

2009 Environmental Lenten Worship Resource

Week Six

April 1

RECOMMITMENT: Creation waits with eager longing: how will you respond?

Texts: Is 55:6-12; Rom 8:18-26 & I John 3:1a; Mt 13:31-33

***NOTE to Worship Leader:** Plan ahead to incorporate an opportunity for congregants to make an “offering” of an earthkeeping action they will commit to do, during this next year. Prior to worship, hand out two small pieces of recycled paper to each adult or older child. During the Prayers of Intercession, or other time of quiet reflection, the people should be invited to write down their creation-care commitment offering – one copy for them to keep as a reminder, and one copy to place in a special offering plate. When the slips have been collected, the worship leader or assistant can lift the plates before the altar, and then gently pour the slips of commitments upon the altar. It could be interesting, following the service, to compile a list of these “offering” commitment ideas and share them with the congregation.*

Introduction – Creation waits, for the revealing of the children of God...

(may be read aloud or printed in bulletin or displayed on a screen)

*See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God;
and that is what we are. [I John 3:1a]*

See what love God has given us, that Jesus the Christ came to be among us, healing and teaching and modeling a new way to live as blessed, loving community. We are called to foster a much wider and deeper community in our time – a community that is inclusive of all members of creation, so that we can move into a more sustainable, hopeful future for all. Creation and countless human communities “groan” on many levels and from many causes.

These past weeks in our Lenten journey have offered times to reflect more deeply on who we are and what our role is, as God’s people – God’s children – on Earth. We have remembered, rediscovered, and repented. We have tried to open our hearts more fully to the “hymn of all creation.” Now it is time to commit, or re-commit, to do something to help tend and mend creation. Now it is time to feel both the urgency and the hope of creation’s “waiting with eager longing” for our response as the children of God, for our response even as we inwardly groan and call for the Spirit’s help and guidance.

God’s Word has gone out, through scripture, through Christ, through the testimony of creation, and through the power of the Spirit. It will not return to God “empty” but can empower us to accomplish what God calls us to do as those sent “for the sake of the world.” And then we shall indeed go out in joy and peace; the

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mountains and hills will sing for us, and the trees of the field will clap their hands (Isaiah 55:12). Amen! Creation waits!

Greeting

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom all things hold together;
The love of God our Creator; and
The enlivening breath and communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all!
(Response) **And also with you.**

Opening Prayer Litany

(read responsively)

Let us pray:

We stand with awe and gratitude as members of God's bountiful and good creation. We rejoice in the splendor and mystery of countless species, our common creaturehood, and the interdependence of all that God makes.

We lament that the human species is shattering the splendid gifts of this web of life, ignoring our responsibility for the well being of all life, while destroying species and their habitats at a rate never before known in human history.

We believe that the Holy Spirit, who animates all of creation, breathes in us and can empower us to participate in working toward the flourishing of Earth's community of life. We believe that the people of God are called to forge ways of being human that enable socially just and ecologically sustainable communities to flourish for generations to come.

We lament that we have rejected this vocation, and have distorted our God-given abilities and knowledge in order to ransack and often destroy ecosystems and human communities rather than to protect, strengthen, and nourish them.

We believe that, in boundless love that hungers for justice, God in Christ Jesus acts to restore and redeem all creation (including human beings). In the cross and resurrection we know that God is drawn into life's most brutal and broken places and there brings forth healing and liberating power. That saving action restores right relationships among all members of "the whole creation."
(Mark 16:15)

We confess that instead of living and proclaiming this salvation through our very lives and worship, we have abused and exploited the Earth and people on the margins of power and privilege, altering climates, extinguishing species, and jeopardizing Earth's capacity to sustain life as we know and love it.

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We believe that the created world is sacred – a revelation of God’s power and gracious presence filling all things. We cling to God’s trustworthy promise to restore, renew, and fulfill all that God creates.

We long for and work toward the day when churches, as embodiments of Christ on Earth, will respond to the “groaning of creation” and to God’s passionate desire to “renew the face of the Earth.” (Romans 8:22 & Ps. 104:30)

We look forward to the day when the lamentations and groans of creation will be over, justice with peace will reign, humankind will nurture not betray the Earth, and all of creation will sing for joy.

And let all God’s people say:
Amen.

*This Litany has been drawn from text excerpts from the “Ecological Affirmations of Faith” section of the *God’s Earth is Sacred* theological statement, commissioned by the National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Program, 2005. Used by permission of the Eco Justice Program Office.

Gathering Song*

Hearing God’s Word

Is 55:6-12

Rom 8:18-26 & I John 3:1a

Mt 13:31-33

Sermon

Hymn*

Prayers of Intercession

(Option – include reflection time to fill out the commitment slips)

Peace

(Offering)

Prayer

(sample)

Let us pray...

Loving God,
We thank you for the wonderful gift of life.
We know that all we are, and all we have, are your loving gifts.
We thank you for the gift of your son, Jesus Christ,
who shows us the way to love, and
who calls us to work together to build

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a community of peace, justice and care for the Earth.
We desire to be good stewards of all your gifts, nurturing them
with reverence and care.
It is our fervent hope and prayer that you who have begun this
good work in us,
will bring it to fulfillment in Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God for ever and ever. Amen.

- By Sr. Ellen C. Rinke, IHM (2008);
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Blessing

(sample)

May the blessing of God, Creator of heaven and Earth,
rest upon you and upon all that God has made;

May the Risen Christ Jesus transform your life and your vision,
so that you may live in reconciliation with all things; and

May the power of God's Holy Spirit move over this whole Earth,
like the breath of Spring,
to renew the Earth and all its people, so that all creation may join
together in praise to
God's holy name!

Almighty God, + Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you now and
forever. Amen.

Sending Song*

Dismissal

Go in peace! Take the love of Christ to all creation!

Thanks be to God!

*Hymn suggestions

Touch the Earth Lightly [ELW 739]

Gather Us In [ELW 532; WOV 718]

We Are Called [ELW 720]

Text notes

Is 55:6-12

A well known passage that is a favorite of many and it has wonderful, "earthy" and natural images, and another call, in keeping with the Lenten context, to "seek the Lord" and "return to the Lord" (v 6-7). The main verses for an earthkeeping emphasis, however, have to be 10-12, with the analogy of God's word, God's purposes, being like the cycle of water / snow that bring "sprouts" and new growth and life. When we open our hearts to God's word / purpose, God calls forth in us the new growth that is needed. As we go forth into the natural world – creation – to share the love and healing of Christ (see also Ephesians 1:5-

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11 and God's plan, in Christ, for the "fullness of time"), we will find peace and creation, too, will greet us with its own joy and welcome.

Rom 8:18-26 & I John 3:1a

Perhaps the keystone text of this whole series ... and the linkages that can be drawn here between creation "in bondage to decay" (and how that is echoed in ecological images in our world today) and creation groaning, as if in childbirth – the bringing forth of something new, and the image of creation, itself, waiting with such eager longing and waiting for – *us* ... waiting for "the revealing of the children of God. It's hard *not* to hear God calling us through this text! Congregants could be invited to imagine how creation is calling to each of them; how do they see or hear that "eager longing"? Through what events or images or creatures in the natural world?

And the short verse from I John just affirms, in case we've forgotten, that we *are* the children of God, and have been made so through God's love for us. And God's love for us is about to be displayed in the most powerful way, as we move into Holy Week and recall the passion of Christ.

Mt 13:31-33

Granted, the ecological implication of these texts is not so obvious! The point that could be made here, however, is about the amazing power, through Christ, in the context of the "kingdom of God." We believe that, in Christ, the kingdom (or reign) of God has already broken into our world - that it is here now, though not yet fully in place. In our Baptism, we are made "workers" in this kingdom of God. The amazing thing is how God's power *magnifies* what at first may seem small and insignificant (the mustard seed, the small amount of yeast). When we take even what may seem to be small steps, in our earthkeeping, God can magnify our efforts, too. Our actions, taken prayerfully and faithfully, could be the "yeast" that helps to change our churches and our communities, our country, and our world.

ACTION IDEAS

If your congregation does not have a "green team" or "earthkeeping team," perhaps one could be formed, following Easter. The discussion guide, *Awakening to God's Call to Earthkeeping* (see below), may be useful in further "seeding" and nurturing the idea of forming such a team to help your congregation be more intentional about ongoing creation care.

Other group learning options could include: study of the ELCA social statement, *Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice* (www.elca.org/socialstatements); the National Council of Churches' materials, such as *Opening the Letter* (discussion guide for the theological statement *God's Earth is Sacred*, www.ncccojustice.org); or hosting a viewing of the 2007 DVD *Renewal* (see Additional Resources under the 2009 Environmental Lenten and Holy Week Worship Resource section).

Foster an atmosphere in your congregation that encourages and supports individual member actions and advocacy on behalf of creation, and encourages a small congregational team in their efforts to weave earthkeeping faithfully throughout the life and practices of your congregation.