

A Liturgy for Earth Sunday

April 19, 2015

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Call to Worship

Leader: Extravagant God, we raise our voices to you in song!

People: Praise God from whom creation flows!

Leader: For air and water, soil and stone,

People: Praise God from whom creation flows!

Leader: For owl and flower, flesh and bone,

People: Praise God from whom creation flows!

Leader: For wind and river, bee and whale,

People: Praise God from whom creation flows!

Leader: For bird and mammal, sun and snail,

People: Praise God from whom creation flows!

Leader: For sight and fragrance, warmth and ice,

People: Praise God from whom creation flows!

Leader: For egg and apple, wine and spice,

People: Praise God from whom creation flows!

Leader: For coal and steel, for brick and fire,
for ocean depth and mountain spire.
For songs and silence, joy and grace,
and purpose in this time and place.

People: Praise God from whom creation flows!

All: Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

Call to Confession

As a people to whom God has entrusted care for the fruits of God's divine imagination, let us humbly confess our failures to be worthy of that trust, seeking to be reconciled to our maker, the architect of all things bright and beautiful.

Prayer of Confession (unison)

Almighty God, life-spark of the universe, we are a broken people. We have wasted so much of our time here in worry and fear about what tomorrow may bring. We have looked beyond the

lonely, weak, and suffering as if they weren't there while busily filling our own storehouses with material things, neglecting even those we love the most in our pursuit of the illusion of security. We have squandered and spoiled the gifts of this good earth, Creator God, endangering our children's future in favor of short-term gains. We treat those gifts as possessions—bargaining chips for personal or political gain. Forgive us, Lord, for not trusting you. Forgive us for being careless with your gifts. Shower us in your healing mercy, that we may be washed clean of complacency, fear, and greed. Renew in us the infant's capacity for unconditional love with which you first created us. In the name of the Christ in whom we see that love so perfectly modeled, Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am. The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.

—*Isaiah 58:9a, 11*

In the name of Jesus Christ, let us accept the forgiveness that is offered to us without condition.

Prayer for Illumination

As we ponder the breathtaking beauty, mystery, and complexity of the world in which you have set us, Lord, open our hearts and minds to the guidance of your Spirit, and to gratitude for the bountiful blessings you have bestowed upon us. In Christ's name, Amen.

Scripture Possibilities for the Sermon

- Psalm 65:5-13
- Hosea 4:3
- Matthew 6:26-29

Prayers of the People

Creator God, author of sensation, sight, and sound,
we come to you this morning in humble awe of the world you created for us.
You confront us daily in the life-affirming beauty of a sunrise
and the joyful song of a mockingbird;
in the intoxicating scent of a blooming rose and the busy-ness of a honey-bee;
in the smell of gentle rain on parched earth and the cool shade of a massive oak;
in the mischievous smile of a wide-eyed child and the warmth of her loving embrace;
in the mastery of the surgeon's blade and the wonder of a body healed;
in the luscious slurp of a ripened peach and the earthy bite of fresh-picked greens;
in the sacrificial guidance of loving parents
and the reassuring sense of their presence in us long after they're gone.
We experience you in all these and countless other ways, loving God,
and are filled with gratitude for your patience and persistence in remaining with us.
We have done so little to deserve such treasures,
and sometimes feel that all we can do is say, "thank you."

We are acutely aware, Gracious God, that we have fallen far short of becoming the people you created us to be.

We feel so often that our hearts are in the right place— that we really do love our neighbors as we love ourselves, that we take the responsibility you have entrusted to us for care of this earth seriously— that we mean well... but somehow, when it comes to translating our feelings into action, we just can't seem to get it right, although we want to, desperately.

At work, we just can't seem to shake our sometimes not-so-secret jealousy and envy when another gets the raise or promotion or recognition that we coveted or thought we deserved, knowing that this is not the model of selflessness Jesus modeled for us.

We pray for those with whom we work and play, that they might see you in our interactions with them.

At home, we have discovered how easy it is, when things don't go exactly the way we want them to, to lash out and hurt the persons who are the closest of all to us, knowing all the while that we dishonor our capacity for love when we do so. We pray for our families, that they might see you in our actions toward them.

And out there in the world, Lord, we find it impossible not to see the pain that is wrought by poverty, neglect, and hatred, and our self-centeredness disguised as personal or national pride. Yet we excuse our inaction by pointing to the enormity of the problems facing us, as if the strength you offer is available only to someone else—someone more worthy than us. We allow fear to guide our actions, blindly grasping at the illusion of safety through the worship of material wealth or weapons, as if you haven't demonstrated throughout history that our ultimate safety is simply in you. We pray for ourselves and for our world, that we might learn to live as you would have us live, caring for the world you have created and for those who do not share our beliefs or goals.

We know you want more for us.

We have seen glimpses of the unimaginable joy that you intended for us—the joy that is available to us if we will just trust in the power of your love to transform not only our own lives, but the lives of those with whom we live and work, and among whom we move.

We want a bit of that joy, Lord, we really do.

And we're here today once again to start repairing our relationship with you—and thus with our friends, and families, and yes, even with those whom we do not know but who perhaps need us most of all.

Strengthen us, Lord.

Pull us closer to you, that we may feel the warmth of your presence.

Speak to us and guide us as we seek to employ the discipline we know we need to fully receive and appreciate the gifts you so freely offer us.

Open our eyes to the joy that awaits us when we trust that guidance and practice the unflinching love this world so badly needs right now,

but which is often so difficult for us to embrace.
Comfort us, Lord, with the knowledge that while perfection is not something we may attain, humility is—and that's one step in the right direction.

Loving God, there are many among us who are hurting—
many who could sure use an extra measure of your grace.
Some of us are struggling with physical illness, some with heartbreaking loss,
some with unmet expectations or shattered dreams, some with uncertain futures,
some with self-doubt and worry, and some, Lord,
with problems they can't even put their fingers on.
Be with these, your children,
in ways that allow them to feel the warmth of your understanding and unconditional love.
And may they continue to feel that understanding and unconditional love
from this community of faith as well.

In the name of the one who made you real to humankind, we pray:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts
as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Invitation to the Offering

The Bible begins with the story of God giving us everything that is. Our experience of the God who gives without condition continues to this very day. Our response to such incomprehensible generosity is what makes God's kingdom here on earth a reality—our time, our talents, and our resources. Let us now respond to God's grace through the presentation of our tithes and offerings.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Gracious God, we have so little to offer when compared to what we have received, but we remember what Jesus did with the loaves and fishes and pray that you will take these gifts and multiply them as only you can to further the work of your kingdom. Help us in the coming days and weeks to practice the generosity you have modeled for us, and to find satisfaction not in the thanks or praise we may receive, but in the knowledge that in giving, we move closer to becoming the people we were created to be. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Charge

Let us never forget: we are God's people, created in God's image. The whole of creation comes from God—the warmth of the sun, the song of the bird, the water that sustains us, our families, our labor, and yes, even those we label as enemies. We are the crown of God's creation. We are called to protect it, to nurture it, and to rejoice and be glad in it. Let us go from this place in humility and gratitude, and be the people of God.

Benediction

Go forth, children of God, into the world that so desperately needs your light. Go forth into a world that virtually hums with the presence of God—from the deserts to the oceans, from the canyons to the mountaintops—and seek the harmony with God that resolves into peace, and justice, and love that knows no bounds. May God in God's infinite wisdom bless you on your way, both now and forever more. Amen.