

2009 Environmental Lenten Worship Resource

Week Two

March 4

REMEMBRANCE: Who are we, and what are we called to be?

Texts: Gen 1:26-28 & Gen 9:8-10, 12-17; Ps 148; Mark 16:9-15
[Alternative texts: Gen 2:7, 15; Jeremiah 18:1-7; 2 Cor 4:1, 6-10]

Introduction – Made in the image of God

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

Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness”

(Gen 1:26a)

May our time of worship today help us to remember who we are, as God’s people and what we are called to be, as “images of God” on Earth: humble servants empowered by God, to proclaim the good news to all creation. May we also remember that we are but one part of God’s amazing creation and that we are called to join with all of creation, in that holy hymn of praise.

God’s precious and wounded creation needs our help to have the strength to continue its song.

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.**

Open 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.

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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

Gen 1:26-28 & Gen 9:8-10, 12-17

Ps 148

Mark 16:9-15

Sermon [Sample provided, see below]

Hymn – *When Long Before Time* (ELW 861; WOV 799)

Prayers of Intercession

(Examples)

Let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need...

We pray for this congregation and for the wider church, that as God's people, we will come to more faithfully tend God's good and precious creation. Lord, in your mercy (Hear our prayer).

We pray for those places in the world, where creatures and landscapes are suffering: [\[name\]](#).

Lord, in your mercy (Hear our prayer).

Lord, we ask for wisdom, to address these problems; courage, to make the changes that may be needed; prophetic persistence, to

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Speak truth to power and to keep striving toward healing for all of your creation. Lord, in your mercy (Hear our prayer).

We pray for all those human populations who may be suffering due to ecological degradations: those who lack clean water; those in the path of extreme weather, losing their lives, homes, or livelihoods; those suffering from increased pollution, disease, or famine; and any others we name at this time [name]. Lord, in your mercy (Hear our prayer).

- By Kim Winchell, in *Awakening to God's Call to Earthkeeping* (ELCA, 2006), page 37

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);
used by permission.

Sr. Ellen is the Pastoral Administrator at
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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,

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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

When Long Before Time [ELW 861; WOV 799]

God of the Sparrow [ELW 740]

Here I am, Lord [ELW 574; WOV 752]

Touch the Earth Lightly [ELW 739]

SERMON SUGGESTION

[Texts: Gen 1:26-28 & Gen 9:8-10, 12-17; Ps 148; Mark 16:9-15]

The children's book, *Old Turtle*, written by Douglas Wood (1992, Scholastic Press), provides a wonderful way to illustrate this *Remembrance* theme and can serve as the central message of a sermon. It requires several readers – at the minimum three to four: the Narrator, Old Turtle, and “other creature voices.” With enough volunteers, all of the dialogue parts can be assigned. The reading of the story may be followed by the short sermon (below), followed by the singing of *When Long Before Time*. The verses of this hymn can also be divided and interspersed throughout the service.

A sermon* to introduce and follow the reading of *Old Turtle*

*By Kim Winchell, 2008

(Introduction)

In this worship service, we will use a teaching story as the central message of the sermon.

It's a children's story, really, but with a message for us as adults, too. Listen for its theological message for us – about who and where and what God is, and, in keeping with our theme of “Remembrance,” the message about the role and place of humans on Earth.

The story describes, in a fresh way, what it means for us to be an “image of God.”

Listen closely, for it can help us to remember who we are, and what we are called to be.

**** The story is read aloud.**

Sermon:

... And Old Turtle smiled. And so did God. Why? Because the people remembered who they were meant to be: “reminders of all that God is ... a message of love from God to the earth, and a prayer from the earth back to God.”

Made in God's image, we are called to care for the Earth and one another, even as God cares for, keeps, and loves us.

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“Dominion” over the Earth, when rightly understood, is a most sacred trust and humbling responsibility. It is also a task that can be filled with joy and hope. When you take steps to help heal the Earth, it *does* give you – and others around you – a sense of both joy and of hope. It can be contagious, in a good way!

Both ecologically and theologically, we are called to be mindful of how we live on this Earth. The health and wholeness of the human community is inter-twined with the health and wholeness of the ecological community that sustains and supports us – a further witness of God’s love for us and for all of creation.

When we humans, through our ignorance, apathy, arrogance, and greed, degrade creation and diminish its fruitfulness ... we diminish and harm ourselves ... we disregard divine mandates to tend the Earth; and we mute creation’s ability to join with us in praising God.

As we heard in the reading from Genesis 9 – God’s covenant was made with ALL creatures, with all life on Earth – not just Noah and his family. And, Psalm 148 urges and invites all of the members and elements of creation to praise the name of the Lord.

There is, you see, a “hymn of all creation,” and it has been ongoing, day and night, since the beginning of time. Psalm 19 proclaims that “The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims God’s handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.” [Psalm 19:1-4a]

This hymn of all creation is an awesome, beautiful, grace-filled song. It flows through the light of each new day and the stars at night, in the songs of birds and the croaking of frogs, in the joyous visual chorus of a field of wildflowers, in the chatter of a group of children at play, in the soaring song of high mountains, in the whisper of wind in pines, in the soothing sounds of rivers and waves.

The harmonies, in this hymn of all creation, have been broken many times throughout history, but perhaps they are the most broken now, in our time. The air of too many cities is polluted and more children suffer from asthma; frogs and other amphibians are in severe decline; waters become stagnant; ocean life suffers; climate change threatens all manner of damaging impacts to human – and natural – communities and ecosystems.

The hymn of all creation is muted, and its harmonies strained or broken.

But, in and through Christ, we are invited anew to enter into this song, with strong voices and with tender love. Yes, challenges abound – But God gives us the power, passion, and hope to meet them. How can we capture that vision, of God’s will for *shalom*? How can we best “sing” this song of harmony, through our actions – our service in God’s name?

It comes down to some very basic questions, initially, that each of us can ask of our Lord: “How can I serve you? How can I be a part of the healing of your world?”

I guarantee you – if you dare to ask these questions in an earnest way in your prayers and in your heart, the Holy Spirit will help provide the answers and point you in the directions you should go. Because enlightened by the Spirit, we can hear, and respond to, creation’s cries, as it waits with eager longing, for the revealing of the children of God.

There is healing work that each of us, uniquely, can do – within our homes, our places of work, our congregations, and our communities. We each have a role, as members of the body of Christ.

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Empowered by the Spirit, we can bear witness to God's hope and unconditional love for the whole world. And, as ambassadors of Christ's compassion, justice, and reconciliation, we can participate in the restoration of right relationships – for ALL creation.

So open your ears and open your heart, to that holy hymn of all creation and sing it – boldly, joyfully, hopefully - wherever God leads you. Be that message of love from God to the Earth, and a prayer of praise from the Earth back to God.

And then you will indeed be faithfully proclaiming the good news to the whole creation!

Amen!

Text Notes

Gen 1:26-28

Two main concepts here: “image of God” and “dominion.” How we view and understand those aspects of our human creature-ness, make all the difference. Dominion does not mean “domination” or use of creation in careless, harmful ways.

Gen 9:8-10, 12-17

More often than not, we tend to think only of Noah and his family (and maybe the dove that came back with the olive sprig), and the rainbow after the great flood. How might we honor that God's covenant is made with ALL creatures on Earth and not just humankind? This part of the covenant is even repeated, several times. Do we give it the attention it deserves?

What does it mean for us to “hold a covenant” with God, that also includes all of creation? What are our duties, in that covenant? How might this “covenant” concept help shape our “dominion”? Isn't there some irony, today, given the rising sea levels (an impact of climate change), when we read of God's promise in verse 15 that “the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh”? Maybe not, since God is not the one who has increased CO2 levels through the burning of too many fossil-based fuels, accelerating global warming and raising sea levels and leading to more severe storms and flooding events!

Ps 148

A grand, joyous, hymn of praise, from all corners and creatures! Do we, in our actions, join into this song of praise in a loving, life-affirming way? Or, do we mute and disrupt the strains of song from the land and its creatures?

Mark 16:9-15

In this longer ending of Mark, the final charge to the disciples and the followers of Christ is to go out and “proclaim the good news to the whole creation” (v 15).

Just imagine if we were to take that seriously!

***Alternative texts** (below) provide options for a continuation of Ash Wednesday's traditional emphasis on our “dust to dust” mortality and the clay or “earthen vessels” nature of our humanity and our call as servants of God.

Gen 2:7, 15

Humankind is formed out of the dust of the ground and placed in the “garden” (on Earth) to “till it and keep it.” Helpful here are the original Hebrew words, that we translate as “till” and “keep” – the words *abad* and *shamar*, used in other Old Testament texts more often to mean “to serve” and “to preserve” or protect: “choose this day whom you will serve” [*abad*] and “The Lord bless you and keep [*shamar*] you.”

Jeremiah 18:1-7

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God, the potter, makes and re-makes us into the type of faithful servants that God would have us be. Lenten disciplines can help us to reflect upon the ways that God might be calling us to change and to live in more sustainable ways upon the Earth.

2 Cor 4:1, 6-10

We are just humble “clay pots” or “earthen vessels,” but with God’s power and Spirit within us, we have power and hope beyond our limitations. The light of the knowledge and glory of God in Christ Jesus brings light to our hearts and helps us to bring light to a weary world.

ACTION IDEAS

Take some time this week to remember a time, or place, in nature that has been (or still is) special to you.

How have you seen, heard, or experienced the “hymn of all creation”?

Gather with others in your congregation, to share some of these stories and experiences.

If you are wondering where to begin on earth-healing actions, you might start by making a list of several categories, in regards to how you “use” and relate to creation.

How do you use energy? and where can you perhaps use less? Do you turn off unused lights and electronic equipment? Can you add more compact fluorescent lights (CFL’s)?

What are your transportation choices? Can you drive less?

Do you avoid using toxic cleaning agents?

Do you recycle what you can, and buy products made from recycled materials?

Choose one to three small changes you can make right now, and steadily add more.

See www.Earth911.org for information on recycling many items.

See <http://ncecojustice.org/crc.html> for energy-saving ideas.

See http://www.ncecojustice.org/mindful_living.html to learn how to avoid using toxic products.