

Worship & Creation

A DIGITAL GUIDEBOOK



A ROCHA
USA

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We are also grateful to our contributing writers: Heidy Sumei Chuang, Ruth Padilla DeBorst, Liuan Huska, Ron and Debra Rienstra, David Swanson, W. David O. Taylor, and Derrick Weston. Each one brings their own important insights to the conversation about what it can mean to love and care for God's whole creation as followers of Christ in specific places, with specific people.

Jenna Henderson, Director of Community Engagement at A Rocha USA, coordinated the project. Ben Johnson at Tending Oaks Creative designed this guidebook and the beautiful archway artwork. Liuan Huska provided editing support.

We hope this resource will support and inspire worshiping communities to more faithfully follow Christ, care for creation, and glorify our good Creator.

A WORD FROM A ROCHA USA'S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

I often visit the Au Sable Institute—one of our key conservation partners—in the beautiful woods of Northern Michigan. On one edge of the Au Sable campus lies a dock on the shores of a reed-filled pond. Louie's Pond teems with life and is surrounded by towering birch and pine trees.

On cool spring nights, I love to sit on that dock with my legs dangling over the edge, spending time with God. Overhead, the night sky is bursting with thousands of twinkling stars proclaiming the glory of the Creator (Psalm 19). Below, all is still except for the soft rustling of leaves in the gentle breeze.

Peace pervades the night and quiets my soul. That is, until the chorus frogs get going.

“Cree-ee-ee-ee-eek!”

They may be small, but they are loud. They are persistent. And they are determined to find mates.

“Cree-ee-ee-ee-eek!” “Cree-ee-ee-ee-eek!” “Cree-ee-ee-ee-eek!”

The first time this happened, as I was sitting there trying to focus and pray, the racket started to annoy me. “Shhhhhhhh!” I admonished, but the frogs continued undeterred.

Then, something happened that changed my attitude. As I kept listening, I began to realize that God made these frogs to live around ponds like this, and he gave them loud voices to call out to one another in the dark. They were in fact fulfilling their role in the place God put them, and this glorifies their Creator.

Now, I no longer wanted them to stop—I wanted to join them! We humans are also part of God's creation. And, like the frogs in Louie's Pond, when we fulfill our role in the places God puts us, we too praise God.

At A Rocha USA, our mission is to “live out God’s call to care for creation and equip others to do likewise.” It’s a two-part mission but, at the end of the day, it’s all about worship. While the theological, scientific, and practical work we offer is intended to benefit our human and other-than-human neighbors, the offering itself is directed to our Creator as a fitting and faithful act of worship.

One way to know what God’s people care about is to look at what we pray about, sing about, and preach about. And what we pray about, sing about, and preach about in turn helps shape who we are and what we care about. ✎

The reason Christians are often not known for our environmental care and concern is not because we lack the biblical calling or theological resources. My shelves are filled with books by leading theologians unpacking the biblical teachings on caring for God’s earth. It was our original vocation in Genesis 1-2. The problem is that, by and large, we have not been faithfully living it out these days.

We have an opportunity to change this. One way to know what God’s people care about is to look at what we pray about, sing about, and preach about. And what we pray about, sing about, and preach about in turn helps shape who we are and what we care about.

This resource is designed to encourage and equip our churches as we reclaim our calling to care for God’s good but groaning world. In this timely and biblical way, may we join with the heavens, the chorus frogs, and all of creation in praising and proclaiming the goodness and glory of our Creator.

~

Rev. Dr. Ben Lowe

Executive Director, A Rocha USA

July 2024

INTRODUCTION

When Christians gather together for worship, we enter consciously and thoughtfully into the presence of our Creator, the God who made us, and the whole world in which we live. Scriptures tell us that the created world matters to God—that the making, sustaining, redeeming, and restoring of creation are part of God’s mission. Our worship, therefore, if it is to form our hearts and minds toward what our God loves, must take into account creation and the relationship we are called to have with it.

Sometimes this is simply a matter of taking care to focus our attention on that which has been neglected or excluded. For us who get our food from the supermarket, prayers for rain and for harvest might not as readily spring to mind as they did for our ancestors who lived in more agrarian societies. And as shaped as we are by post-Enlightenment rationalism, we may be more inclined than we realize to limit our following of Jesus to a discipleship merely of the mind. Yet God calls us to recover a whole-life discipleship of our entire selves.

In some cases, we have allowed the content of our worship to drift away from biblical teaching. As NT Wright points out in *Surprised by Hope*, generations of hymnody have taught us to conceive of our future hope as a disembodied state to which God will “take me home”—a vision quite different from the biblical vision of the final resurrection, God’s healing of the world, and the marriage of heaven and earth.

This resource is designed to give churches words to speak of God’s creation in our gathered worship—words that both express the cries of our hearts and also form us to see the created world through God’s eyes and with God’s heart for it. It has been developed with the conviction that, rather than dedicating one “Earth Day” Sunday a year to the topic of creation care, churches will more effectively form people toward a Christian view of creation by keeping the creation-to-new-creation reality in front of us in small, repeatable ways throughout the year.

In this guidebook you will find prayers, blessings, and exhortations that correspond to various parts of a liturgical service (such as from a prayer book tradition) but which can be adapted for use in other contexts. Some of these might fit readily into

your church's normal order of service; others might require some reimagining of your current liturgy, along with some vision-casting for why changes are being made.

But words and ideas are not all we need. As these prayers are incorporated into their place in our liturgy, they will be coupled with the movements of worship: the kneeling, standing, and walking in procession, as well as the sights, sounds, silences, and smells that involve our whole bodies. Indeed, embodied worship is a strength of liturgical traditions.

The act of singing, too, involves our whole selves—our body, mind, and spirit—and you will find many examples of songs that speak of God's creation, with annotations explaining the many ways songs can function in corporate worship, as well as links to other sources of songs themed around creation care.

Lastly, you will find several reflection essays written by scholars and practitioners on a variety of topics related to creation care and corporate worship.

We hope the examples and ideas presented here can serve to expand your church's gathered worship to more fully express the vision for creation that the scriptures paint for us. We pray that God's people, shaped by God's word and nourished at God's table, would be propelled out into the world to faithfully love and steward God's creation.

~

Wes Crawford

July 2024

Calls to Worship & Praises



Since the goodness and grandeur of God is so readily visible in the created world around us, it makes sense to begin with these realities as we gather the people of God for worship. We can praise God for his majestic wonders of creativity and for his tender care. We can proclaim that all creation reveals the glory of God, and we can call all creation to join in that proclamation.

Creator God,
we praise you for this world.
As we continue to learn more of the vastness of your cosmos
and the smallest particles of each atom,
we stand in awe that you created all things
in a great harmonious design.
Open our eyes and ears that we may take delight
in the beauty and variety of sky and sea,
of desert and mountain, of plants and flowers,
of birds and fish, of creatures large and small,
and of humankind, the crown of your creation.
We praise you for the world you made, maintain,
and give to us to care for and enjoy. **Amen.**

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Psalm 148 (NIV)

¹ Praise the LORD.

**Praise the LORD from the heavens;
praise him in the heights above.**

² Praise him, all his angels;
praise him, all his heavenly hosts.

³ **Praise him, sun and moon;
praise him, all you shining stars.**

⁴ Praise him, you highest heavens
and you waters above the skies.

⁵ **Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for at his command they were created,**

⁶ and he established them for ever and ever—
he issued a decree that will never pass away.

⁷ Praise the LORD from the earth,
you great sea creatures and all ocean depths,

⁸ **lightning and hail, snow and clouds,
stormy winds that do his bidding,**

⁹ you mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars,

¹⁰ **wild animals and all cattle,
small creatures and flying birds,**

¹¹ kings of the earth and all nations,

you princes and all rulers on earth,
¹² **young men and women,**
old men and children.

¹³ Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for his name alone is exalted;
his splendor is above the earth and the heavens.

¹⁴ And he has raised up for his people a horn,
the praise of all his faithful servants,
of Israel, the people close to his heart.

Praise the LORD.

~

A prayer especially mindful of children

Based on Psalm 8

O Lord, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
Everything we see reminds us of your power and glory
because you made everything out of nothing.
You made the sun and the moon,
you made the land and the sea,
you made the birds and the fish and all the animals,
and you made us to love you and take care of your creation.
We praise you for all your gifts
and for helping us take care of your world.
Thank you for your creativity and your love.
O Lord, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth! **Amen.**

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~

Gathering in God's name: Creator God theme

(Biblical references: Psalm 104, Matthew 13)

We praise you, living God:
you give strength to the earth that sustains us,
you open your hand to feed all living things.

We praise you, Lord Jesus Christ:

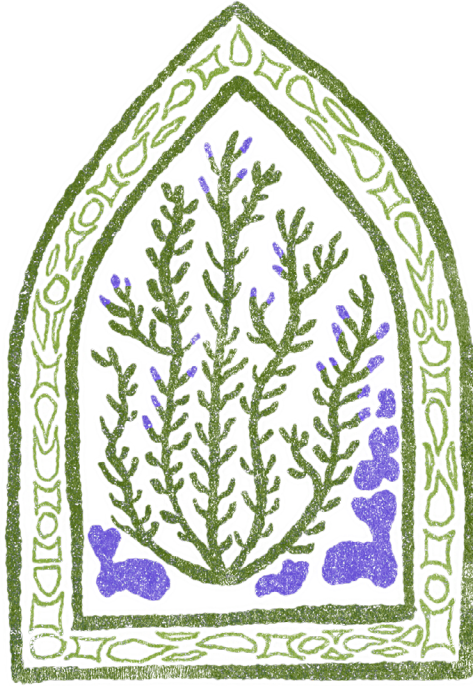
you teach us with stories of seeds and weeds and harvest time,
you call us to accept your word and bear much fruit.

We praise you, Holy Spirit, fire of love:
you are the breath of life in every creature,
you refresh our thirsty souls with grace.

Blessed be God, Source of Wisdom, living Word, abiding Spirit,
Blessed be God for ever.

—Resource created by the Anglican Church in Australia, found on the website of the [Anglican Communion Environmental Network](#).

Confessions & Laments



Although we can readily see God's glory in creation, we are quickly faced with the reality that things are not how they should be. We have not taken care of our world as we should have, and the most vulnerable populations of the world suffer the effects of this the most. The more you think about it, the more you see the direness of our situation, and the temptation to despair is strong. But instead of pretending everything is okay, we can bring our despair to God in lament. Instead of hiding from our failures, in confession we can bring them to him who sees us and knows us and loves us. And we find in scripture that we are loved by the God who not only created the world but also sent his Son to redeem it.

LAMENTS

A lament for a time of global environmental and climate crisis

The following lament has been composed from various scriptural texts to voice our grief in the face of this global environmental crisis. "Take words with you and return to the Lord; say to him, 'Take away all guilt; accept that which is good, and we will offer the fruit of our lips'" (Hosea 14.2). As the Psalms give witness, in worship we come before the Lord not only with words of praise, but also of lament to express our grief and sorrow.

In shaping its use in worship, it may be appropriate for the leader to keep a space for silence either between the verses, for reflection, or before the lament is recited. Such a period of silence may conclude with the words, "Lord, hear our cry."

Refrain:

The land cries out to you, O Lord.

1. The land mourns: and all who dwell on it languish.
2. The beasts of the field, the birds of the air: and even the fish of the sea are perishing. (*Hosea 4:3*)
3. For the earth is scorched with fire: the air polluted, and the waters choked with waste.
4. The ice melts and the seas rage: the waters surge and floods devastate the land.
5. The water springs are silent, and the streams run dry: the green places are a dry land where there is no water. (*Psalms 63:2b*)
6. The fertile ground is exhausted: the land has become a parched and windswept wasteland.
7. The holy cities have become a wilderness: Zion has become a desolation. (*Isaiah 64:10*)
8. So turn us again, O Lord: and come to our help. (*Psalms 80:4a,3b*)
9. Drop down, O heavens, from above: and let righteousness rain down upon the poor. (*Isaiah 45:8*)
10. Let the earth open: and let wholeness and healing spring forth. (*Isaiah 45:8b*)
11. Then the wilderness and the dry land shall be glad: the desert shall rejoice and blossom. (*Isaiah 35:1*)
12. The mountains and hills shall break forth into singing: and the trees of the forest shall clap their hands. (*Isaiah 55:12b*)

**Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be for ever. Amen.**

The land cries out to you, O Lord.

—From [A Time for Creation: Liturgical Resources for Creation and the Environment](#), © The Archbishops' Council 2020, The Liturgical Commission of the Church of England.

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A lament for drought, deforestation, flood

The sections of this lament could be used separately, depending on the context of a particular local need, or together, in the context of the suffering around the world. Deforestation is brought about by humans, and drought and flood have been seen as “natural” disasters. But climate change is accelerated by deforestation, and drought and flood are expected to become more frequent and more severe in many parts of the world as a result. See [this resource](#) for more information.

Biblical references: Isaiah 44:3, John 4, Revelation 21, Psalm 62, 69, Isaiah 55

Drought turns farmland to dustbowl, drains rivers, lays bare the soil.
Gardens wither, livestock die, people lose heart, communities crumble.

How long, O Lord, how long?

Refresh the parched and thirsty earth.

Revive our flagging spirits.

When will you give us the water of life?

Deforestation shreds the landscape, leaches soil, poisons rivers.
Smoke hangs in the air, rainfall patterns change,
birds and animals lose their habitat, cultures and people die.

How long, O Lord, how long?

Rebuke the greed for land.

Regenerate the stricken forests.

When will the trees clap their hands at your salvation?

Floods wash away soil, flatten crops, ruin homes.
Drinking water fails, disease spreads, fear clings,
livelihoods lie buried in mud, animals and people drown.

How long, O Lord, how long?

Restore the soaked and tattered land.

Relieve the suffering people.

Are you not our strong rock and refuge?

—Resource created by the Anglican Church in Australia, found on the website of the [Anglican Communion Environmental Network](#).

PRAYERS OF CONFESSION

Let us confess our greed
and repent of the ways in which we have damaged God's good creation:

We confess to you
our lack of care for the world you have given us.
Lord have mercy.
Lord have mercy.

We confess to you
our selfishness in not sharing the earth's bounty fairly.
Christ have mercy.
Christ have mercy.

We confess to you
our failure to protect the environment.
Lord have mercy.
Lord have mercy.

—From [*A Time for Creation: Liturgical Resources for Creation and the Environment*](#), © The Archbishops' Council
2020, The Liturgical Commission of the Church of England.

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Lord God, you have provided for us
a creation filled with food and water,
a universe rich with energy and resources,
and charged us to have dominion over all you have created.
But we confess that we have often spoiled your gifts,
we have put material possessions ahead of everything else,
and we have abused the environment you have provided for us.
Forgive us, Lord, and make us better stewards of your creation.
We pray through Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

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Creator God, we confess that all too often
we have ignored and denied your lordship of the land entrusted to us
by assuming the right to do with it as we please,
by taking more from it than we have returned to it,
by taking for granted its productivity,
by denying justice to many who have labored on the land,
by wanting food for less than it costs to produce.
We confess that material values, rather than kingdom realities,
have often determined our relationships.
We have indulged our appetites with little consideration for others.
We have been more interested in our neighbor's land than in our neighbor.
We have harbored bitterness and resentments
because of economic problems.
We are not reconciled to some who have hurt us,
even members of your body.
Lord of the church, have mercy on us.
Grant us peace with you and with each other in Christ. Amen.

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God of all creation,
you loved us into being,
yet we often flee our rightful place in your creation.
We confess that we exploit the gifts you place around us
and dominate the richness of the natural order.
Forgive our greedy grasping.
We confess our part in the devastation of our planet home,
mirrored in the violence of cities,
and the brokenness of hearts.

Forgive and restore us, O God.
Nurturing God, remind us of other ways to live
and of a place called home,
where creation reflects your goodness
and each thing lives in balance with all others.
Come and find us, set us right again,
and take us home. **Amen.**

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Holy and merciful God,
we confess that we have failed to honor you
by rightly claiming our kinship with all your creatures.
We have walked heavily on your earth,
overused and wasted its resources,
taken for granted its beauty and abundance,
and treated its inhabitants unjustly,
holding future generations hostage to our greed.
Have mercy on us and forgive us our sin.
Renew in us the resolve to keep and conserve your earth as you desire and intend,
with grateful and compassionate hearts,
through your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

—From [*Liturgical Materials for Honoring God in Creation*](#), The Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music
of The Episcopal Church USA, 2021.

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God of compassion, have mercy upon us.
Heal our relationship with all creation.
Forgive us for our mistreatment and neglect
of the creatures who share the earth with us.
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent
for what we have done to harm them,
and for what we have not done to help them.
Fill us with your Spirit,
that we may care for one another and for all creatures,
according to your will and in the fullness of your love;
through Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Amen.

—From [*Liturgical Materials for Honoring God in Creation*](#), The Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music
of The Episcopal Church USA, 2021.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Based on Romans 8:1–2, 18–21, NRSV

Hear the good news of the gospel about our life in Christ:

There is therefore now no condemnation

for those who are in Christ Jesus.

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus

has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

Hear the good news of the gospel about all of creation:

I consider that the sufferings of this present time

are not worth comparing

with the glory about to be revealed to us.

For the creation waits with eager longing

for the revealing of the children of God;

for the creation was subjected to futility,

not of its own will

but by the will of the one who subjected it,

in hope that the creation itself

will be set free from its bondage to decay

and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

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Prayers



Our first and most important work in addressing environmental crisis is to petition the Lord of all Creation to do his work of renewal and restoration. We ask him to make all things new, beginning in the hearts of his people who are led by his Spirit.

Glorious God,
the whole creation proclaims your marvellous work:
increase in us a capacity to wonder and delight in it,
that heaven's praise may echo in our hearts
and our lives be spent as good stewards of the earth,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

—From [*A Time for Creation: Liturgical Resources for Creation and the Environment*](#), © The Archbishops' Council
2020, The Liturgical Commission of the Church of England.

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Let us pray to God, that he will bring to fruition all that he desires for his creation.
Father, Lord of creation,
in your mercy, hear us.

You have created the universe by your eternal Word,
and have blessed humankind in making us stewards of the earth.
We pray for your world,
that we may share and conserve its resources,
and live in reverence for the creation
and in harmony with one another.
Father, Lord of creation,
in your mercy, hear us.

You have given the human race a rich land,
a land of streams and springs,
wheat and barley,
vines and oil and honey.
We have made by sin a world of suffering and sorrow.
We pray for those who bear the weight of affliction
that they may come to share the life of wholeness and plenty.
Father, Lord of creation,
in your mercy, hear us.

In Christ you call us to a new way of life,
loving our neighbors before ourselves.
Help us to treat with care and respect the world as it is
as we live in hope and anticipation of the world as it will be
when your kingdom comes and your will is done.
Father, Lord of creation,
in your mercy, hear us.

We thank you for those, living and departed,
who have shown a true respect for your creation...

Help us to follow in their footsteps,
until, with them, we see you face to face,
where all is made new in Christ our Lord.

Father, Lord of creation,
in your mercy, hear us.

—From [*A Time for Creation: Liturgical Resources for Creation and the Environment*](#), © The Archbishops' Council
2020, The Liturgical Commission of the Church of England.

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The following is a guide for extemporaneous prayers. The pattern provides a suggested text for the opening and closing of each part of the prayer and calls for extemporaneous prayers of thanksgiving, petition, and intercession.

Creator God,
we praise you for creating a world filled with beauty and variety.
We thank you for revealing yourself
through the beauty of a flower and the power of a storm.
Today we particularly marvel at the beauty of . . .
 for your work in the world, especially . . .
 for evidence of your presence in the church and local community . . .
 for creating humanity in your image and
 for our task as caretakers of this world and all it contains.
Yet we come before you, acknowledging that
we have failed in our task as stewards of this world.
Along with creation we look forward to the new creation.
As we wait, we pray that we may be greater imagebearers of you,
as evidenced in
 our care of creation, especially . . .
 our work toward peace and reconciliation in our world,
 especially . . .
 our government and all who lead . . .
 the church worldwide and particularly the work of . . .
 the ministry of this church as we . . .
 in our love and care for persons who have particular needs,
 especially . . .
We offer these prayers in the name of our creating God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
who with all creation we worship now and through eternity. **Amen.**

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God of beauty and of justice,
we pray for the earth—
for restoration of soil, air, and water.
We pray for all people you have created—
for restoration of dignity and hope.
We pray for our nation and community—
for restoration of our sense of responsibility in service.
We pray even for ourselves—
for restoration of our resolve to love you and the world you made.
Through Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

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A litany for the care of creation

For the earth and the gift of good land,
we give thanks, O Lord.
For the anticipation of a new growing season,
we give thanks, O Lord.
For those who labor on the farm and in the marketplace,
we give thanks, O Lord.
For the abundance of food and the opportunities to share,
we give thanks, O Lord.
For the delight of eating and the challenge of self-denial,
we give thanks, O Lord.

O God, our help, we lift up our hearts for the needs of your people:
to those who continue to be burdened with financial problems,
give strength, O Lord.

To those who have lost their land or livelihood,
who have experienced the pain of displacement,
give hope, O Lord.

To those serving people who are troubled and discouraged,
give wisdom, O Lord.

To those who are strong and have prospered,
give humility, O Lord.

To those seeking to be open to your gifts and calling,
give us grace to be patient in suffering
and sensitive to the pain of others.

Help us to be faithful to that which you have committed to us so that we may realize your kingdom where we are.

Through Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray,
saying, “Our Father . . .”

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Climate change prayer

Holy God,
earth and air and water are your creation,
and every living thing belongs to you: have mercy on us
as climate change confronts us.

Give us the will and the courage
to simplify the way we live,
to reduce the energy we use,
to share the resources you provide,
and to bear the cost of change.

Forgive our past mistakes and send us your Spirit,
with wisdom in present controversies
and vision for the future to which you call us in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

—Resource created by the Anglican Church in Australia, found on the website of the [Anglican Communion Environmental Network](#)

~

COLLECT PRAYERS FROM THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 1979

For fruitful seasons

Almighty God, Lord of heaven and earth: We humbly pray that your gracious providence may give and preserve to our use the harvests of the land and of the seas, and may prosper all who labor to gather them, that we, who are constantly receiving good things from your hand, may always give you thanks; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

For stewardship of creation

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.**

For joy in God's creation

O heavenly Father, who hast filled the world with beauty: Open our eyes to behold thy gracious hand in all thy works; that, rejoicing in thy whole creation, we may learn to serve thee with gladness; for the sake of him through whom all things were made, thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

For agriculture

Almighty God, we thank you for making the earth fruitful, so that it might produce what is needed for life: Bless those who work in the fields; give us seasonable weather; and grant that we may all share the fruits of the earth, rejoicing in your goodness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

For knowledge of God's creation

Almighty and everlasting God, you made the universe with all its marvelous order, its atoms, worlds, and galaxies, and the infinite complexity of living creatures: Grant that, as we probe the mysteries of your creation, we may come to know you more truly, and more surely fulfill our role in your eternal purpose; in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

For the conservation of natural resources

Almighty God, in giving us dominion over things on earth, you made us fellow workers in your creation: Give us wisdom and reverence so to use the resources of nature, that no one may suffer from our abuse of them, and that generations yet to come may continue to praise you for your bounty; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

For the harvest of lands and waters

O gracious Father, who openest thine hand and fillest all things living with plenteousness: Bless the lands and waters, and multiply the harvests of the world; let thy Spirit go forth, that it may renew the face of the earth; show thy loving-kindness, that our land may give her increase; and save us from selfish use of what thou givest, that men and women everywhere may give thee thanks; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

For rain

O God, heavenly Father, who by thy Son Jesus Christ hast promised to all those who seek thy kingdom and its righteousness all things necessary to sustain their life: Send us, we entreat thee, in this time of need, such moderate rain and showers, that we may receive the fruits of the earth, to our comfort and to thy honor; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

For the future of the human race

O God our heavenly Father, you have blessed us and given us dominion over all the earth: Increase our reverence before the mystery of life; and give us new insight into your purposes for the human race, and new wisdom and determination in making provision for its future in accordance with your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Communion



The Great Thanksgiving tells the story of God's redemption of the world in Jesus Christ, culminating in table fellowship with our crucified, risen, and ascended Lord. Here are two eucharistic rites that place special emphasis on the creation and restoration of our world.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give him thanks and praise.

Hearts and minds and souls and voices

we lift in thanks and praise to you,

Lord God of heaven and earth.

You made the earth as a playground for us to enjoy your glory,

and yet we consistently turn your abundance into scarcity,

your elegance into our meanness,

and your simplicity into our corruption.

In Noah you drew all the goodness of your creation into one ark,

and in Moses you placed the law of love into the ark of your covenant.

In Christ you turned the wood of manger and cross

into the ark of your salvation.

And so we rejoice to thank you, singing, with all the company of heaven,

the hymn of your unending praise.

Holy, holy, holy, Lord, God of power and might.

Heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

God our rock, to trust in you is to build a house on solid ground

that will never shift through wind and rain.

You make and renew your church through your word of life.

Send your Holy Spirit upon your people,

that all who eat and drink in your name

may behold you face to face and taste and see that you are good.

By that same Spirit come down upon these gifts of bread and wine,

that they may be for us the body and blood

of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord;

who, at supper with his disciples, took bread, gave you thanks,

broke the bread, and gave it to them, saying,

“Take, eat: this is my body which is given for you;

do this in remembrance of me.”

After supper he took the cup.

Again he gave you thanks, and gave it to his disciples, saying,

“Drink this, all of you: this is my blood of the new covenant,

which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

Great is the mystery of faith.

Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.

Renewing God, after half a year of flood
you brought the ark of hope to solid ground
and gave your creation new birth.

Heal your stricken world today,
that the groaning of the soil, the sky, and the seas
may foretell the greater glory you have prepared
for your time of eternal covenant grace.

As you justify your children by faith,
uphold all who face injustice and neglect and cruelty.

Hasten that day when your new heaven and new earth
will engulf the distress and disappointment and destruction of your people,
and you will be all in all, everlasting God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

—From [*Eucharistic Prayers*](#) by Samuel Wells and Abigail Kocher (Eerdmans, 2016). Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

~

The Lord be with you
and also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give thanks and praise.

Blessed are you, Lord God,
our light and our salvation;
to you be glory and praise for ever.
From the beginning you have created all things
and all your works echo the silent music of your praise.

In the fullness of time you made us in your image,
the crown of all creation.

You give us breath and speech, that with angels and archangels
and all the powers of heaven
we may find a voice to sing your praise:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.**

**Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

How wonderful the work of your hands, O Lord.
As a mother tenderly gathers her children,
you embraced a people as your own.
When they turned away and rebelled
your love remained steadfast.

From them you raised up Jesus our Saviour, born of Mary,
to be the living bread,
in whom all our hungers are satisfied.
He offered his life for sinners,
and with a love stronger than death
he opened wide his arms on the cross.

On the night before he died,
he came to supper with his friends
and, taking bread, he gave you thanks.
He broke it and gave it to them, saying:
Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;
do this in remembrance of me.

At the end of supper, taking the cup of wine,
he gave you thanks, and said:
Drink this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant,
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

Jesus Christ is Lord:
**Lord, by your cross and resurrection
you have set us free.
You are the Saviour of the world.**

Father, we plead with confidence
his sacrifice made once for all upon the cross;
we remember his dying and rising in glory,
and we rejoice that he intercedes for us at your right hand.

Pour out your Holy Spirit as we bring before you
these gifts of your creation;
may they be for us the body and blood of your dear Son.

As we eat and drink these holy things in your presence,
form us in the likeness of Christ,

and build us into a living temple to your glory.
Bring us at the last with [*N and*] all the saints
to the vision of that eternal splendour
for which you have created us;
through Jesus Christ, our Lord,
by whom, with whom, and in whom,
with all who stand before you in earth and heaven,
we worship you, Father almighty, in songs of everlasting praise:
**Blessing and honour and glory and power
be yours for ever and ever. Amen.**

Post-communion prayer:

Lord of the harvest,
with joy we have offered thanksgiving for your love in creation
and have shared in the bread and the wine of the kingdom:
by your grace plant within us a reverence for all that you give us
and make us generous and wise stewards
of the good things we enjoy;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

—From [*A Time for Creation: Liturgical Resources for Creation and the Environment*](#), © The Archbishops' Council
2020, The Liturgical Commission of the Church of England.

Benediction & Sending



After we have been fed at the Lord's table and assured that we are living members of his Body and heirs of his eternal kingdom, we are sent out into the world to do the work he has given us to do. Here we can remind God's people of their vocation as stewards of creation, and we can call them to join God in his work of restoration.

May God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who is the source of all goodness and growth,
pour his blessing upon all things created,
and upon you, his children,
that you may use them to his glory and the welfare of all peoples. **Amen.**

—Reprinted by permission from [*The Worship Sourcebook*](#), © 2004, CRC Publications.

~

May God the Father,
who clothes the lilies of the field
and feeds the birds of the air,
provide you with all we need for life in its fullness.
Amen.

May God the Son,
who fed the five thousand and turned water into wine,
feed you with his life and transform us in his love.
Amen.

May God the Holy Spirit,
who hovered over the waters of creation
and formed the world from chaos,
form you in the likeness of Christ and renew the face of the earth.
Amen.

—From [*A Time for Creation: Liturgical Resources for Creation and the Environment*](#), © The Archbishops' Council
2020, The Liturgical Commission of the Church of England.

~

A prayer attributed to St. Francis

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let us sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is discord, union;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.
Grant that we may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;

to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. **Amen.**

—From [*The Book of Common Prayer, 1979*](#).

~

A commitment and blessing for the end of a service

As the whole of creation looks with eager longing for the redemption of humankind, let us pledge ourselves anew to serve our Creator God, the Father who is the maker of all things, the Son through whom all things are made, and the Holy Spirit, the giver of life, who renews the face of the earth.

Let us stand to affirm our commitment to care actively for God's creation.

**Lord of life and giver of hope,
we pledge ourselves to care for creation,
to reduce our waste,
to live sustainably,
and to value the rich diversity of life.
May your wisdom guide us,
that life in all its forms may flourish,
and may be faithful in voicing creation's praise.**

May God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the source of all goodness,
pour his blessing upon all things created,
and upon us his children,
that we may use his gifts to his glory
and the welfare of all peoples;
and the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you, and remain with you always.
Amen.

Go in peace, and may the commitment we have made this day
be matched by our faithful living.
Thanks be to God. Amen. Amen. Amen.

—From [*A Time for Creation: Liturgical Resources for Creation and the Environment*](#), © The Archbishops' Council 2020, The Liturgical Commission of the Church of England.

Blessings



Blessing of the land or a garden

God of the Universe,
you made the heavens and the earth,
So we do not call our home merely “planet earth.”
We call it your creation, a divine mystery,
a gift from your most blessed hand.
The world itself is your miracle.
Bread and vegetables from earth are thus also from heaven.
Help us to see in our daily bread your presence.

Upon this garden
may your stars rain down their blessed dust.
May you send rain and sunshine upon our garden and us.
Grant us the humility to touch the humus,
that we may become more human,
that we might mend our rift from your creation,
that we might then know the sacredness of the gift of life.
that we might truly experience life from your hand.
For you planted humanity in a garden
and began our resurrection in a garden.
Our blessed memory and hope lie in a garden.

Thanks be to God,
who made the world teeming with variety,
of things on the earth, above the earth, and under the earth.
Thank be to God
for the many kinds of plants, trees, and fruits
that we celebrate.
For the centipedes, ants, and worms,
for the mice, marmots, and bats,
for the cucumbers, tomatoes, and peppers,
we rejoice that we find ourselves eclipsed by the magnitude
of generosity and mystery.
Thanks be to God.

—From [*Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals*](#) by Shane Claiborne, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove,
and Enuma Okoro, 2010.

~

A rite for the blessing of a garden

Blessed be the God of all creation:
For in your goodness you make all things new.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray.

Gracious God, you open wide your hand and give of your goodness to all things living: Renew the face of the earth and increase the sustainable harvests of the world, that the land may bring forth enough for all, and your people may share justly and give honor to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Presider or other appointed leaders from the congregation may then lead the People in prayer, using one or more of the following collects, as appropriate.

Lover of all you have made: Protect and sustain the creatures of our local habitat. Increase their well-being, watch over them with love, and give us wisdom to honor our kinship with them; through Jesus Christ, the first-born of all creation. **Amen.**

God, whose Spirit moved over the deep: We thank you for the gift of water. Bless the waters on the ground and under the ground, and the waters that fall from the sky, that this garden may flourish and bear good fruit; through Jesus Christ our Savior. **Amen.**

God, who alone provides seed for the sower and bread for the eater, you have taught us to ask of you our daily bread: Bless the sowing of the seed this year, grant fertility to the soil, and strengthen the hands of the gardeners who till it, that through their labor your people may be nourished; through Jesus Christ, the bread of life. **Amen.**

Holy God, you have blessed our plowing and preparing of the ground: Protect what we plant and bring it to maturity, that we and others may enjoy a fruitful harvest; through Jesus Christ our Sustainer. **Amen.**

The Presider and People then say together

Holy One:

Bless and protect this garden and all who keep it.

Strengthen and uphold them in their labor,

that these plants may bear good fruit

and our care for the earth may witness to your love and justice;

in the name of the Creator, Word, and Spirit. Amen.

The Deacon or Presider may dismiss the People with these words

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

—From [*Liturgical Materials for Honoring God in Creation*](#), The Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music of The Episcopal Church USA, 2021.

Songs



Singing can be one of the most powerfully formative practices in corporate worship, because it involves our bodies and affections more than speaking does, and also because we sing songs repeatedly over time.

Many hymns and worship songs echo patterns from the psalms of mentioning aspects of creation in a “roll call,” reminding us that all the earth is God’s creation and calling everything in creation to praise God. But we need songs to do more than remind us simply that creation exists; we need songs that will give us language to praise our Creator, to lament the state of the world, to confess and repent of our own part in the poor stewardship of creation, to pray for our world, to call ourselves to active obedience to God, and many other postures of worship. And of course we need to keep in mind that if we get really preachy and heavy-handed people are unlikely to connect with the songs. So we’re looking for songs that can coach us in appropriate postures towards God’s world:

- The earth belongs to God.
- The blessings of creation are a gift to us.
- The hope of the gospel is not just personal salvation, but the redemption of all creation.
- God calls us to work with him in the restoration of the world.

It can be helpful to do a regular “song audit” to assess the content of the song rotation of your church. (Planning Center Services has a [feature to generate a report](#).) As you consider the list of songs and what they say: How many songs about creation care are in your regular rotation? Of those songs, what do they say about creation? Does the theology of your songs suggest that the world God created won’t last or isn’t our future home, and therefore doesn’t matter? Do we shy away from calls to action; and if so, why?

SONG EXAMPLES

“Praise the Lord, All Praise and Blessing” — Matt Scott

This is a reworking of a hymn text by Joel Blomqvist (1840–1930) that calls all creation to sing God’s praise (similar to “All Creatures of Our God and King”), also adding a chorus that is the specific praise: “Everything that you have made is beautiful. Everything that you have made is good.”

Praise the Lord, all praise and blessing render to his mighty name.
Thank him ever for his goodness, now and evermore the same.
Now and evermore the same.

He created earth and heaven, deepest sea, and all therein
Smallest creature, highest being; let your anthems now begin.
Let your anthems now begin.

*Everything that you have made is beautiful.
Everything that you have made is good.
Everything that you have made is beautiful.
Everything that you have made is good.*

Stars above in brilliant glory, sun that scatters wide its gold,

Birds aloft all join the chorus—every creature, young and old!
Every creature, young and old!

~

“For the Beauty of the Earth” — Folliot Sandford Pierpoint (Baptist Hymnal #638)

This classic hymn is essentially a litany of thanksgiving for all of God’s gifts in song form. Listen here.

For the beauty of the earth, for the glory of the skies.
For the love which from our birth over and around us lies:

*Lord of all, to thee we raise
This our hymn of grateful praise.*

For the wonder of each hour, of the day and of the night,
Hill and vale and tree and flow’r, sun and moon and stars of light: [refrain]

For the joy of human love, brother, sister, parent, child,
Friends on earth and friends above; for all gentle thoughts and mild: [refrain]

For the church that evermore lifteth holy hands above,
Off’ring up on ev’ry shore her pure sacrifice of love: [refrain]

For thyself, best Gift Divine! to our race so freely giv’n;
For that great, great love of thine, peace on earth and joy in heav’n: [refrain]

“Joy to the World” — Isaac Watts (Hymnal 1982 #100)

This is always sung at Advent or Christmas, but it is actually a metrical version of Psalm 98 (like “Shout to the Lord”). Stanza 3 says, “No more let sin and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground; he comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found.” This is a proclamation of the true hope of Christ’s coming—to reverse the death and decay of the curse.

Joy to the world! The Lord is come: let earth receive her King;
let every heart prepare him room, and heav’n and nature sing.

Joy to the earth! The Savior reigns: let men their songs employ;
while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground;
he comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the nations prove
the glories of his righteousness and wonders of his love.

~

“All Things Rise” — Sam Yoder, Vineyard Campbellsville

These next two (this one a Vineyard song from 2015, and the next one a twentieth century hymn) both function as theological narratives of our relationship to God’s world: created in goodness, broken by sin, redeemed by the person and work of Jesus. Creation is included in the scope of Christ’s redemption and restoration.

God, how beautiful your Holy Word, that formed the worlds in such goodness
O, the shame that we would spurn it all to turn and fall into darkness

God, we’ll sing how through your Son you turned this loss and hurt into glory
How when scorned in death you raised him up; his gain’s become the whole world’s story

*Let all things rise and bless your name
All things made right and new again
O Lord our God, your goodness is free and boundless
Is reaching endless through it all*

And on this road with every step we take, your faithfulness is our portion
You’ve prepared a city bright and fair, whose gates forever stay open

Son of God, in you we’ve taken up the way of love’s occupation
O, the joy to share in your reward: the stunning turn of new creation
[chorus]

Just as you promised, God, your Son was raised up
In him, we’ll follow, in him we’ll all be raised up

O Lord, you’ve made yourself a home
Heaven and earth forever one
All things once sown in weakness you raise in promise
Your beauty arches above it all

~

“God, All Nature Sings Thy Glory” — text by David Clowney (Trinity Hymnal #122)

God, all nature sings thy glory, and thy works proclaim thy might;
Ordered vastness in the heavens, ordered course of day and night.
Beauty in the changing seasons, beauty in the storming sea—
All the changing moods of nature praise the changeless Trinity.

Clearer still we see thy hand in man whom thou hast made for thee;
Ruler of creation's glory, image of thy majesty.
Music, art, the fruitful garden, all the labor of his days,
Are the calling of his Maker to the harvest feast of praise.

But our sins have spoiled thine image; nature, conscience only serve
As unceasing, grim reminders of the wrath which we deserve.
Yet thy grace and saving mercy in thy Word of truth revealed
Claim the praise of all who know thee, in the blood of Jesus sealed.

God of glory, power, mercy, all creation praises thee;
We, thy creatures, would adore thee now and through eternity.
Saved to magnify thy goodness, grant us strength to do thy will;
With our acts as with our voices thy commandments to fulfill.

~

“This Is My Father’s World” — words by Maltbie Babcock (African American Heritage Hymnal #149)

This hymn makes several bold declarations: The world belongs to God. Creation declares God’s praise. God’s lavish creativity is shown in creation. God rules over our world, even when that is difficult to see. Heaven and earth will be one, as a result of Christ’s work.

This is my Father's world, and to my listening ears
All nature sings, and round me rings the music of the spheres.
This is my Father's world: I rest me in the thought
Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas—his hand the wonders wrought.

This is my Father's world: the birds their carols raise,
The morning light, the lily white declare their Maker's praise.
This is my Father's world: he shines in all that's fair;
In the rustling grass I hear him pass; he speaks to me everywhere.

This is my Father's world: O let me ne'er forget
That though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the Ruler yet.
This is my Father's world: the battle is not done.
Jesus who died shall be satisfied, and heav'n and earth be one.

~

“All Your Works Are Good” — Sandra McCracken

Based on Psalm 104

The moon it marks the seasons; the sun knows when to go down

The ocean holds its creatures; the river knows its bounds

The birds, the trees, the cattle, and all things great and small
We find our place in creation; your hand sustains it all

*All your works are good.
All your works are good.
From everlasting, to everlasting,
All your works are good.*

He makes the clouds his chariot; he wraps himself in light
He stretches out the heavens, like a tent across the sky

He knows our every burden, when darkness veils our eyes
He comes with spring returning, bringing death to life (Chorus)

As we labor until evening, there's a message on the wind
Be still and know your maker; be satisfied in Him (Chorus)

~

"Creation Hymn" — Matt Boswell

This song seeks to answer the question: What can we learn about God's nature and character from creation?

Creator God, who carved the canyons with a painless breath
Who sends the rains on unmanned fields and tucks the sun to rest
The dawn is clothed with brilliance and adorned in full array
Reflections of the Father's love put wildly on display

O Sovereign one who fashioned oceans deep by whisper strong
Who rends the waters from the land and lends the depths her song
The fullness of the sky and sea in reverence do they stand
To testify the sovereignty and goodness of your hand

*Halleluiah! All creation sings
Holy, Holy, Glory to the King*

Eternal King, who shows no turning faithful through all change
Unbroken praise and righteousness adorn your matchless name
The frailty of created things sustained by Christ alone
Sufficient is your providence; Immortal is your throne

~

“In Labor All Creation Groans” — Bifrost Arts (words by Sister Delores Hufner)

This simple lament affirms that the fate of all creation is bound up with how the evil of the human heart is dealt with, and it speaks the peace of Christ as our only hope.

In labor all creation groans till fear and hatred cease,
Till human hearts come to believe: In Christ alone is peace.

In labor all creation groans till prejudice shall cease,
Till every race and tribe and tongue in Christ will live in peace.

In labor all creation groans till rape and murder cease,
Till women walk by night unharmed and Christ is this world's peace.

In labor all creation groans till false divisions cease,
Till enemies are reconciled in Christ who is our peace.

~

The next two songs appear on the excellent [Doxecology](#) album from Resound Worship in the UK.

“Nature Shines with Beauty” by ReSound Worship (UK)

Words and music by Chris Juby

Nature shines with beauty,
bringing us a revelation
of the Maker's glory,
leading us in adoration.

*O God who made the stars
and formed us from the dust,
your plans are over ours
and all your ways are love.*

Nature groans in labour,
longing for the revelation
of the Maker's children
on the day of liberation

~

“God, the Maker of the Heavens” — ReSound Worship (UK)

Words: Sam Hargreaves; Music: Charles Converse

This is sung to a familiar hymn tune and could therefore be introduced very easily to most congregations.

God, the maker of the heavens,
and the planet that we share,
show us how to live, like Jesus,
lives of gratitude and care.
Make us mindful of the footprints
from the lives that we pursue.
Make us partners in your mission:
you are making all things new.

God, the gardener of Eden,
teach us how to tend this earth,
learning from the changing seasons,
times of fallow and new birth.
Lord have mercy when we're careless,
rich resources we misuse.
Use our hands to heal creation:
you are making all things new.

God of labor and vocation,
Lord of science, trade and art,
take our efforts and our passions
make them mirrors of your heart.
Every habitat and creature
loved and valued, God, by you.
May our lives reveal your Kingdom:
you are making all things new.

OTHER SONG SOURCES

More places to find songs related to creation care:

- The A Rocha USA [Creation Care Songs](#) playlist contains many of the above songs and more
- [Climate Vigil](#) album from Porter's Gate
- [From Smallest Seed: The A Rocha Project, Volume 1](#)
- [Together in the Harvest: The A Rocha Project, Volume 2](#)
- [A New Heaven and a New Earth](#)
- ["Worship Songs about Care for Creation"](#) blog post by the Calvin Institute for Christian

Reflections



EMBODYING OUR TRUE IDENTITY AND VOCATION WITHIN CREATION

Ruth Padilla-DeBorst

The Psalmist sings in celebration:

“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 reveal knowledge.
They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.
Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world” (Psalm 19:1, NIV).

And in a way it is true! Nature reveals a Creator God, lover of beauty, color, and diversity. The Spirit nourishes and sustains the plants and animals that, in turn, make human life possible. And Jesus Christ often refers to non-human members of creation as humanity’s teachers regarding the ways of God. And yet today, with exorbitant levels of environmental pollution, fires filling the skies with smoke, rivers and oceans burdened by plastic, extreme droughts in some places and disastrous floods in others, the song is drowned and the question is inevitable: Do the skies really declare the glory of God? Or do they rather tell another story, a story of indifference, irresponsibility, and abuse on the part of us as humanity?

The work of conservation, earth-keeping, and environmental justice is not some marginal agenda that can be picked up or not according to personal whim or individual interest. It is an essential dimension of our identity and vocation! ✈

The good news story (gospel) begins “in the beginning” (Gen 1:1). In contrast to other creation stories in the ancient world, the epic poem that opens Scripture portrays a good God who creates out of love and celebrates the goodness of creation. Human beings are created in God’s image, as beings-in-community, meant to relate rightly to God, to others, and to the entire created order: this is our true identity. And they are placed in the garden to care for it, to relate in love with it, and to celebrate its goodness as God did in the beginning: this is our true vocation. The work of conservation, earth-keeping, and environmental justice is not some marginal agenda that can be picked up or not according to personal whim or individual interest. It is an essential dimension of our identity and vocation!

So, these are the crucial questions in the midst of our planet’s critical condition: Do we yearn to live into and out of the good news of God’s good creation, a story of pulsating life and diverse abundance? Or will we settle for the story of our consumer society, a story of scarcity and deprivation, in which there is never enough, and extraction and exploitation are the rule of the day? Do we desire to perceive and join in the song of creation? Do we hope for the day in which the heavens again may declare the glory of God?

Then let’s walk today in step with the life-giving Spirit, following Jesus and worshiping our Creator through our care of the world God so loves. We need not wait for God’s re-creation of all things. Let’s live the gospel story of goodness. Let’s value, defend, and provide hospitable spaces to the diverse species that compose the biotic community. Plant trees. Clean rivers. Educate people. Nourish a creature-friendly imagination. Reduce our carbon footprint by living more simply and communally. None of these actions are marginal but, instead, core to the gospel, acts of worship that daily draw us closer to our true identity and our true vocation in response to God’s love.

~

Ruth Padilla-DeBorst is a theologian, missiologist, educator, and storyteller. She teaches at Western Theological Seminary, serves with the Comunidad de Estudios Teológicos Interdisciplinarios (CETI, a learning community with students across Latin America) and is part of the networking team of INFEMIT (International Fellowship for Mission as Transformation). She lives with her husband, James, in Costa Rica as a member of Casa Adobe, an intentional Christian community part of the Friends of A Rocha network.

THE LOCAL CHURCH AND CREATION CARE

David Swanson

A few years ago, in a Latino neighborhood north of where I live in Chicago, a power company demolished an old smokestack. Carried out with seemingly no precautions, the implosion blanketed the Little Village community in layers of dust and debris. In the days and weeks that followed, neighbors complained of trouble breathing and recurring headaches.

Acts of environmental racism like this one often don't register when we think about caring for creation. The reason, I think, for this oversight is that we tend to separate people from the rest of creation. But the creation narratives of Genesis remind us that human beings, with everything else, were created. Along with the rest of God's handiwork, you and I belong to the interdependent community of creation.

Remembering that people are part of the creation compels us to extend creation care to urban neighborhoods like Little Village. Just as important, a vision for creation inclusive of humans allows churches to reclaim their critical role as local caretaking communities no matter where they are located.

Context-specific Care

A congregation that understands itself to be intricately connected to its immediate environment—whether rural, suburban, or urban—will accept its God-given responsibility to be conduits of God's blessing to their entire community. Context will form the specific expressions of a local congregation's care. For example, it was Our Lady of the Gardens Catholic Church which provided the space for neighbors to organize their advocacy efforts in one of Chicago's most polluted neighborhoods. In other settings, a church might maintain community gardens in a food-insecure neighborhood, mobilize volunteers to remove garbage from a local stream, or support efforts to protect threatened suburban wetlands. In each case, the church's presence opens channels of care for the local creation of which it is a part.

Unfortunately, this isn't typically how we think about our churches. Like much of Western society, contemporary American Christians have imagined ourselves as separate from the rest of the creation. So, while we might celebrate the occasional

individual Christian who is passionate about creation care, we don't imagine ourselves collectively as a community of caretakers. If we are to extend our God-given vocation beyond the occasional individual and into every environment—suburban and urban, wilderness and agricultural—we will need to reclaim this vision of communal caretaking for our churches. And to reclaim our caretaking vocation, there are three simple things we need to remember about who God made us to be.

Remembering Our Calling

First, like our non-human kin, people are creatures. We are not the creator but neither are we merely resources, machine-like beings whose value comes from our utility. No, along with all of creation, we human beings have been created with love. Remembering our creatureliness attunes us to our impact on our fellow, beloved creatures.

Second, along with the rest of creation, people are recipients of grace. Accustomed as we are to electricity pulsing through outlets, clean water spilling from faucets, and prepared food lining grocery store shelves, we might forget how dependent we are on creation. Without the giving nature of the Creator, we'd have no way to survive. We share this essential characteristic with the rest of creation. "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made," writes the psalmist, "and all their host by the breath of his mouth" (Psalm 33:6, NRSV). All of creation is sustained by grace and we are no exception. Responding with gratitude to the gifts of Creator and creation allows us to care for our communities attentively and affectionately.

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or how much we consume, but for how we express God's
blessing to the communities to which we belong. 🌿*

Third, people were made to be agents of loving care in the world. In a society in which consumerism exerts a powerful force, we can think of our purpose through the lenses of our purchases or possessions. Image-bearers, though, are not to be known for what or how much we consume, but for how we express God's blessing to the communities to which we belong. Rather than treating creation as a means to self-serving ends, caretakers prioritize the flourishing of the entire local community

of creation.

Remembering these three characteristics of our humanity—that we are creatures, recipients of grace, and conduits of loving care for creation—frees our churches to reclaim our caretaking vocation wherever God has planted us.

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ROOTED IN RELATIONSHIP: WHY WE CARE FOR CREATION

Liuan Huska

Go to church on Sundays. Check. Attend small group. Check. Tithe. Check. Give up social media for Lent. Check. Volunteer at the food pantry. Check. Care for creation. Check?

As we hear about wildfires, flooding, species loss, PFAS in our water, microplastics in our soil, and more, our first reaction might be guilt. Many of the environmental crises of our day stem from human misuse of creation and failure to clean up our messes. When we understand that caring for creation is part of our calling as Christ-followers, it can be easy to add that to the list of things we should do as good Christians. Then comes the inescapable feeling that we can never do enough. Recycle, plant native species, pick up trash, electrify appliances, reduce air travel, advocate for climate-responsive policies, the list is endless.

Relational to the Core

This checklist approach to creation care misses the point. The heart of our calling to care for creation is relationship. At the birth of world, God says, “Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature, so they can be responsible for the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the cattle, and yes, Earth itself, and every animal that moves on the face of the Earth” (Gen. 1:26, MSG). God then makes the first male and female and sends them forth into a very good creation.

Notice in this description the relationships. God speaks from within the Triune Godhead as “us.” God—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is relational to the very core. Humans, bearing God’s image, are also made for relationship.

The second version of the creation story in Genesis 2 describes how the first man named the animals, entering into relationship with each one through identification. Since he couldn’t find a suitable companion, God made the first woman. We as human beings were made to know, love, and enjoy each other and all of God’s

creation. Sin, in this light, is anything that goes against the openness, trust, and connection that we were made for.

Jesus, the son of God, came to bridge the rift between us, God, and all creation that grew after humanity's first sin. Christ's work of redemption and restoration is a free gift to all who call on Jesus (Eph. 2:8-9). There's nothing we can do to earn our salvation—not even save the planet.

Why do we care for creation, then, if it's not because we are required to?

Web of Belonging

We care because we know and love. Every element of creation—from milkweed plants to the northern lights—is part of the web of relationship and belonging that God wove from the start of the earth. Indigenous people in many parts of the world refer to creation as kin—a Sitka Spruce grandmother or a Salmon brother, for instance. This is not entirely removed from the Christian tradition, where Saint Francis of Assisi referred to Sister Moon, Brother Fire, and Mother Earth.

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In the Bible, all of creation comes alongside humans, pointing us to God's truth and character (Psalm 19, Job 38-42, Luke 19:40) and groaning with us for deliverance (Romans 8). Though we may not be aware of it, creation keeps us company, like a family member—always there, always reminding us of who we are and who God is.

The challenge for churches in this time of nature loss and climate crisis is to live out what we have already received from Jesus—healed relationships with God, each other, and all creation. The indifference we come across in Christian communities toward the plight of the earth may have less to do with not understanding our stewardship task and more to do with the fact that we don't know the critters, waters, fields, and forests just outside the church doors.

The first human expressed his relationship with the rest of creation by naming the animals. Could we include the names of local species and places in our worship and prayers? What could it look like to bring creation into our worshiping community? Or, better yet, what could it look like to join the rest of creation in what they are already doing—constantly praising our Creator? How can we get to know our fellow creatures and let them show us the way?

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PRAYING OUR CARE OF CREATION

W. David O. Taylor

If it is true, as the Book of Psalms reminds us, that all of life can and should be brought to God in prayer, what does it mean to bring creation in all its glory and terror into the prayers of God's people? What do we say and how do we say it? By looking to the psalms and by taking advantage of the "Collect" form of prayer, I believe we find a way to begin such work faithfully.

The Psalter as a Book of Creation Care

As I write in my book *Open and Unafraid*, the psalmists remind us repeatedly not only of our royal identity as bearers of the divine image but also of our royal responsibility, namely, to exercise a gracious rule over God's works in a way that models God's own gracious rule. We discover how to do this work by paying attention to how Scripture echoes itself.

All throughout the Psalter, the psalmists ask God to "watch" (*shamar*) (Ps. 16:1), to "keep" (*shamar*) (Ps. 17:8), and to "preserve" (*shamar*) their lives (Ps. 86:2). In Psalm 2:11, the psalmist urges the kings of the earth to "serve" (*avad*) the Lord with reverence. And in Psalm 8:6, the Lord entrusts to humans the "rule" (*mashal*) of his terrestrial works.

Much of this vocabulary is echoed in the first two chapters of Genesis where God charges humanity "to till (*avad*) and to tend (*shamar*) creation" (2:15). The first term in this instance, *avad*, often appears in contexts where humans are charged to "serve" or "worship" God, while the second term, *shamar*, suggests the idea of "watching over" or "preserving."

The point of the psalms, with its Genesis perspective, is this: we "till" and "serve" creation for God's sake; we "tend" and "watch over" creation in God's name; and we lovingly "rule" over creation not only as royal representatives but also as priestly mediators who offer all of creation back to God in wonder, love, and praise.

The Collect Form of Prayer

With this in mind, how might we say what needs to be said about creation care in

prayer—in a manner which offers a generous invitation to the diverse collection of saints that make up our individual congregations? I think the Collect form of prayer can show us the way forward.

One of the best parts of the Collect prayer is that, while prescriptive in form, it lends itself easily to extemporaneous expression. It can be used to pray for all sorts of concerns: pets and pandemics, sublime sunsets and despoiled seas, solar eclipses and oil spills, bitterly cold mornings and raging hurricanes. ✈

Dating back to the fifth century, the Collect is rooted in a basic biblical pattern of prayer that “collects” the prayers of God’s people. It’s a form of prayer that grounds us in the work and character of God, which we witness supremely in Scripture. We first recall God’s own creative and preservative purposes for creation before we ask God to establish his good purposes for creation in and through us, here and now.

In form, it follows a very specific “logic”:

1. Begin by naming God
2. Remember God’s activities or attributes
3. State your request of God
4. State your desired hope for such a request
5. End by naming God again

To illustrate the particular shape of a Collect, I share here two prayers from my book, *Prayers for the Pilgrimage*, one “For the Care of Creation,” and another “For Green Spaces”:

O Lord, you who made us to till and to keep the earth, grace us, we pray, to preserve its beauty and to steward all its riches as well as to delight in all of its variety, so that we might care for it as you care for it, in wisdom and in love. We pray this in the name of the One who sustains all of creation, Jesus Christ

himself. Amen.

O Lord, you who make us to lie down in verdant pastures, strengthen us this day to become advocates of public gardens that foster community, parks that preserve nature's beauty, and wild places that remind us of our smallness, so that all who encounter such green spaces might experience the joy of your creation. We pray this in the name of Jesus, the True Gardener. Amen.

One of the best parts of the Collect prayer is that, while prescriptive in form, it lends itself easily to extemporaneous expression. It can be used to pray for all sorts of concerns: pets and pandemics, sublime sunsets and despoiled seas, solar eclipses and oil spills, bitterly cold mornings and raging hurricanes.

It lends itself easily to both prayers of praise and prayers of lament and even perhaps to cursing prayers. It can offer opportunities for intimately personal prayers as well as for broadly communal prayers. And whatever your congregational culture, it keeps returning us to the God who promises to restore creation in the face of all sin-distorting forces and who chooses to use us to accomplish this holy work.

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PREACHING IN A CLIMATE-CHANGED WORLD

Derrick Weston

In my work at Creation Justice Ministries, we often ask lay people, “How often do you hear sermons on climate change/environmental issues?” Typically, the answers range from “never” to “once a year,” allowing for an annual Earth Day sermon in some contexts. For the kinds of people who are often involved in our programming, this is, of course, disappointing. They care deeply about these issues and want to see the church mobilized around caring for God’s creation.

Our knee-jerk response may be to blame the preachers for ignoring these topics. Why would they neglect something that seems to be such an important issue for many in their congregations? So we ask a similar question of preachers: “How often are you preaching on creation justice?” The answers don’t shift much—never or once a year. But when speaking to preachers, we get the opportunity to explore some of the reasons why a climate sermon may not be on the agenda. Some of the answers we hear are:

- It’s too political.
- It’s not relevant to our context.
- I don’t know enough about the science.
- This feels disconnected from our faith and/or the Bible.
- We have more pressing issues going on in our community (a refrain we hear often in marginalized communities).
- We’re just trying to keep the doors open.

While these may feel like excuses, they reflect the pressures that many pastors are feeling in a polarized culture where church attendance is down across the board. That said, the urgency of our climate crisis requires that the church speak on behalf of God’s creation. During one of our recent retreats, Dr. Jerusha Neal, a homiletics professor at Duke Divinity School, used the image of an iceberg to describe where preaching on climate change is now and where it needs to go: instead of climate sermons being relegated to the work of a “green team” or an annual sermon (the part of the iceberg above the surface), it needs to move to a regular part of the church’s mission, vision, and theology and be mentioned from the pulpit regularly

(the foundations of the iceberg under the surface).

Some of the concerns that pastors mention are more complicated to address than others. For some communities, conversations around climate change will simply be too political, though it is unfortunate that care for God's creation has become a partisan issue. While knowing some of the basics of climate science can be helpful, it often does little to change hearts.

Perhaps the most important concern to address is the idea that care of creation is somehow at best a tangential issue to our faith, if not wholly unrelated. Nothing could be further from the truth. Ellen Davis, author of *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible*, reminds us that the Bible was written by and for a people who were "land-centered in their theological perspective." Right relationship with God meant right relationship with the land and disobedience to God had consequences for both land and people. The biblical text, both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, are overflowing with metaphors from creation, a reminder that God often is revealed in creation and that creation is oftentimes our best teacher. The people of the biblical eras knew the rhythms of nature. What has changed is that we in the 21st century church have allowed technology to move us further away from creation and therefore further away from the biblical context.

Ultimately, we won't preach about care of God's creation if we don't see ourselves as part of it. ✎

Changing our biblical hermeneutic so that we see and understand creation and our role in it more clearly should certainly cause us to preach on environmental issues more often. But so should changing our perspective of what is happening in our own communities. Black, brown, and low-income communities are often the first to be harmed by environmental crises, a fact that should concern any of us who regularly preach on justice issues. Poor air quality, poor water quality, and extreme heat are all being experienced by those who contribute the least to creating these problems. Health impacts like asthma and lead poisoning are environmental issues. While care for oceans, glaciers, and rainforests are crucial topics, they often seem distant, best left for people who have the luxury to care about such things. But caring for creation means caring about the tree cover or lack thereof in our cities, the pollution in the

water we drink, and the toxins in the air we breathe.

Ultimately, we won't preach about care of God's creation if we don't see ourselves as part of it. What may end up being the first task of the preacher is correcting a theology that says we are outside and/or over the natural world, and instead recognizes what the narratives in Genesis tell us: humans are part of creation and we have a unique role in the created order to tend to our fellow created things in ways that only we can. Perhaps then the first task of preaching in a climate-changed world is to go back to the very beginning.

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GOD'S WORSHIPFUL DESIGN: AN INVITATION TO CHURCHES AND ARTISTS

Heidy Sumei Chuang

“God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.”

—Genesis 1:31 (NIV)

When I teach watercolor classes, I begin with this verse to help my students understand that creativity is a gift from God and a mirror of His own creative process. It is a poignant and profound way in which we, God's masterpieces, image him. Just as God looked and saw (surveyed, reflected on, concluded) that all he had made was very good, we, too, are invited by Christ to “consider the birds of the air and the flowers of the field.” This “seeing” is the very first skill I teach my students, for the work of a visual artist stems from our ability to perceive and consider. Just as a cellist knows their instrument uniquely—the weight of their bow and the smooth ebony beneath their fingertips—so the artist wields the instrument of observation with lifelong practice and curiosity.

Learning to Look

When we learn to look, two things happen. First, we discover that creation is very good. I am reminded of my time at Les Courmettes, the A Rocha France site, painting moths and discovering the beauty and intricacy of these often-overlooked insects. I was delighted to notice subtleties I had not seen before, like how the colors of the moth's wings were the same as the pink limestone that is a feature of that place. Sometime later, at L'Abri in Switzerland, this experience was mirrored in my workshop with students as I asked them to closely observe and draw moths at various stages of their lifecycle. The act of looking and creating was utterly transformative, with one student sharing that three days earlier, she would have killed a moth without a second thought. They had learned to cherish—to see the “very goodness”—of this tiny piece of creation. The artist's role is to teach people to see. When we learn to see, we respond with love.



Hummingbird Hawk-Moth, Macroglossum stellatarum
A Rocha France
Watercolor on Paper
30" x 40"

The second thing that happens is that God is revealed in creation—"The heavens declare the glory of God" (Psalm 19:1, NIV). When I have sent my students into nature to practice looking, God has spoken to them as He so often speaks to me. The artist is a storyteller. As I consider, ponder, and discover the depths of God as revealed in creation, my art tells these stories.

My friend, a composer, tells me that for her, the beauty of music is that it unfolds through moments in time. As an artist, I find great beauty in art's ability to hold countless brushstrokes, hours of effort, and corresponding or even contradictory ideas all together, at once, on the same paper. Meaning is so powerfully received when it is rooted in the complexity of life; as Hosea wrote, "I will...make the valley of Achor a gateway of hope" (Hosea 2:15, HCS). Not the valley of abundance or ease, but the valley of trouble. Art holds space for mystery and paradox in a way that is unique to this discipline and has been explored within Christian worship for centuries if not millennia.

God's Worshipful Design

“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills—to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of crafts’” (Exodus 31:1-5, NIV).

The first time God's Spirit is recorded as filling a person is to give an artist wisdom, understanding, and craftsmanship. This passage also speaks of what God finds beautiful—our worshipful response to the work of his hands, the land beneath our feet. Not just any land. The pomegranates and grapes made of gold were meaningful and fruitful in their culture, time, and place.

This passage also speaks of the invitation and role of individual artists, for Bezalel was called by name.

The question of how art can fulfill its role in worship is not answered from a distance but rather within a specific community. This can sometimes be lost in our increasingly global world. Who are your artists? What land do you inhabit? What is significant, worshipful, and beautiful in your church community?

If the church, in a world full of industry and agenda, can create spacious places for artists to flourish, they will become the storytellers, teachers, and hope-bringers God has designed them to be. They will bless the body and creation with their ability to look and respond. Art is not just something God uses but sits right at the center of His rich and full design for worship.

The call to the visual artist is to see and worship, build up the body of Christ, and finally, be hope-bringers to our despairing and complex world, by speaking of God's care—for us and all of creation. ✎

Finally, I am reminded of two stories. The first was the Easter Vigil at my church, Church of the Cross, Boston, where artists, musicians, chefs, florists, and others

filled the church with God's creation and our worshipful response to Him. I saw in the details artistic coincidences that are impossible to orchestrate apart from God's pleasure, intention, and presence within our art.

The second was an exhibition of my work at Waterfall Gallery, New York City, one of the busiest and most secular cities on earth. Many at the exhibition saw paintings pleasing to the eye, but those who had eyes to see saw the message of reconciliation and hope within my floral collection, "Beauty from Ashes." The call to the visual artist is to see and worship, build up the body of Christ, and finally, be hope-bringers to our despairing and complex world, by speaking of God's care—for us and all of creation.

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POSTURES OF WORSHIP FOR EVERYDAY

CREATION CARE

Debra and Ron Rienstra

As professors, we rejoice when students report that something they've learned and practiced in the classroom becomes useful and important to them in their lives outside school. Maybe it's a particular sentence pattern for their writing or a sermon technique for their preaching. If worship is, among other things, a classroom for faith formation, what do we learn there that can be applied to creation care in our daily lives?

We propose that nine “postures” that we practice in worship also prepare us to worship God more deeply every day in our creation care work.

If we worship God, we will love what God loves—and pay attention to it. ✎

Attention. Simone Weil observed that “Prayer consists of attention.” By practicing attention and focus in our worship and devotions, we build a capacity to pay prayerful attention to the world around us. Do you know the names of the trees, birds, streams, and landforms where you live? Most people regard the living world as merely a backdrop to much more important human business. Yet we depend on the living world because we, too, are creatures. Moreover, God loves all of creation, not just human beings. Our savior is redeeming this beloved world, “reconciling to himself all things” (Col. 1:20). If we worship God, we will love what God loves—and pay attention to it.

Delight. In worship, we praise God, delighting in God and all his works. In our daily lives, do we take time to delight in swamp white oaks and nesting robins and native prairies and the silly ostriches and storks—which, at least according to Job 39:13-18, God especially enjoys? Delighting in this beautiful world is a natural outcome of

loving the God who created it, a natural form of worship.

Gratitude. Of course, we give thanks to God in worship for many things—our salvation, God’s grace and healing, God’s goodness, and for the beauty of creation, too. We can respond with gratitude whenever we experience the abundance and beauty of the living world: when we hike to a mountain summit or enjoy a delicious tomato from the garden, for example. Expanding our gratitude practice means noticing the generous gifts of creation not just when they are useful to us. Many plants and creatures do not serve us at all, yet their very being gives glory to God and we can give thanks for that as well.

Grief. We are taught in worship to bring our grief and sorrow before God, our Healer and Shepherd. When we pay attention and learn to delight in this world, we also feel a new kind of grief: grief over the damage this world has suffered because of human greed, conflict, foolishness, and sometimes just our lack of understanding. We might begin to notice how a local industry carelessly dumped waste into a river or how a certain farming technique, while it worked well for a while, actually ended up degrading and eroding soil. We might feel grief about piles of plastic waste in our oceans. We can bring this grief to God, too.

Lament and repentance. Lament and repentance are distinctive practices, and we need them both. Lament is not about guilt, it’s simply about bringing our anguished questions before God. Why did my mother get cancer? Repentance is, of course, about acknowledging our own sin and “turning” from it. We can bring both lament and repentance into our creation care as well. Why do wildfires engulf so much of Canada? Why another hurricane on the East Coast? And then, the hard part: How am I complicit in a way of life that depends on damaging the earth? What must we do to turn from destructive ways and become healers?

Humility and wonder. In worship, we “bow” before God and humble ourselves. We wonder at God’s glory and beauty. Similarly, humility and wonder are the first requirement for creation care. This world is not ours, “the earth is the Lord’s.” We humans do not own and control everything, nor do we know everything. Humble curiosity and reverent wonder emerge from our worship of God and guide us as we practice science and gain knowledge, reconnect to the living world where we live, and seek to heal and care for it.

Service. In worship, we signify service to God usually through our offerings. Outside

the worship space, we serve each other in myriad ways. But what about serving the earth? In Genesis 2, Adam is given his original vocation: to “serve” (*abad*) and “protect/observe” (*shamar*) the soil. *Shamar* is the word used for “keeping the law,” “keeping the sabbath,” and “keeping kosher.” It means to watch intently, to observe, keep boundaries around, care about, and commit to fiercely. Anything we do for creation care, from planting native wildflowers to advocating for pollution mitigation on city council, becomes a form of service to God.

Of course, the learning here flows both ways: what we learn in worship, we apply to creation care in daily life. But our creation care work also enhances our worship. We practice attention, delight, gratitude, healthy grief, lament, repentance, humility, wonder, and service in our daily practices and thus deepen our worship of God on Sundays, too.

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