

# Earth Day Worship Resources

**Sunday, April 22, 2012**

Provided by the Sustainable Sanctuary Coalition of  
Greater Kansas City



**Our Vision for the World:** We envision an Earth where all of creation flourishes.

**Our Mission:** We partner with, encourage, and assist faith groups to preach, teach, model, and advocate for sustainable living and ecological justice for all creation.

**Our Focus:** We aid faith communities in the Kansas City area to care for creation both on a collective and individual level.

For more information and additional resources to help your congregation create a more sustainable world, please visit our website:

<http://sustainablesanctuary.org>

or contact us at:

[info@sustainablesanctuary.org](mailto:info@sustainablesanctuary.org)

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## *Introduction*

### **Dear Clergy and Lay Leaders,**

We all know that the Earth, the very foundation of life and wellbeing, is in trouble. As people of faith, we are deeply disturbed by this and are committed to doing our part to protect and heal the planet.

One way we can do this is to use the momentum of Earth Day—this year falling on Sunday, April 22—to emphasize Earth care at our worship on that day.

We can't under-estimate the power of collective awareness and action for positive social change. Earth Day, emerging from humble beginnings in 1970, has grown into a global event with significant influence. Earth Day has been credited with kicking off the Environmental Decade of the 1970s and contributing to legislation such as the Clean Air Act, the Water Quality Improvement Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Toxic Substances Control Act, and others. Another key development influenced by the advent of Earth Day was the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency.

This collection of resources is intended to assist you in making your Earth Day plans. It includes sample sermons, prayers, worship ideas, quotes, scripture suggestions, denominational statements on the environment, and links to additional resources. **While Earth Day only comes once a year, consider using these resources throughout the year to deepen your congregation's commitment to Earth-care.**

Those of us at the Sustainable Sanctuary Coalition stand ready to assist you in any way we can as you prepare to celebrate Earth Day. Many of our active volunteers have years of experience in their own church's Green Teams or other forms of environmental activism. Please do not to hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or feel you'd like additional support.

We'd love to hear from you about what you are doing or did for Earth Day, so we can keep compiling ideas. And it lets others know they are joined by many other congregations in promoting Earth care.

On behalf of all of us at SSC and, in particular, on behalf of Planet Earth, we thank you for your interest and support. The Spirit be with you in your preparations and worship for Earth Day!

God Bless You,

Carol Meyer, Executive Director  
Sustainable Sanctuary Coalition



### **A Message from the President of the Sustainable Sanctuary Coalition:**

*Jesus taught us to care for the least of these. One of the things we can do to help those who live in poverty is care for the earth. The more the environment is abused the more the people on the margins of the world's economy suffer. Preach about this on Earth day and help your congregation follow the teachings of Jesus.*

Dr. R. Glen Miles  
Senior Minister  
Country Club Christian Church  
Kansas City, Missouri  
President, Board of Directors  
Sustainable Sanctuary Coalition

## ***Section One: Bible Passages Relating to Creation***

### **God's Relationship with Creation**

#### **A. God Created the Universe**

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth... God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. (Genesis 1:1, 31)*

*You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you. (Nehemiah 9:6)*

*The Lord reigns... Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad, let the seas resound and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy, they will sing before the Lord for He comes, He comes to judge the earth. (Psalm 96: 10-13)*

*How many are your works, O Lord! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number-living things both large and small. (Psalm 104:24-25)*

#### **B. God Owns Creation**

*To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. (Deuteronomy 10:14)*

*Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. (1 Chronicles 29:11)*

*The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters. (Psalm 24:1-2; cf. Psalm 89:11; 1 Corinthians 10:26)*

#### **C. God Loves Creation**

*He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD. By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth. (Psalm 33:5-6)*

*The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.... The LORD is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made. (Psalm 145:9, 13; cf. Psalm 145:17)*

*For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. (John 3:16)*

### **D. God Values Creation**

*God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. (Genesis 1:31)*

*For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world His eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things He has made. So they are without excuse. (Romans 1:19-20)*

*They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11:9)*

### **E. God Sustains Creation**

*In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind. (Job 12:10)*

*You care for the land and water it; you enrich it abundantly..... The meadows are covered with flocks and the valleys are mantled with grain; they shout for joy and sing. (Psalm 65:9-13)*

### **F. God Redeems Creation**

*When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust. When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth. (Psalm 104:29-30)*

*The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. (Romans 8:19-21)*

## **God's Relation with Animals**

### **A. God's Covenants with Animals**

*I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you-the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you-every living creature on earth. (Genesis 9:9-10)*

*In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the creatures that move along the ground. Bow and sword and battle I will abolish from the land, so that all may lie down in safety. (Hosea 2:18)*

### **B. God's Concern for Animals**

*And of every living thing, of all flesh, you shall bring two of every kind into the ark, to keep them alive with you. (Genesis 6:19)*

*Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest, so that your ox and your donkey may have relief. (Exodus 23:12; cf. Deuteronomy 5:14)*

*Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God's sight. (Luke 12:6; cf. Matthew 10:29)*

### **C. God's Promise to Animals**

*The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11:6-9)*

## **Human's Relationship with Creation**

### **A. Command to Care for Creation**

*The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. (Genesis 2:15)*

*You must keep my decrees and my laws.... And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you. (Leviticus 18:26, 28)*

*If you follow my statutes and keep my commandments and observe them faithfully, I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. (Leviticus 26:3-4)*

*You shall not pollute the land in which you live.... You shall not defile the land in which you live, in which I also dwell; for I the LORD dwell among the Israelites. (Numbers 35:33-34)*

### **B. Humans Have Defiled the Land**

*I brought you into a plentiful land to eat its fruits and its good things. But when you entered you defiled my land, and made my heritage an abomination. (Jeremiah 2:7)*

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*It will be made a wasteland, parched and desolate before me; the whole land will be laid waste because there is no one who cares. (Jeremiah 12:11)*

*There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land. There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed. Because of this the land mourns, and all who live in it waste away; the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the fish of the sea are dying. (Hosea 4:1-3)*

*The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers, the exalted of the earth languish. The earth lies under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, and broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse consumes the earth; its people must bear their guilt. (Isaiah 24:4-6)*

### **C. Consequences of Defiling the Land**

*He turned rivers into a desert, flowing springs into thirsty ground, and fruitful land into a saltwaste, because of the wickedness of those who lived there. (Psalm 107:33-34)*

*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. Therefore a curse devours the earth; its inhabitants suffer for their guilt. (Isaiah 24:4-6)*

## ***Creation's Relationship with the Creator***

### **A. Creation Testifies of the Creator**

*Ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish of the sea inform you. Which of these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind. (Job 12:7-10)*

*The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. (Psalm 19:1-4; cf. Psalm 97:6)*

*Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. (Romans 1:20)*



### **B. Creation Praises the Creator**

*Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad, let the sea resound, and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy; they will sing before the Lord. (Psalm 96:11-13)*

*Praise the Lord from the heavens, praise him in the heights above. Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his heavenly hosts. Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars. Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies. Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created. He set them in place forever and ever; he gave a decree that will never pass away. (Psalm 148:1-6)*

*Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths, lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding, you mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds. (Psalm 148:7-10)*

Find more scriptures on creation care at [www.christianecology.org/Stewardship.html](http://www.christianecology.org/Stewardship.html)

### ***Section Two: Blessings and Prayers***

#### ***Beatitudes for Stewards of Earth*** by Father Ed Eschweiler

- *Blessed are they who reverence all created things as sacred: in God's eyes all creation is good.*
- *Blessed are they who understand that creation is like a beautiful tapestry, with every strand depending on others.*
- *Blessed are they who see the beauty of Earth as a reflection of the beauty of God, who creates it.*
- *Blessed are they who do not waste or spoil Earth's resources, which are for everyone, even those not born yet.*
- *Blessed are they who reverence the air--the breath of God and the Spirit of our life.*
- *Blessed are they who reverence the life-giving waters that sustain the Earth's climate and nourish Earth's inhabitants.*
- *Blessed are they who reverence the soil that supports our homes and our footsteps and yields abundant harvests.*
- *Blessed are they who reverence the trees and other plants that call down the rains, stabilize the soil, and freshen the air.*
- *Blessed are they who reduce what they consume, re-use what they can, and recycle what they can no longer use.*
- *Blessed are they who praise God the Creator in their reverent and gentle use of all things on Earth.*

#### ***Prayer for the Earth***

Most gracious God, we come before you to pray for the wellbeing of the planet. You alone know the full extent of the destruction we have wrought to your beautiful handiwork, and what needs to be done to remedy it. We pray for the people around the globe who suffer because of environmental damage. We pray for the defenseless creatures harmed or made extinct by our selfishness and ignorance. We pray for the oceans, air, mountains, plants, and soil, that life and health may again pulse in them. We pray that we humans have a change of heart and stop harming the planet. Pour out your Holy Spirit on us that we may have the passion and wisdom to work effectively to restore your creation. Guide us in our personal, congregation, and community efforts. Give us strength to

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continue on with this work when it is difficult and requires sacrifice. Bless the Earth and all its life in every way. Amen.

### ***Petitions for the Earth***

That the Earth be revered and cared for as God intends, let us pray to the Lord.

That we stop poisoning the soil and seas with trash and toxins, let us pray to the Lord.

That we repent of our greed and live simply and lightly on the Earth, let us pray to the Lord.

That all members of this faith community take seriously our religious leaders' mandate to protect the Earth, let us pray to the Lord.

That global warming is halted and reversed before more damage can occur, let us pray to the Lord.

That protection of the Earth be a top political priority, let us pray to the Lord.

Response: Lord, hear our prayer.

### ***Prayer for Earth Day***

Heavenly Father and Mother, thank you for our life-giving Earth that we celebrate today on Earth Day. Bless all the celebrations, educational programs, and projects that seek to express our appreciation for this great gift. May we be zealous for the Earth not just today, but every day of our lives. Guide us in the monumental and important mission of restoring the integrity of creation. We dedicate our lives anew to you and to this great work of our time. Bless all our efforts that they may bear tremendous fruit. Amen.

### ***Children's Earth Prayer***

Dear God, thank you for this beautiful planet. Bless it and keep it safe from harm. We pray for the protection of the animals, the soil, air and water. May we care for all you have made. Help us to love the Earth as you do. Amen.

### *Prayer of Thanksgiving for the Earth*

Oh amazing Creator, there is no end to the awe we feel in the face of your magnificent creation. Words cannot convey our gratitude for such an undeserved gift. We praise you for the beauty that stops us in our tracks wherever we turn. We revere you for the fecundity of creation that has spewed forth life and goodness for billions of years. We thank you for the multitude of ways that the natural world sustains and nourishes us in body and spirit. We are humbled that we are part of such a display of your glory. Our hearts overflow with love for You, revealed in the wonder of creation. May all the angels, saints, and holy ones join us in our song of gratitude, praising You forever and ever. Amen.

**Note:** Feel free to adapt these prayers to make them suit your religious tradition.

### ***Section Three: Environmental Quotes***

#### ***Awe and Wonder***

*Love all that has been created by God, both the whole and every grain of sand. Love every leaf and every ray of light. Love the beasts and the birds, love the plants, love each separate fragment. If you love each separate fragment, you will understand the mystery of the whole resting in God."*

Fyodor Dostoevsky

*I think every discovery of the world plunges us into jubilation, a radical amazement that tears apart the veil of triviality.*

Judy Cannato

*Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts.*

Rachel Carson

*The universe is an inexhaustible celebration of ultimate mystery!*

Brian Swimme

*By cutting ourselves off from the rest of creation, we are left bereft of awe and wonder and therefore of reverence and gratitude. We violate our very beings, and we have nothing but trivia to teach our young.*

Matthew Fox

*The whole earth is a living icon of the face of God.*

St. John of Damascus (675-749)

*Earth's crammed with heaven, and every common bush is afire with God.*

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

### ***The Human Role in the Universe***

*The natural world is the larger sacred community to which we belong. To be alienated from this community is to become destitute in all that makes us human. . . [T]his sense of the sacred character of the natural world as our primary revelation of the divine is our first need.*

Thomas Berry, from *The Dream of the Earth*

*In the evolutionary story—ours and that of Planet Earth—the planet always wins out. Mother Earth has an amazing resilience, a very profound intelligence, and can be quite ruthless in maintaining her integrity. In Gian terms, we are just another species, neither the owners nor the stewards of the planet. Our future depends much more on a right relationship with Gaia than on enforcing our self-righteous claim to be masters of creation.*

Diarmuid O'Murchu

*Where the earth is, we are.*

Walt Whitman

*Any human being exists only as a member of the wider community of life, air, water, and soil. We have no existence apart from the living earth. We are Earth. What we do to Earth, we do to our self.*

Michael Dowd

### ***The Moral Imperative to Care for the Planet***

*Treat the earth well. It was not given to you by your parents; it was loaned to you by your children. We do not inherit the Earth from our Ancestors; we borrow it from our Children.*

Indian Proverb

*All creation is the Lord's, and we are responsible for the ways in which we use and abuse it.*

from United Methodist Social Principles

*When all the trees have been cut down, when all the animals have been hunted, when all the waters are polluted, when all the air is unsafe to breathe, only then will you discover you cannot eat money.*

Cree Prophecy

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*All human institutions, professions, programs and activities must now be judged by the extent to which they inhibit, ignore, or foster a human and Earth relationship.*

Thomas Berry

*The day is not far distant when humanity will realize that biologically it is faced with a choice between suicide and adoration.*

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

*The environment is not just another issue, but an inescapable challenge to what it means to be religious.*

The Very Reverend James P. Morton, Dean, Cathedral of St. John the Divine

*We should think of our resources not as having been left to us by our parents, but as having been loaned to us by our children.*

Kenyan proverb.

### **Miscellaneous**

*If you want to cultivate peace, protect Creation.*

Pope Benedict XVI

*The earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need, but not every man's greed.*

Mahatma Gandhi

*The Gospel's good news of redemption applies to the earth, as well as the earthling.*

Dr. R. H. Meneilly

*The destruction of a species of God's creation is like tearing a page out of Scripture.*

Paul Gorman

*For too long, we have glorified the Creator while crucifying the creation.*

From *The Greening of Faith*

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*When it comes to loving our neighbor, we should remember we all live upwind and upstream from someone else—both in time and place.*

Source unknown.

*In our every deliberation we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations.*

From the Great Law of the Iroquois Confederacy

*What is the use of a house if you haven't got a tolerable planet to put it on?*

Henry David Thoreau

*The plain fact is that the planet does not need more "successful" people. But it does desperately need more peacemakers, healers, restorers, storytellers and lovers of every shape and form. It needs people who live well in their places. It needs people of moral courage, willing to join the fight to make the world habitable and humane. And these needs have little to do with success as our culture has defined it.*

David Orr



## *Section Four: Sample Earth Day Sermons*

### *An Earth Day Sermon*

By Steven Whitney, preached at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Earth Day Sunday, April 21, 1996.

Texts: Genesis 2:15, 9:8-11 and Job 12:10, 38:1-7

Good morning! Happy Earth Day! And thanks be to God for this opportunity to reflect on the goodness of the creation and on our role in its stewardship.

As you may have read in the Messenger, I am a professional environmentalist. I work to protect, among other things, the forests of this great land which John Muir once described as the finest God ever planted. My work has enabled me to do many things -- I've given plenty of speeches -- but this is my first sermon. And, to tell you the truth, it's a little scary. Speaking from the head is easy. Speaking from the heart is harder to do -- at least for me.

So I think I'll begin with a true story. Last Tuesday afternoon, I took some time off, and knowing these remarks would require a little thought, I gathered up a Bible and some other materials and walked down the street to our local pub for a cool micro-brew and a sandwich. Needless to say, the waitress was a little surprised at my choice of reading materials, so I explained what I was doing and then I asked her if she thought it was improper to write a sermon while sitting in a tavern. She replied by asking where I went to church. When I said "St. Stephen's Episcopal" she chuckled and said "Oh, don't worry about it, they've all been here."

And she may be right, and that's OK. Because, unlike some other religious traditions, those of us in the Anglican tradition openly celebrate God's creation in all of its manifestations. The forests that blanket the landscape, the clear water that flows from the mountains, the bald eagles and killer whales, the flowering shrubs that paint our neighborhoods with flashes of pink and yellow, the diversity of human life, and yes, even the hops for my beer last Tuesday afternoon. For all that we have, and all that we are, we owe thanks to God.

Christians five centuries ago knew this well. They set aside a few days a year during planting time, Rogation Days, to offer their thanksgivings and to ask for the Lord's blessing on their fields and crops. Today's readings from that Rogation Day tradition are pretty clear about who is the Creator. Did you hear what God said to Job from the whirlwind? **"Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth . . . when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?"** Of course, you and I know the answer, its right there on page one of the bible -God created heaven and earth and said it was good. And, although in the Christian tradition the human role in God's world is unique among the animals, man and woman are not creators, they are merely a part of the Creation -- placed in the garden by God. Job learned that lesson the hard way.

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But our Rogation Day readings for today don't stop with this reaffirmation of God as Creator. They go on to affirm that God not only created the earth and all that is upon it, but that Creation **belongs to God** - the land, the water, the animals, the air, the "riches" -- all God's. This is emphasized by way of the parable from Luke about the rich man who has accumulated so many worldly goods that he must build a bigger barn to contain them all. God's response is to call the rich man a fool and declare, "This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" We know the answer to that one too.

So from the readings we know that God is the creator and that creation belongs to God. But it's the collect that gives us some insight into the role of humanity in the context of Creation. It begins by saying to the Lord . **your hand is open wide to satisfy the needs of every living creature** . . Notice it doesn't limit the statement to creatures that provide us with food, or those that are commercially valuable. It is unequivocal. It says every living creature.

When I first read today's collect, I was reminded of the story from the Jewish tradition when Noah is loading the Ark with the Camels and water buffalos and the goats, when up the ramp comes a pair of tiny little gnats. According to the story, Noah turned to God and said , "**You want me to save the gnats? Of what possible value could they be?**" And God replied "**Yes Noah, save the gnats. They hold many secrets you may never know.**"

In fact, it is the Noah story where the bible is quite clear that God's covenant was established not just with people, but with all of creation. God said to Noah and his sons, "**I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the Earth.**" Have you seen the rainbows over Seattle during the past few weeks? They truly have been amazing. No one who has seen them can possibly doubt God's resolve to uphold his covenant with the Earth.

But what about us? I wonder what God thinks of our modern attitudes toward the diversity of life, where value is measured not in terms of the secrets the creatures may hold, but in dollars and cents. We treat the earth like an ark in reverse. Rather than march the animals two by two up the ramp of survival, we march them faster and faster down the gang-plank of extinction. "**They are taking our property rights**" we say, "**just to save the spotted owl or the wild salmon.**" But I think we need to start asking ourselves the question, whose property is it, really? And, on whose authority do we use our private land to the detriment of God's creation?"

Which brings us back to the collect for today and our request that God "**grant that we, remembering the account that we must one day give, may be faithful stewards of your good gifts...**" Faithful stewards. . . What does it mean to be a faithful steward of God's creation? Good question. Fortunately the bible provides guidance -- the first reference right in Genesis 2 when God placed the human creature in the garden "**to till it and keep it.**" Clearly this direction from God means we have the authority, if not the responsibility, to till the Earth in order to make its productive powers flourish. But does this mean we are to till **all of it?** I don't think so, because we also have the obligation to "**keep it**" which means to sustain it, conserve it, perpetuate it -- to "**keep**" the Earth by protecting its God created life systems and life forms. And, let's not forget the rainbow -- God's covenant with creation and with all of the world's creatures. "Till it" yes, but know when to stop.

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In the modern age, of course, "when to stop" is usually a political call. And the world of environmental politics can be complicated and frustrating. In conservation work it is often said that all victories are temporary and all defeats permanent. And most of the time it's true. Yet, despite the frustrations, and the fact that it seems I work twice as hard for half as much money - I wouldn't give it up for anything.

Years ago I was fond of saying that environmental work is a lot like working for the Church. Only back then I had no idea how true that statement really was. You see I didn't find my way to church until 1986 after my first daughter was born, and long after my career was underway. At first, I pretty much just went through the motions, until one Sunday something clicked. I remember the sermon vividly. It was on the subject of intergenerational responsibility and was illustrated by reference to the environment and our obligation as Christians to care for creation. That was the first day I remember really hearing a lesson. It made sense to me. It was relevant to the world today. It was important. And, it came right from the bible. Since then, I've heard a green message almost every Sunday.

I used to defend my decision not to attend church by saying that I always felt more spiritual on a mountaintop than in a building. But while that was true, it hardly justified living a life without God. I was missing the point. The point is, God speaks to me through the mountains -- always has. It just took me awhile to learn how to listen. **For me, and perhaps for you, nature is the ultimate tangible manifestation of God in our midst.** And, I have come to learn that somewhere deep in that knowledge lies the basic motivation for my life's work. Like the little gnats in the Noah story, there remain many secrets I may never know -- this spiritual journey is still more mystery to me than understanding. But day by day, one step at a time, with God's help, the understanding grows.

Let us pray.

Lord, we thank you for this opportunity to reflect on your creation, your covenant with all living things, and our obligation to be good stewards of the gifts you have provided. Help us to understand that each of us has an important role in Caring for Creation, by the choices we make and by the actions we take. Give us the wisdom to choose thoughtfully, and to act with care, in accordance with your will, and your love of this good Earth, our island home.

Happy Earth Day – Amen

### ***You Renew the Face of the Earth***

Scripture and Sermon for Earth Stewardship Sunday, April 26, 2009

Rev. Helen Nelson

Psalm 104:24-35 (NIV)

24 How many are your works, O LORD!  
In wisdom you made them all;  
the earth is full of your creatures.

25 There is the sea, vast and spacious,  
teeming with creatures beyond number—  
living things both large and small.

26 There the ships go to and fro,  
and the leviathan, which you formed to frolic there.

27 These all look to you  
to give them their food at the proper time.

28 When you give it to them,  
they gather it up;  
when you open your hand,  
they are satisfied with good things.

29 When you hide your face,  
they are terrified;  
when you take away their breath,  
they die and return to the dust.

30 When you send your Spirit,  
they are created,  
and you renew the face of the earth.

31 May the glory of the LORD endure forever;  
may the LORD rejoice in his works—

32 he who looks at the earth, and it trembles,  
who touches the mountains, and they smoke.

## Earth Day Worship Resources

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33 I will sing to the LORD all my life;  
I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.

34 May my meditation be pleasing to him,  
as I rejoice in the LORD.

35 But may sinners vanish from the earth  
and the wicked be no more.  
Praise the LORD, O my soul.  
Praise the LORD. [c]

This ancient hymn of praise reflects the psalmist's reverence for the Creator realized in the awesome majesty of Creation. In this psalm, David acknowledges six assumptions about God and the world that God has created:

- God is the source of the earth and all the creatures that inhabit it (v.24-25). In this section of the psalm (v. 24-32) land and sea are mentioned specifically, while air is mentioned earlier in the chapter. In wisdom God created an immeasurable multitude and diversity of creatures (v. 24). Scarcity of resources was not part of God's plan for Creation. God created an abundance of natural resources. Over time many creatures, such as the leviathan mentioned in v. 26, have become extinct, due to the effects of climate changes, both natural and human-caused, and by pollution, overconsumption, and other human behaviors.
- All creatures depend on God's created order for sustenance and are satisfied by God's presence (v.27, 28). There is a sense that something beyond the physical is missing when the divinely established order of nature is disrupted. Who doesn't feel closer to God in a natural setting than in a built environment? While we may like the creature comforts and conveniences of city life, our souls long to get back to nature. We hunger for the more pronounced presence of God in the wild and untamed corners of the earth, in the slower pace of rural life, in the silence of a starlit night or the crashing of waves and thunder.
- All creatures are intensely frightened by God's absence, as they depend on God for their very breath and will die without God's support (v. 29). Oxygen is essential for almost all life on earth, certainly for all forms of life we can observe without a microscope. To be deprived of oxygen is to be deprived of life. Millions of children and adults around the world are becoming sick and dying from air and water pollution from manufacturing processes, agricultural chemicals, lawn care products, and motor vehicle exhaust. Pollutants in the air fall to the ground and into bodies of water in the form of rain and snow. Pollutants on the land wash into rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, and oceans when it rains, evaporate, and then pollute the air.

## Earth Day Worship Resources

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- God as Spirit is continually recreating, thus renewing the earth (v.30). The psalmist views God's act of creation not as a once and only event at the beginning of time, but as an ongoing activity demonstrated in the natural processes of birth, life, and death. The Hebrew word *Ruwach* translated in v. 29 as breath also means wind, and is translated in v. 30 as Spirit. The wind is always moving, or it is not wind. There is an inhalation and exhalation of the breath or one is not breathing. The implication here is that God, or Spirit, is always moving, sometimes as seemingly unpredictable as the wind, and sometimes in an observable pattern or cycle like breathing. In the midst of so many threats to the life on Earth, this is encouraging. This is hopeful. This is good news, indeed. One might almost picture God renewing the face of the earth by giving mouth-to-mouth resuscitation to a dying planet.
- God is engaged in an intimate and dynamic relationship with the earth. The psalmist uses the poetic device of personification with both the Creator and the Creation. God is described in very human terms, specifically male terms in this context, as he opens his hand (v. 28) hides his face (v. 29), looks at the earth, and touches the mountains (v. 32). Not only is God poetically personified, but so is the planet. Earth herself is described as a living being that has a face (v. 30), thus allowing for a face-to-face encounter between Creator and Creation. Might we imagine the Creator offering a sign of affection, perhaps even a holy kiss, to his precious Creation?
- The relationship between Creator and Creation is meant to be an experience of enduring joy. The psalmist calls for God to rejoice in what God has created and asks that it may last forever (v. 31). David determines to sing praises to God for all of his life and desires for God to be pleased with the way his thoughts of Creation have caused him to rejoice in its Creator (v. 34). Like so many others who have had the opportunity of being in a remote and pristine natural area, the psalmist seems to sense his own smallness in relation to the vast and transcendent glory of nature. He realizes his own dependency upon the Creator and the necessity to value the gift of Creation with which he is inextricably linked in a web of mutual dependency.
- Failure to honor the Creator by failing to value Creation is a sin. To neglect our duty to care for the earth as stewards of Creation is to dishonor God. To intentionally continue in such sin when it threatens to harm or destroy the earth, sea, or air, as well those creatures, including humans, who inhabit these environments is an especially wicked offence to God. Apparently realizing the dire consequences of environmental sin, David calls for drastic measures, asking God to intervene by any means necessary. Keenly aware of his own predisposition to sin, the psalmist pleads with his own soul to praise God. If his soul praises God, then his actions will proceed from a pure heart and a clear mind. In this way, he can be assured at least that his sin will vanish from the earth and his wickedness will be more. With a spirit of true repentance, he can cooperate with God in renewing the face of the earth.

## Earth Day Worship Resources

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Psalm 104 reminds us that as part of Creation, we depend on God and are accountable to God. We are creatures, but not helpless creatures. We are created with the capacity to think, to feel, and to act. We are responsible for the way we interact with our Creator and with the rest of Creation. We have a symbiotic relationship with every other creature on earth, and with the planet itself. As part of God's beloved Creation, we are in an intimate and dynamic relationship with God that has the potential to produce deep fulfillment and enduring joy in our lives, as long as we honor the Creator and value Creation. To disregard, abuse, or fail to care for any part of Creation is sin and a wicked offence to God. When we repent of sin, God is "faithful and just to forgive us of all unrighteousness". God's redeeming grace is available to us when we heed Jesus' call to "sin no more".

You may be familiar with the Three Rs of Environmental Stewardship: "Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle". Many environmentalists have added a fourth R: "Renew" to encourage the transition to renewable resources. I long for the day when we all repent of the sin of environmental injustice and sin no more by reducing what we buy, reusing what we have, recycling what we no longer need, and switch to renewable resources. Then, the psalmist's prayer will be answered, and, perhaps, God will rejoice, turn to face us, and say, "You renew the face of the earth."

*Additional sample sermons can be found on the SSC website ([www.sustainablesanctuary.org](http://www.sustainablesanctuary.org)) under Worship Resources.*

### Section Five: Worship Ideas for Earth Day

Having special speakers, classes, outings, or events for Earth Day at your congregation would be wonderful. However, nothing is quite as valuable as placing the welfare of the planet at the center of your worship service. It gives a strong message that creation care is at the heart of faith, and not a peripheral concern.

Here are some ideas that might interest you and spark your creativity:

- As the rest of this packet strongly suggests, if possible devote your sermon to the connection between faith, spirituality, and our obligation to care for the Earth. Additional sample sermons can be found on the SSC website ([www.sustainablesanctuary.org](http://www.sustainablesanctuary.org)) under Worship Resources.
- After the sermon, time could be given for everyone to fill out a small index card saying what action they will take to be better stewards of the Earth. They could be taken home or put in the offering basket and blessed at the altar.
- Have the teens write and pray prayers of petition focused on their greatest Earth concerns.
- Younger children could draw pictures on an Earth Day theme, which could be prominently displayed in the worship space entrance for all to see
- The service could have a penitential rite that focuses on our wrongs against the earth and asks for God's forgiveness and pledges repentance
- Visuals could include a statue of St. Francis; a globe or big picture of the Earth; the elements of earth, air, water, and fire; an environmental banner; a display of sacred objects from the Earth brought by members; or a mobile of Earth objects.
- Incorporating the Arts would be great, for instance liturgical dance, the display of original Earth artwork or photographs, a special choir piece or solo relating to the glory of God's creation, or a nature story/testimonial used somewhere in the worship
- It might be a perfect occasion to call your Green Team forward and give them a blessing, or if you don't have one, various other people, like the grounds keepers, the recyclers, the facilities managers, etc. who help make the parish more "green."
- If you have a smaller congregation, you might have a handout for people as they leave church. It could be an Earth prayer, a flower, a sticker, or a packet of seeds. I've known churches who've given away trees.
- You might include a flier in the bulletin or order of worship with stories of hope, highlighting people of faith who are making a difference for the environment
- Tables could be set up in the back of the worship space for folks to sign a petition or write a congressperson related to an Earth care issue
- You could bless your grounds (and garden if you have one) after the service. A sample blessing prayer can be found on the SSC website



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Doing something special on Earth Day is great for building community, getting people involved, spicing things up, helping people make connections between their faith and the environment, and certainly good for our beloved Earth and its hurting people, so desperately in need of some serious prayer and beneficial actions.

## ***Section Six: Denominational Statements about Climate Change***

### ***The General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) of the United Methodist Church:***

*As a matter of stewardship and justice, Christians must take action now to reduce global warming pollution and stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters around the world whose land, livelihood and lives are threatened by the global climate crisis.*

<http://www.umc-gbcs.org/site/apps/nl/content3.asp?c=frLJK2PKLqF&b=3631781&ct=3956191>

### ***From the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops:***

*At its core, global climate change is not about economic theory or political platforms, nor about partisan advantage or interest group pressures. It is about the future of God's creation and the one human family. It is about protecting both "the human environment" and the natural environment. It is about our human stewardship of God's creation and our responsibility to those who come after us.*

<http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/globalclimate.shtml#introduction>

### ***Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:***

*Caring, serving, keeping, loving, and living by wisdom--these translate into justice in political, economic, social, and environmental relationships. Justice in these relationships means honoring the integrity of creation, and striving for fairness within the human family. It is in hope of God's promised fulfillment that we hear the call to justice; it is in hope that we take action. When we act interdependently and in solidarity with creation, we do justice. We serve and keep the earth, trusting its bounty can be sufficient for all, and sustainable.*

### ***From the 2006 Presbyterian Church General Assembly, Resolution on Climate Change:***

*(The Church) strongly urges all Presbyterians to immediately make a bold witness by aspiring to live carbon neutral lives (and) calls upon all Presbyterians to take this seriously, to pray asking for God's*

*forgiveness and guidance, to study this issue, to calculate your carbon emissions, to educate others, and to use less energy, striving to make your life carbon neutral. [www.pcusa.org](http://www.pcusa.org)*

### ***The Episcopal Church, Response to Global Warming:***

*Global Warming threatens the future of God's good creation, and the effects of Global Warming disproportionately hurt the lives of the poorest and most vulnerable in the United States and around the world... Episcopalians and The Episcopal Church at every level support efforts that seek to reduce Global Warming, including national and international legislation that increase the supply of clean energy and reduce consumption of fossil fuels.*

[http://gc2006.org/legislation/view\\_leg\\_detail.aspx?id=188&type=CURRENT](http://gc2006.org/legislation/view_leg_detail.aspx?id=188&type=CURRENT)

### ***2006 UUA Statement of Conscience:***

*We as Unitarian Universalists are called to join with others to halt practices that fuel global warming/climate change, to instigate sustainable alternatives, and to mitigate the impending effects of global warming/climate change with just and ethical responses. As a people of faith, we commit to a renewed reverence for life and respect for the interdependent web of all existence.*

<http://www.uua.org/socialjustice/socialjustice/statements/8061.shtml>

### ***Mennonite Central Committee Statement:***

*The land, the rivers, and the skies cry out for healing. They "groan" for reconciliation with the human family they wish to sustain. As followers of Jesus Christ, we need to hear this cry. We need to hear and obey the command of our Creator who instructed us to be caretakers of and at peace with the creation. Faithful stewards of the gospel are also faithful stewards of God's creation. There have been and there are successful efforts underway within God's creation where responsible people are taking action to correct the abuses. But much more remains to be done.*

<http://www.interfaithpower.org/Tmennonite.htm>

### ***Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life:***

*Preventing climate change is a preeminent expression of faithfulness to our Creator God. ...We pray that the wisdom, faith, and solidarity of the American people will bring us together - at this critical juncture - to redirect our national energy policy toward conservation, efficiency, justice, and maximum use of the perennial abundance of clean and renewable energy that our Creator brought into being by proclaiming, "Let there be light" (Gen. 1:3). <http://www.coejl.org/action/alert/energysecurity2.pdf>*

### ***Evangelical Climate Initiative:***

*The same love for God and neighbor that compels us to preach salvation through Jesus Christ, protect the unborn, preserve the family and the sanctity of marriage, and take the whole Gospel to a hurting world, also compels us to recognize that human-induced climate change is a serious Christian issue requiring action now. <http://www.christiansandclimate.org/>*

### ***A Pastoral Teaching from the House of Bishops of The Episcopal Church***

meeting in Quito, Ecuador, September 2011.

*The mounting urgency of our environmental crisis challenges us at this time to confess "our self-indulgent appetites and ways," "our waste and pollution of God's creation," and "our lack of concern for those who come after us" (Ash Wednesday Liturgy, Book of Common Prayer, p. 268). It also challenges us to amend our lives and to work for environmental justice and for more environmentally sustainable practices.*

*Christians cannot be indifferent to global warming, pollution, natural resource depletion, species extinctions, and habitat destruction, all of which threaten life on our planet. Because so many of these threats are driven by greed, we must also actively seek to create more compassionate and sustainable economies that support the well-being of all God's creation.*

*We are especially called to pay heed to the suffering of the earth. The Anglican Communion Environmental Network calls to mind the dire consequences our environment faces: "We know that . . . we are now demanding more than [the earth] is able to provide. Science confirms what we already know: our human footprint is changing the face of the earth and because we come from the earth, it is changing us too. We are engaged in the process of destroying our very being. If we cannot live in harmony with the earth, we will not live in harmony with one another.*

### ***Section Six: Additional Resources***

**The NRSV Green Bible** is an almost essential resource. It contains wonderful articles at the beginning of the book and great ideas and resources at the back. Bible passages relating to creation are in green. It also contains a green subject index to scripture passages.

Helpful information may also be found on the following websites:

- National Council of Churches. <http://www.nccecojustice.org/earthday/EarthDayIdeas.php>  
Here you can find some great ideas about planning a complete Earth Day program that would be appropriate for just about any religion
- <http://earthday.envirolink.org/guide6.html> provides a variety of ideas appropriate for both church and community events on Earth Day
- Green Faith website, <http://greenfaith.org/religious-teachings>. This link provides additional links to official statements and positions by various denominations within major religious traditions on earth-care and the environment
- Green Faith website, <http://greenfaith.org/resource-center/spirit/eco-themed-worship-services>. This link provides prayers, references from sacred texts, and ideas for ecologically-themed worship services: