property of our churches, or of our homes, or even (in a way) our own country, while we desecrate our neighbor's property, whether it be literally the house next door, or the environmental racism of placing radioactive waste sites in or near Native-American reservations or locating landfills in areas where poor people live. Wisconsin imports garbage from Illinois, Minnesota, Michigan, and Iowa (and also exports some as well), with the sites receiving the garbage close to the borders and in generally lower-income areas. In relation to climate change, our US population that is small in comparison to the rest of the world is a significant majority polluter and creator of carbon dioxide that is affecting countries such as Syria and Pacific Island nations that are suffering from rising oceans that are making land unusable for farming because of salinization from ocean waters. We are feeling the climate change in Wisconsin with invasive species moving north as the temperature rises.

**Psalm 148:** Praise the LORD! This Psalm calls for lightning, frost, mountains, beasts, and cattle, and more to praise God. How do these inanimate objects, and non-human creatures, praise the LORD? That could be an interesting avenue to explore. Do they praise God by being who/what they are and not trying to be anything other? How does the Wisconsin River offer praise, or the Dells, or Timms Hill, or the Ice Age Trail? Cattle do not strive to be anything other than cattle: they do not try to fly, they do not store up treasures, they do not establish by-laws. How might we, as human beings who have wills, egos, and desires, praise the LORD by how we live in relation to God's creation which is also being called to offer praise? If we destroy what is around us, are we denying God the praise that is due by reducing the number of "things" that can offer praise?

**Ezekiel 34:17-19:** God chastises the people through the prophet Elijah because not only are they (symbolically, but also quite likely literally) taking the best pastures and the best water for themselves, but they are also contaminating the rest, a double whammy against the poor and their neighbors. What might Elijah have to say to us Wisconsinites today about the dead zone at the mouth of the Mississippi, or chemicals that leech into groundwater from mining in the northern part of our state, or the damage of fracking?

sand mining and CAFOs (Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations), or the oil pipeline being forced through Standing Rock's sacred spaces? To continue the passage, in Ez 34:22 God says "Therefore I will rescue my flock". Who is God's flock today?

**John 1:5:** The opening of John's Gospel offers the image of the eternal Christ who is the Word (the Logos) of God, through whom all things were created and in whom is life, and the life is the light for humanity. What is life? If life comes through the Word, then what ought our relationship to anything that has life look like? What is our moral and ethical call to other forms of life? If life is light for us, in what form is the light of God shining at us through the robin, the holstein, the muskie, or the deer?

**Romans 8:18-25:** Paul writes that all creation waits eagerly for the fulfillment of God's plans, which will include creation being set free from decay. For the daring and intrepid preacher, there is potential here for an exciting and fascinating exploration of the Second Law of Thermodynamics versus the idea of things being set free from decay (and the words in the Revelation passage about all things being made new). For other preachers, this passage, like some of the others before, includes a sense that there is a life-force beyond humanity: all creation is waiting eagerly. How do our actions help or hinder this idea of (an almost) sentient creation that is able to wait eagerly? Sure Paul is speaking metaphorically here, so let us not extend it too far (or, heck, take a risk and extend that metaphor until it snaps and see what happens!), but Paul does imply a communal relationship among all things in creation: we are all - janitors and white tail deer, maple trees and Lake Winnebago, corn and lightning (such as the Psalm above stated) - eagerly waiting for God's realm to come to fruition. Are we in it together? How could we better be in it together? Should we be in it together?

**Rev. 21:1-5:** John's vision of the New Jerusalem, where God and people will live together. But this is not "heaven" as a disembodied spiritual place that is away from earth; the New Jerusalem will be on this earth. It is an incarnational, earthly existence. Contextually, John is writing this to fellow Christians in the early second century who are being persecuted, arrested, even executed by the Roman Empire. John is offering hopeful words that the current condition is not in accordance with God's vision for how things ought to be, and that all will be made right. "God will wipe away every tear...there shall be no crying or mourning or pain." Where is the crying, mourning, and pain of today? If all creation can eagerly wait (as the Roman passage says), can it also cry or feel pain? What is it crying about? Do we (as humans in general or as followers of Jesus specifically) have tears we ought to shed, cries we ought to let out, and grief to bear? What might John write, as a challenge and as a hope, to 21st century Wisconsin Christians? To Wisconsin citizens? To our political, corporate, and religious leaders? Or if not the John who wrote Revelation, what might John Muir, Aldo Leopold, Sigurd Olson, and Gaylord Nelson say to us? How can you preach a message of "Hey, it's all going to work out in the end" without abdicating our responsibility today?

Another prayer suggestion, or possible bulletin cover:

A Sioux Prayer  
from Chief Yellow Lark (1887)

Oh, Great Spirit, whose voice I hear in the winds,

Whose breath gives life to the world, hear me.  
I come to you as one of your many children.  
I am small and weak.  
I need your strength and wisdom.  
May I walk in beauty.  
Make my eyes ever behold the red and purple sunset.  
Make my hands respect the things you have made,  
and my ears sharp to your voice.  
Make me wise, so that I may know the things you have taught your children,  
The lessons you have written in every leaf and rock.  
Make me strong,  
Not to be superior to my brothers,  
but to fight my greatest enemy: myself.  
Make me ever ready to come to you with straight eyes,  
So that when life fades as the fading sunset,  
May my spirit come to you without shame.

In the papal letter, named *Laudato Si'* or "Praise Be to You," the pope includes two prayers — one for believers of all kinds and one specifically for Christians. You may want to include one or both in your service.

Here are the texts of those prayers:

### **A prayer for our earth**

All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures.

You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.

Pour out upon us the power of your love,  
that we may protect life and beauty.

Fill us with peace, that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

O God of the poor,  
help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth, so precious in your eyes.

Bring healing to our lives,

that we may protect the world and not prey on it,

that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction. Touch the hearts  
of those who look only for gain at the expense of the poor and the earth.

Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,

to be filled with awe and contemplation,

to recognize that we are profoundly united with every creature  
as we journey towards your infinite light.

We thank you for being with us each day.

Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle for justice, love and peace.



### **A Christian prayer in union with creation**

Father, we praise you with all your creatures.  
They came forth from your all-powerful hand;  
they are yours, filled with your presence and your tender love. Praise be to you!  
Son of God, Jesus,  
through you all things were made.  
You were formed in the womb of Mary our Mother, you became part of this earth,  
and you gazed upon this world with human eyes.  
Today you are alive in every creature in your risen glory.  
Praise be to you!

Holy Spirit, by your light you guide this world towards the Father's love  
and accompany creation as it groans in travail.  
You also dwell in our hearts and you inspire us to do what is good.  
Praise be to you!

Triune Lord, wondrous community of infinite love, teach us to contemplate you  
in the beauty of the universe, for all things speak of you.  
Awaken our praise and thankfulness for every being that you have made.  
Give us the grace to feel profoundly joined to everything that is.  
God of love, show us our place in this world as channels of your love  
for all the creatures of this earth, for not one of them is forgotten in your sight.  
Enlighten those who possess power and money that they may avoid the sin of  
indifference, that they may love the common good, advance the weak, and care for this  
world in which we live.

The poor and the earth are crying out.  
O Lord, seize us with your power and light, help us to protect all life,  
to prepare for a better future, for the coming of your Kingdom  
of justice, peace, love and beauty.  
Praise be to you!  
Amen.