

Season of Creation

LET JUSTICE AND PEACE FLOW

2023



PACIFIC CONFERENCE
OF CHURCHES

Contents

INTRODUCTION	2
Join the river of justice and peace	3
The river of life brings hope instead of despair	4
A mighty torrent can move mountains.....	5
How the river of justice and peace inspires our advocacy actions.....	6
2023 SEASON OF CREATION PRAYER	7
IDEAS TO CELEBRATE THE SEASON OF CREATION	8
Advocacy action	10
Ecumenical Prayer Service	11
Contextualized Liturgies and Reflections	22
<i>Liturgy and Reflection Prepared by Ms Daphne Kiki - Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea</i>	
Let the Forests Praise Week	30
Let the Forests Praise – Liturgy 1	30
<i>Liturgy and Reflection Prepared by Dr. Di Rayson, Eco-theologian - Pacific Theological College</i>	
Let the Forest Praise – Liturgy 2.....	34
<i>Liturgy and Reflection Prepared by Rev. Dr Marie Ropeti - Samoan Theologian (Auckland, New Zealand)</i>	
Let the Land Praise Week	39
<i>Liturgy and Reflection Prepared by Dr. Di Rayson, Eco-theologian Lecturer - Pacific Theological College</i>	
Let the Wilderness Praise Week	44
<i>Liturgy and Reflection Prepared by Dr. Di Rayson, Eco-theologian Lecturer - Pacific Theological College</i>	
Let the Rivers and Oceans Praise Week	49
<i>Liturgy and Reflection Prepared by Dr. Di Rayson, Eco-theologian Lecturer - Pacific Theological College</i>	
Let ALL the Creatures Praise & the Feast of St Francis Week	54
<i>Liturgy and Reflection Prepared by Dr. Di Rayson, Eco-theologian Lecturer - Pacific Theological College</i>	
The Final Blessing	59

INTRODUCTION

Welcome!

Welcome to this year's Season of Creation. Thank you for bringing your community together for this special season of ecumenical solidarity. We emerge from one with a stronger sense that we share one common home, and of the urgency to protect it together.

The Season of Creation is the annual Christian celebration to pray and respond together to the cry of Creation: the ecumenical family around the world unites to listen and care for our common home, the Oikos of God.

The Season "Celebration" begins 1st of September - the day of Prayer for Creation, and end on the 4th of October – the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology beloved by many Christian denominations.

This year we will unite around the theme "Let Justice and Peace Flow" with the symbol of A Mighty River – as Christians, let us prepare to witness the power of working together to let justice and peace flow as we care for our common home.

Through prayer, practical advocacy, and sustainable actions, this 2023 Season of Creation can prophetically renew our ecumenical unity and care for our common home. We invite you to join this special season and be part of this mighty movement for justice and peace.

May we journey together in communion as the People of God to let justice and peace flow!

Join the river of justice and peace

Prophet Amos cries out “But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!” (Amos 5:24) and so we are called to join the river of justice and peace, to take up climate and ecological justice, and to speak out with and for communities most impacted by climate injustice and the loss of biodiversity.

Our prayers, sermon and liturgies must call for justice not only for humans but for all creation. Justice, allied with peace, calls us to repent of our ecological sins and to change our attitudes and actions. Righteousness demands that we live in peace, not conflict with our human neighbors, and building right relationships with all of creation. ‘Peace’ (shalom) involves not only the absence of conflict but positive, live-giving relationships with God, ourselves, our human neighbors, and all creation.

Those indigenous communities that recognize the sacredness of natural elements and so live as an embodiment of an interconnected way of life, expressing a partnership between people and the life of the Earth, have much to teach the rest of the world.

We are invited to join the river of justice and peace on behalf of all Creation and to converge our individual identities, of name, family or faith community, in this greater movement for justice, just like tributaries come together to form a mighty river. As the people of God, we must work together on behalf of All Creation, as part of that mighty river of peace and justice.

(Adapted from the Season of Creation Resource Guide 2023)

The river of life brings hope instead of despair

Prophet Isaiah proclaims “Listen carefully, I am about to do a new thing, now it will spring forth; will you not be aware of it? I will even put a road in the wilderness, rivers in the desert.” [\(Isaiah 43:19\)](#)

Biodiversity is being lost at a rate not seen since the last mass extinction. The hope of keeping average temperature increases to 1.5 degrees Celsius is fading. The world humans have known, enjoyed and celebrated is changing rapidly beyond repair. The futures of young people are threatened by the cascading impacts of the loss of biodiversity and a changing climate. Industrialization, colonisation and the extraction and consumption of resources have created great wealth, unequally distributed. Powerful Global North nations have grown wealthy at the expense of Global South nations and indigenous and subsistence communities.

Today’s climate and ecological emergency hurts the most vulnerable, many living in the least wealthy nations, who have contributed the fewest emissions.

Indigenous peoples make up five percent of the world’s population and protect nearly 80 percent of the world’s remaining biodiversity.

We are presently more aware than ever of the link between fossil fuels, and violence and war. We can, however, dream and work for a world where each country produces the energy they need from God-given gifts of the sun and wind, rather than going to war for fossil fuels.

The urgency grows and we must make visible peace with Earth and on Earth, at the same time that justice calls us to repentance and a change of attitude and actions. As we join the river of justice and peace with others then hope is created instead of despair. Streams can rise in the desert. An economy of peace can be built instead of an economy based on conflict.

“The Season of Creation is a special time of the year to pray with others as part of and with God’s creation. I am reminded that at a joint response in loving creations comes from first being in a loving relationship with Creator God.” – Jasmine Kwong Creation Care Catalyst, Lausanne Movement.

A mighty torrent can move mountains

Our individual actions during the Season of Creation are important. Celebrating creation, taking part in clean-ups, planting trees, and reducing our carbon footprint are some of the immediate actions we can take.

We must also recognize that as we need a mighty movement of justice, individual actions are no longer enough. Justice also includes paying historic debts. At a global level, nations with power and wealth have a duty to deal justly and honestly with communities that suffer most from the climate and ecological crises. They have not dealt righteously with their less wealthy neighbours in global forums. They have not fulfilled their promises of financing the losses and damages that vulnerable communities are suffering from, or funding necessary biodiversity initiatives in less wealthy nations, nor they made the necessary sacrifices to stay below 1.5 degrees Celsius global warming.

Nevertheless, Global South nations, working together for more than 30 years, managed to win a victory at COP27 in making wealthier nations realise their moral duty to provide financing for loss and damage.

The recent decisions at COP15 to preserve biodiversity are also helpful and required similar perseverance. The new UN Treaty on Oceans marks a historic moment for protecting marine biodiversity in international waters, adding to the hope of more persistent global responses to the climate crisis. These victories have been achieved by those with less power working together. Together we can be a mighty river of justice of peace, that brings new life to earth and future generations, a river that can move the mountains of injustice.

“There has never before been a time, in the history of human existence, when we have so gravely threatened not only our own existence, but that of the rest of the living world. But it’s not too late to act, if we do it now, if we do it together.” – Bishop Olivia Graham, Diocese of Reading, Church of England.

(Adapted from the Season of Creation Resource Guide 2023)

How the river of justice and peace inspires our advocacy actions

Those living in the Global North must ask their elected representatives to fulfil their promises. These promises include funds promised at global meetings for the most vulnerable communities affected by climate change and for the preservation of remaining biodiversity.

Other actions in recognition of our interconnectedness and interdependence with all of Creation include learning about and signing the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Rivers, part of the movement to recognize the inherent rights of Mother Earth. As an ecumenical family, we can engage in these actions and contribute to ensure that the web of life is preserved and cared for.

At the same time that we trust in God's work, we recognize that we can also participate in God's will for justice and peace. This Season of Creation, may we journey together in communion as the people of God to let justice and peace flow!

The Season of Creation is a reminder to young people that God is Creator, and we humans, along with others (animals and plants), are creatures. It is a reminder that we need to take care of one another as our Creator takes care of us. Season of Creation is important for youth as it recognizes us (youth) as leaders of today rather than the victims of tomorrow.” – Priyanka Gloria Gupta, Intern at the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

(Adapted from the Season of Creation Resource Guide 2023)

2023 SEASON OF CREATION PRAYER

Creator of All,

From your communion of love life sprung forth like a mighty river and the whole cosmos came into being.

On this Earth of overflowing love, the Word was made flesh and went forth with the life-giving waters proclaiming peace and justice for all creation.

You called human beings to till and keep your garden. You placed us into right relationship with each creature, but we failed to listen to the cries of Earth and the cries of the most vulnerable. We broke with the flowing communion of love and sinned against you by not safeguarding the conditions for life.

We lament the loss of our fellow species and their habitats, we grieve the loss of human cultures, along with the lives and livelihoods that have been displaced or perished, and we ache at the sight of an economy of death, war and violence that we have inflicted on ourselves and on the Earth.

Open our ears to your creative, reconciling and sustaining Word that calls to us through the book of Scripture and the book of creation. Bless us once again with your life-giving waters so that the Creator Spirit may let justice and peace flow in our hearts and overflow into all creation.

Open our hearts to receive the living waters of God's justice and peace, and to share it with our suffering brothers and sisters, all creatures around us, and all creation.

Bless us to walk together with all people of good will so that the many streams of the living waters of God's justice and peace may become a mighty river all over the Earth.

In the name of the One who came to proclaim good news to all creation, Jesus Christ.

Amen.

(Adapted from the Season of Creation Resource Guide 2023)

IDEAS TO CELEBRATE THE SEASON OF CREATION

The Season of Creation is a time to renew our relationship with our Creator and all creation through celebration, conversion, and commitment. It is an annual ecumenical season where we pray and act together as a Christian family for our common home.

We are called to engage in the Season of Creation starting early in the year, so that we can build a year-long process of preparation for the celebration that takes part later in the year.

As you prepare for the Season of Creation, remember that rather than events we are building encounters, to cultivate listening in the spirit of ecumenism, engaging in prophetic action for our common home and strengthened by eco-spirituality to commit and follow-up on our responsibilities as stewards of creation.

There are many different ways to celebrate the season. Here are some suggested ideas:

1. Host an ecumenical prayer service

Hosting a prayer service is a simple and beautiful way to celebrate the season. While a prayer service that stays within your church community is welcomed, this season offers a wonderful opportunity to connect with Christians outside of your denomination / congregation or network.

If interested, contact local Christian communities of denominations different from your own, and ask the clergy or justice coordinator whether he/she would like to collaborate in co-hosting a prayer service for the Season of Creation.

In light of this year's theme, see how you might intentionally include the needs and participation of groups and individuals in your community that work with social justice, peace-building, or the rights of rivers. You might also consider taking up a donation collection to support a particular issue.

Ask all participating communities if possible to advertise and promote the service. Broadcasting information via social media, print and web media will ensure good attendance and lead to a diverse, dynamic celebration.

2. Hold your worship service

outside

To celebrate God's creation fully, it is good, where practical, to take our worship outside a building and to worship in the context of God's creation-which is already worshipping God eloquently as every creature, and even mountains, rivers, oceans, land, birds, and trees/forest worship the Lord simply by doing what God created them to do.

You might like to consider a site of environmental significance. If it is a place of great natural beauty, the focus would be on giving thanks to God and committing ourselves to protecting the site and others. If it is a place of environmental degradation, the focus is on confessing our environmental sins and lamenting the voices of co-creatures who have been lost, and committing to actions of healing and restoration.

Depending on your style of worship and the weather, consider an informal service or brief Eucharist that incorporates the ecumenical service offered in this Celebration Guide, or other creation-centered liturgies.

For your offering, ask children and adults to gather symbols from nature and take them to the holy table. These symbols can represent the "fruit of the earth and work of human hands" alongside the bread and wine, and serve as a reminder of the voices of all creation that joins in the feast.

Include a moment of silence to listen to, and wordlessly join in with the song of creation's worship. Or play sounds of water or a river in the place of singing as you come to the table.

In place of the sermon, you can divide into groups for a short Bible study.

3. Organise a creation walk or pilgrimage

Organise a contemplative walk outside by a local river to meditate on the gift of God's creation and our response to be in deeper communion with all life. Organise a pilgrimage to a significant ecological site or a site that witness ecological or social justice. Invite a group to study ecological themed Scriptures, or pray with ecologically themed prayers. Your pilgrimage could also culminate in a prayer service.

Advocacy action

The Season of Creation is an important time to unite our voices for our common home and our vulnerable sisters and brothers. This year more than ever before we have the opportunity to prophetically join forces as an ecumenical family and call for bold actions for climate justice and the preservation of biodiversity to build peace with Earth and on Earth.

Here are some concrete steps you can take to get involved with your faith community and act together for justice on climate, nuclear and biodiversity issues:

- Learn who is active on these issues in your faith community. How are members/leaders of your church/faith community engaged at the local, national and international levels?
- Learn more about effective advocacy. Many faith organisations have helpful resources.
- Determine with your faith community who you should influence. Meetings with and petitions and letters to the editor of your local media outlets.
- Join and support campaigns for fair and just climate financing, nuclear and ecological justice and biodiversity funding.

“The Season of Creation has been a gift to the churches. It has awakened the already present creation dimension in the diverse worship traditions, it has provided language that responds to the concerns of the youth, and it has provided a bridge between the varied ministries and between the faith communities and the civil society.” – Rev’d Dr. Rima Nasrallah, Middle East Council of Churches.

(Adapted from the Season of Creation Resource Guide 2023)

Ecumenical Prayer Service

We encourage you to use this prayer service to mark the beginning and end of the Season of Creation, at events that you host during the season, or to incorporate into your community's worship throughout the Season.

As you plan your service, consider featuring a "mighty river" by decorating your worship space with images of rivers, or water.

Leader parts are in regular font, congregational responses are in bold.

Welcome

"Listen carefully, I am about to do a new thing, now it will spring forth; will you not be aware of it? I will even put a road in the wilderness, rivers in the desert." (Isaiah 43:19)

We gather in the name of God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of the Earth and all creatures!
Amen.

Praise be to the Holy Trinity! God is sound and life, Creator of the Universe, Source of all life, whom the angels sing; wondrous Light of all mysteries known or unknown to humankind, and life that lives in all.

(Hildegard of Bingen, 13th Century)

Opening Prayer

Blessed are you, Creator of all
to you be praise and glory forever
as your dawn renews the face of the Earth
bringing light and life to all creation
bring hope to your people.
May we rejoice in this day you have made
Open our eyes to behold your presence
And strengthen our hands to work for justice for all of creation,
That the world may rejoice together and give you praise

(Adapted from Lancelot Andrewes, 1626)

Greeting A Four Direction Prayer

Let us turn our hearts to the West

From there the Thunders bring us cleansing rain

Creator God, heal us and our relatives

Let us turn our hearts to the North

Winter comes to us from there and calls us to rest

Creator God, restore our strength

Let us turn our hearts to the East

The morning Sun begins each day there

Creator God awaken us and help us to walk with a renewed life

Let us turn our hearts to the South

Where the warm winds come from to give us comfort and joy

Creator God soothe our aching souls

Let us turn our hearts to the Sky

From there our Creator sees all around us

Creator God help us to trust you to lead us

Let us turn our hearts to the Earth

From there quite wisdom comes to teach us

Creator God hear us as we pray

(Adapted from the Season of Creation Resource Guide 2023)

Psalmody – Psalm 85

We are presently more aware than ever of the link between fossil fuels, and violence and war.
Let us pray and proclaim with the Psalmist:

Lord, you poured out blessings on your land!

You restored the fortunes of Israel.

You forgave the guilt of your people –

Yes, you covered all their sins.

May your love and truth meet together

Let justice and mercy kiss

You held back fury.

You kept back your blazing anger.

Now restore us again, O God of our salvation.

Put aside your anger against us once more.

Will you be angry with us always?

Will you prolong your wrath to all generations?

Won't you revive us again,

So, your people can rejoice in you?

May love and truth meet together

Let justice and mercy kiss

Show us your unfailing love, O Lord,

And grant us your salvation.

I listen carefully to what God the Lord is saying,

for he speaks peace to his faithful people.

But let them not return to their foolish ways.

Surely his salvation is near those who fear him,

so, our land will be filled with his glory.

Unfailing love and truth have met together

justice and peace have kissed!
May love and truth meet together
Let justice and peace kiss
Truth springs up from Earth,
And righteousness smiles down from heaven.
Yes, the Lord pours down his blessings.
Our land will yield its bountiful harvest.
Righteousness goes as a herald before him,
Preparing the way for his steps.
May love and truth meet together
Let justice and peace kiss
(Adapted from the New Living translation)

Litany of repentance

God of light, life and love,
God of land, and sea, and sky,
Who called creation into existence and wove it into a rich
Tapestry, a fine mat, a web of life

Your Spirit hovered over the face of the primordial waters,
And was breathed into humankind after you made us equally in your image.
Your Word was made flesh and embodied Your divine
love as it took root and bore fruit in us, restoring our relationship with you.

Yet we have not honoured this relationship with You and the rest of Your Creation.
We have disrespected the web of life
We have devalued the fine ecological mat that You wove with so much love
We have uprooted Your tree of life and sold it as logs.

We have forgotten that we sweat and cry saltwater and have polluted Your Oceans and rivers...oceans that cry for justice and rivers that call to righteousness.

Instead of everything that has breath praising You, all creation groans in pain as trees and phytoplankton choke on carbon belched from our desires for more, and our care for less.

All around we see the consequences of our ecological sin as we extract and exploit, as we defile and pillage our sister and brother creation:

Heatwaves and wildfires, bitter winters, droughts and floods

Rising sea levels and rising ocean temperatures

More extreme cyclones, typhoons and hurricanes

Yet we are blind

Creation roars in pain

Yet we are deaf

You call us in Christ, to speak truth to power and peace

to this planet, our common home

Yet we are silent.

God of hope and healing

May our Rivers of Righteousness

Wash away our apathy, our greed and selfishness

and reveal the deep relationships You created for us with all creation.

Nourish us with the water of life that restores,

turning deserts of despair into oases of hope.

May the waves of Your embrace
Transform us back into guardians of Your creation.
May the currents of Your justice
Carry us to Your lagoon of peace
Where all creation may enjoy
Life in abundance

We pray in the name of the one who came so that the whole
cosmos may have everlasting life,
Jesus the Christ,

Amen.

(Rev. James Shri Bhagwan, General Secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches)

Repentance

In God there is forgiveness.
**Loving and all-seeing God,
forgive us where we have failed to support
one another
and to be what we claim to be.
Forgive us where we have failed to serve
you;
and where our thoughts and actions
have been contrary to yours we ask your
pardon.**

God forgives us; be at peace.

[Silence]

Rejoice and be glad,
For Christ is resurrection,
Reconciliation for all human race
And for the whole of creation. **Amen.**

*(Adapted from the New Zealand Prayer Book –
Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia)*

Scripture Reading

First Reading- Amos 5:21-24

Justice, allied with peace, calls us to repent of our ecological sins and to change our attitudes and actions. Righteousness demands that we live in peace, not conflict with our human neighbours, and building right relationships with all of creation. We are invited to join the river of justice and peace on behalf of all creation and to converge our individual identities, of name, family or faith community, in this greater movement for justice, just like tributaries come together to form a mighty river. Let us hear the words of prophet Amos:

“I can’t stand your religious meetings.

I’m fed up with your conferences and conventions.

I want nothing to do with your religion projects,

Your pretentious slogans and goals.

I’m sick of your fund-raising schemes,

Your public relations and image making.

I’ve had all I can take of your noisy ego-music.

When was the last time you sang to me?

Do you know what I want?

I want justice – oceans of it.

I want fairness – rivers of it.

That’s what I want. That’s all I want.”

(The Message translation)

Second Reading- John 7:37-39

On this Earth, our common home, the Word was made flesh and went forth with the life-giving waters proclaiming peace and justice for all creation. Let us hear the Word of the Lord:

“On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has

said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.” By this Jesus meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.”

The Affirmation of Faith

You, O God, are supreme and holy.
You create our world and give us life.
Your purpose overarches everything we do.
You have always been with us.
You are God.
You, O God, are infinitely generous,
Good beyond all measure.
You came to us before we came to you.
You have revealed and proved
Your love for us in Jesus Christ,
God made flesh,
Who lived and died and rose again.

You are with us now.
You are God.
You, O God, are Holy Spirit.
You empower us to be your gospel in the world.
You reconcile and heal; you overcome death.
You are our God. We worship you.

(Adapted from the New Zealand Prayer Book)

Intercessory Prayers

Creator and Redeemer, as we approach you in prayer, make us walk in beauty and balance. Make us open our hearts and minds. Make us speak the truth. We pray for your community, the Church, the Body of Christ. We pray for all our relatives in the circle of life throughout all Creation, for those chosen to be our leaders and teachers.

In peace, we pray to you, Lord God.

We call upon the Earth, our planet home, with its beautiful depths, soaring heights and deep waters, its vitality and abundance of life, and together we ask:

That it may teach us and show us the way.

We call upon the mountains and deserts, the high green valleys and meadows filled with wild flowers, the snows, the summits of intense silence, and we ask:

That they may teach us and show us the way.

We call upon the land which grows our food, the nurturing soil, the fertile fields, the abundant gardens and orchards, and we ask:

That they may teach us and show us the way.

We call upon the forests, the great trees reaching strongly to the sky with earth in their roots and the heavens in their branches, the fir and the pine and the cedar and we ask:

That they may teach us and show us the way.

We call upon the creatures of the fields and forests and the seas, our brothers and sisters the wolves and deer, the eagle and dove, the great whales and the dolphin. We ask:

That they may teach us and show us the way.

We call upon all those who have lived on this earth, our ancestors and our friends, who dreamed the best for future generations, and upon whose lives our lives are built, and with thanksgiving, we call upon them too...

That they may teach us and show us the way.

We call upon the nations of the world to hear the cry of those who have suffered loss of homes, lives and hope because of climate change. May they hear the cry of those whose schools, churches, hospitals, roads and infrastructure have been damaged. We pray for justice and for peace:

That they may teach us and show us the way.

We pray for all victims of war and violence. We pray for countries where the greed for oil and gas are leading to war. We hold in our hearts those areas where fossil fuel projects have destabilized communities and human rights abuses have occurred. We pray for areas where climate change has led to drought and conflict over water and resources is taking place. May

we respond to the cry of the Earth and those living in poverty, as peacemakers who challenge the violence that threatens us all. We ask:

That they may teach us and show us the way.

Creator, you made the world and declared it to be good: the beauty of the trees, the softness of the air, the fragrance

of the grass speaks to us; the summit of the mountains, the thunder of the sky, the rhythm of the waves speaks to us; the faintness of the stars, the freshness of the morning, the dewdrops on the flower speak to us. But above all, our heart soars, for you speak to us in Jesus the Christ, in whose name we offer these prayers.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Let us pray with the Lord's Prayer that Jesus has taught us.

[Pray the traditional version of the Lord's Prayer or the following version by Jim Cotter adapted in the New Zealand Prayer Book]:

Eternal Spirit, Earth maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,

Source of all that is and that shall be,

Father and Mother of us all,

Loving God, in whom is heaven:

The hallowing of your name echoes through the universe!

The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world!

Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!

Your communion of peace and freedom sustain our hope and come on Earth.

With the bread we need for today, feed us.

In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.

In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.

From trials too great to endure, spare us.

From the grip of all that is evil, free us.

For you reign in the glory of the power that is love, now and forever. **Amen.**

Sharing of Peace

The peace of God be with you all.

In God's justice is our peace.

Brothers and sisters,

Christ calls us to live in unity with each other

and with the whole of Creation

We seek to live in the spirit of Christ.

Benediction

May we be blessed to open our hearts to receive "the living

waters of God's justice and peace" within us:

Amen.

May we be blessed to share "the living waters of God's

justice and peace" with our suffering brothers and sisters

and all creatures around us:

Amen.

May we be blessed to walk together with all people of good

will so that the many streams of "the living waters of God's

justice and peace" may become a mighty river all over the

Earth:

Amen.

And may God bless us on this journey, the Father, the Son,

And the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

(Adapted from the Season of Creation Resource Guide 2023)

Contextualized Liturgies and Reflections

Prayer for Creation

Gracious Creator God,

We gather here, connected to the land, the waters, and the spirit of all living things. In this sacred moment, we offer our prayer, guided by the wisdom of our Indigenous ancestors and the spirit that flows through all creation.

We honour and acknowledge You as the Source of all life, the Owner of the cosmos and the Earth. We stand in awe of the beauty and diversity that You have woven into the fabric of creation. Help us to remember that we are but one thread in this intricate tapestry, interconnected with every living being.

As we enter the Season of Creation, we seek guidance and understanding. We lament the wounds inflicted upon our Mother Earth, the destruction of ecosystems, and the loss of sacred lands. We repent for the harm caused by our human actions, by systems of exploitation, and by the disregard for Indigenous wisdom.

Grant us the strength to rise as stewards of the Earth, as caretakers of Your creation. Inspire us to listen to the voices of Indigenous peoples, who have nurtured and protected these lands since time immemorial. May we learn from their deep connection to the land, their reverence for

all living beings, and their commitment to sustainable ways of life.

In this season of reflection, renewal, and restoration, empower us to heal the wounds inflicted upon the Earth. Guide us in honouring our sacred responsibilities as guardians of the land, the waters, and the skies. Help us to cultivate a deep respect for the interconnectedness of all things, and to live in harmony with nature.

As we walk this path, may our actions be guided by love, compassion, and justice. Grant us the courage to challenge systems of exploitation and to advocate for the rights of Indigenous peoples and the preservation of their ancestral lands. May we be agents of positive change, nurturing a future where all beings can thrive.

We offer this prayer in gratitude for the gift of life, for the teachings of our ancestors, and for the opportunity to be part of the sacred journey of creation. May our hearts be open to the whispers of the wind, the songs of the birds, and the wisdom of the land.

In the name of the Creator, the Sustainer, and the Healer our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ, we pray.

Amen.

Psalms 148:1-14 NIV

Psalm 148 is a beautiful and poetic expression of praise to the Creator. When considering an Indigenous reflection on this psalm and its connection to the Season of Creation, it is important to acknowledge the diverse and rich spiritual traditions of Indigenous peoples around the world. While each Indigenous community has its unique perspectives and interpretations, I can offer a general reflection that may resonate with Pacific Indigenous values and experiences.

Psalm 148 serves as a powerful reminder that the Creator is the owner and sustainer of all creation, extending beyond just humans to encompass the entire cosmos. It emphasizes the centrality of the Creator in the act of praise, calling upon all creation to offer their devotion and recognition to the Lord. By recognizing the importance of relationships and the act of praise, the psalm highlights the interconnectedness between humans, creation, and the Creator. It encourages a sense of reverence, gratitude, and responsibility for the world we inhabit.

In the context of the Pacific way of life, which often places a strong emphasis on interconnectedness and relationship, this Psalm resonates deeply. The Pacific cultures have a profound understanding of the interdependence between humans, the environment, and the spiritual realm. This worldview aligns closely with the themes present in Psalm 148: 1-14.

Verse 1 of the Psalm invites all of creation, from the heavens to the earth, to praise the Creator. Indigenous peoples often view the natural elements, animals, plants, and celestial bodies as living beings, worthy of honour and respect. This verse emphasizes the value of the interconnectedness of all beings, acknowledging the role of each creature in the symphony of praise to the Creator.

Verses 3-4 specifically mention the sun, moon, and stars praising God. Pacific cultures often have a deep understanding of celestial bodies and their significance. They serve as guides for navigation, mark the passage of time, and hold spiritual meanings. This verse humbles us as Pacific people and reminds us of the cosmic relationship we share between humans, celestial bodies, and the divine.

As the psalm progresses, it includes various elements of the natural world, such as mountains, hills, animals, and even weather phenomena like storms and lightning. In every Pacific Culture, these elements hold great spiritual significance. For example, mountains symbolize strength and stability in some PNG cultures, animals might represent spiritual guides or messengers in some Fijian cultures, and storms could embody the power and unpredictability of nature in other Pacific Cultures.

Psalm 148 indeed presents a cosmological perspective on praise, highlighting the interconnectedness of all creation, from the celestial realms to the earthly realm. By including a wide range of elements in the Psalm, from heavenly bodies to earthly creatures, it emphasizes the comprehensive scope of praise and its universal significance. The act of praising the Lord becomes a unifying force, bringing together all aspects of creation in a harmonious relationship. This relationship is not limited to humans alone but includes the whole of creation, embracing

the natural world, celestial bodies, and spiritual dimensions. The act of praising the Lord becomes a shared language that transcends boundaries and unites all beings in acknowledging the divine presence.

Psalms 148 reminds us as human beings that we are not seen as separate from the rest of creation but are placed in parallel with the ecological and cosmic order. This interconnectedness reflects a Pacific understanding of the world, where humans are seen as an integral part of the larger web of life, rather than being set apart from or superior to other beings. By portraying the act of praising God as a shared responsibility among all creation, the psalm invites humans to recognize their place within the larger community of beings. It calls for a harmonious relationship with the natural world and encourages humans to fulfil their role as caretakers and stewards of the Earth.

From a Pacific perspective, this cosmological relationship resonates with the deep spiritual connection that many Pacific peoples share with the land, sea, and sky and the deep spiritual connection with God and all of HIS creation. It acknowledges the sacredness of all creation and the importance of maintaining balance and harmony in our interactions with the natural world.

In the Christian context, this understanding of our cosmic connection finds its ultimate fulfillment in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Through his incarnation, Jesus not only reveals the divine nature but also demonstrates a deep concern for the welfare of all creation. The psalm echoes this truth by calling on all creation, including humanity, to praise the Lord.

By embracing this cosmic perspective, we are invited to live in harmony with creation, to recognize the sacredness of the natural world, and to be responsible stewards of the Earth. It encourages us to view our worship and spirituality as an active engagement with the world, participating in the ongoing work of God's creation and redemption.

Psalms 148 speaks to the profound truth that as part of creation, we are called to join with all of creation in praising the Lord. It reminds us of our interconnectedness and invites us to live in reverence and gratitude, recognizing that our Christian life is intimately tied to the cosmic reality of God's creation.

In summary, Psalm 148 beautifully portrays the interconnectedness of all creation and invites humans to recognize their place within this cosmic order. It aligns with Indigenous perspectives that emphasize the inherent connection between humans, the Earth, and the divine. This understanding encourages a holistic approach to spirituality and a profound sense of responsibility toward the well-being of the Earth and all its inhabitants. Psalm 148 encapsulates the idea that as human beings, we are intimately connected to the rest of creation, and our role is to join with all of creation in praising the Lord. It recognizes that our existence is part of a larger cosmic reality, and our worship and praise are not limited to our individual selves but extend to encompass the entire created order. This psalm invites us to see ourselves as part of the intricate tapestry of life, acknowledging the beauty and diversity of creation and the interdependence of all beings. It emphasizes that our worship is not isolated or detached from the world around us

but is intricately woven into the fabric of creation itself. By including various elements of creation in its call to praise—such as the celestial bodies, mountains, animals, and even the forces of nature—the psalmist emphasizes the universal nature of worship. It encourages us to recognize that our devotion to the Lord is intimately connected to the world we inhabit which invites a deeper appreciation and stewardship of the natural world, recognizing that all beings have a voice in the chorus of praise to the Creator.

Amen.

Prayer for Blessing

Great Creator,

We stand in awe of your handiwork, the beauty and wonder of the Earth and all its creatures. We acknowledge you as the Creator of all things, the One who breathes life into every living being.

In the spirit of our Christian faith and Indigenous heritage, we offer this blessing for creation:

May the land be blessed, with fertile soil and abundant harvests. May it provide sustenance and nourishment for all living beings. May we care for the land as responsible stewards, tending to its needs and preserving its sacredness.

May the waters be blessed, flowing pure and clean. May they quench the thirst of all creatures and sustain the delicate balance of ecosystems. May we protect and honour the waters, safeguarding them from pollution and overuse.

May the skies be blessed, with clear air and gentle breezes. May they bring refreshing rains and warmth to the Earth. May we cherish the skies and strive to reduce pollution, embracing sustainable practices for the well-being of all.

May the animals be blessed, our brothers and sisters in creation. May they find safety and abundance in their habitats. May we treat them with respect and reverence, recognizing their intrinsic value and interconnectedness with our own existence.

May the plants be blessed, the green tapestry of life. May they provide food, medicine, and shelter for all beings. May we honour their wisdom and nurture their growth, living in harmony with the natural world.

May the Indigenous peoples be blessed, the keepers of ancient wisdom and guardians of the land. May their voices be heard and their rights respected. May we listen and learn from their deep connection to the Creator and the land.

May all humanity be blessed, with hearts filled with love and compassion. May we recognize our interconnectedness and responsibility towards one another and the Earth. May we strive for justice, equality, and sustainable practices for the well-being of present and future generations.

Great Creator God, we offer this blessing with humble hearts, grateful for the gift of creation and the opportunity to be caretakers of your world. May we walk in harmony with your divine plan, guided by your wisdom and grace.

In your Jesus's holy name, bless us and guide us.

Amen.

Prayer of Preparation

ALL: Let all creation praise the Lord

Blessed are you, Lord God,

Creator of all the heavens and all that fills the sky

Creator of vanua and moana and all that fills the Earth

Redeemer of the world

and restorer of all relationships within

Sanctifier of our hearts and mind

Strengtheners of our bodies and hands

We offer praise and glory alongside the voices of all creation

We praise you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

ALL: Let all creation praise the Lord

“The Season of Creation is a splendid opportunity for Christians around the world to embody the communion for which we human earthlings are created, and to do so in the quest for lifeways that build justice among people and allow Earth’s web of life to flourish.” – Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda, PhD., Professor of Theological and Social Ethics, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary of California Lutheran University. Director, PLTS Center for Climate Justice and Faith.

Psalm 148

1 Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD from the heavens;

praise him in the heights!

2 Praise him, all his angels;

praise him, all his host!

3 Praise him, sun and moon;

praise him, all you shining stars!

4 Praise him, you highest heavens,

and you waters above the heavens!

5 Let them praise the name of the LORD,

for he commanded and they were created.

6 He established them for ever and ever;

he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.

7 Praise the LORD from the earth,

you sea monsters and all deeps,

8 fire and hail, snow and frost,

stormy wind fulfilling his command!

9 Mountains and all hills,

fruit trees and all cedars!

10 Wild animals and all cattle,

creeping things and flying birds!

11 Kings of the earth and all peoples,

princes and all rulers of the earth!

12 Young men and women alike,

old and young together!

13 Let them praise the name of the LORD,

for his name alone is exalted;

his glory is above earth and heaven.

14 He has raised up a horn for his people,

praise for all his faithful,

for the people of Israel who are close to him. Praise the LORD!

Prayers of confession

Jesus, our deliverer, we pollute your beautiful creation, we abuse the land and the sea, we try to control your landscapes and the other creatures. Lord have mercy

ALL: Lord have mercy

Jesus, our hope, forgive us as we take away hope from the Earth, from the forests and gardens, from people and animals. Christ, have mercy

ALL: Christ, have mercy

Jesus, God's shalom and sautu, we disrupt your peace and the work of your Spirit. Lord, have mercy

ALL: Lord, have mercy.

Confession

In silence before God our Creator, we confess our sins. We confess, oh Lord, that we do not love your creation as you do. We do not listen to the voices of creation rising up to praise you. Instead, we hear our own voices. We see our own needs, and we ignore the needs of our fellow creatures. Teach us Lord, to see the face of Christ in our brothers and sisters, the land, sea and sky, and all who walk and creep, who swim and fly. Help us care for the family, the household of your creation.

May God who is merciful and good, living and loving cleanse us from selfishness and pride, power and abuse. May God restore us into his image so that we, as part of creation, might raise our voices in songs of praise through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Absolution

God who is creator,
redeemer, and sanctifier,
promises to forgive as we recognise our guilt
and confess our sins.
Know that your sins are forgiven
and go, sin no more.
Love God and your neighbour,
the ecology in which we rejoice.

“The Season of Creation will be an opportunity to pray, reflect and act together as the People of God for our common home. Like tributaries joining forces to become a mighty river, the ecumenical family come together on a synodal bath of care for our common home through justice and peace.” – Sister Alessandra Smerilli, Secretary of the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development

Prayers of the people (Intercession)

Creator God, we thank you that you have created us to be a part of your great family of creation. We pray for our brothers and sisters: sun, moon, and stars, forests and reefs, vanua and moana. We pray for their health and abundant life.

All: Lord, hear our prayers for creation

Christ eternal, who is in all and through all creation, we thank you for life and love. We pray for our brothers and sisters: plants and animals who give us food. We pray for mercy as we garden, raise animals and shop for food. Let us show mercy in the way we feed ourselves and our communities. Let us bring good news and grace to the world around us.

All: Lord, hear our prayers for creation

Spirit of Life, breath of God, the whole of creation is filled with you. We pray for justice in our world. Where there is darkness, bring light. Where there is despair, bring hope. Cleanse our rivers and mangroves, our streets and our skies. Help us do the work of restoring your world, to your praise and glory.

All: Lord, hear our prayers for creation

Eternal and ever living God, you who are beyond and yet closely within all of creation, we offer to you our lament for the world and its destruction. Strengthen us to bring the gospel of good news to all the world and work to restore its integrity.

All: Lord, hear our prayers for creation

Creator of all, your love embraces each of us in our pain and hurt, in our brokenness and sorrow. Help us to hear the voices of praise all around us, from birds and fish and waterfalls and rain. In the dark, quiet spaces of despair, help us to remember that even the rocks themselves cry hosanna. The Earth is filled with your glory.

All: Lord, hear our prayers for creation.

In the name of Christ, we pray.

Amen.

Let the Forests Praise Week

Readings:

Exodus 3:1-15

Romans 12:9-21

Psalm 105:1-6, 105:23-26

Matthew 16:21-28

Let the Forests Praise – Liturgy 1

Smell the soil of the forest floor. See the red earth—or is it brown?—covered in fallen leaves, teeming with worms and insects, alive with fungi and moss. Look to the trunks of the trees: tall and straight, sometimes bent, sometimes intertwined. Notice the different bark, the lichen, the vines that wind their way upward. Follow their lead, and gaze at the sky through the puzzle of leaves against the blue. See the shapes and colours, see the light dance through the spaces. See the birds and bats and their homes. Listen for their voices. Taste the warm, rich air. The whole community of the forest praises God. Praise the Lord.

Forests are special parts of creation. Many cultures have considered groves of trees to have sacred characters and qualities. As a child, I would visit a grove of temperate rainforest where the trees have enormous buttress roots to hold up the huge trees in the shallow soil. The roots are so big, above the ground, forming walls and tangle. We kids would play in these roots, hiding among them and squeezing into the heart of the tree, waiting to be found. I can still smell the rich fragrance of the forest floor and the flying foxes that make their homes high up in the fig trees, sleeping all day and bursting into life at twilight, ready to feed in the neighbouring fruit trees. I still return to these same trees, although they don't seem quite as giant as they did to the 5-year-old me. They are still majestic though, and still wonderful in their life-giving characters, holding the rainforest together. Trees form an important part of many stories of the Bible, including today's Old Testament story of God speaking to Moses from the burning bush. God as fire, housed in the sacred tree. Moses knew that this was sacred ground and removed his shoes. There's a particular poignancy of being barefoot on the ground, recognizing the presence of God in the bush. I wonder if we also recognise that Christ is in fact present in the trees around us? Colossians reminds us that Christ is in all and through all of creation, reconciling the world. If we look attentively, we can recognise the face of Christ in our

brothers and sisters of the forest, just as we see the face of Christ in the poor and the destitute, in each other.

I often think of the Tree of Life at the centre of the Garden of Eden, and another tree, a broken, sawn tree, near another Garden: the cross of Christ not far from the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus prayed for us before his crucifixion. From creation, to redemption, and through to Revelation, trees tell the story of God's love and mercy. Revelation 22 describes the river of life flowing from the throne of God with the Tree of Life once again producing fruit. The leaves of the tree are for the healing of nations, the scripture says.

The leaves of the trees truly are for the healing of nations. Our brother and sister trees hold the soil together and make homes for countless species, in the soil, under the bark, and among the branches. The tree trunks store enormous amounts of carbon, sometime for centuries, then when they die, slowly decompose and return nutrients to the soil. But the leaves! The leaves themselves give us the very oxygen we breathe. Without our forests, we all die. Truly then, the Tree of Life and the leaves really are for healing the nations. We must learn to safeguard our precious forests so save our planet from overheating and causing the sea-level rise that threatens our way of life.

Trees have long been signposts to the glory of God. Each time we plant and nurture a tree, or save a tree from being felled, we recognise the face of Christ and we bring healing to the nations, including our own.

Prayer of Preparation

ALL: Let all creation praise the Lord

Blessed are you, Lord God,

Creator of all the heavens and all that fills the sky

Creator of vanua and moana and all that fills the Earth

Redeemer of the world

and restorer of all relationships within

Sanctifier of our hearts and minds

Strengthener of our bodies and hands

We offer praise and glory alongside the voices of all creation

We praise you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

ALL: Let all creation praise the Lord

Psalm 105

1 O give thanks to the Lord and call upon his name:

tell among the peoples what things he has done.

2 Sing to him, O sing praises:

and be telling of all his marvellous works.

3 Exult in his holy name:

and let those that seek the Lord be joyful in heart.

4 Seek the Lord and his strength:

O seek his face continually.

5 Call to mind what wonders he has done:

his marvellous acts, and the judgements of his mouth,

6 O seed of Abraham his servant:

O children of Jacob his chosen one.

23 Then Israel came into Egypt:

and Jacob dwelt in the land of Ham.

24 There the Lord made his people fruitful:

too numerous for their enemies,

25 Whose hearts he turned to hate his people:

and to deal deceitfully with his servants.

26 Then he sent Moses his servant:

And Aaron whom he had chosen.

Prayers of confession

Jesus, our deliverer, we see the trees not as our brothers and sisters, but as sources of wealth and tools for our own use. Lord have mercy.

ALL: Lord have mercy

Jesus, our hope, forgive us as we damage the forests that are homes to many creatures, seen and unseen. Christ, have mercy

ALL: Christ, have mercy.

Jesus, God's shalom and sautu, come to us afresh. Lord, have mercy.

ALL: Lord, have mercy.

In silence before God our Creator, we confess our sins. We confess to you, oh

Lord, our disregard for the forests. We confess that we have used the forests in ways that do not honour the family of creation. We have seen the trees not as brothers but as tools for our use. We have not honoured the homes of the plants and animals and we have not protected the lungs of the Earth. We repent and are sorry.

May God who is merciful and good, living and loving cleanse us from selfishness and pride, power and abuse. May God restore us into his image so that we, as part of creation, might raise our voices in songs of praise through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Absolution

God who is creator,
redeemer, and sanctifier,
promises to forgive as we recognise our guilt
and confess our sins.
Know that your sins are forgiven
and go, sin no more.
Love God and your neighbour,
the ecology in which we rejoice.

Prayers of the people (Intercession)

Creator God, we thank you that you have created us to be a part of your great family of creation. We pray for our brothers and sisters: the forests of our islands and all the world. We pray for their health and abundant life. We pray for their resilience against human threats of destruction.

All: Lord, hear our prayers for the forests

Christ eternal, who is in all and through all creation, we thank you for life and love. We pray for our brothers and sisters: the mangroves and rainforests, the plants and animals, the insects and microorganisms. We pray for all we see and those we don't see. We pray for their relationships with each other and with us.

All: Lord, hear our prayers for the forests

Spirit of Life, breath of God, the whole of creation is filled with you. We pray for justice in our world. Where there is darkness, bring light. Where there is despair, bring hope. Cleanse our forests and mangroves from pollution: from carbon in the air, from rubbish on the ground, from plastic in the sea. Bring life and hope to our forests as they suffer drought and heating.

All: Lord, hear our prayers for the forests

Eternal and ever living God, you who are beyond and yet closely within all of creation, we offer to you our lament for the world and its destruction. Strengthen us to bring the gospel of good news to all the world, and especially to our forests, and work to restore their integrity.

All: Lord, hear our prayers for the forests

Creator of all, your love embraces each of us in our pain and hurt, in our brokenness and sorrow.

Help us to hear the voices of praise all around us, from the birds and trees of the forests and from the fish and insects of the mangroves. In the dark, quiet spaces of despair, help us to remember that even the rocks themselves cry hosanna and the branches of trees reach to the sky to praise you. The Earth is filled with your glory.

All: Lord, hear our prayers for the forests

In the name of Christ, we pray.

Amen.

.....

Let the Forest Praise – Liturgy 2

This week we worship with creation in a forest, remembering that God created humans from Earth and planted a forest garden to be a home with the rest of their kin in creation. Consider having your congregation worship out of doors in an actual forest or thicket of trees! Otherwise, a forest can be experienced within a church building by locating living trees, ferns, and other forest, plants throughout the church, including the sanctuary.

“Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight...”

Genesis 2:9

Opening Invocation

In the name of the Earth, the Sky, and the sacred Forest,

We gather to honour and celebrate the profound beauty of Creation,

To renew our connection with the natural world,

And to share in the wonder of the changing seasons,

As the Earth undergoes her endless cycle of growth, life, and rebirth.

Song / Hymn of Praise

Verse 1:

Healthy leaves and mighty roots,
Our Mother Earths embrace,
We cherish your boundless strength,
As we worship this sacred space.

Verse 2:

Beneath the beautiful canopy,
Of branches vast and high,
Reside the creatures great and small,
Whose lives intertwine with the sky.

Chorus: *O Forest, O Life, O Nature divine,*

*We sing our praise to thee,
In every season of your glory,
In your wisdom we are set free.*

Call to Worship

Leader: Blessed be the sacred Forest, the root of all life, and the embrace of the Earth.

People: In the Forest, we find solace, inspiration, and an eternal connection to Creation.

Leader: As the season turns and life awakens,

People: Let us pursue a righteous path, grounded in the principles of respect, reverence, and responsibility.

Leader: O Forest, we honour your powerful presence and embrace your wisdom.

People: In the communion of the wilderness, we pledge our love and kinship to Creation.

“Embracing our Role in Creation”

God is the source of everything in creation. “God said, ‘Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.’ And it was so (Gen. 1:11). God creates everything, but God also literally sows the seed for the perpetuation of creation through the ages. The creation is forever dependent on God”. In God we live and move and have our being”

An appropriate theology of creation, should generally include the following key elements:

- The origin of the universe: Acknowledging God and the creation of the cosmos and all living beings within it.
- Imago Dei (image of God): Recognizing the distinctive nature of human beings as created in the image of God, which nurtures a sense of morality, purpose, and responsibility.
- Stewardship: Emphasizing the responsibility of human beings to care for creation, protect the environment, and manage resources sustainably to promote integrity and do justice.
- Interconnectedness: Appreciating the relationships between all aspects of creation, fostering a sense of unity, interconnectedness, and interdependence throughout nature and humanity.
- Redemption and renewal: Understanding the larger narrative of creation, which includes themes of brokenness and healing, and engaging in the renewal of the world in cooperation with divine grace.
- Eschatology: Recognizing the ultimate destiny of creation, which inspires a vision of the future and informs actions taken in the present.

This theology of creation promotes a deep sense of wonder, responsibility, and ethical involvement in the ongoing story of creation, encouraging thoughtful engagement and stewardship. Embracing our role in creation as outlined in the theology of creation offers a profound understanding of our place and purpose in the world. By acknowledging that God is the source of all life and creation, we are reminded of our dependence on divine grace and guidance. Furthermore, the concept of Imago Dei confers upon humanity a unique moral and spiritual significance, bringing forth an unmistakable sense of duty and purpose.

The responsibility of stewardship requires us to engage in sustainable and environmentally conscious practices, caring for the earth’s resources and living beings that rely on it. This goes hand in hand with the ideas of interconnectedness and interdependence, which

promote a reverence and respect for all creation, fostering harmony within the natural world and our human communities.

As we recognize the unfolding narrative of redemption and renewal, we can participate in the healing process of creation and work towards restoring harmony where it has been disrupted. Our hope in the ultimate destiny of creation, or eschatology, informs the choices we make today as we strive to care for the earth and live out our God-given roles as responsible stewards.

By embracing this theology of creation, we can develop a holistic, compassionate, and ethical awareness of our place in the world, which can inspire us to act and make a positive difference in the planets well-being. Ultimately, this deep-rooted sense of responsibility can lead us to transform our own lives, our communities, and offer hope and healing to the world.

Let us now enter a time of silence, where we may attune our hearts and minds to the gentle whispers of the Forest. Here, let go of all judgments and distractions, and embrace the serene harmony that surrounds you. May we be reminded of our sacred connection to the Earth and all living beings, with gratitude and humility.

[2 minutes of silence]

Blessing of the Forest

Leader: May the spirit of the Forest be ever-present in our souls,

People: Covering us in its rich tapestry of life.

Leader: Through the seasons, may we remember to care for and protect the Earths beauty,

People: For we are all parts of this intricate web, bound together in the gift of Creation.

Dismissal

Go forth into the world, carry the peace and serenity of the Forest within your hearts. May we preserve the natural world with mindful steps and wise actions, and always walk in gratitude for the bountiful blessings of the Earth.

Amen.

(P.S: Healthy leaves and mighty roots & quote; is an original hymn composed in the response above, so there is no readily available music for it. However, you can set the lyrics to an existing, simple, and well-known tune, or collaborate with a local musician or songwriter to create a suitable original composition to accompany the lyrics, reflecting the theme and emotions of the hymn.)



“We live in a very turbulent and troubling times as we continue to struggle for a world peace and the reconciliation and unity of all creation. We are surrounded by war, violence, climate challenges and unjust systems that continue to dehumanize and oppress people around the globe. Christians are urged to join with God in ever-flowing river for justice and peace in the world.”
– Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay, General Secretary, World Council of Churches.



Let the Land Praise Week

Readings:

Exodus 12:1-14

Psalms 149

Romans 13:1-10

Matthew 18:10-20

Let the Land Praise

This week's Old Testament reading tells of the preparation Moses and the Hebrew people were making for the first Passover. Much of the Old Testament narrative is a story of belonging: belonging to God and to land. From the creation in the Garden of Eden and then being cast out, God's people of the Old Testament (or what we might call the Hebrew Bible) are yearning to return to a place, like the Garden, where God blesses all life. God is yearning for God's people to return to him and come out of their bondage to sin.

The Exodus Passover is part of that story: a people that God wants to be in relationship with him, rescued out of a place of slavery and led with fire and cloud through dangerous waters and into a new land. The Hebrews would eventually arrive in the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey. A land that would provide for their needs to settle, plant crops, and keep herds of animals. More importantly perhaps, it would be a land of safety and where they could worship their God in freedom. The freedom of the Hebrews was both literal (free from slavery to the Egyptians) and spiritual (free from slavery to sin). The promised land is both as well: a real place to settle and live, and a metaphorical 'place' of being in communion with God.

Sometimes we over-spiritualise the Exodus narrative and think more about the grace and forgiveness of God without remembering how important the actual landscape is in this story. Fire and clouds, water and desert, all play important roles in this narrative, along with the human characters that we know so well: Moses, Aaron and Miriam; the Pharaoh and his daughter; and Moses' mother, Jochebed, even though we might not remember her name (see Exodus 6:20 and Numbers 26: 59).

Think though, of the land in this story. The land of Egypt that holds the Hebrews and suffers the plagues: rivers and water turned to blood, plagues of insects, frogs and locusts, and even light blotted out. How the land and its creatures suffered! And then imagine the waters of the Red Sea drawing aside under Moses' command, holding back while thousands of Hebrews escape, only to collapse and drown the pursuing Egyptians. Think how the sea itself suffered and how it had to contain the remnants of death as the soldiers and horses drowned.

Now imagine the wilderness. For forty years, thousands of lost Hebrews and their animals wandered around, scavenging for food, polluting the land with their refuse, compacting the soil underfoot. How they must have impacted the delicate ecosystems of that place. Their disobedience to God had a disastrous effect on the land. When humans sin, it's not only

humans who suffer. Then Joshua finally leads the people into the Promised Land and they claim this new place. Even now, the narrative is mixed, for the Hebrews displace the indigenous people of the land, the Canaanites. According to the books of Joshua and Judges, the Canaanites were so corrupt they would jeopardise the worship and witness of the Israelites. The Canaanite people and all of their animals were put to the sword. The land would drink the blood of many before Israel was established.

There are many parallels in the biblical story with other places and times in human history. When nations go to war, or invade, or colonise, or test nuclear weapons, there are many casualties. It is not just people who suffer, but also the creatures—the animals and forests—and the land itself who are victims of human violence. Just like the people, the effects of colonisation and war continue through generations and still impacts the land and ecosystems. And yet the land praises God. Soils might regenerate and bring us food. Rocks and stones cry hosanna and praise their maker. There is so much we do not understand about the world around us and about the land under our feet, this same dirt that first formed Adam in the Garden of Eden.

The Hebrew Bible should remind us that the land is always a character in the biblical stories, and in our own stories, and the land is always loved by our Creator God. Our role is to also love the land, pray and work for its recovery, and to nurture growth and plentiful food. The land is a blessing to us and our fellow creatures and the land is loved by God. The land is filled with the Spirit of God.

Prayer of Preparation

ALL: Let all creation praise the Lord

Blessed are you, Lord God,

Creator of all the heavens and all that fills the sky

Creator of vanua and moana and all that fills the Earth

Redeemer of the world

and restorer of all relationships within

Sanctifier of our hearts and minds

Strengthener of our bodies and hands

We offer praise and glory alongside the voices of all creation

We praise you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

ALL: Let all creation praise the Lord

Psalm 149

1 O praise the Lord, and sing to the Lord a new song:

O praise him in the assembly of the faithful.

2 Let Israel rejoice in him that made him:

let the children of Zion be joyful in their king.

3 Let them praise him in the dance:

let them sing his praise with timbrel and with harp.

4 For the Lord takes delight in his people:

he adorns the meek with his salvation.

5 Let his faithful ones exult in his glory:

let them sing for joy upon their beds.

6 Let the high praises of God be in their mouths:

and a two-edged sword in their hands,

7 To execute vengeance on the nations:

and chastisement upon the peoples,

8 To bind their kings in chains:

and their nobles with fetters of iron,

9 To visit upon them the judgement that is decreed:

such honour belongs to all his faithful servants.

Praise the Lord.

Prayers of confession

Jesus, our deliverer, we see the land not as our brother and ground of our being, but as a resource to be owned and abused to our own glory. Lord have mercy.

ALL: Lord have mercy

Jesus, our hope, forgive us as we damage the land that is our life, our Mother Earth that we mine and pollute. Christ, have mercy

ALL: Christ, have mercy

Jesus, God's shalom and sautu, come to us afresh. Lord, have mercy.

ALL: Lord, have mercy

In silence before God our Creator, we confess our sins. We confess, oh Lord, that

we think of ourselves as superior to the land that holds us. We do not recognise that this soil that gives us food is the same soil from which God moulded the first humans. The Earth is our Mother who gives us life, and yet we have treated her with disrespect. We confess that we do not love the world in the way you love the world. We repent and are sorry. Teach us to love this land, and to treasure the soil that gives us life. May God, who is merciful and good, living and loving, cleanse us from selfishness and pride, power and abuse. May God restore us into his image so that we, as part of creation, might raise our voices in songs of praise through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Absolution

God who is creator,
Redeemer, and sanctifier,
Promises to forgive as we recognise our guilt
And confess our sins.
Know that your sins are forgiven
And go, sin no more.
Love God and your neighbour,
The ecology in which we rejoice.

Prayers of the people (intercession)

Creator God, we thank you that you have created us to be a part of your great family of creation. We pray for the Earth who is our Mother, Earth who is our ground of being, Earth who is our provider. We pray for the integrity of Earth and her resilience against the onslaughts of humans. Teach us to learn to walk lightly, to tread gently.

All: Lord, hear our prayers for the land

Christ eternal, who is in all and through all creation, we thank you for life and love. We pray for the land on which we live. We pray for the soil that provides our food, the creatures who provide nutrients, the worms that turn it over. We pray for the roots of trees and crops that make their home in the soil. We pray that they would be nourished and know your love. We pray they would find water and warmth and sing their own praises to you.

All: Lord, hear our prayers for the land

Spirit of Life, breath of God, the whole of creation is filled with you. We pray for the creatures in our soil and the plants who are rooted in the earth as each, in their own way, breathes the breath of your life. We pray for those who work on the land and in the soil that they would be strong and faithful and that they would be treated with fairness and justice in their work.

All: Lord, hear our prayers for the land

Eternal and everliving God, you who are beyond and yet closely within all of creation, we offer to you our lament for the world and its destruction. Strengthen us to bring the gospel of good news to all the world, and especially to our land, and work to preserve the fertility and provenance of this place.

All: Lord, hear our prayers for the land

Creator of all, your love embraces each of us in our pain and hurt, in our brokenness and sorrow. Just as Mother Earth drank the drops of blood of her dearest Son on the cross, we lament for the destruction of our land and the degradation of lands around the world. We pray for coastal communities losing land to rising seas and we pray for soil that is becoming saline. We pray for rivers filling with runoff from mines and we pray for places affected by pollution of all kinds. In the dark, quiet spaces of despair, help us to remember that even the rocks themselves cry hosanna beneath our feet.

All: Lord, hear our prayers for the land

In the name of Christ, we pray.

Amen.

“The Season of Creation is a vital and necessary reminder that God’s saving, healing, justice-seeking love extends to every part of creation. As the Church, the household of God, we are called to live out this life-giving love for the benefit of all.” – Rev Faith Whitby, Bishop of the Central District, Methodist Church of Southern Africa.

Let the Wilderness Praise Week

Readings:

Exodus 14: 19-31

Romans 14: 1-14

Matthew 18: 21-35

Let the Wilderness Praise

What comes to mind when you think of wilderness? There are at least two different ways to think of wilderness. Sometimes we think of wild places that have not been impacted by humans, but remain in their natural state, undisturbed by human activity. Other times we think of wilderness as lonely, isolated places, deserts even, where life is hard. A place where demons might torment, or where we wrestle with angels. Wilderness can have a bad name, a place of punishment and deprivation. It might surprise you that in the Bible, most of the time a word is translated into English as ‘wilderness’ it is simply describing a place not inhabited by humans. A wild place. A natural place, with undisturbed ecosystems. A place where the apex predator is not a human. A place where animals are the chief engineers and where plants are not lined up in crops. A free place.

The Exodus story has the Hebrews wandering in the wilderness of Sinai for 40 years. This wilderness is the scene for three important theological ideas: covenant, miraculous provision, and judgement. Moses was given the law and commandments on Mt Sinai and the Hebrews became the covenant people of God. Later prophets, Hosea and Ezekiel, stated that God would lead Israel again into the wilderness to renew the covenant. Perhaps this is why John the Baptist’s ministry occurs in the wilderness—away from human habitation. Perhaps this is why Jesus goes to the wilderness, alone, to pray and prepare for his ministry of the new covenant.

The Bible tells of God’s miraculous provision in the wilderness. Manna from heaven and water from rocks! Being led by God in cloud and fire! John the Baptist being fed on honey and insects! Jesus being attended by angels! This is not a wilderness that lacks fertility. The Bible’s wilderness is a place where God provides through ecosystems that humans are not usually a part of. The Bible’s wilderness is a place of unexpected grace.

The Bible’s wilderness is also sometimes a place of judgement. The original generation who are rescued from Egypt will die in the wilderness. Even Moses will pass away before reaching the

Promised Land. God's judgement on their lack of faith and pride meant they would not be blessed with the new land. Jesus's temptation in the wilderness was a turning point, for it is Satan who is judged and Jesus is found ready for his ministry. Just because a place is unfamiliar to us doesn't mean it is desolate. We can think about wilderness as being a place that exists with or without us. It's a place we can go because it is isolated from human intervention, a place we can commune with God and with nature. Wilderness might be a place of miraculous provision! It might be a place of judgement. But it also reminds us that God continues to be in covenant relationship with us and the world. Being separated from wild places and from nature affects us as humans. Our brains are different, our immune systems and stress hormones work less well. Humans are designed to spend time in natural spaces. You might experience this when you are in the forest or by the sea. This is why it is important to protect the wild spaces and to keep them safe from pollution and climate change. Even cities are better, happier places when there are plenty of trees and green spaces.

This Season of Creation, I encourage you to think about wilderness as an opportunity to be in nature without the harmful impact of humans to distract you from the glory of God. Even the rocks and stones praise God! Let the wilderness praise God's name.

Prayer of Preparation

ALL: Let all creation praise the Lord

Blessed are you, Lord God,

Creator of all the heavens and all that fills the sky

Creator of vanua and moana and all that fills the Earth

Redeemer of the world

and restorer of all relationships within

Sanctifier of our hearts and minds

Strengthenener of our bodies and hands

We offer praise and glory alongside the voices of all creation

We praise you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

ALL: Let all creation praise the Lord

Psalm 114

1 When Israel came out of Egypt:
and the house of Jacob from among a
people
of an alien tongue,
2 Judah became his sanctuary:
and Israel his dominion.
3 The sea saw that, and fled:
Jordan was driven back.
4 The mountains skipped like rams:
and the little hills like young sheep.

5 What ailed you, O sea, that you fled:
O Jordan, that you were driven back?
6 You mountains, that you skipped like
rams:
and you little hills like young sheep?
7 Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the
Lord:
at the presence of the God of Jacob,
8 Who turned the rock into a pool of water:
and the flint-stone into a welling spring.

Prayers of confession

Jesus, our deliverer, you are with us in the verdant places and the wilderness.

Lord have mercy.

ALL: Lord have mercy

Jesus, our hope, forgive us as we wander like lost souls in the wilderness when you have brought us into your kingdom of abundant life.

Christ, have mercy

ALL: Christ, have mercy.

Jesus, God's shalom and sautu, come to us afresh.

Lord, have mercy.

ALL: Lord, have mercy.

Confession

In silence before God our Creator, we confess our sins. We confess to you, O Lord, our desire to rule the Earth and her creatures and our actions that have harmed our world. We confess and are sorry for the damage we do to wild places through forest clearing, polluting the air and seas, and dumping our waste. Help us see the wilderness as you do: homes to ecologies and brothers and sisters whose names we do not know. May God, who is merciful and good, living and loving, cleanse us from selfishness and pride, power and abuse. May God restore us into his image so that we, as part of creation, might raise our voices in songs of praise through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen!**

Absolution

God who is creator, redeemer, and sanctifier, promises to forgive as we recognise our guilt and confess our sins. Know that your sins are forgiven and go, sin no more. Love God and your neighbour, the ecology in which we rejoice.

Prayers of the people (intercession)

Creator God, we thank you that you have created us to be a part of your great family of creation. We pray for places in the Pacific and throughout the world that are still unharmed by human hands and unaffected by human pollution. We might call these places wild but we know they are ordered by your creator's hands and provide life to the communities of species that live in them.

All: Lord, hear our prayers for the wilderness

Christ eternal, who is in all and through all creation, we thank you for life and love. We pray for the plants and animals, microbes and insects that we do not yet know. We pray that we could learn the names and come to love the species we do not yet know who live in wild places. We thank you that they are our brothers and sisters and we thank you that we are part of the ecology of the world.

All: Lord, hear our prayers for the wilderness

Spirit of Life, breath of God, the whole of creation is filled with you. We pray for wild places where winds blow, moving seeds and sand and soil, creating new life and new landscapes. Lord God, there

is so much we do not know about the world around us, and yet we would attempt to master our world. From the heights above to the depths of the world, you alone are all-knowing, you alone are God.

All: Lord, hear our prayers for the wilderness

Eternal and ever living God, you who are beyond and yet closely within all of creation, we offer to you our lament for the world and its destruction. Teach us what it means to love the world as you do: the places that are beautiful and precious to us, and the places we would despise. Help us know what it means to bring the gospel to places we might call wilderness, places we do not understand or love.

All: Lord, hear our prayers for the wilderness

Creator of all, your love embraces each of us in our pain and hurt, in our brokenness and sorrow. We think of your Son Jesus Christ spending time in the wilderness with the wild beasts. Teach us, in our own times of desolation and despair, to listen to the wisdom of wild beasts and monsters of the deep. Forgive us for imagining ourselves to be rulers of this world when you alone reign. Help us to remember that even the rocks themselves in the desert and wild places cry hosanna.

All: Lord, hear our prayers for the wilderness

In the name of Christ, we pray.

Amen.

Let the Rivers and Oceans Praise Week

Readings:

Exodus 16:2-15

Psalm 105: 1-6; 105:37-45

Philippians 1

Matthew 20:1-16

Let the Rivers and Oceans Praise

The very start of Genesis (1:2) tells us that the breath of God swept over the waters before the days of creation began. Sometimes I imagine this as the Spirit singing the waves and making oceans laugh. Water is essential to life and the process that moves water from the land to sky and back again is at the very heart of the Earth System. It's called the hydrologic cycle and we see it when clouds form and rain, and when water evaporates back into the sky. It is an ongoing rhythm. Genesis (1:6-8) describes this as God separating the sky from the Earth and placing the waters in their spaces. God then gathers the waters up into rivers and oceans, revealing the land that would go on to produce vegetation. Throughout the Bible the rivers define the land and its peoples. Water is vital in itself, and acts as a metaphor for spiritual vitality. Jesus talks to women gathering water and calls himself the water of life.

I love the creation stories because they show how interconnected creation is. No single element can exist without the network of life around it, and harming one portion affects the whole system. Every species that dies impacts the rest of the ecology. Every river or ocean that is harmed affects not only the water, but all of the creatures that live within it, all of the plants and animals that rely on it, and the great landscapes and seascapes that contain it.

People of the Pacific have long had a profound relationship with moana. The ocean is the foundation of life and culture, as provider of food and connector of islands. The ocean is more than a body of water, it is essential to life and wellbeing, it connects us to our maker. The Bible records the creation of the unknown creatures of the sea (Gen. 1:21) and notes leviathan, a great unknown animal, who sports with ships (Ps. 74:14). We might know more about the creatures of the sea than the writers of the Bible, but we actually know only a tiny portion of the species that live deep in the ocean.

Beneath the ocean rare minerals bubble up and form nodules. Mining companies are keen to start harvesting these minerals from the sea floor under the deep sea. Deep sea mining would be very

lucrative to the private companies, but devastating to the ocean. The noise and light pollution intruding into the dark quiet of the deep sea will disrupt the lives of the creatures in ways we can't understand. We don't even know the names of most of these creatures, let alone how they would be affected by deep sea mining. We do know that the sediment that will be churned up will muddy the oceans for hundreds of kilometres around the sites. It will be like underwater dust storms, clogging the water and suffocating fish. Processing of the minerals on the mining vessels will release radioactive water back into the sea.

Imagine if countries allow this to happen. Such a desecration of moana has never occurred, even though the ocean suffers so greatly already. Plastic pollution that forms gigantic clumps the size of nations! Mining exploration and vessels that make so much noise that whales can't hear each other underwater. Overfishing and indiscriminate harvesting of the oceans that deplete food for local communities. Radioactive waste, dumping of artillery, failed rocket experiments that land in the sea...so much damage to our oceans.

Much of the time I lament for the health of the ocean, and cry for the coral reefs that are heating and dying. The very ocean that gives us life is the first victim of climate change. It is the ocean that is absorbing most of the excess heat, causing it to swell and leading to sea level rise. The ocean also absorbs extra carbon from the atmosphere, making the water acidic. Corals and animals cannot make their exoskeletons in acidic water, so if the heat doesn't kill them, the acid will. I weep the same salty tears as the ocean.

How can we help the rivers and oceans praise God? By protecting them from humans. By reducing our use of plastics across our nations. By looking for alternatives to burning fossil fuels for energy. And especially, by preventing deep sea mining and its false promises of prosperity.

The Earth is the Lords, and everything it in. We pray for the health and wellbeing of our rivers and seas.

Prayer of Preparation

ALL: Let all creation praise the Lord

Blessed are you, Lord God,

Creator of all the heavens and all that fills
the sky

Creator of vanua and moana and all that
fills the Earth

Redeemer of the world

and restorer of all relationships within

Sanctifier of our hearts and minds

Strengthenener of our bodies and hands

We offer praise and glory alongside the
voices of all creation

We praise you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

ALL: Let all creation praise the Lord

Psalm 105

1 O give thanks to the Lord and call upon his
name: tell among the peoples what things
he has done.

2 Sing to him, O sing praises: and be telling
of all his marvellous works.

3 Exult in his holy name: and let those that
seek the Lord be joyful in heart.

4 Seek the Lord and his strength: O seek his
face continually.

5 Call to mind what wonders he has done:
his marvellous acts, and the judgements of
his mouth,

6 O seed of Abraham his servant:

O children of Jacob his chosen one.

37 He brought Israel out with silver and
with gold: and not one among their tribes
was seen to stumble.

38 Egypt was glad at their going: for dread
of Israel had fallen upon them.

39 He spread out a cloud for a covering: and
fire to lighten the night.

40 The people asked, and he brought them
quails: and satisfied them with the bread from
heaven.

41 He opened a rock, so that the waters
gushed: and ran in the parched land like a
river.

42 For he had remembered his holy word:
that he gave to Abraham his servant.

43 So he led out his people with rejoicing:
his chosen ones with shouts of joy;

44 He gave them the land of the nations:
and they took possession of the fruit

for which other peoples had toiled,

45 So that they might keep his statutes:
and faithfully obey his laws. O praise the
Lord.

Prayers of confession and lamentation

Jesus, our deliverer, you are with us in the waters of the rivers and seas

Lord have mercy.

ALL: Lord have mercy

Jesus, our hope, water of life and quencher of our soul's thirst

Christ, have mercy

ALL: Christ, have mercy.

Jesus, God's shalom and sautu

Lord, have mercy.

ALL: Lord, have mercy

Confession

The Lord leads us beside still waters. In the calm of the lagoon at dawn, or by the rockpool, we know your presence. Hear us oh Lord, as we confess our sins. We confess to you, oh Lord, our desire controls the waters who give us life. Just as we cannot hold water in our hands, so too we cannot tame the tide or halt the river. Forgive us for our arrogance. We confess and are sorry for the damage we do to the waters who bring us life. Forgive us for our use of plastic and our pollution of our rivers. Forgive us, we pray, for the mining that leaves sediment and heavy metals in our waterways. Forgive us, oh Lord, when our desire for development blinds us to the damage to moana. Help us see the waters as you do: homes to ecologies and brothers and sisters whose names we do not know, from the source of the waterways in the mountains to the depths of oceans. Forgive us Lord when we do not protect these sacred places. May God, who is merciful and good, living and loving, cleanse us from selfishness and pride, power and abuse. May God restore us into his image so that we, as part of creation, might raise our voices in songs of praise through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Absolution

God who is creator, redeemer, and sanctifier, promises to forgive as we recognise our guilt and confess our sins. Know that your sins are forgiven and go, sin no more. Love God and your neighbour, the ecology in which we rejoice.

Amen.

Prayers of the people (intercession)

Creator God, we thank you that you have created us to be a part of your great family of creation. We pray for our brothers and sisters, the rivers and oceans, the waterfalls and rockpools, the lagoons and waterways. We pray for their health and prosperity.

All: Lord, hear our prayers for the waters

Christ eternal, who is in all and through all creation, we thank you for life and love. We pray for the plants and animals, the fish and creatures of the deep. We pray for all the species we do not know. We pray that we could love and protect them without knowing their names. We pray for their privacy in the depths of the sea and in the dark spaces of the rivers.

All: Lord, hear our prayers for the waters

Spirit of Life, breath of God, the whole of creation is filled with you. We recall your Spirit playing over the waters even before your works of creation started and filled this place with your imagination. We are so grateful for the beauty and majesty that fills our oceans and waterways. We are grateful for the plants and animals that are food to us. We pray that we will care for them and protect them, being responsible for the creatures that are in our care.

All: Lord, hear our prayers for the waters

Eternal and ever living God, you who are beyond and yet closely within all of creation, we offer to you our lament for the ocean and its destruction. Teach us what it means to love the waters as you do: the places that are beautiful and precious to us, and the places we do not yet know. Help us bring the gospel of good news to the oceans and rivers. Teach us what it means to live without plastic, fossil fuels, and mining which harms our seas.

All: Lord, hear our prayers for the waters

Creator of all, praise rises to you from the trickling of water in our forests to the crashing of waves on the shore. From the depths of our cells we are saltwater, in our mothers' wombs we swam, the tears of lament we cry are the same saltwater as our ocean. Protect, oh Lord, our rivers and oceans and teach us what it means to sacrifice our own desires to protect the world.

All: Lord, hear our prayers for the waters

In the name of Christ, we pray.

Amen.

Let ALL the Creatures Praise & the Feast of St Francis Week

Readings:

Exodus 17:1-7

Psalm 78:1-4; 78:11-16

Philippians 2

Matthew 21:23-32

Let all the Creatures Praise the Lord

Jesus' vision of the gospel is much, much bigger than individual, personal salvation and piety. So big, that Jesus described it as the 'kingdom of God' – a whole new way of perceiving the world and ordering it. During this Season of Creation, I hope you have gained a glimpse of just how big that vision is. God's kingdom includes all of creation, not just the humans! God's kingdom is an entire family, a household, a whole ecology of life! From the tiniest microbes and fungi to the planets above, the birds, lizards and fish, frogs and coral, sea monsters and pets, trees, crops and flowers...all of creation are our kin, our brothers and sisters. And so, the good news of the gospel belongs to all of them! No wonder that all of creation praises the creator!

St Francis is the patron saint of animals, biodiversity, and ecology. The Greek word *oikos* means home or household and is the root of economy and ecology, as well as ecumenism: the household, or the family, of communities of people of faith. The world is our home, and it's not just ours but it's home to all kin, plants and animals, landscapes and skies. As we complete our Season of Creation by celebrating the life and work of St Francis, we think of the special relationship's humans have with animals. Humans have had companion animals as long as we've been human: we've slept near them, hunted with them, shared our food and homes with them. There's something quite mystical about relationships that cross species. People who have looked into the eye of a whale say they're never the same. I recently had a female bower bird sit on my hand for about 10 mins and it was so special.

I like to think that Jesus would have liked dogs, and cats, and all of the animals he came in contact with. I think there's a reason he's born in an animal stable, surrounded by creatures and then rides into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey. He starts his ministry by going to the wilderness and spending time with the wild beasts. He's called the lamb of God and the Good Shepherd. We get the sense from the gospels that Jesus was very aware of all the animals and plants, even the little ones that we might not pay much attention, such as the wildflowers, sparrows, and mustard weeds along the side of the road. Jesus said that the Creator God watches over each of these: they are members of God's household, God's ecology, God's *oikos*. And all Season of Creation we've been focusing on how all of creation praises God in their own voices.

Right now, we are entering a mass extinction of species right around the world. Some species are dying because they've been hunted or overfished to extinction, but most because humans have destroyed their habitats, and polluted the land, water and air. Even though there have been mass extinctions in the Earth's history (think of the dinosaurs) they have never occurred anywhere nearly as quickly as this one.

About a million species are expected to become extinct, and humans are the driving cause. Their voices of praise to God are being silenced by humans. This is a long way from Adam and Eve in the Garden, walking closely with God and giving names to the animals. Names are important. In ancient cultures, a name told a story about the one it identified, so Adam naming the animals shows that Adam truly knew their characters. Genesis tells us that Adam 'called the animals', and I wonder if that was less about naming them according to their characteristics, and more about calling out to them and sharing languages with them. The image of Adam in the Garden, communicating with the other creatures is, I think, an image of God's household valuing and loving each other, each knowing their place in the ecology, each having a special role.

St Francis is known for his relationships with plants and animals. He called them kin. St Francis invited all of creation: animals, plants, natural forces, even Brother Sun and Sister Moon, to give honour and praise to the Lord. St Francis served the poor and communed with nature, demonstrating that peace with all of creation is inseparable from peace with people. This is why Pope Francis took the name of Francis, and his first encyclical, *Laudato Si*, addressed to all people, reminds us of the link between the injustices of the poor and the creatures due to biodiversity loss and climate change. So how do we preach the gospel to the whole world? Who is our neighbour? What would it look like to preach God's love and reconciling mercy to the forests and the coral reefs? How do we bring the gospel of peace and freedom to factory-farmed animals whose most basic rights are violated? How do we honour the lives of the little ones, the sparrows, or the thousands of creatures that we have not yet even named, those we have never called out to? Creatures who will become extinct before we have even known them. How can we listen and amplify their voices of praise?

The love we have for our pets and our livestock is a glimpse of the capacity we have as humans to love more and more of the ecology. As we bless these beautiful creatures let us also commit to bless the rest of the household, those whose names we know and those we are yet to call. Pray with me a prayer by Jessica Morthorpe:

May the rhythms of our liturgy be breath, and wind, and wave.

May the bees give their sermons, and the birds their wisdom.

May ripples and dandelion seeds carry our prayers to the ears of God.

May the freedom from walls widen our hearts and fill them with compassion.

In the name of God who is Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier...Amen.

Prayer of Preparation

ALL: Let all creation praise the Lord

Blessed are you, Lord God,

Creator of all the heavens and all that fills
the sky

Creator of vanua and moana and all that
fills the Earth

Redeemer of the world

and restorer of all relationships within

Sanctifier of our hearts and minds

Strengthenener of our bodies and hands

We offer praise and glory alongside the
voices of all creation

We praise you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

ALL: Let all creation praise the Lord

Psalm 78: 1-4; 12-16

1 Give heed to my teaching, O my people:
incline your ears to the words of my mouth;

2 For I will open my mouth in a parable: and
expound the mysteries of former times.

3 What we have heard and known: what
our forebears have told us,

4 We will not hide from their children, but
declare to a generation yet to come: the
praiseworthy acts of the Lord, his mighty
and wonderful works.

11 For he did marvellous things in the sight
of their ancestors: in the land of Egypt, in
the country of Zoan.

12 He divided the sea and let them pass
through: he made the waters stand up in a
heap.

13 In the daytime he led them with a cloud:
and all night long with the light of fire.

14 He cleft rocks in the wilderness: and
gave them drink in abundance as from
springs of water.

15 He brought streams out of the rock: and
caused the waters to flow down like rivers.

16 But for all this they sinned yet more
against him: and rebelled against the Most
High in the desert

Prayers of confession and lamentation

Jesus, our deliverer, you are with us in our
brothers and sisters, the animals that fill
this world

Lord have mercy.

ALL: Lord have mercy

Jesus, our hope, who came to Earth in
creaturely form

Christ, have mercy

ALL: Christ, have mercy

Jesus, God's shalom and sautu

Lord, have mercy.

ALL: Lord, have mercy

Confession

Lord how we love the animals of this Earth! Our brothers and sisters, created with us on the sixth day of creation. Just as we love the creatures: the birds and fish, the lizards and beasts, the insects and our pets, we confess that we do not love them as you do. Hear us oh Lord, as we confess our sins. We confess to you, oh Lord, our desire controls the animals who share this world with us. Some give us love, some give us food, some help us in other ways. And yet we confess that we do not treat them with love, we do not uphold their lives as gifts from you. We confess and are sorry for our treatment of the animals. We do not protect and love and honour them as we should. We confess that we have hunted and killed, even to the point of extinction. We confess that we treat animals as less worthy than ourselves, when you see them as children in your household. Father of all life, forgive us. Help us instead to bring good news to the animals. Help us bring safety and joy to their lives and help us protect their homes, for they are our homes too. May God, who is merciful and good, living and loving, cleanse us from selfishness and pride, power and abuse. May God restore us into his image so that we, as part of creation, might raise our voices in songs of praise through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Absolution

God who is creator, redeemer, and sanctifier, promises to forgive as we recognise our guilt and confess our sins. Know that your sins are forgiven and go, sin no more. Love God and your neighbour, the ecology in which we rejoice.

Amen.

Prayers of the people (Intercession)

Creator God, we thank you that you have created us to be a part of your great family of creation. We thank you for our pets that we love and bring us joy. We thank you that you bless all our loving relationships. We ask you to bless our pets.

All: Lord, hear our prayers for the animals

Christ eternal, who is in all and through all creation, we thank you for life and love. We thank you for the lives of the animals. We thank you for bees and butterflies that bring life to the plants. We thank you for worms and microbes that bring life to the soil. We thank you for birds and fish and all the animals that make up the web of life on this Earth.

All: Lord, hear our prayers for the animals

Spirit of Life, breath of God, the whole of creation is filled with you. We pray for everything that breathes your life and brings you praise. Help us to listen for the voices of praise around us. Help us to honour their lives and treat them well, with love and compassion.

All: Lord, hear our prayers for the animals

Eternal and ever living God, you who are beyond and yet closely within all of creation, teach us what it means to love the animals as you do. Help us know what it means to bring the gospel to animals: those who are near to extinction, those whose names we know and those whose names we do not know. Help us protect their homes: the rivers, reefs, and forests, so they can live in safety.

All: Lord, hear our prayers for the animals

Creator God, your love embraces all of creation including the animals. Help us as humans to look outside ourselves and our own needs and see the creatures as our family. Give us hearts of compassion and hands that work to protect the world. Help us to learn the wisdom of creation from the animals around us. We thank you for the luscious variety of life on Earth, reflecting your creativity and love.

All: Lord, hear our prayers for the animals

In the name of Christ, we pray.

Amen

Reference:

Lunceford, Joe E. "Wilderness." In Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible, David Noel Freedman, editor. William B. Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, 2000, p. 1378.

The Final Blessing

(Inspired from Psalm 104)

O Lord our God, you are very great,
You wrap yourself in light as with a garment,
You stretch out the heavens like a tent.
You lay the beams of your upper chambers on the waters
And make the clouds your chariot
Lord, you make springs and pour water to flow between the mountains,
And give water to all creatures.
The birds of the sky nest by the waters, they sing among the branches.
You water the mountains from your upper chambers;
The land is satisfied by the fruit of your work.
All trees that you planted are well watered.
How great are your works, Lord!
In wisdom you made them all
Send your Spirit, so that they are created,
and the face of the ground is renewed.
Grant us your blessings,
So that we work for justice and peace all our life,
And we sing praise to you, our God, as long as we Live.
In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.