

2009 Environmental Lenten Worship Resource

Week Four March 18

REPENTANCE: What have we done to the Earth and to ourselves?

Texts: Is 24:4-7; Hosea 4:1-3; Deut 30:11, 14-18a, 19; John 3:16-17
[Additional possible texts: Jeremiah 12:4; 2 Chronicles 7:14]

***NOTE to Worship Leader:** If you have collected environmental news clippings since the first Wednesday, be sure to find a way to highlight those in connection with this service.*

Introduction – Turning around and choosing the better path

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

The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers; the heavens languish together with the earth. The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. [Isaiah 24:4-5]

Vanishing species; diminishing freshwater supplies (especially in arid regions); toxic pollution in water, air, soil, manufactured goods; climate change; extreme weather events; increasing poverty and hunger. Degradation of creation - at the hands of and through the activities of humankind - lies behind most of these increasingly challenging problems facing many people and creatures the world over. Both religious leaders and scientists have categorized the declining health of Earth's ecological systems as largely spiritual and moral problems, involving our values and choices.

We are at a crucial moment, in Earth – human relationship. We need to make new choices, going forward – choices that promote health, sustainability, justice and peace, for all of creation. Repentance is about expressing sorrow and regret, and then also “turning back” or turning around, and choosing right paths.

Let us this day reflect on what we have done, or left undone, in the care of God's Earth.

Let us express our sorrow, ask God's forgiveness, and open our hearts to God's guidance to help us choose the better paths, so that we and our descendants may live.

Greeting

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom all things hold together;
The love of God our Creator; and

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The enlivening breath and communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all!

(Response) **And also with you.**

Opening Litany of Prayer

(Read responsively)

Let us pray:

Ever-living God, you created the Earth and all that is in it and found it very good.

Forgive us all that we have done to harm the Earth and one another.

God of life and love, you created all that exists to sustain life on the Earth, human life and all forms of life, and the landscapes and ecological systems that underlie all life.

Forgive us for squandering the incredible natural riches of this Earth, using your creation as if it were merely a collection of objects for our use alone.

God of grace, you sent your Son, Jesus Christ, to reconcile all things, making peace by the blood of his cross, and making us ambassadors of his will for restored relationships.

Forgive us for not truly understanding what it means to live abundantly in the richness of relationships built on justice, peace, compassion, and sustainable inter-relationship with all of your creation.

God of mercy and hope, forgive us for our apathy and arrogance, short-sightedness and greed, that contribute greatly to the suffering of others and the harming of your creation. Bless our time of gathering here, and speak to us in this time of worship and in the days to come, that in our hearts we may hear and understand what you call us to do to help heal your world.

Give us the wisdom, compassion, and courage to do all that we can to restore, preserve, and protect your creation. All praise and glory are yours, now and forever, Amen.

- Adapted from the prayer litany in
Awakening to God's Call to Earthkeeping,
by Kim Winchell (ELCA, 2006), p. 26.

Gathering Song*

Hearing God's Word

Is 24:4-7

Hosea 4:1-3

Deut 30:11, 14-18a, 19

John 3:16-17

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Sermon (see text notes below)

Hymn*

Prayers of Intercession

[include current eco problems and people affected by them]

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
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!

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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

God, When Human Bonds Are Broken [ELW 603; WOV 735]

Healer of Our Every Ill [ELW 612; WOV 738]

Let My Prayer Rise Up [Service Music, ELW 232 – could be particularly meaningful if used with more lengthy prayer petitions on behalf of creation during this week’s worship.]

Touch the Earth Lightly [ELW 739]

Text notes

Is 24:4-7 & Hosea 4:1-3

Again and again in the prophetic texts, when the people of God have broken their relationship and their covenant, with God by chasing after idols and neglecting the causes of justice, mercy, and the care of those in need – the land itself *mourns* and suffers; it languishes and dries up, no longer fruitful; the creatures and birds ... even the fish of the sea, perish.

Looking at these texts from a justice and eco-theological perspective, one cannot help but hear echoes in our world today. We neglect God and give our attention to new idols of our time; and we too often neglect to see, or care for, the “least of these.” By our too often short-sighted choices, we bring harm to creation in so many ways, with resulting harm to human communities, as well. We have neglected God’s call to care for this Earth that God loves so much; and we, and all of creation, suffer.

Deut 30:11, 14-18a, 19

In this portion of the speech by Moses to the Israelites, there is a crucial “crossroads” kind of choice put before them. They can love and serve God, or they can bow down to idols; they can follow God’s ordinances, or go their own way. It is such an important decision to be made, that even heaven and earth are called to witness to it (v 19).

Ecologically speaking, and especially in regard to climate change, WE are at what could be called a 21st century “Deuteronomy 30:19 moment.” We have before *us* blessing or curse, life or death, in the paths we will choose. We are urged to “choose life” so that we and our descendants may live. It has been said by some that this is a *kairos* moment of both crisis and opportunity: a key moment for waking up and hearing God’s call, making bold and new choices that provide hope and a sustainable future for all.

As people of faith, how can we think that our Lord would have us do any less?

John 3:16-17

Yes, even this so familiar verse can especially call us to change our ways (repent) and care for creation. Why? Because we need to more fully appreciate why God sent his only begotten Son to Earth. “For God so loved the world ...” How many times have we heard that and thought “For God so loved people,” or “me” that Jesus came to save? The small, but crucial distinction here is that “world” in the text is *cosmos* in the original Greek. God’s saving grace through Jesus is extended far beyond individuals (as important to God’s plan and love as we may be).

God’s love is far bigger, and broader, and deeper than we typically give God credit for.

Surely, out of our gratitude to God – and Jesus – we can love the world, too.

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And, in our day and time, that calls us to care for creation: loving our neighbor and caring for the Earth go hand in hand.

Additional possible texts:

Jeremiah 12:4 & 2 Chronicles 7:14

Each of these texts, and particularly the verse from 2 Chronicles, could provide a lead-in to a time of quiet, reflective prayer – a moment to really engage in a spiritual state of repentance.

Or, they could be used in connection with the spoken Prayers of Intercession, and the lifting up of particular environmental issues and those people (and species) affected by them.

ACTION IDEAS

In your times of prayer, share your sorrow with God about how we have harmed creation on so many levels. Ask for help and guidance in making the changes you know you should in your own life, and join with others in your congregation or community to take steps to help heal the Earth.

Consider holding a “candlelight vigil” to reflect and pray about these things (check the National Council of Churches’ website www.ncccojustice.org for a service outline).

Try to learn more about a specific current environmental issue and take action in both personal changes (if applicable) and by engaging in advocacy on this issue with your elected officials. Visit www.elca.org/advocacy to learn more about how to advocate and about environmental issues that the ELCA is active on, and sign up for “e-Advocacy alerts.”