

AND IT WAS GOOD

Genesis 2:4b-15; Psalm 148; Matthew 6:25-34 // An Earth Day Celebration

We confess that God is our Creator, the maker of heaven and earth. And the God who creates also calls creation “good.” This conviction shapes the way we view and live in our world. We care for the world, see God’s beauty in it, and aim to be good stewards of its care. Our responsibility is to become God’s instruments, seeking the earth’s justice, renewal, and sustainability.

MAIN THEME: *We praise God as creator and reflect on how we can better obey God’s commission to “take care” of the earth.*

CHOOSING MUSIC // FOR SINGING

- ✪ **For the Beauty of the Earth** [Key of G]
Text and Music: Edward John Hopkins and Folliot Sandford Pierpoint
Public Domain
- ✪ **This is My Father’s World** [Key of D]
Text and Music: Franklin Lawrence Sheppard, Maltbie Davenport Babcock, and Stan Loyd
© 2010 Broadman Press (Admin. by Music Services, Inc.)
- ✪ **All Creatures of Our God and King** [Key of D]
St. Francis of Assisi
Public Domain
- ✪ **How Great is Our God** [Key of C]
Text and Music: Chris Tomlin, Ed Cash, Jesse Reeves
© 2004 sixsteps Music (Admin. by Capitol CMG Publishing)
- ✪ **Across the Lands** [Key of D]
Text and Music: Keith Getty and Stuart Townend
© 2002 Thankyou Music (Admin. Capitol CMG Publishing)
- ✪ **God of Wonders** [Key of E]
Text and Music: Marc Byrd and Steve Hindalong
© 2000 Never Say Never Songs (Admin. by Brentwood-Benson Music Publishing, Inc.)
- ✪ **Hear Our Praises** [Key of C]
Text and Music: Reuben Morgan
© 1998 Hillsong Music Publishing (Admin. by Capitol CMG Publishing)
- ✪ **Indescribable** [Key of G]
Text and Music: Jesse Reeves and Laura Story
© 2004 Laura Stories (Admin. by Capitol CMG Publishing)

CREATING DRAMA // FOR HEARING

Purchase and use “**Don’t Worry About Tomorrow**” // The Work of the People [www.theworkofthepeople.com] as the Matthew scripture reading:

The “Letter to All the People,” attributed to Chief Seattle of the Duwamish Indians, was written in the mid-1800s and represents a profound understanding of the earth as sacred and our mission to care for it. Consider reading portions of it to remind worshipers that there is still much work to be done. Make it more poignant by having another reader insert contemporary news headlines regarding ways in which we are failing to care for our earth.

Enlist your best readers for a dramatic reading of Psalm 148, a psalm which highlights all of creation in the praise of God. Place readers at different areas of the worship space and have them project their voices prominently for an antiphonal effect.

ALL: Hallelujah!

Voice 1: Praise God from the heavens; praise God from the heights!
Praise God, all you angels;
Praise God, all you multitudes in heaven!

**ALL: Praise God, sun and moon; praise God, all you shining stars!
Praise God, you highest heavens,
and you waters above the heavens!**

Voice 2: Let them praise the name of the Most High,
for God commanded and they were created.
God established them forever and ever;
God fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.

**ALL: Praise God from the earth,
you sea monsters and all deeps,
fire and hail, snow and frost,
stormy wind fulfilling God’s command!**

Voice 3: Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars!
Wild animals and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds!
Sovereigns of the earth and all peoples,
royalty and all rulers of the earth!
Young men and women alike, young and old, together!

ALL: Let them praise the name of God!

Voice 4: For God’s name alone is exalted;
God’s glory is above earth and heaven.
God has raised up a horn for God’s people.

**ALL: Praise for all the faithful,
for the people of Israel who are close to God.
Hallelujah!**

FINDING ART // FOR SEEING

Ask worshippers to bring photos of their favorite outdoor spaces and places. At the beginning of the service, invite everyone to come forward to place their photos prominently at the front to create a wall collage, reminding worshippers that sacred space extends outside the walls of our worship building.

Plan a procession where particular worshippers are asked to bring “raw” elements of creation and place them at the front when worship begins: a candle representing light, a clear bowl of water, a bowl of dirt, a plant or flower, fruit and vegetables, natural stones, leaves, and feathers.

If you choose a specific theme for your service such as clean air, fresh water, ocean care, sustainable energy, or local farming and agriculture, display prominent photos of work toward such initiatives throughout the service.

LIVING WORSHIP // FOR DOING

If you’ve chosen a particular environmental theme (clean air, sustainable energy, local farming, etc.), create a handout which informs worshippers on how to serve and be better stewards by highlighting the needs of that initiative.

Let this worship gathering serve as the beginning of a community project or event. Here are some ideas:

- Spend the afternoon cleaning up a local park or prominent highway.
- Have a green church workday to set up rain barrels, do native landscaping on church grounds, and replace incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescent bulbs.
- Host a “green fellowship” complete with organic, fair-trade coffee, treats from local shops and restaurants, and fresh produce from local farmers. Use re-useable plates, cups, silverware, and napkins. Educate worshippers by posting big, easy-to-read signs to educate them on how to make meals more “green.”
- At that fellowship, invite a guest speaker who is an expert on how to “go green” locally, emphasizing resources in your own community.
- Plan on spending time with other worshippers in the beauty of nature. Plan a group picnic at a local trail, park, or natural area. Give thanks to God for the use of beautiful green spaces.

MAKING SPACE // FOR WORSHIPING

If possible, make plans to worship outdoors today. There is no better way to celebrate God’s creation than to worship outside in the midst of it.

If worshiping outdoors is not an option, bring the outdoors in. Purchase or ask worshippers to bring their homegrown plants, flowers, and herbs to create a greenhouse-like worship space. The more green, colorful, and fragrant, the better.

If your congregation uses printed materials in worship, print only on recycled paper for today. Consider recommending that worshippers continue to use recycled paper for their printed worship materials even after Earth Day.

THE LORD'S TABLE// FOR CELEBRATING SACRAMENT

If you are celebrating the Lord's Supper today, decorate the Lord's Table with bags of grain and bunches of grapes, reminding worshipers that the Lord's gifts come from the earth.

WRITING POETRY// FOR PRAYING

As Matthew 6 suggests, we often worry about our wellbeing. Sometimes our worry is a result of our trying to be our own masters, rather than trusting God's care for us and the world. As we celebrate God's good creation, we also need to confess our failure to be good caretakers.

Use this prayer, based on the creation story of Genesis 1, or allow its themes to inspire your own prayer.

God of all creation:

ALL: On the first day you made day and night.

Forgive us for taking granted the dependable patterns of your world.
Open our eyes to see the beauty of the cosmos you created as our home.

ALL: One the second day, you made the sky.

Forgive us for polluting the air.
Help us see how best to restore and renew your creation.

ALL: One the third day you made the seas and plants.

Forgive us for spoiling the seas.
Give us resolve to change our hurtful habits.

ALL: On the fourth day you made the sun and moon.

Forgive us for failing to pause in praise of their splendor.
Open our lips so that we will sing your praise.

ALL: On the fifth day you made swarms of living creatures.

Forgive us for seeing their value only in terms of serving our interests.
Give us new opportunities to delight in their beauty and diversity.

ALL: On the sixth day you made humankind in your image.

Forgive us for denying dignity to all your people.
Work through us until all know their worth as your creatures.

ALL: On the seventh day you rested.

Forgive us for failing to take joy in our rest.
Help us enter your rhythm of rest, even in this day of worship.

ALL: Through Christ, our Lord, firstborn of all creation. Amen.

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SAMPLE WORSHIP SERVICE

And It Was Good // Genesis 2:4b-15; Psalm 148; Matthew 6:25-34 // An Earth Day Celebration

[Worship outdoors, preferably in a space known for its natural beauty]

GREETING

Leader: Come, let us dwell in God's good creation.
Let us dwell in God's masterpiece.
Come, because the earth is the Lord's,
and God's earth is our home

All: **We live in God's world; we are not alone. We share this life with the heavens and the earth, with trees and grasses, with fish, birds, and animals, with minerals and creatures of every form, and with all our brothers and sisters.**

Leader: God is good and everything God creates is good. God is love and everything God creates is love's fruit. Let us worship our loving Creator!

PROCESSION

Song of God's Providence
This is My Father's World

While worshipers are singing, have those designated to bring natural elements (candles, bowl of water, dirt, plants, fruit, vegetables, etc.) to process to the front to create a focal point with their offerings, reminders of God's good gifts.

WELCOME

Say hi to other worshipers and welcome one another in the name of Christ.

SCRIPTURE READING

Psalm 148 // All of Creation Praises God

ALL: **Hallelujah!**

Voice 1: Praise God from the heavens;
praise God from the heights!
Praise God, all you angels;
Praise God, all you multitudes in heaven!

ALL: **Praise God, sun and moon; praise God, all you shining stars. Praise God, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens!**

Voice 2: Let them praise the name of the Most High, for God commanded and they were created. God established them forever and ever; God fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.

ALL: **Praise God from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling God's command!**

Voice 3: Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars! Wild animals and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds! Sovereigns of the earth and all peoples, royalty and all rulers of the earth! Young men and women alike, young and old, together!

ALL: **Let them praise the name of God!**

Voice 4: For God's name alone is exalted; God's glory is above earth and heaven. God has raised up a horn for God's people.

ALL: **Praise for all the faithful, for the people of Israel who are close to God. Hallelujah!**

SONGS OF WORSHIP

All Creatures of Our God and King
Across the Lands

SCRIPTURE READING

Genesis 2:4b-15
Creation's Story

REAL LIFE DIALOGUE

Thinking about Earth Care

[Prior to the service, gather contemporary news headlines regarding ways in which we are failing in the earth's care. Interweave them into excerpts from Chief Seattle's "Letter to All the People" and have worshippers "planted" in the congregation who will read these headlines at designated points.]

"The President in Washington sends word that he wishes to buy our land. But how can you buy or sell the sky, the land? The idea is strange to us. If we do not own the freshness of the air or the spark of the water, then how can you buy them? Every part of this Earth is sacred to my people; every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every meadow, every humming insect. All are holy in the memory and experience of my people. We know the sap that courses through the trees as we know the blood that courses through our veins. We are a part of the Earth, and it is part of us. The perfumed flowers are our sisters. The bear, the deer, the great eagle: these are our brothers. The rocky crests, the juices in the meadow, the body heat of the pony, and the man all belong to the same family."

Insert headline: e.g., "Americans constitute 5% of the world's population but consume 24% of the world's energy."

"The shining water that moves from the streams and rivers is not just water but the blood of our ancestors. If we sell you our land, you must remember that it is sacred. Each ghostly reflection in the lakes tells of memories in the life of my people. The water's murmur is the voice of my father's father. The rivers are our brothers. They quench our thirst. They carry our canoes and feed our children. So you must give to the rivers the

kindness you would give to any brother."

Insert headline: e.g., "The rainforest disappeared way more quickly this year . . ."

"One thing we know: our God is also your God. The Earth is precious to him, and to harm the Earth is to heap contempt on its creator."

Insert headline.

"Your destiny is a mystery to us. What will happen when the buffalo are all slaughtered? The wild horses tamed? What will happen when the secret corners of the forest are heavy with the scent of men and the view of the ripe hills is blotted by talking wires? Where will the thicket be? Gone. Where will the eagle be? Gone. And what is it to say good-bye to the swift pony and the hunt? The end of living and the beginning of survival!

Insert headline.

"We love this Earth as a newborn loves its mother's heartbeat. So if we sell you our land, love it as we have loved it. Care for it as we have cared for it. Hold in your memory the land as it is when you receive it. Preserve the land for all children and love it as God loves us all. As we are part of the land, you too are a part of the land. As the Earth is precious to us, so is it precious to you.

Insert headline.

"One thing we know: there is only one God. No man, be he red man or white man, can be apart. We are brothers after all."

CONFESSING TOGETHER

Leader: God of all creation:

ALL: **On the first day you made day and night.**

Leader: Forgive us for taking granted the dependable patterns of your world.

Leader: Open our eyes to see the beauty of the cosmos you created as our home.

ALL: **One the second day, you made the sky.**

Leader: Forgive us for polluting the air. Help us see how best to restore and renew your creation.

ALL: **One the third day you made the seas and plants.**

Leader: Forgive us for spoiling the seas. Give us resolve to change our hurtful habits.

ALL: **On the fourth day you made the sun and moon.**

Leader: Forgive us for failing to pause in praise of their splendor. Open our lips so that we will sing your praise.

ALL: **On the fifth day you made swarms of living creatures.**

Leader: Forgive us for seeing their value only in terms of serving our interests. Give us new opportunities to delight in their beauty and diversity.

ALL: **On the sixth day you made humankind in your image.**

Leader: Forgive us for denying dignity to all your people. Work through us until all know their worth as your creatures.

ALL: **On the seventh day you rested.**

Leader: Forgive us for failing to take joy in our rest. Help us enter your rhythm of rest, even in this day of worship.

ALL: **Through Christ, our Lord, firstborn of all creation. Amen.**

SONG OF ADORATION

Indescribable

SCRIPTURE READING

Matthew 6:25-34 // Don't Worry
Purchase and use the video "Don't Worry About Tomorrow" as the Matthew scripture reading from The Work of the People.

MESSAGE

And It Was Good

CLOSING SONG

For the Beauty of the Earth

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Life and Ministry of Our Church

BENEDICTION

Leader: The whole creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God. Go forth and be the children of God for this world: the tillers, the keepers, the peacemakers, and the hope-bringers. Don't worry and try to be a master of it all. Instead care for creation as a humble response to God's love. Amen.

SENT OUT TO SERVE

Begin a "green church" workday. Look for ways to be more energy efficient and earth-friendly. For example: Set up rain barrels, do native landscaping on church grounds, replace incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescent bulbs, or start a community garden on church grounds.