

Interfaith Worship Resources on Earth Stewardship

2014 EDITION



Provided by

SUSTAINABLE SANCTUARY
coalition

Introduction

Dear Clergy and Lay Leaders,

We all know that God's 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.

We can't under-estimate the power of collective awareness and action for positive social change. Earth Day has grown into a global event with significant influence. It has been credited with kicking off the Environmental Decade of the 1970s and contributing to legislation such as the Clean Air Act, Water Quality Improvement Act, Endangered Species Act, Toxic Substances Control Act, and others.

This collection of resources is intended to assist you in making your worship plans around an Earth stewardship theme. It includes sample sermons, prayers, worship ideas, quotes, scripture suggestions, denominational environmental statements, and links to additional resources. **While Earth Day only comes once a year, consider using these resources throughout the year to emphasize Earth stewardship.**

Those of us at the Sustainable Sanctuary Coalition are ready to assist you in any way we can. Please do not 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 we'd love to have a copy of your sermon if you are willing to share it.

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,

Chad

Rev. Chad J. Cooper, Executive Director
Sustainable Sanctuary Coalition

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



Section One: Bible Passages Relating to Creation

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God's Relationship with Creation

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)

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*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)*

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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)

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*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)*

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God Owns Creation

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

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*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)*

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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)

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## 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)*

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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)

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*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)*

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God Values Creation

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

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*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)*

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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)

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## God Sustains Creation

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

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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)

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## 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)*

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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)

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

### **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)*

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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)

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### **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)*

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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)

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*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)*

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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)

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

### **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)*

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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)

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*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)*

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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)

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### **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)

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*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)*

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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)

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## **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)*

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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)

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

### **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)*

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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)

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*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)*

## 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)*

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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)

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*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)*

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Find more scriptures on creation care at www.christianecology.org/Stewardship.html

Section Two: Blessings and Prayers

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Calls to Worship

Bless the Lord, O my soul.

O Lord my God, I stand in awe at your greatness.

Your being is clothed with honor and majesty and robed in light

You stretch out the heavens like a tent, making the winds your messengers,
and fire and flame your servants.

How great are your works, O God!

In your wisdom you created the earth and all that is within it.

In thanksgiving, let us worship and praise the Lord our God.

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**Leader:** How wonderful are the works of God!

**People:** We give thanks and praise for the beauty of creation.

**Leader:** God made all living thing-- animals, plants, & humans--and calls us to care for and protect them all.

**People:** As people of faith, we strive to care for all of creation.

**Leader:** God equips and empowers us live as good stewards.

**People:** Let us worship and praise God together!

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O God, Holy Spirit, whose breath gives life to the world

and whose voice is heard in the soft breeze,

we need your strength and wisdom.

Come to us and among us;

Come as the wind and cleanse us.

We join with your Creation and with each other

to sing the song of the stars;

to rejoice in the sunlight;

and to refresh the air.

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(For Christian worship. Use the hymn *Holy, Holy, Holy* in the response)

**Leader:** Our God created the heavens and the earth.

**People (singing): Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!**

**Leader:** Our God created us in God's image, male and female God created us.

**People (singing): Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!**

**Leader:** Our God made us to be in relationship with creation and with God.

**People (singing): Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!**

**Leader:** Our God desires relationship with us, for God created us in the image of God, in relationship

with one another.

**People (singing): God in three persons, blessed Trinity!**

Leader: Come, let us worship the Triune God, blessed Trinity!

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General Prayers

(Christian) Almighty God, who has created and is creating, we look around at the beauty of this earth and are amazed by your works. Spectacular sunsets, cheerful birds singing, humorous and beloved pets are all reminders of the wonders of creation. For all of this, we give you thanks. Bind us together as a community that we might care for one another, building each other up in faith. On this Earth day, O God, enliven in us a new energy to care for your creation. Teach us new ways reduce our waste and creative ways to reuse items. Empower us to be good stewards of this Earth that we love, and which you have entrusted to us. We pray all of this in Jesus' holy name. Amen

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O God, we thank you for this Earth, our home; for the bright wide sky and the blessed sun, for the oceans and streams, for the towering hills and the whispering wind, for the trees and green grass. We thank you for these wonders of nature that we are able to experience year round. We thank you for our senses by which we hear the songs of birds, and see the bright summer sun, and taste autumn's fruit, and rejoice in the feel of snow, and smell the breath of spring flowers. Grant us a heart opened wide to all this beauty; and save us from being so blind that we pass the glory of even the most common wildflower or unwelcome creature. We ask all of this in our thankful heart for this created Earth of beauty. Amen.

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(Christian) Gracious God, your amazing love extends through all time and space, to all parts of your creation, which you created and called good. You made a covenant with Noah and his family, putting a rainbow in the sky to symbolize your promise of love and blessing to every living creature, and to all successive generations. You made a covenant with Abraham and Sarah, blessing them and their descendants throughout the generations. You made a covenant with Moses and the Israelite people to all generations, giving them the 10 commandments and challenging them to choose life. In Jesus, you invite us to enter into a new covenant, in communion with all who seek to be faithful to you.

As people of faith, we are called into covenant. Your covenant of faithfulness and love extends to the whole creation. We pray for the healing of the earth, that present and future generations may enjoy the fruits of creation, and continue to glorify and praise you. Amen. *(National Council of Churches)*

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### **Prayer of Compassion** *(By St. Basil the Great, 330-379.)*

O God, enlarge within us the sense of  
fellowship with all living things,  
our brothers the animals to whom thou  
gavest the earth as their home in  
common with us.

We remember with shame that in the past  
we have exercised the high dominion  
of man with ruthless cruelty  
so that the voice of the earth,  
which should have gone up to thee  
in song, has been a groan of travail.

May we realize that they live not for  
us alone but for themselves and for  
thee, and that they love  
the sweetness of life.

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Offering Prayer *(By Tanya Marcovna Barnett)*

All good gifts come from you, dear God, and you reveal glimpses of your grace through them. Thank you for inviting us to be partners with you in caring for your creation. We offer these gifts now, knowing that they come first from you, then from other members of your family of creation, then from us. Bless these symbols of our awareness that we depend upon you and your creation for all that we call "ours." Please accept these gifts and our desire to be your partners. In Your name. Amen.

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### **Intercessory Prayer** *(From National Council of Churches)*

Creator God, you make all things  
and weave them together in an intricate tapestry of life.  
Teach us to respect the fragile balance of life and to care for all the gifts of your creation.  
Guide by your wisdom those who have power and authority,  
that, by the decisions they make, life may be cherished  
and a good and fruitful Earth may continue to show your glory and sing your praises.

Almighty God,  
you have called us to tend and keep the garden of your creation.  
Give us wisdom and reverence for all your plants and animals who share this planet with us and

whose lives make possible our own.

Help us to remember that they too love the sweetness of life and join with us in giving you praise.

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Prayer for the Earth *(by Carol Meyer)*

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

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### **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.

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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.

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### **Prayer of Thanksgiving for the Earth** *(by Carol Meyer)*

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.

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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.

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### ***Prayers of the People***

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

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

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

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

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

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

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(Christian)

We give you thanks and praise, O God of creation, for the grandeur of all that you have made, saying
We thank you, God.

For the healing waters of creation, which bring pleasure and health, purity and life,
We thank you, God.

For the richness of the good Earth that brings forth fruits and flowers, a pleasure to taste and a joy to behold,
We thank you, God.

For the soaring birds of the air, the crawling creatures on the Earth, the gliding fishes in the seas, for all creatures great and small with whom we share this precious web of life,
We thank you, God.

For the invigorating sunlight of day, the deepening mystery of night, the wonder of the stars, and the call of the unknown in the universe,
We thank you, God.

From heedless misuse and dishonoring of the wonders of your hand,
Good Lord, deliver us.

From squandering resources, abusing our companion species, and polluting the habitat we all share,
Good Lord, deliver us.

From the folly of imagining ourselves free from the fate of your whole creation,
Good Lord, deliver us.

For the courage and wisdom to confess how little we have cared for your gifts,
Strengthen us, O Spirit.

For the conviction that you have called us to love and restore the Earth,
Strengthen us, O Spirit.

For repentance and the determination to begin our stewardship anew,
Strengthen us, O Spirit.

O merciful Creator, your hand is open wide to satisfy the needs of every living creature: Make us always thankful for your loving providence; and grant that we, remembering the account that we must one day give, may be faithful stewards of your good gifts; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever, **Amen.** *(From St. Thomas Episcopal Church, Medina, Washington)*

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## ***Litanies***

### **Litany of the Six Directions** *(from the Native American Tradition)*

**Leader:** We turn to the West for a blessing to the Spirit of Shalom, Peace: make us whole, make us holy, help us to love You and one another with our whole heart, our whole mind, our whole being, we pray:

**People:** Empower us, Holy Spirit.

**Leader:** We turn to the North for a blessing to the Spirit of Integrity: give us Your strength and the courage to endure all the problems we may face, we pray:

**People:** Empower us, Holy Spirit.

**Leader:** We turn to the East for a blessing, to the Spirit of Illumination: open our eyes to the sacredness of every living thing, we pray:

**People:** Empower us, Holy Spirit.

**Leader:** We turn to the South for a blessing, to the Spirit of Transformation: help us to grow in wisdom and grace and the goodness of the ages, we pray:

**People:** Empower us, Holy Spirit.

**Leader:** We look to the Heavens, to the Spirit of Openness: fill us with a breadth of vision to see that Your love embraces all, we pray:

**People:** Empower us, Holy Spirit.

**Leader:** We touch the Earth for a blessing, and thereby touch the Spirit which lives among us

and within us: help us to be more human and to praise you through the work of our hands, we pray:

**People:** Empower us, Holy Spirit.

**Leader:** Let us go from here blessed and renewed in the Spirit of Peace, in the Spirit of Integrity, in the Spirit of Illumination, in the Spirit of Transformation, with hopes lifted high to the heavens and with hearts loving the earth in the name of our loving, creating, nurturing God.

**People:** Amen!

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Benedictions

All Sustaining Spirit,
You encircle space and time;
You swirl and sing through every season.
In silent stillness you settle deep into the soul of Creation.
Your sacred wisdom has come to us this day
in the words of ancient truth,
through the words of present day prophets,
for the ones whose future wellbeing is formed by our response today.
May our actions be formed
by what has been spoken and heard and felt here today.
Make us wise and faithful stewards of Creation
sustained by your Spirit forever more. Amen. *(By Rev. Helen Nelson, 2012.)*

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**Leader:** Certainly God is raising up people even today to bring us through this dark time.  
**People:** Life-giving God, we offer ourselves in service to you, supported by a great cloud of witnesses who urge us on.  
**Leader:** We are connected to other people of faith and conscience around the world who are working for a peaceful, just, and sustainable world.  
**People:** This global community supports us; we support each other.  
**Leader:** We are related to the earth and all its creatures in a web that cannot be broken without injury to all.  
**People:** The earth and our fellow creatures support us; we are their advocates.  
**Leader:** Therefore, let us lay aside every weight and sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, resisting all powers that destroy, bringing healing and hope to the world.  
**People:** O God, Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer, we offer our lives in service to you.

*(from National Council of Churches)*



## Section Three: Environmental Quotes

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### **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

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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)

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*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*

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*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

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*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

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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

~~~~~

*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

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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

"Preservation of the environment, promotion of sustainable development and particular attention to climate change are matters of grave concern for the entire human family. "

Pope Benedict XVI

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*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

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*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*

~~~~~

*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

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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

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*We meet God in and through the world, if we are ever to meet God. God is not out there or back there or yet to be, but hidden in the most ordinary things of our ordinary lives. If we cannot find the transcendent in the world, in its beauty and its suffering, then for us bodily, earthy creatures it is probably not to be found at all.*

Sallie McFague

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Section Four: Facts on the Environment

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The planet's natural eco-systems and regenerating bio-capacity are being severely impacted and as a result compromising the ability of the planet to sustain life. Forests, fisheries, oceans, rangeland, fresh water systems, and other natural ecosystems are all threatened and many on the verge of collapse. Water, land, and air are getting increasingly polluted. Here are a few quick facts that might be helpful in your preaching. Source footnotes are also included.

Forests

- *The world has lost 80% of the original forests which covered the earth. (1)*
- *In the United States, less than 4% of our original forests are left. (2)*

Species Extinction

- *25% of all mammals (3) and 12% of birds (4) are threatened with extinction*
- *In the next 30 years, as many as one-fifth of all species alive today will be extinct (5)*
- *Species are dying at an unprecedented rate – 100 to 1000 times faster than their natural rate (6)*

Water

- *Currently more than one-third of the world's population experiences serious water problems and polluted water sickens more than 1 billion people each year. (7)*
- *Forty percent of waterways in the US have become undrinkable. (8)*

Topsoil

- *As a result of erosion over the past 40 years, 30% of the world's arable land has become unproductive. (9) Soil erosion is leading to expanding deserts.*
- *The United States is losing soil 10 times faster -- and China and India are losing soil 30 to 40 times faster -- than the natural replenishment rate. (10)*

Fishing

- *75% of all fish stocks are either exploited or over-exploited (11)*
- *19% of coral reefs are already gone and 35% are seriously threatened (12)*

Wetlands

- *The world has lost half its coastal wetlands, including mangrove swamps and salt marshes (13)*

Resources


- *In the past three decades, one-third of the planet's natural resources have been consumed. (14)*

Climate Change

- *Could raise the sea level by 2 feet, flooding lands where millions of people live (15)*
- *Causes reductions in rainfall across vast areas where crops are now grown (16)*
- *Causes the melting of many glaciers and a rise in snow elevations, affecting water and food supplies across the globe (16)*
- *Contributes to more storms and hurricanes of increasing intensity and frequency (16)*

Notes:

- (1) World Resource Institute, The Last Frontier Forest, 1997
- (2) Lester Brown, Michael Renner, Christopher Flavin, Vital Signs 1998, Worldwatch Institute, Washington D.C.
- (3) International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, The Red List of Threatened Species, 2008
- (4) BirdLife International, Threatened Birds of the World (Barcelona, Spain, and Cambridge, U.K.:Lynx Ediciones and BirdLife International, 2000), p. 2; World Conservation Union – IUCN, Species Survival Commission, www.redlist.org/tables/table1a.html, viewed 12 February 2001.
- (5) “The majority of scientist (70%) polled think that during the next thirty years as many as one-fifth of all species alive today will become extinct.” American Museum of National History, Press Release, 20 April 1998
- (6) According to World Wildlife Fund CEO Carter Roberts in a report to Congress during a hearing on HR 3086, the “Global Wildlife Conservation, Coordination and Enhancement Act of 2009.”
- (7) United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Sources No. 84, November 1996
- (8) American Rivers, Americans Most Endangered Rivers of 1998 Report.
- (9) “Food, Land, Population and the U.S. Economy”, Pimentel and Giampietro, Nov. 1994.
- (10) David Pimentel, Journal of the Environment, Development and Sustainability, Volume 8, 2006.
- (11) Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, “The state of the world fisheries and aquaculture”, 2006, page 33

- (12) Wilkinson, C. (2008). Status of coral reefs of the world: 2008. Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network and Reef and Rainforest Research Centre, Townsville, Australia.
- (13) Don Hinrichsin. Coastal Waters of the World: Trends, Threats and Strategies. Washinton, D.C., Island Press, 1998, page 90.
- (14) Paul Hawken, Amory Lovins and L. Hunter Lovins, Natural Capitalism, Little Brown and Company, (1999), page 4.
- (15) IPCC, 2007: Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability . Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [Parry, Martin L., Canziani, Osvaldo F., Palutikof, Jean P., van der Linden, Paul J., and Hanson, Clair E. (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 1000 pp
- (16) Low Impact Living Web Site, <http://www.lowimpactliving.com/pages/your-impacts/global-warming>, viewed 19 January 2011

Section Five: Sample Earth Day Sermons

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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.

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.

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

Psalms 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.

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.
- 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.

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.ssckc.org) under Worship Resources.

Section Six: Preaching Ideas from Lectionary Readings, April 21

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What follows are ideas to spark your creativity in connecting the Lectionary readings to Earth stewardship themes. Use of more in-depth Biblical commentaries and exegesis tools might also help you find additional correlations.

First Reading:

Acts 9:36-43 (Revised Common Lectionary)

This is the account of Peter bringing Tabitha (Dorcas) back to life. This is a story of hope, about being brought back to life by God's power. Some things in the natural world are also dying, so it is also time for us to take action, just as the disciples did when they called Peter. They didn't despair but believed something could be done. So also, we are called to do what we can, and also, like Peter, to pray. Often we discount the power of prayer to bring about positive results for the wellbeing of the Earth.

Acts 13:14, 43-52 (Roman Catholic Lectionary)

Paul and Barnabas say that God commanded them to be a light to the Gentiles, so that they might bring salvation to the ends of the earth. We know that for Jesus, and presumably for Paul and Barnabas, salvation was not just a spiritual reality for the next life, but something that involved God's reign of justice here and now on the Earth.

In our day, we are vividly aware that social justice and the integrity of the Earth are intimately connected. We also know that even salvation in the traditional Christian sense of eternal life after death is dependent on a healthy Earth. The church that preaches and mediates this salvation is dependent on the Earth providing the basic necessities of life, and can only thrive if the natural world is thriving.

"I have set you to be a light..." – There seems to be a common misperception that environmentalism and Christianity don't mix. But surely Christians who love God should be the first ones to love what God loves, which is creation. We believe the Earth is a sacred reality that comes forth from God, so we of all people, should decry its wanton, utilitarian destruction for greedy purposes. We Christians should be in the forefront of caring for the environment, modeling sustainable practices in our congregations, homes, workplaces, and communities. We need to be the light, boldly and prophetically caring for the Earth even when it's not popular.

Psalm Response:

Psalm 23 (Revised Common Lectionary)

This most beloved of biblical passages utilizes many nature images to give a sense of comfort and safety. In many parts of the world, the green pastures are being replaced by barren deserts, due to our unsustainable environmental practices. Fresh, clean, clear water is something most people have no experience of. This could be a place to talk about the water crisis in the world. And far from nature restoring the soul, many only know pollution, scarcity, and ugliness that scar their souls and bring suffering and sickness. When creation was respected and honored, it did indeed makes our cups to overflow and bring goodness and mercy, but no longer.

Psalm 100 (Roman Catholic Lectionary)

This is truly a beautiful psalm of thanksgiving and joyfulness. You could talk about giving thanks to God for creation and all its blessings, perhaps lifting up examples of the intelligence, beauty, and awe-inspiring wonders of creation. “Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth” – what sense can we make of this except that the Earth is filled with the spirit of God, and too participates in praise of its Creator? We know that the Earth is indeed a bio-spiritual living organism that participates in the wisdom and purpose of God. This is also a psalm of hope in an age when many feel hopeless about the state of the planet. It reminds us that God’s love and faithfulness continue on and enable us to co-create with God a new kind of world that honors creation.

Second Reading:

Revelation 7:9-17

This is such a rich text for preaching about Earth stewardship. We see that in God’s perfect design, there is no hunger and thirst or scorching heat, yet that is what people around the globe are increasingly experiencing. This text provides a perfect opportunity to talk about global warming and what it is doing to the planet and its life, including humans, and how this is certainly contrary to the plan of God. In this passage, Jesus is the shepherd at the center of this perfection. You could lift up the values and teachings of Jesus that could guide us in creating a more sustainable and life-giving world: caring about the least among us, renouncing greed and materialism, being non-violent, putting love at the center of everything, letting go of fear and trusting God to provide.

Gospel Reading:

John 10:22-30 (Revised Common) or John 10:27-30 (Catholic)

This text referring to Jesus the good shepherd would also support the theme of the Revelation reading that Jesus has the answers that we need, and that we are called to follow him. One of the things he certainly modeled was gospel simplicity, something that is desperately needed in our society of over-consumption. This could be the theme of the whole sermon, in fact.

Jesus says, “The Father and I are one.” You could use this to build a theme around the oneness and interdependence of all creation, and our oneness with God, which gives us the grace to do something about the plight of the environment. This passage also has a strong message of hope, that nothing can snatch us out of God’s hands. It’s another call to let go of fear and hopelessness about the state of the planet, which only make matters worse, and to get busy doing something and finding solution to the problems.

Section Seven: Worship Ideas for Earth Day

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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 resource strongly suggests, if possible devote your sermon to the connection between faith and our obligation to care for the Earth. Additional sample sermons can be found on the SSC website (www.ssckc.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, a packet of seeds, or even 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

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. These ideas can also be used at any worship emphasizing Earthcare.

Section Eight: Denominational Statements about Climate Change

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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

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

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 Nine: Additional Resources

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Books:

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

The Great Work: Our Way into the Future by Thomas Berry. A classic, deep, and hopeful book by a top cultural historian and theologian, who masterfully lays out a spiritual and practical vision for a new mutually beneficial relationship between humans and the natural world. Highly recommended.

Ecology at the Heart of Faith by Denis Edwards. A Christian resource that connects ecology with the main elements of Christian theology and practice.

Earthsongs: Praying with Nature by Wayne Simsic. Wonder, reverence, and praise in encounter with the beauty of nature. Addresses our longing to encounter nature from the depths of our life.

Websites:

Eco-Justice Ministries, <http://eco-justice.org/E-list.asp>. Rev. Peter Sawtell writes weekly articles called *Eco-Justice Notes* that are invaluable in linking current ecological themes/issues with faith and congregational life. You can get hundreds of sermon ideas from reading his past articles. Geared to Christian churches, but still helpful to an interfaith audience.

National Council of Churches, <http://www.ncccojustice.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

Green Faith, <http://greenfaith.org/religious-teachings>. Provides additional links to official statements and positions by various denominations within major religious traditions on earth-care and the environment

Green Faith, <http://greenfaith.org/resource-center/spirit/eco-themed-worship-services>.
Provides prayers, references from sacred texts, and ideas for ecologically-themed worship.

Envirolink, <http://earthday.envirolink.org/guide6.html> provides a variety of ideas appropriate for both church and community events on Earth Day