

Service for Arbor Day or Earth Day

Fourth or Fifth Sunday of Easter

April 22 or 29, 2018

From the Wisconsin UCC Creation Care Team

Theme: The Gift of Trees

The ways the scriptures honor trees, and why we should too.

Scriptures: Genesis 2:8-17; Daniel 4:10-12; Psalm 1; Isaiah 55:12-13; Luke 13:18-21; Revelation 22:1-5

Call to Worship I (*Based on Genesis 2:8-9*)

Leader: God planted a garden in Eden, in the east.

People: And out of the ground, God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to see, and good for food.

Leader: We thank you, O God, for maples that bring forth sweet sap in spring, leaves for shade in summer, glorious color in autumn, and whose bare limbs remind us to continue to reach for the heavens even in the frigid dark of winter.

People: We thank you for all the species of trees you created, and for all they share with us: for our evergreens, oaks, ash, willow, and aspen.

Leader: We give thanks for birch trees, whose bark can leap into flame, and conjure a life-saving campfire even in the cold and rain. We thank you for fruit trees, evergreens and oaks.

People: We praise you that the flowers of trees give the bees pollen and the bears nuts and berries. We thank you that roots and fallen leaves hold and sustain the soil and protect our watersheds.

Leader: As trees use sunlight and water to make their own food, they also send oxygen to the air; they are the lungs of our planet, a breath of hope in this time of global crisis.

People: As Creation is graced and sustained by trees, may our faith be strong like them and bear good fruit.

Or -

Call to Worship II

Based on Jeremiah 17:7-8

Leader: Blessed are we when we trust in God.

People: When we trust in God, we are like trees planted by water.

Leader: The trees send out roots by the stream.

People: They do not fear when heat comes, and their leaves remain green.

Leader: They do not fear the drought for they will still bear fruit.

People: Like trees, may our spiritual roots grow near the stream of Life, drawing living water so we too may thrive and bear fruit. Thanks be to God.

Or

Call to Worship III

Based on (in order): Psalm 96:12; Psalm 148:9; Job 14:7; 1 Chronicles 16:33

Leader: Let all the trees of the forest sing for joy!

People: Fruit trees and all cedars praise the Lord!

Leader: For there is hope for a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that its shoots will not cease.

People: Let the trees of the forest sing for joy before God!

Opening Prayer

Creator of the forests and plains, deserts and shores, You made special trees for every place and season. The Wise Men brought the Baby Jesus frankincense and myrrh, harvested from trees. Jesus was a woodworker, who rose again after death on a wooden cross. The Psalmist calls on the fruit trees and cedars to praise you. Thank you for the gift of trees and for all they provide and supply to your creatures and our ever-cycling web of life. Help us learn to be “oaks of righteousness,” tall and strong in the wind and storms. Guide us to make sound choices in protection of all your gifts of creation, and especially your masterpieces - the trees. **Amen**

Opening Hymn

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

(New Century Hymnal numbers below)

- 12 I Sing the Mighty Power of God
- 28 For the Beauty of the Earth
- 31 All Things Bright and Beautiful
- 39 Cantemos al Creador (Creator God We Sing)
 - This is Our Creator’s World (This is my Father’s World)
 - God Who Touches Earth With Beauty

Prayer of Confession (*unison*)

Holy Creator and Sustainer, forgive our attitude that all earth’s features and creatures are here solely for our use or even our exploitation. Their value should not be measured in human utility, but in their own existence and connection to all other species and planetary processes. Nurture our appreciation for the lives of our woodland kin. Help us learn to be like them – they need no pay or motivation to grow, sow seed, and give food, solace, and shelter to all who come to them. Teach us to live in harmony with the awesome and marvelous home you have given us. Through Jesus Christ, your Risen Son, Amen.

Words of Assurance

God’s love and power are eternal and perennial. Just as the maple leaves come down in colorful splendor each fall, and pussy willows burst into new green leaves each spring, so God’s promise of love, support, and forgiveness revolves in each season of our lives. **Amen.**

Scriptures: Genesis 2:8-17; Daniel 4:10-12; Psalm 1; Isaiah 55:12-13; Luke 13:18-21; Revelation 22:1-5

Children’s Time –

- Share insights from any of the Children’s books listed below, or the Legend of the Dogwood (<http://www.appleseeds.org/dogwood.htm>)
- Another object lesson would be to give each child a pussy willow (if available locally where it’s legal to prune a few). If kept in water from the time they are cut, they will turn into new green leaves, much like a moth emerging from a cocoon.
- Have the children see how many kinds of trees they can name.
- Ask the children if planting a tree in Wisconsin can help the polar bears. Ask them where the polar bears live and how far that is from Wisconsin. Planting trees here will help all God’s creatures by helping take excess carbon out of the atmosphere; it can even help the polar bears.

Sermon – *(see resources and suggestions below)*

Hymn

- 32 God of the Sparrow, God of the Whale
- 556 God Who Stretched the Spangled Heavens
- 557 Pray for the Wilderness
- 569 Touch the Earth Lightly
- For Beauty of Meadows

Call for Offering

As we are showered with gifts from trees, berry bushes and forest, let us gather together our offerings in joy and thankfulness.

Offertory Prayer

As a small seed grows into a bountiful apple tree, so let our gifts - small and large - gathered together - become an orchard in service to You and to the world. Amen.

Prayers of the People

A Prayer for the Care of Creation

O God, the only source of life and energy and wealth, defend our planet earth.

Teach us to conserve and not to squander the riches of nature, to use aright the heritage of former generations, and to plan for the welfare of our children's children. Renew our wonder, awaken our concern, and make us better stewards and more careful tenants of the world you lend us as our home. Hear us, O God, our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, in the name of Jesus the Christ who opened our eyes to the simplicity, grandeur and wonder of your whole creation. Amen.

From Voices United

The Lord's Prayer

Closing Hymn

- 433 In the Bulb There is a Flower
- 425 For the Fruit of All Creation
- 586 Come to Tend God's Garden

- Mountain Brook With Rushing Water
- I/We Shall Not be Moved
- God Sculptor of the Mountains <http://www.stmargaretschurch.org/connect/news/god-the-sculptor-of-the-mountains.html>
- You Shall go out in Joy <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=unWnWSgoSt0>

Benediction – Isaiah 55:12-13

Leader: For you shall go out in joy,

People: and be led forth in peace;

Leader: the mountains and the hills before you

People: shall break forth into singing,

All: and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.

Resources:

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
- 59 This is Our Creator’s World (This is my Father’s World)
- 514 God Who Touches Earth With Beauty
- 615 I/We Shall Not be Moved

For those with access to The United Church of Canada’s hymnal Voices United there are some wonderful creation-focused hymns under the section Creation and Providence (291-311) especially:

- 296 A more inclusive version of This Is My Father’s World - This Is God’s Wondrous World
- 297 All Praise to You (Stewards of Earth) set to Finlandia is especially moving

There’s an excellent Order of Service on-line, including a tree planting ceremony as an “Act of Commitment:”

<http://atyourservice.arocha.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/The-Life-of-Trees-Service-Order.pdf>

Background on the many scriptural references to trees:

<https://discoveryseries.org/courses/celebrating-the-wonder-of-a-tree/lessons/trees-and-worship/>

Some key points from this source:

- “The Bible itself contains more references to trees than to any other living thing except people.”

- “We find some 550 references to trees, or wood, in the Bible. At least 26 different kinds of trees are specifically mentioned.”

A list of trees mentioned in the Bible, along with people, places, and events associated with trees can be found at <https://christiananswers.net/dictionary/trees.html>

The Arbor Day Foundation has a good reference, especially on the many uses of forest products and the functions of trees in the ecosystem: <https://www.arborday.org/trees/index-benefits.cfm>

Aldo Leopold’s conservation classic [A Sand County Almanac](#) has a wonderful description of national and natural history, as observed in the rings when cutting an old oak. The account is called “Good Oak” in the February chapter.

[The Man Who Planted Trees](#) by Jean Giono, published in 1953. This story was made into a gorgeous animated short by Frédéric Back with Christopher Plummer narrating in 1987. It won an Oscar for best animated short that year. It is on youtube (probably illegally, but who knows), here: <https://youtu.be/KTvYh8ar3tc>

[The Tale of Three Trees](#) is a traditional children’s folktale with several retold versions.

[The Lorax](#) – Doctor Suess’s version of a call for environmental action

The Legend of the Dogwood – <http://www.appleseeds.org/dogwood.htm>

[The Giving Tree](#) by Shel Silverstein

[The Things Trees Know](#) by Douglas Wood, a delightful little book by the author of [Old Turtle](#)

[The Hidden Life of Trees](#) by Peter Wohlleben explains amazing new theories on how trees actually feel and communicate.

Joyce Kilmer’s classic poem: “I think that I shall Never see, a Poem as Lovely as a Tree”

[Bringing Nature Home](#) by Douglas W. Tallamy and Rick Darke is an excellent reference on the importance of native plantings to sustain the food web and protect sensitive species.

Remarkable Trees of the World and Meetings with Remarkable Trees by Thomas Pakenham are excellent large-format books with photos of some of the oldest and largest trees on the planet.

In the Lord of the Rings, J. R. R. Tolkien gave us the Ents, the shepherds of the trees who look like trees themselves (they are not trees, but they are very tree-ish). Many of them, particularly Treebeard, are among the oldest beings of Middle Earth, and Gandalf points out that Treebeard is indeed the oldest living being, thousands of years older even than Gandalf and the elves. They are quite powerful when roused. Tolkien was very much a fan of trees. There is also in folklore from all around the world many stories of talking and sentient trees. The variety of trees (beyond the ents) and their functions that Tolkien created for his epic would make an interesting sermon in itself. An article here is a good start for the trees of middle-earth: <https://goo.gl/U2YNQ9>

Suggestions:

Share information on Wisconsin's "Champion Trees" in the Message. These can be found at <https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/UrbanForests/champion/>

Share the background and origin of Arbor Day, and make people aware of any local celebrations coming up (or already held). <https://www.arborday.org/> The Arbor Day website has helpful pages related to all things trees. Especially noteworthy is the section on Membership. For \$10 you receive a 6 month membership to the Foundation along with 10 free saplings suitable to your growing zone or you can elect to have the 10 trees planted in a rainforest or a national park. For \$15 you get the same offer and a one-year membership.

For a visual meditative piece on the healing power of connecting/reconnecting with nature, particularly forests go to www.healingforest.org and open "How Forests Heal People."

Healing Forest is a journey to **discover the magical healing powers of nature**. To find ways to reconnect people with nature. Join us in this exploration of fascinating forests and inspiring stories of healing from nature. Our aim is simple. Helping people heal. Helping Forests heal.

Forests are known to have great healing properties. As humans, we have evolved in nature. It's where we feel most comfortable. It has been scientifically proven that when we spend time in nature, our brain behaves differently. It affects how we feel and think, which has a direct impact on our immunity and healing powers.

Things to do:

Plant trees! If you don't have a space, the Arbor Day Foundation will plant them in National Parks (see above).

Plant trees for the polar bears! [Polar Bears International](#) has many ways to help fight climate change! This organization is dedicated to saving the polar bears, their habitat, and sea ice. Here's their message of hope: *“It isn't too late. Act now to effect change. Taking action now won't result in an immediate stop to climate change, but new studies show that we could see the effects in about a decade. Your actions today will help prevent potentially catastrophic changes from taking place—not only helping polar bears, but preserving the climate that allow us to flourish.”* **Tree planting anywhere in the world can help the bears; trees help remove excessive carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, resulting in less global warming and better sea ice conditions for polar bears.**

Go Solar! Leaves are the original “solar collectors,” turning sunlight into sugar. Make like a tree and install solar collectors to produce electricity or heat. [Renew Wisconsin](#) has grant programs for solar installations at non-profit facilities, including churches. Based on a survey our Creation Care Team sent out last year, several of the congregations that responded have installed solar panels on their church grounds.

Attend the Solar Panel workshop at our Annual Conference in June!

Stay informed and engaged on Climate issues. Attune your lifestyle, purchases, and voting to promote tree and climate-friendly practices.

Two hidden word puzzles about trees are included with the service if you want to print them and share them with your congregation.