

Healing our Earthly Home



*A Worship Service Order for the
50th Anniversary of Earth Day*

March, 2020

Healing our Earthly Home

Outline:

An Offering of Worship

(Centering for Worship/Prelude, options for Call to Worship, Opening Hymn, and Opening Prayer)

A Time to Confess

(Options for Prayers of Confession and Assurance of Pardon)

A Time to Listen

(Children's Time, Scripture Readings, Message, Hymn suggestions, Prayers of the People and the Lord's Prayer)

A Time for Receiving the Gifts of the Earth

(Call for Offering, Offertory Hymn, Presenting our Gifts, and Offertory Prayer)

A Time to Act in Hope for Healing Our Earthly Home

(Suggested Opening Words, Invitation, Blessing and Commitment Ceremony, Closing Hymn, and Benediction)

Other Resources

(Choir Anthem, Hymn and Sermon Suggestions; Children's Time ideas; Links to Other Resources and Illustrations)

This service was compiled and written by the Wisconsin Conference Creation Care Team of the United Church of Christ. Illustrations are from students from Dodgeville and Mineral Point School Districts. These paintings are featured in Chuck Tennessen's book, "Because We're All Forever Earthbound."

This service is recommended for use on April 19, 2020, the Sunday immediately before the 50th Anniversary of Earth Day (April 22, 2020), but can be used anytime. It will also be used for the Service at the annual meeting of the Wisconsin Conference in June 2020.

Illustration at right by Annabel Bradley



Healing our Earthly Home

Service for Earth Day or Creation Celebration

Scripture basis: Romans 8:15-25; and Job 12:7-9

An Offering of Worship

Centering for Worship/Prelude (suggestion: an arrangement of “For the Beauty of the Earth”)

(Consider distributing blue or green marbles to each person now or at some point in the service, and sharing one of the paragraphs below as the prelude is played in the background).

“The third planet from the sun looks like a brilliant, blue ball floating in space. An orb blessed with life and beauty, whirling in the cosmos. We offer you this blue marble as a symbol of the loveliness and yet the fragility of our home, the Earth. Think about what you love best on earth as you hold this gift.”

OR, (without marbles):

“Imagine looking at our earthly home from space. Imagine God has placed it in your hands to care for. Picture/think of one thing you especially love about God’s beloved Creation.”

Call to Worship I:

We walk in wonder beneath the sun and stars

Creation is God’s masterpiece and we are blessed to share it.

We give thanks for the air, the land, and the water

and for all the creatures joined together in the web of life

Beauty is before us, around us, over us and beneath us

We join our hearts, minds, and spirits as one in thanks and awe.

Or, Call to Worship II: Psalm 24 & 148 Earth-rise & God’s Profligate Generosity” in Everyday Psalms by James Taylor

One: When astronauts first showed us our planet from the moon, they changed our perspective and our theology forever.

Psalm 24:1 – 3

Earth-rise

Turning and turning, our pale blue globe burns bright in the black spaces of eternity.

The Earth is the Lord’s, and all that is in it – all life embodied in the only home we know.

God created life in the oceans, and continues to nourish it with nutrients from the mountains.

Trace the course of a river to its source; stand among the mountains and marvel.

Who would dare defile this paradise?

Psalm 148

God’s Profligate Generosity

Jubilation, exaltation, celebration, one and all!

Within the womb of the heavens, the Earth leaps to praise its Creator.

As the pearl necklace of planets swing around the sun, as the shining oceans embrace the continents, so do all living things praise the Giver of Life.

For God expressed a thought, and the thought took life.

God wanted to speak, and the Word became flesh and lived among us.

In that Word was holiness, the spirit that makes every life more than the sum of its chemicals.

From the tiniest plankton in the sea to the great whales, from the ants that burrow in the dust to the eagle that soars in the heavens – all owe their existence to God.

Fire and hail, snow and frost, sun and drought, wind and rain – in God, all things work together for good.

Mighty mountains compost into rich soil;

fruit trees and maples aerate the atmosphere.

The dung beetle depends on the waste of cattle;

Birds and wind currents carry seeds to new orchards.

Not one part is cut off from God's energy;

Everything has been equally created to live interdependently.

God scatters new life even among weeds and thistles;

And all Creation responds with rejoicing.

From Everyday Psalms by James Taylor Copyright © 2005, Wood Lake Books

Or, Call to Worship III:

Psalm 8

Awe and Wonder

My God, my God,

How wonderful you are!

There is nothing like you in the whole earth.

I look up to the skies, and I see you there;

Babies and infants open their mouths,

And I hear them cry your name.

Compared to you, our weapons, our bombs,

our power to destroy,

dwindle into insignificance.

On a starry night, with your glory splashed across the skies,

I gaze into your infinite universe, and I wonder:

Who am I?

Why do I matter?

Why do you care about mere mortals?

We humans are less than specks of dust in your universe.

We have existed less than a second in the great clock of creation.

Yet you choose us as your partners.

You share the secrets of the universe with us;

You give us a special place in your household;

You trust us to look after the earth, on your behalf –

not just the sheep and oxen,

but also the wolves that prey on our domestic animals;

the birds, the plants, and even creatures we have never seen

in the depths of the sea.

My God, my God!! How amazing you are!

From Everyday Psalms by James Taylor Copyright © 2005, Wood Lake Books

Opening Hymn *(see also hymn suggestions at the end of the service order)*

“When in Awe of God’s Creation” Chalice Hymnal #688

Or

“This Is God’s Wondrous World” (This Is My Father’s World) Chalice Hymnal #59

“For the Beauty of the Earth” New Century Hymnal #28

Opening Prayer

Gracious Creator, we ask for your grace and wisdom to face difficult challenges ahead. Our actions have led us to a time when we need to rethink our living to protect and restore our earthly home. Open our minds and hearts to what you will teach us. Help us to act in wisdom and fairness in stewardship of our Earthly home. Through our Risen Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.



By Morgan Fuerstenberg

A Time to Confess

Prayer of Confession I

Asking forgiveness from God for *pretending to be God*:

Scripture says “The earth is the LORD’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it.” Yet we pretend that the earth is ours, God; and by pretending that the earth is ours, we are pretending that we are you. Forgive us our hubris and our lack of faith at thinking that we are you. Not only are we not you, we aren’t as good as you. You would compassionately tend this earth, keeping it pristine for the sake of the life of all of your creatures, and for the sake of future generations. We prefer to assume it is ours to do with as we please. Mountains that took millions of years to form, we tear down in months to extract the coal. We have hunted animals to extinction and destroyed habitats to the near-destruction of other species. Through using the land, water, and air as our dumping ground, we have changed the climate, threatening millions of species, including our human neighbors here and around the world. Humble us, Holy One, to stop thinking we are you, and to stop acting as though what you have made is actually ours. Help us to live gently within your creation. Help us to be good stewards who take care of your creation as tenderly as you take care of us. Let us never forget who is the Creator and who is the created. In Jesus’ name we pray. **Amen.**

OR, Prayer of Confession II

Asking forgiveness *from creation*:

Creator God, you formed us of the dust of a precious blue marble floating through unfathomable space. We are made from the dust of this holy orb, and to its dust we shall return. Yet we act like we are not of its dust, but are somehow outside of and above this planet we are so deeply connected to. Forgive us, Earth, for forgetting who we are. Forgive us our abuses of the prairie grass and the tree, the dodo and the O’ahu ‘akialoa* [*or insert whatever animals are no longer here because of human-caused extinction***], the squashberry, the phlox moth, and the passenger pigeon [*or use some Wisconsin specific animals, fish, flora****], the whale and the wolf. Forgive us for clear-cutting your forests, for tearing down your mountains, for polluting you to extract fossil fuels and precious metals. Forgive us for dumping our waste into your waters and for changing your climate for our convenience. Teach us respect, merciful one, until we learn to live gently with creation, to stop demanding from it what we want, but to accept only what it offers, and do so with deep gratitude for your abundance of life and your stewardship of us. **Amen.**

* O’ahu ‘akialoa is an extinct bird also called the Hawaiian Honeycreeper

** A list of human-caused extinction is available here:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Species_made_extinct_by_human_activities

*** A list of Wisconsin’s endangered and threatened species is available here:

<https://dnr.wi.gov/files/PDF/pubs/er/ER001.pdf>

OR, Prayer of Confession III

Asking forgiveness from God *for abusing holy creation*:

Creator God, you formed us of the dust of a precious blue marble floating through unfathomable space, and placed us upon it to be its stewards and caretakers. We have failed in this sacred mission. We have taken what is yours and treated it like it is ours to use, misuse, overuse, and abuse. For our own convenience, we have allowed species to go extinct. For our own warped desires, we have allowed our neighbors to die or get sick from our pollution, from climate change, and from keeping them in poverty while we extract the precious metals of their lands. And we have hurt ourselves through mismanagement of the land and by the anxiety that our greed and need for more, more, more creates in us. Forgive us for defiling your holy creation of earth: land, sea, and air, and all the animals, insects, birds, and flora upon and within them. Forgive us for defiling ourselves with greed and apathy, and with the pollution and toxins that we create. Teach us humility. Teach us to live so that we are not lying when we pray that we'll be satisfied if you "give us our daily bread." Give us your Spirit of hope and humility to love what you have *made* as much as we say that we love *you*. Let us know awe as we did as children, to respect the awesomeness of what you have made for us. **In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**

Assurance of Pardon

The Good News that Jesus brought to us is that our God is a God of love, mercy, and grace. Nothing we do can separate us from divine love. Through God's relentless dedication to us and to all creation, you are forgiven!

A Time to Listen

Children's Time – (*See suggestions below*)

Scripture Reading: Romans 8:18-25; Job 12:7-9

Message – "**Healing Our Earthly Home** (*see Sermon and Service Ideas below*)

Hymn suggestion "**The Earth and All Who Breathe**" (TERRA BEATA) **Voices United #295**
(*between Scripture and Sermon or after Sermon – at the discretion of the worship leader*)

Prayers of the People/Pastoral Prayer and The Lord's Prayer

A Time for Receiving the Gifts of the Earth

Call for Offering

Before we are asked to give anything, we must first acknowledge that we are first and foremost receivers. This is especially true as we ponder God's good and marvelous Creation. God invites us to claim our birthright and adoption as God's partners in healing our Earthly home.

Offertory Hymn

"**We Cannot Own the Sunlit Sky**" **New Century Hymnal #563**

Presenting Our Gifts

“We Are Not Our Own” (verses 1-4) New Century Hymnal #564

Offertory Prayer (*unison*)

With grateful hearts for all we have received, we offer these gifts, O God, to give tangible expression to our desire to join you in expressing our three great loves – love of children, love of neighbor, love of creation. We offer them and ask you to bless them with the Spirit of Christ who showed us how to care as you care. Amen.

A Time to Act in Hope for Healing Our Earthly Home

Suggested Opening Words - (*Worship Leaders may want to recruit readers for a variety of voices if these quotes are read during the service; they would also be good food for thought in newsletters or bulletins*).

“In hope we are saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience”...and perseverance.” (Romans 8:24-25)

“Hope has never trickled down. It has always bubbled up.” Studs Terkel

“Because we care for and love the earth, we can’t but cry out in lament and despair for the earth. Because we care for our families, our children, and children everywhere, we can’t help but despair over the state of the earth and the future of the world we are passing on to them. Unless that kind of grief and lament and anger is put to speech, it can never become energy. Laments are all an expression of grief, but they are also an expression of hope. Hope is an insistence that things cannot remain this way and they must be changed.”
Walter Brueggemann

“Hope means another world might be possible, not promised, not guaranteed. Hope calls for action; action is impossible without hope. To hope is to give yourself to the future, and that commitment to the future makes the present inhabitable. Anything could happen, and whether we act or not has everything to do with it.”
Rebecca Solnit

“Our task is to embrace our generation’s challenge at this moment. God’s helping presence is everywhere, and at every turning point. The gifts of the Creator’s Spirit empower us to accomplish more than we could ask or imagine. As urgent as our crisis is, God offers us the courage we need to address the greatest moral challenge humanity has ever faced. When we work together, with the Creator’s sustaining and creative power, there is hope. *We can do this.*” Jim Antal

Invitation

One: People from every corner of creation, people of every land and in every place, all people, all humanity, let us join with the earth and let us join with each other in this sacred circle of life. Let us join together and awaken to our peril. Our home is in danger; our lives are in jeopardy, and our children are afraid.
From denuded forests to depleted fisheries, from polluted rivers to contaminated air, let us finally awaken and attend to the groaning cries of our planet.
Let us awaken – older generations and younger generations, humans of every shape and size, so that the future of the web of life on our planet can be protected and healed.

Let us awaken and listen to each other and to our earth; let us pray with each other, act alongside each other, and turn our hearts and minds and bodies and souls to each other so that our precious earth can be sustained for future generations.

Blessing and Commitment Ceremony

(If you are distributing marbles as a tangible symbol and have not distributed them yet, do so now)

One: Each of you holds in your hand a reminder of the blessed Earth given and entrusted to our care. Now is the time for each of us to decide what we will do with this precious gift. In a moment of silence listen for how you are being called to commit yourself to contribute to Earth's healing. What is one behavior you could change and/or action you could take to begin the healing journey? As you hold the Earth in your hand, offer a prayer of blessing for the healing of our Earthly home. Then offer an intention of what you will carry forward from this time of worship to act in hope for a better tomorrow for the Earth and all who are sustained by it. After a time of silence you are invited to share with a neighbor the blessing you have offered and what intention to act in hope you have committed to.

One: Now let us join together in a covenant of healing:

All: Today we join in a renewal of our covenant with God and with one another. Standing together as followers of Jesus, we commit ourselves to the healing and protection of God's creation. We commit to stand against all threats to life, and to resist all powers that would destroy it.

We commit to the discovery of some new beauty every day in God's creation: the sunrise and the sunset, the birds, flowers, trees, rainbows, stars, and the many forms of life that inhabit the earth.

We commit to listen to the animals as they try to teach us, the birds as they try to tell us, the plants of the earth and the fish of the sea as they declare to us their message of hope and healing for the world.

We will remember always that God speaks to us through the beauty of God's good creation, and we will try our best to answer God's call to revere all that God has created.

May we, together with people everywhere, awaken and begin to co-create the foundation of a new world so that the future of all life on our planet and the future of human lifeways can be protected and healed.

Closing Hymn

Creator God, You Made the Earth

ST. COLUMBA 8.7.8.7 ("The King of Love My Shepherd Is")

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Creator God, you made the earth,
A gift beyond comparing!
You called it good, you gave it worth,
You placed it in our caring.

You gave your gift of Sabbath rest,
Your pattern for creation.
You give us times to heal, to bless,
To join in celebration

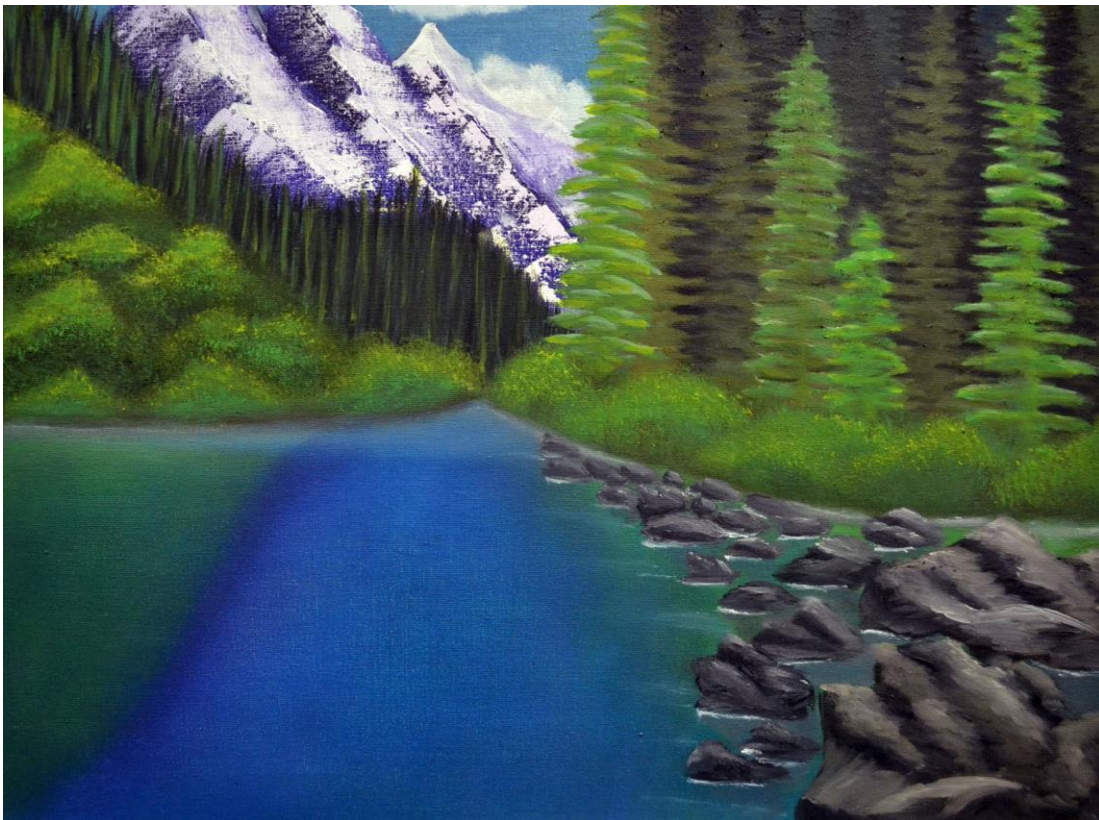
You give us Christ, who reconciled
The things of earth and heaven.
In him, you call each one your child!
What wondrous love you've given!
Because we've turned away from you,
Your world still needs your healing.
Creation longs to be made new
Through Christ, your love revealing.

God, by your Spirit, may we be
Communities of caring,
That as we're healed, your world may see
The hope that we are sharing.

Benediction

One: Christ calls us to be his disciples, to serve him with love and compassion, to serve Earth and the peoples of Earth. Will you care for creation?

All: **With Christ, we will celebrate and revere all life! With Christ, we will care for creation! With Christ, we will help heal our Earthly home!**



By Makayla Parkin

Other Resources

Choir Anthem Suggestions:

These songs written or arranged by Marty Haugen:

“All You Works of God”

“One Ohana”

“No One Can Own the Wind”

Choral settings of “Simple Gifts” (*Voices United* 353)

Hymn Suggestions:

See “*Stewardship and Creation*” hymns in the *New Century Hymnal*, numbers 556 to 569; there are many other creation and stewardship songs in the *Chalice Hymnal* (pages 688 – 698).

Also: (*New Century Hymnal* numbers at left)

- 3 Many and Great, O God are your Works - Chalice 58
- 4 Joyful, Joyful We Adore You - Chalice 2
- 12 I Sing the Mighty Power of God - Chalice 64
- 17 All Creatures of our God and King - Chalice 22
- 28 For the Beauty of the Earth - Chalice 56
- 31 All Things Bright and Beautiful - Chalice 61
- 32 God of the Sparrow, God of the Whale - Chalice 70
- 39 Cantemos al Creador (Creator God We Sing) - Chalice 60
- 425 For the Fruit of All Creation - Chalice 714
- 433 In the Bulb There is a Flower - Chalice 638
- 462 Creating God Your Fingers Trace - Chalice 335
- 556 God Who Stretched the Spangled Heavens - Chalice 651
- 557 Pray for the Wilderness
- 569 Touch the Earth Lightly - Chalice 693
- 586 Come to Tend God’s Garden
- 591 This is my Song – Chalice 722
- The Sun is on the Sea and Shore – Chalice 3
- This is Our Creator’s World (This is my Father’s World) - Chalice 59
- God Who Touches Earth With Beauty - Chalice 514
- I Shall Not be Moved - Chalice 615
- Restless Weaver - Chalice 658
- When in Awe of God’s Creation - Chalice 688
- Mountain Brook with Rushing Water - Chalice 690 (also works to the tune of Hymn to Joy or Hyfrydol)
- For Beauty of Meadows – Chalice 696
- Creative God You Spread the Earth – Chalice 697

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

Also Chester A Custer’s “The Earth O Lord Belongs to Thee,” <https://www.hopepublishing.com/find-hymns-hw/hw3888.aspx>

Sermon Suggestion:

Rev. John Helt, co-Chair of the Wisconsin Conference Creation Care Team, wrote a special sermon on Creation Care and the call to heal the earth. It is available for churches to use with this service.

[Link to Word version](#)

[Link to PDF version](#)

Children's Time ideas:

- *Creation Justice Ministries* www.creationjustice.org has a 2020 "Fierce Urgency of Now" service order including a children's service, focusing on planting trees as a symbol of hope (<http://www.creationjustice.org/earth-day-sunday.html>).
- What tools do we use to face difficult times for planet Earth – faith, hope, and love...
- What can children do to help our planet – ask the kids what they do at home, school, and what their church is doing. Share a brief bio of Greta Thunberg and how she is trying to make the world aware of the work we need to do in the next decade to save the Earth.
- Two excellent children's books are: *Does God Have a Big Toe: Stories About Stories in the Bible – "Partners"* pp. 1-3 (by Marc Gellman, HarperCollins Publishers c. 1989) OR *When God Made the World* (by Matthew Pail Turner, Convergent Books c. 2020)
- Share a story from Chuck Tennesen's book, "Because We're All Forever Earthbound."

Things to do:

- There are many, many sources on the internet under the heading of "things you can do to help the planet." There are many suggestions for easy changes in our household activities, our buying, driving, etc. Political and social will to enact change is also needed – be sure your elected representatives know the actions you would like taken to respond. Here is one of those websites: 52 things to do for the earth – (use one per week in each bulletin) <http://www.creationjustice.org/blog/52-ways-to-care-for-creation>
- Follow a "Kairos Call To Action" on the UCC website: https://www.ucc.org/a_kairos_call_to_action

Links to Other Resources:

This year's Creation Justice Ministry Earth Day Liturgy resource "The Fierce Urgency of Now" has more information at this link <http://www.creationjustice.org/earth-day-sunday.html>

This [Earth Facts link](https://nineplanets.org/earth/) provides lots of amazing information about our planet: <https://nineplanets.org/earth/>

The Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address "Greetings to the Natural World" is very inspiring and could be used as part of this service, or other Creation Care or Earth Day observance or meal. This Thanksgiving address was (and is) used by the six nations of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) to open and close major gatherings or meetings. The prayer was also sometimes used individually at the beginning or end of the day. It is available at this link: https://americanindian.si.edu/environment/pdf/01_02_Thanksgiving_Address.pdf

Blue or green marbles to distribute can be purchased at low cost from discount stores. More expensive marbles (around \$2 each) can be purchased on line through Amazon or at this link: [Earth marbles](#)

When distributing marbles, it may be meaningful to read an excerpt from **Carl Sagan's book "Pale Blue Dot"** that he wrote in response to the image of earth taken from Saturn. Here is a link:

<https://www.planetary.org/explore/space-topics/earth/pale-blue-dot.html>

Illustrations:

Sincere appreciation is also given to the young artists from Wisconsin's Dodgeville and Mineral Point School Districts who shared their original works with us for illustrations: Annabel Bradley, Makayla Parkin, and Morgan Fuerstenberg. Thank-you for sharing your joy of creation with us. These pieces are from the collection

of student art in Chuck Tennesen's book, *Because We're All Forever Earthbound*. Single use of the drawings and paintings is allowed for bulletin covers or supplemental illustrations when using this service order. They can be downloaded [from this link on the on the Wisconsin Conference UCC Creation Care webpage](#).