

LET ALL THINGS NOW LIVING

A Worship & Preaching Resource for Season of Creation Year A

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Northern Illinois Synod (ELCA)
Creation Care Committee

Introduction

Dear Colleagues,

I am so glad that you are reading this. That means you are interested in celebrating “Season of Creation” at your congregation. Or at the very least it means someone you know convinced you to take a look at this material.

Long ago, when I was a “small group leader” (the 1980’s term for camp counselor) at Lutheran Outdoor Ministry Center (LOMC), I began a journey without even knowing it – a journey of ecotheology. That word, of course, is a combination of ecology and theology. Until those days at camp, I had always assumed this faith thing was all about human beings and God. But as I fell in love with the woods and prairies of LOMC, and through my experiences as a small group leader, and through the curriculum created and led by Pastor Jack Swanson, I realized faith had to do with God’s relationship with *all of Creation*,¹ not just human beings. That epiphany influenced my journey through the remainder of college, through my years as a school teacher, through my years of seminary, and through what is now 22 years of ordained ministry.

In 2011 I picked up a copy of *Season of Creation: A Preaching Commentary*² when it was hot off the press. I have been leading my congregations in the Season of Creation since that time. I was so excited that someone had come up with a lectionary for me to bring ecotheology into worship – in a very intentional way. The Psalms speak of trees and mountains praising God with us. Now we can intentionally do that during a four-week season.

As long as I have been leading congregations through the Season of Creation, I have had to do a lot of work in collecting and creating liturgy. Though there are a number of resources that can be tapped into online, I found many of them did not fit well into the liturgical flow and pattern of our Lutheran liturgy. Thus, I was doing a tremendous amount of adapting and writing. In addition, though I had the commentary put together by Habel, Rhoads, and Santmire, I did not have colleagues around me with whom I could discuss and struggle with the texts, nor were there many preaching resources available online.

I began to envision a process to create a resource that would make Season of Creation a more accessible undertaking for pastors and worship leaders. It was built around the concept of the long defunct *AHA!* preaching resource. When I was first ordained, a subscription to *AHA!* was gifted to me and I used it faithfully until it went out of production. Each year, a group of 20 preachers would be invited to a “preach-in” which was an intense week when they worked through the entire lectionary for the subsequent year. They would collect their comments on the pericopes as well as various illustrations shared at the event and publish them in a useable format, sending it quarterly to the thousands of subscribers across the U.S. and Canada. I envisioned this sort of process to create a resource for Season of Creation with the idea of expanding it to include liturgy, hymn suggestions, and other types of helps that we often get from *Sundays and Seasons*.

The Northern Illinois Synod Creation Care Committee has endorsed the “Season of Creation,” sponsoring and successfully passing a resolution at the 2018 synod assembly that encourages all congregations of the synod to fit the season into their liturgical year. Part of that resolution was a promise to provide resources to congregations to aid in conducting the Season of Creation. To accomplish that, a group of NIS pastors were gathered at LOMC (you can find the participants at the end of this resource) during the final week of January 2020 to produce the document you have before you. I served as the coordinator for the week while Rev. Dr. Leah Schade of Lexington Theological Seminary was our guest theologian.

¹ We capitalize the terms Creation and Earth to denote the level of respect we are affording the other-than-human world, thereby treating these entities as subjects rather than objects. This is especially important when considering how Creation and Earth are a subject, or character, in the biblical narrative and, thus, in our liturgy and preaching.

² *Season of Creation: A Preaching Commentary*. Norman C. Habel, David Rhoads, and Paul Santmire, Editors. (Minneapolis:Fortress Press, 2011)

I would ask you not to look upon “Season of Creation” simply as a gimmick to address climate change and other ecojustice issues. Rather, it is a way to honor and give thanks for all that God has made as well as a means to confess and receive forgiveness and repent of our sins against God’s grand Creation. That said, as we proclaim the gospel for all of Creation, it is probably inevitable that discussions of ecojustice will arise. After all, isn’t it inevitable that we end up discussing political and socio-economic issues again and again when we proclaim the gospel for humanity?

I do hope that you will read on and find all the wonderful things this resource contains. It is a true work of collaboration by a very compassionate and talented group of people. But more than anything, I hope that you will celebrate the Season of Creation in your context and that you will find this resource helpful in doing so. Indeed, God so loved the cosmos³ that he sent his son... If God so loves the cosmos, we ought to be imaging God in our actions as well.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Jeff Schlesinger
 Pastor, Heart of Illinois Lutheran Parish
 Season of Creation Retreat Coordinator

What is Season of Creation?

The Season of Creation is an optional season that can be inserted into many different parts of the church year. Developed by three ecotheologians, Season of Creation was first imagined by Norman Habel in Australia and then further developed in cooperation with David Rhoads and H. Paul Santmire of the United States. Churches that use the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL) follow the life of Jesus through the seasons of the church year. During ordinary time the focus is on the Spirit’s action in the Church. But there is not a specific time to focus on God the Creator. As Habel et al say, “Now it is time to turn our attention to God’s relationship with all creation and with our relationship with creation (and with God through creation.)”⁴ They go on to say, “[The Season of Creation] brings the celebration of Earth fully into the orbit of Christian worship as a natural and integral part of the church year.”⁵

As the Season of Creation was developed in the early 2000’s, a lectionary of pericopes was created for each year of the three-year cycle of the RCL. Following is the lectionary presented in this resource for Season of Creation year A:

Week	Theme	1 st Lesson	Psalm	2 nd Lesson	Gospel
SOC 1(A)	Forest Sunday	Genesis 2:4b-22	Psalm 96:1-13*	Acts 10:34-42	John 3:1-16
SOC 2(A)	Land & Prairie Sunday	Genesis 3:14-19; 4:8-16	Psalm 139:1-18*	Romans 5:12-17	Matthew 12:38-40
SOC 3(A)	Wilderness Sunday	Joel 1:1-12;* 17-20	Psalm 65:1-13*	Romans 8:18-27	Matthew 3:13-4:2
SOC 4(A)	River & Stream Sunday	Ezekiel 47:1-12*	Psalm 104:25-33	Revelation 22:1-5	John 7:37-38*

Close inspection of the table above will reveal differences from the lectionary presented in *Season of Creation: A Preaching Commentary*. The first differences are in the names of a couple of the Sundays. This is done for contextual reasons. Since this resource was composed from the perspective of Northern Illinois clergy and prepared for use by other Northern Illinois clergy, the team felt it was best to expand the titles of the second and fourth Sunday. With the land of Illinois being so closely tied to the prairie which was once so pervasive, the team felt it appropriate to call week two “Land & Prairie Sunday” rather than limit it to just

³ The Greek word in John 3:16 is actually cosmos (κοσμος) rather than world as we so often translate it.

⁴ Habel et al, p. 3.

⁵ Ibid, p. 5. (For a nice list of reasons why to have a Season of Creation read the section **Why a Season of Creation?** pp. 5-7.)

“Land.” In regards to week four, though there are two significant rivers which traverse through the synod (the Rock and Illinois) and the granddaddy of all North American rivers forms the western border of the synod, the team felt that many people of Northern Illinois live along or near one of the many tributary streams of these rivers and added “stream” to the title of the week.

The second difference is marked by asterisks. There are lessons outlined in *Season of Creation: A Preaching Commentary* for which the team recommends alternatives. This recommendation was made with careful discernment and following agreed upon guidelines.⁶ In the end, the team felt that since the SOC lectionary is topical, if they were thoughtful and responsible, it was within their purview to suggest these alternatives.⁷

When Should a Congregation Celebrate Season of Creation?

There is no right or wrong answer to when a congregation might begin and end the four-week Season of Creation. It isn't even necessary to be consistent from one year to the next.

Perhaps the most common time that congregations celebrate Season of Creation is during September. By doing this, the four weeks of September can serve as the four Sundays of the season and everything can be concluded by celebrating St. Francis of Assisi Day the first Sunday of October.⁸

But one is certainly not bound to these dates. The Season of Creation can appropriately be celebrated during the Easter season. A congregation could consider adapting it to use as a Lenten series. Some congregations have spread the weeks of the season throughout the church year (i.e. celebrating on the 4th Sunday for four consecutive months). At least one Northern Illinois Synod dubbed July their “Season of Creation Month,” while another congregation in the synod did all three years of seasons in one summer at their midweek services.

A Thought on Making the Season Special

Using the Season of Creation material as a sermon and worship series is very useful and will bear much fruit. But some congregations have successfully taken the Season of Creation a step further.

Many congregations solicit photographs from their members and create either a slide show or gallery either for each Sunday of the season or for the season as a whole. One congregation decorated the sanctuary thematically each Sunday of the season. In this resource you will find ideas for field trips, studies and service projects that can be done during the season. Gathering a task force to brainstorm and enact such activities can help the congregation anticipate before and enhance the excitement during the Season of Creation.⁹

⁶ The team of pastors that created this resource developed the following protocol in regards to the pericopes of the Season of Creation lectionary:

Pericope Protocol

We are thankful for the scholars who have put together the lectionary for Season of Creation (SOC). Because it was constructed with themes in mind and not with sequential and seasonal structure as more traditional lectionaries such as the RCL and the Narrative Lectionary, we will do the following as we create our resource for the SOC:

- Suggest alternative texts for preachers and worship leaders to consider for each given Sunday
- Assign alternative texts for those Sundays when the following criteria are met:
 - There is no explicit reference of the day's theme within the text, and
 - We are unable to discern a solid connection between the pericope put forth by the authors of *Season of Creation* and the theme of the day or the other assigned texts for the day, and
 - There is consensus among the retreat group to assign an alternative text for the day.

⁷ And the team also hopes that Habel, Rhoads, and Santimire will not feel offended by its boldness but rather recognize that it is building upon and expanding the work of these three well respected scholars.

⁸ St. Francis of Assisi Day is actually October 4. In addition, these dates work well as September 1 is “Creation Day” as decreed in 1999 by Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios I of Constantinople. He said it as a time to offer “prayers and supplications to the Maker of all, both as thanksgiving for the great gift of creation and as a petition for its protections and salvation.” (Habel et al, p. 7.)

⁹ If your congregation should come up with a successful idea, please send it via email to Pastor Jeff Schlesinger at photo.pastor1965@gmail.com so that it can be included in future editions of this publication.

Using This Resource

If you have looked ahead in this resource, you will find five major sections: a liturgy for the season and then a set of resources for each of the four Sundays of Season of Creation year A.

Liturgy

The liturgy is intended to follow the typical order and flow used by ELCA Lutherans who rely on the ELW as their main worship guide. Prayers of the Day are also included in this resource, but they are printed alongside the hymn suggestions in the materials for the individual Sundays. A copy of the liturgy as a Microsoft Word document has been included on the disk to make it more convenient to copy and paste the material.

Sunday Resources

Individual materials for each Sunday of year A (Forrest, Land & Prairie, Wilderness, River & Stream) have been developed. You are free to use and alter any and all of them as you see fit. There are four main sections for each Sunday: The Lessons, Seeds from the Texts, Fruits for Preaching, Hymn Suggestions and Other Suggestions.

Lessons

The lessons are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Bible. The introductory sentence in italics offers context and/or a lens through which to consider the text. The Psalms utilize the ELW translation.

Seeds from the Text

This section offers quotes and thoughts of the members of the team as they discussed the pericopes. The hope is that these “seeds” might get you thinking and will “sprout” a sermon for you. There is not a name assigned to these items, but they are actual quotes or paraphrases of real comments made by team members. Should you find it appropriate to use these seeds verbatim or paraphrased in your sermon and wish to give credit, please feel free to use something like, “A colleague said...” or “A friend of mine told me...”

Fruits for Preaching

This section contains illustrations, inspirations, and other outside resources that might be used within a sermon. Every effort has been made to offer a solid reference in case you find it necessary to cite, to dig deeper, or to verify.

Hymn Suggestions and More

The final page for each Sunday contains a chart with suggested hymns and a Prayer of the Day for the given Sunday. The code for the hymn resources appears below. In addition, there are suggestions offered for Children’s messages, service projects, field trips and activities, and whatever ideas the team thought would enhance the given Sunday.

Hymn Resource Key

ELW – Evangelical Lutheran Worship
WOV – With One Voice
LBW – Lutheran Book of Worship
W&P – Worship and Praise

} ELCA Resources

SOG – *Songs of Grace: New Hymns for God and Neighbor*. By Carolyn Winfrey Gillette. Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2009.

HAB1 – *Habel Hymns Volume 1: Songs for Celebrating with Creation* by Norman C Habel. (Copyright 2004 by Norman C. Habel, ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. Administered by Willow Connections Pty Ltd, Brookvale, NSW – Australia)

HAB3 – *Habel Hymns Volume 3: Songs to Explore the Mystery of Evolution and Ecology* by Norman C Habel. (Copyright 2012 by Norman C. Habel. Not yet published.)

Seasonal Liturgy - Season of Creation (A)

Litany/Call to Worship

Come, worship the God of all Creation.

We gather to praise the Creator, the continuous source of all living things.

Come, worship our God who breathes life into being.

We praise the Creator who fashions the forests, whose trees clean the air of this world.

Come, worship our God who forms life out of soil.

We praise the Creator whose land brings nourishment.

Come, worship our God who receives our lament in the wilderness.

We praise the Creator whose Son brings healing to all Creation.

Come, worship our God who sends waters flowing with life.

We praise the Creator whose baptism unites us to be one in the Body of Christ with all Creation.

Confession

Blessed be the holy Trinity, + one God, who so loves the world and all who live in it. **Amen.**

Let us confess our sin in the presence of God, Creation, and one another.

Silence is kept for reflection.

Reconciling God,

we expect nature to serve our needs, and we have damaged it in the process. We trample every wild place and pollute your waters. We abuse your good Earth until it cries out in pain. Forgive us, loving God. Remind us of the covenant you made with the whole Earth. Nourish us so we can restore your awe-inspiring Creation. Amen.

Christ, the one who was buried into the heart of the Earth and then raised up to new life, forgives you all your sin. Freed from your burdens, be led by the Spirit to do God's healing work in the world. **Amen.**

Hymn of Praise

- "Earth and All Kin" - <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/ecopreacher/2017/09/hymn-earth-and-all-kin/>
(Permission granted by author to print the words in bulletin or for projection as long as it is being used for worship or another function of the Season of Creation. Must include proper attribution.)
- "Creator, We Thank You for All You Have Made" – from *Songs of Grace* (Gillette, Carolyn Winfrey. Discipleship Resources, 2009.) – set to the tune of *Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise* - https://www.carolynshymns.com/creator_we_thank_you_for_all_you_have_made.html
- "Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee" – ELW 836 (v. 1-2)

Offering Prayer

Loving Creator,

all Creation comes from you – forests, lands and prairies, wild places, rivers and streams. As we bring our offerings to you, we ask that you bless them so that your kingdom comes on Earth as it is in heaven; in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Preface

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God, through our Savior Jesus Christ; who entered the heart of the Earth, opening the way for humanity to be restored with all Creation to your divine goodness.

And so, with all the choirs of angels, with the church on Earth and the hosts of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

Thanksgiving at the Table

Sculptor of the Earth, we praise you for the way your fingers traced the rivers across the land and lifted up the mountains.

Painter of the landscapes, we praise you for how your brushstrokes bring color to our forests and vitality to our wilderness spaces.

Breath of life, we praise you for the gift of your wind that sustains our very living, and which brings all flora and fauna dancing into being.

In great joy you sent to the canvas of the cosmos your Son, Jesus Christ, to bring restoration and healing to all that is broken.

On the night before he died, our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks; broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take and eat; this is my body, given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me.

With this bread and cup, we proclaim the mystery of faith:

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

O Holy God, reveal the Word made flesh through the mending of the woodlands and prairies, of the rocky peaks and valley streams. Renew our awareness of our place in the web of Creation. Send us with a yearning hunger to advocate for a healthier planet.

All glory is yours, blessed Trinity, creator, redeemer and sanctifier, now and forever. **Amen.**

Communion Blessing

The bread of the Earth and the fruit of the vine strengthen you and keep you in God's grace.

Amen.

Prayer after Communion

Let us pray. God, you never give up on your beautiful yet damaged Creation. Though Jesus was broken on the cross, in the resurrection the Risen Lord encounters us with new life. Send us, who have received his body and blood, as signs of your redeeming power that restores our relationship with all of Creation and unites us with the risen life of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Benediction

Almighty God, who breathes life into you and all living things, who heals all the world, and who sustains all Creation, give you peace and purpose, in the name of the Father, and the + Son, and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Dismissal

Go in peace. Care for Creation.

Thanks be to God.

1st Sunday of Creation (A) – Forest Sunday

1st Reading – Genesis 2:4b-22

As God formed Creation and breathed life into being, humanity is entrusted with the cultivation of God's abundant blessings.

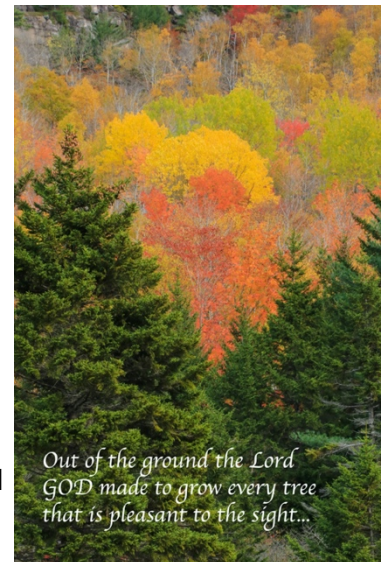
In the day that the Lord GOD made the earth and the heavens, ⁵when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up — for the Lord GOD had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; ⁶but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground — ⁷then the Lord GOD formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. ⁸And the Lord GOD planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. ⁹Out of the ground the Lord GOD made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁰A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches. ¹¹The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; ¹²and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. ¹³The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Cush. ¹⁴The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

¹⁵The Lord GOD took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. ¹⁶And the Lord GOD commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; ¹⁷but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die."

¹⁸Then the Lord GOD said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner." ¹⁹So out of the ground the

Lord GOD formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. ²⁰The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. ²¹So the Lord GOD caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. ²²And the rib that the Lord GOD had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.



Psalms 96

¹ Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth.

² **Sing to the Lord, bless the name of the Lord; proclaim God's salvation from day to day.**

³ Declare God's glory among the nations and God's wonders among all peoples.

⁴ **For great is the Lord and greatly to be praised, more to be feared than all gods.**

⁵ As for all the gods of the nations, they are but idols; but you, O Lord, have made the heavens.

⁶ **Majesty and magnificence are in your presence; power and splendor are in your sanctuary.**

⁷ Ascribe to the Lord, you families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord honor and power.

⁸ **Ascribe to the Lord the honor due the holy name; bring offerings and enter the courts of the Lord.**

Forest Sunday
Season of Creation 1
Year A

Genesis 2:4b-22

Psalms 96

Acts 10:34-42

John 3:1-16



1st Sunday of Creation (A) – Forest Sunday

⁹ Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness; tremble before the Lord, all the earth.

¹⁰ **Tell it out among the nations: “The Lord is king! The one who made the world so firm that it cannot be moved will judge the peoples with equity.”**

¹¹ Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea thunder and all that is in it; let the field be joyful and all that is therein.

¹² **Then shall all the trees of the wood shout for joy at your coming, O Lord, for you come to judge the earth.**

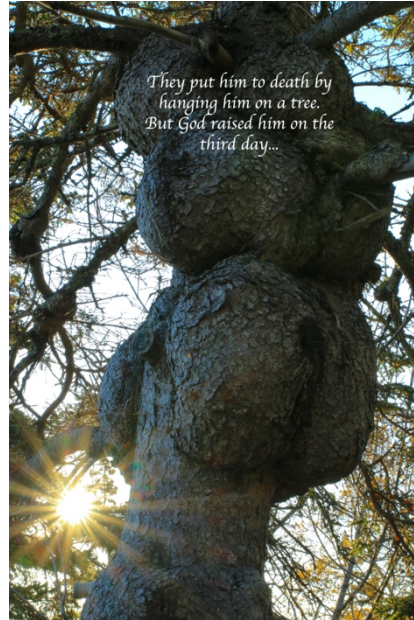
¹³ You will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with your truth.

2nd Reading – Acts 10:34-42

Paul notes that “they put [Jesus] to death by hanging him on a tree” (v. 39). Trees have been used as instruments of torture and death throughout human history. However, Paul proclaims that the resurrection brings new life to all.

³⁴Then Peter began to speak to them: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ — he is Lord of all. ³⁷That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: ³⁸how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. ³⁹We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; ⁴⁰but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, ⁴¹not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the

dead. ⁴²He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead.



Gospel – John 3:1-16

Nicodemus comes to Jesus and has his entire viewpoint of faith reoriented according to a new way of understanding God’s grace and mercy. Entering into a Season of Creation, we come to Jesus who reorients OUR thinking about the environment according to the same grace and mercy of God.

¹Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ²He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” ³Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” ⁴Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” ⁵Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ ⁸The wind

**Forest Sunday
Season of Creation 1
Year A**

Genesis 2:4b-22

Psalm 96

Acts 10:34-42

John 3:1-16

Pictures available to use for bulletin covers and PowerPoints in a separate file on this disk.

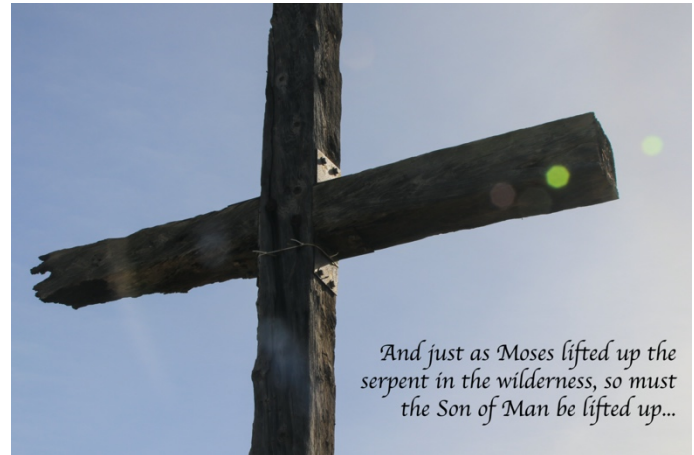
1st Sunday of Creation (A) – Forest Sunday

blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." ⁹Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" ¹⁰Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?"

¹¹Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must

the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.



In Genesis 2:5, the author is describing what does not yet exist and names "People to cultivate the soil." This suggests a vocation for humanity. Compare this image with Genesis 1:26, when the author tells us that God's commandment is for humanity to have dominion over Creation. These two stories give differing perspectives of our relationship with Creation, and we live in the tension of having dominion over it and being called to cultivate it. Which story is God calling us to be aligned with today?

In Genesis 2:7, God breathed the breath of life into the man who became a living being. Consider the sacred breath exchange between trees and other living creatures, including humans. Trees breath in carbon dioxide and breath out oxygen. Humanity, as well as other living creatures of the land and sky, breath in oxygen and breath out carbon dioxide. This sacred relationship is even found in the

shape of the bronchial tubes within human lungs. Compare an image of the inside of human lungs to an image of the branches of a tree. This relationship is truly sacred.

In Genesis 2:9, the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil are both described as being at the center of Eden. In Acts 10:39 Paul's sermon reminds us that "They put [Jesus] to death by hanging him on a tree." Trees have a central place in the stories of God's Creation and God's salvation. How does this create a sense of care for forests and trees within our community and world today?

The word Garden in Genesis in Hebrew is "gan" which connotes a walled garden or enclosed garden. How does the call to stewardship of forests create in us a desire to protect the woodlands of our day, both those that are in

Seeds from the texts *"Quotes" and Comments*

Forest Sunday
Season of Creation 1
Year A

Genesis 2:4b-22
Psalm 96
Acts 10:34-42
John 3:1-16

protected areas like state forests and community parks, as well as on public lands?

Psalm 96:12 says "Let the trees of the forest rustle with praise before the LORD, for he is coming" (New Living Translation). How do forests rustle with praise?

Psalm 96:12-13 describes the trees of the forest singing for joy before the Lord who comes to judge the Earth.

1st Sunday of Creation (A) – Forest Sunday

Consider the tremendous loss of forests due to climate-fueled natural disaster (forest fires in Australia, California, for example) or to human deforestation (the clear-cutting in the Amazon rainforests, for example). How does the loss of forested land take the joy out of the forests singing to God? How can we work together to help the forests sing again?

“John 3:16 tells us ‘For God so loved the world ...’ This is an important verse to read on the

first Sunday of Season of Creation. It reminds us that God’s act of salvation was motivated by love for the entire *world*, which is *cosmos* (κοσμος) in Greek, not just for humanity. Forests are an integral and indispensable part of Creation. I have come to think of salvation as being not only for us, but for all of Creation.”

Reforesting Faith author Matthew Sleeth points out that with the exception of God and people, the Bible mentions

trees more than any other living thing. Consider this partial list of Biblical tree stories: The Stump of Jesse (Isaiah 11); the Oaks of Mamre (Genesis 18); Elijah’s respite under a Broom Tree (1 Kings 19); Jonah respite under a bush (Jonah 4); Zaccheaus climbing a tree to see Jesus (Luke 19); The River of Life with the trees on its banks (Rev. 22). How does God still speak through trees to us today?

Our small community was devastated by the loss of a popular teen to suicide. A month after the funeral services, the family gathered with his friends in the back yard and planted a special tree and spread the young man’s ashes into the ground with the tree as it was planted. Reflect on the significance of why grieving families and communities find comfort in planting a tree in memory of a loved one.

Steve is a farmer. One afternoon he looked out across his fields as we shared a cup of coffee together, he pointed to the tree line. He remembered the day he and his father and his grandfather planted the trees there. It serves as a wind block in the winter, which was only the practical side of putting them there. But the animals that come and take refuge under them has become a sacred connection for Steve and his trees. Whether it is grazing deer, hawks perching before taking flight after prey, or the occasional fox that runs in and out of the shade, these trees have become a living sanctuary for Steve and his family.

The Podcast “Radio Lab” features an episode called “From Tree to Shining Tree” which explores the hidden world of the forest. Check out this summary from the July 30, 2016 Radio Lab Podcast. Follow the link after the summary to listen to the podcast for more ...

“In this story, a dog introduces us to a strange creature that burrows beneath forests, building an underground network where deals are made and lives are saved (and lost) in a complex web of friendships, rivalries, and business relations. It’s a network that scientists are only just beginning to untangle and map, and it’s not only turning our understanding of forests upside down, it’s leading some researchers to rethink what it means to be intelligent. “
<https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/radiolab/articles/from-tree-to-shining-tree>

“A forest can feel like a place of great stillness and quiet. But if you dig a little deeper, there’s a hidden world beneath your

Fruits for Preaching *Stories, Anecdotes and Citations*

Forest Sunday
Season of Creation 1
Year A

Genesis 2:4b-22

Psalms 96

Acts 10:34-42

John 3:1-16

feet as busy and complicated as a city at rush hour.

In June 2016, Suzanne Simard gave a Ted Talk presentation titled “How Trees Talk.” Check out this summary, and follow the link below to watch the presentation for more inspiration ...

“A forest is much more than what you see,” says ecologist Suzanne Simard. Her 30 years of research in Canadian forests have led to an astounding discovery -- trees talk, often and over vast distances. Learn more about the harmonious yet complicated social lives of trees

1st Sunday of Creation (A) – Forest Sunday

and prepare to see the natural world with new eyes.

https://www.ted.com/talks/suzanne_simard_how_trees_talk_to_each_other

The Tale of Three Trees is a children's book but is also a powerful metaphor for adults. The three trees each have great aspirations for being something prominent. But the first gets cut down and formed into a feeding trough, disappointing the spirit of the tree. The second gets cut down and crafted into a boat, disappointing the spirit of the tree. The third gets cut down and formed into a cross, disappointing its spirit as well. Yet, each of these three in their new purpose ended up intersecting with Jesus, and God's most important story ever. How do we listen to trees today? How do we appreciate the sacredness of a tree, whether it is cut down and turned into a house, into paper, or for any other purpose?

The author Bill Bryson's book *A Walk in the Woods* recounts his journey along the Appalachian Trail. He writes, "Woods are not like other spaces. To begin with, they are cubic. Their trees surround you, loom over you, press in from all sides. Woods choke off views and leave you muddled and without bearings. They make you feel small and confused and vulnerable, like a small child lost in a crowd of strange legs. Stand in a desert or prairie and you know you are in a big space. Stand in the woods and you only sense it. They are vast, featureless nowhere. And they are alive" (44). Reflect on your experience of hiking and feeling the woods come alive, even as they loom large over

you. Where is God found in the midst of these woods being alive?

Consider the lives of earth martyrs, men and women who have been killed for their efforts to protect the environment, in particular forested lands. In Brazil, Luiz Albert Araújo was murdered in October 2016 after exposing a deforestation operation that used slave labor. Also in Brazil, Waldomiro Costa Pereira was murdered for his efforts to protect land from corporations and wealthy landowners. Sister Dorothy Stang was murdered in 2005 by two men as she read the Beatitudes. Sister Stang was working in Brazil defending the rainforest and fighting against deforestation. Consider why these stories all take place in Brazil, near the largest forest ecosystem in the world.

As someone who connects with Native American spirituality, the practice of "Council of All Beings" is something I personally connect with. In this practice, the tribe sends members to the places it may be moving to, or where it may be hunting. Members of the tribe place themselves in the "shoes" of the trees, the insects, the wildlife, the flowers. As they listen with the ears of nature, they learn what the impact may be if the tribe moved to this place or hunted in this place. When the members return, the Council of All Beings begins with their reporting what the trees and deer and mosquitos etc all have to say, and only after listening to nature the tribe is able to decide if it is right to move or hunt in that

place. How might we benefit from a similar practice today before we consider more human encroachment into forested lands?

In a National Geographic article published on Feb 7, 2019, author Christina Nunez offers some startling statistics about human deforestation efforts. Though forests still cover 30% of the world's land area, it is quickly disappearing. From 1990 to 2016, the world lost 502,000 square miles of forests. That is a size equal to the area of Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, Nebraska and Kentucky. Read the article at the link below for more information about these statistics and again, ask how these numbers inform our vocation to care for the forests. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/global-warming/deforestation/>

I love hiking in the state forests and parks. Use the link to the Illinois DNR for a complete list of state parks and state forests. Consider hiking in one of these the week ahead of your "Forest Sunday." I remember one time riding horseback through a forest and inspiration for upcoming sermons was hitting me all over the place, or maybe it was the branches of the trees – either way, God used the moment to draw my attention to God's beauty and called me to use that beauty in my sermon. Could a walk in the woods do the same (not the branches, the God speaking!) for you? <https://www.dnr.illinois.gov/Parks/Pages/default.aspx>

1st Sunday of Creation (A) – Forest Sunday

Forest Sunday Hymn Suggestions	Gathering	Song of Day	Offering/Communion	Sending
He Comes to Us as One Unknown – ELW 737		X	X	
Light Dawns on a Weary World – ELW 726	X	X		
When Long Before Time – ELW 861		X	X	
Let the Whole Creation Cry – ELW 876				X
There in God's Garden – ELW 343		X		X
Let All Things Now Living – ELW 881				X
Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee – ELW 836	X			X
Oh, Sing to God Above – ELW 555	X			X
God Created Heaven and Earth – ELW 738	X		X	X
All Creatures, Worship God Most High! – ELW 835	X			X
Tree of Life and Awesome Mystery – ELW 334 (v. 1-3, Gen & Lent 2)	X	X	X	
The Earth is the Lord's – SOG 1	X	X		
Creator, We Thank You for All You Have Made – SOG 3			X	X
Mother Earth, Our Mother Birthing – HAB1 #7	X	X		X
O For a Thousand Trees – HAB1 #21	X	X	X	X

Prayer of the Day

O Lord, maker of all things, you planted the trees of the Earth and raised them up to give the breath of life for all creatures. As your Son was lifted up on the tree bringing new life to all Creation, stir us by your Spirit to protect the world you have made. We join the forests in praising you, through Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

Get Up & Go

Places in and around the NIS to visit in relation to Forest Sunday

- Walk around a forest preserve (identify trees). Consider a Bible reading about trees, before, during, and after your walk.
- Visit Morton Arboretum (Lisle, IL), Klehm Arboretum & Botanical Gardens (Rockford, IL), or another botanical venue. (https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_botanical_gardens_and_arboretums_in_Illinois)

Ideas for Children's Sermons

- Read *When God Was a Little Girl*, David R. Weiss, ACTA Publications, Chicago, IL: 2015. This children's book shares a conversation between father and daughter as they imagine how God, as a young girl, created the world with all its diversity.
- Bring a branch of leaves from each different tree on the church property. Teach the children the names of the trees. Remind them that the trees too are part of the congregation and worship God in their own way (see Isaiah 55:12)
- If you can, take the children outside to meet the trees. Have them observe the roots, the trunk, the canopy, and the things that live on and around the tree. Talk about how God created trees. Read verses about trees in the Bible.

Being a Good Neighbor

Ideas for Service Projects for Forest Sunday

- Write your elected officials to protect and sustain local woods.
- "Think before you print" – consider ways you can avoid unnecessary printing and copying to save on paper
- Have your church use bamboo toilet paper and other environmentally friendly products - <https://us.whogivesacrapp.org>
- Use cloth napkins rather than disposable napkins (try bandanas)
- Consider not using bulletins – but if you do, use the Season of Creation logo - <https://seasonofcreation.com/about/the-season-of-creation-logo/>

Other Ideas

- Lead a book study on *The Hidden Life of Trees* by Peter Wohlleben
- Conduct a study on the ELCA Caring for Creation Social Statement - <https://seasonofcreation.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/bible-studies-forest-sunday.pdf>
- Obtain trees to plant in your church yard. Display them in pots in the front with the name of the species. During the sending song ask people of all ages to process the trees out onto the lawn and plant them in pre dug holes. Gather around the largest tree or lay hands on all the trees and give a blessing.
- Decorate your sanctuary with potted palms, Christmas trees (for pines), and other potted trees. Add stuffed animals that make their home in trees (owls, monkeys, squirrels, etc.)

2nd Sunday of Creation (A) – Land & Prairie Sunday

1st Reading - Genesis 3:14-19; 4:8-16

In addition to Adam and Eve being cursed because of their sin, the land also suffers the consequences of human brokenness. In the story of Cain and Abel, humanity and the Earth continue to be deeply interconnected to each other and to God as the land cries out with Abel's blood.

¹⁴The Lord GOD said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. ¹⁵I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel."

¹⁶To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."

¹⁷And to the man he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you,

'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; ¹⁸thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

⁸Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let us go out to the field." And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him. ⁹Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?"

¹⁰And the LORD said, "What have you done? Listen; your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground! ¹¹And now you are cursed

from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. ¹²When you till the ground, it will no longer yield to you its strength; you will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth."

¹³Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is greater than I can bear! ¹⁴Today you have driven me away from the soil, and I shall be hidden from your face; I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and anyone who meets me may kill me."

¹⁵Then the LORD said to him, "Not so! Whoever kills Cain will suffer a sevenfold vengeance." And the LORD put a mark on Cain, so that no one who came upon him would kill him. ¹⁶Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD, and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

Psalm 139:1-8

¹ Lord, you have searched me out;
O Lord, you have known me.

² **You know my sitting down
and my rising up; you discern
my thoughts from afar.**

³ You trace my journeys and
my resting-places and are
acquainted with all my ways.

⁴ **Indeed, there is not a word on
my lips, but you, O Lord,
know it altogether.**

⁵ You encompass me, behind and
before, and lay your hand upon me.

⁶ **Such knowledge is too
wonderful for me; it is so high
that I cannot attain to it.**

⁷ Where can I go then from your
Spirit? Where can I flee from your
presence?

⁸ **If I climb up to heaven, you
are there; if I make the grave
my bed, you are there also.**

*By the sweat of
your face you shall
eat bread until you
return to the
ground...*



*...for out of it you were taken; you are
dust and to dust you shall return.*

Land & Prairie Sunday
Season of Creation 2
Year A

Genesis 3:14-19;
4:8-16

Psalm 139:1-18

Romans 5:12-17

Matthew 12:38-40

2nd Sunday of Creation (A) – Land & Prairie Sunday

- ⁹ If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
¹⁰ **even there your hand will lead me and your right hand hold me fast.**
- ¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness will cover me, and the light around me turn to night,"
¹² **darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day; darkness and light to you are both alike.**
- ¹³ For you yourself created my inmost parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb.
¹⁴ **I will thank you because I am marvelously made; your works are wonderful, and I know it well.**
- ¹⁵ My body was not hidden from you, while I was being made in secret and woven in the depths of the earth.
¹⁶ **Your eyes beheld my limbs, yet unfinished in the womb; all of them were written in your book; my days were fashioned before they came to be.**
- ¹⁷ How deep I find your thoughts, O God! How great is the sum of them!
¹⁸ **If I were to count them, they would be more in number than the sand; to count them all, my life span would need to be like yours.**

2nd Reading – Romans 5:12-17

Paul tells us that sin comes into the world through humanity and that salvation for the world comes through Christ.

¹²Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned — ¹³sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. ¹⁴Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of

Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come.

¹⁵But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. ¹⁶And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. ¹⁷If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

Land & Prairie Sunday
Season of Creation 2
Year A

Genesis 3:14-19;
4:8-16

Psalms 139:1-18

Romans 5:12-17

Matthew 12:38-40

Pictures available to use for bulletin covers and PowerPoints in a separate file on this disk.



...the grace of God and the free gift in grace of one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many.

2nd Sunday of Creation (A) – Land & Prairie Sunday

Gospel – Matthew 12:38-40

Jesus proclaims that he will go into the heart of the Earth to redeem the sin of all the world.

³⁸Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to him, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." ³⁹But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so for three days and three nights the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth.

Land & Prairie Sunday
Season of Creation 2
Year A

Genesis 3:14-19;
4:8-16

Psalms 139:1-18

Romans 5:12-17

Matthew 12:38-40

In the first Genesis text, the conflict between Cain and Abel echoes in the tension between ranchers and farmers because of Cain and Abel's sacrifices. Later, when Cain founded a city, he sets up a tension between those who live in cities and those who live in rural areas. Their livelihood and their connection to the land is so different. How do these tensions still exist today in your context? In what situations has it been resolved?

We often think of land as real estate, as property to be used however we desire, often without considering our neighbors or the land itself. What are the different ways that the Bible refers to land? Is it ours or does it continue to belong to God?

Creation suffers because of human choices throughout history. What is our individual vocation to reconcile Creation? What is our church's vocation?

In Genesis, there is a rupture in the relationships between man and woman, humans and animals, humans and Earth, humans and God. The story of "The Fall" has been used to

justify the oppression and abuse of women and girls. The story explains the origins of the Domination System and patriarchy. It's not meant to be *prescriptive*, but rather, *descriptive*.

Adam and Eve choose to *know* the difference between good and evil. Cain chooses to *act* on the difference between good and evil.

Psalms 139 is a wonderful psalm to keep in your heart and mind, especially when you are facing a world that seems so huge that you might get lost. The psalmist reminds us that there is no place you can go where God is not already present.

The Christology of Romans 5:12-17 has ecological implications. Sin came into "the world" – the cosmos (κοσμος) – through humanity. How does Christ's grace free both humanity *and* the world? In other words, what are the environmental ramifications of Christ's righteousness? And how does the church participate in that?

Seeds from the texts "Quotes" and Comments

Jonah ran away from the land and was swallowed up by a sea beast. Jesus, on the other hand, willingly goes into the heart of the land. How does Jesus use Jonah as an example to set himself apart from Jonah and other prophets?

Jesus does not present himself as ruling over the Earth but willingly going into the Earth. In the process, Christ redeems the land from sin and death just as Christ redeems us. How is this experienced in the "already but not yet"?

The Greek phrase in Matthew 12:40 is *en kardia ge* (ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ τῆς γῆς), literally in the heart of the Earth. And "heart" here does not just mean in the center of the Earth. Jesus is saying that he is going to that place within the Earth that is the seat of physical life, just like a human heart. This is extremely important for our concept of the created world.

2nd Sunday of Creation (A) – Land & Prairie Sunday

“In 1820, Illinois had 22,000,000 acres of prairie land and 14,000,000 acres of forests. Prairies were mainly in the northern two-thirds of the state with forests in the southern one-third. All but nine counties had large areas of prairies. In central Illinois, trees could only be found in scattered sites called ‘prairie groves’ or along waterways. By 1900, most of Illinois’ prairies were gone. The majority of these lands were converted to agricultural practices. By 1978, less than 2,300 acres of high-quality prairie remained in the entire state. Most of the undisturbed prairie sites today are found along railroad rights-of-way, in pioneer cemeteries and in places that are not suitable for farming.”

<https://www.dnr.illinois.gov/education/Pages/ILPrairies.aspx>

As an alternate reading, Genesis 4:1-16 could be used in place of the current second lesson. This would allow the congregation to dwell in the Genesis stories and the pain the land experiences after Adam and Eve are cursed and again when Abel is killed.

Have the lessons printed out so that parishioners can circle references to the land.

Popular culture perpetuates the myth that we own land. This is shown in the song, “This Land is Your Land.” In the original version, each verse ended “God blessed America for me” instead of “This land was made for you and me.”

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/This_Land_Is_Your_Land

I think I would give the lector the day off and set up the Genesis reading with a technique I have used in the past. Before reading, I would ask the congregation to tell me what they know about the story of Adam and Eve and the story of the Fall. Then I would ask what the consequences are of the Fall. After this, I would complement them on their recall but set up the reading by saying, “This is Land Sunday. Listen to the consequences of the Fall with regards to the land and Creation. I think you’ll be shocked how intimately humanity and land are connected...”

In Genesis, the land is cursed by human sin, but God intended the land to be a blessing. We see this when God provides the land of milk and honey to the people of God (Exodus 3:7-10, Deuteronomy 26:12-15). How does the tension found in these stories lead you into a preaching moment?

I enjoy Mary Oliver’s beautiful poem from *American Primitive* titled, “Clapp’s Pond.” The imagery transports us to an encounter with nature. It erases the artificial line between humanity and Creation.

Fruits for Preaching

Stories, Anecdotes and Citations

Land & Prairie Sunday
Season of Creation 2
Year A

Genesis 3:14-19;
4:8-16

Psalms 139:1-18

Romans 5:12-17

Matthew 12:38-40

http://famouspoetsandpoems.com/poets/mary_oliver/poems/15843

Many of our churches have large grass plots that are ecological dead zones. They are mowed so there is no animal habitat, no nectar for bees and butterflies. Plus the gas of the lawn mower is destructive to the air and unnecessary use of fossil fuels. What if churches grew prairies instead of grass?

When do we, humanity, cross the line and abuse/overuse/overextend the Earth?

Research what native tribes lived on the land before European settlers drove them out. Here’s an interactive map: <https://native-land.ca/>. What can we learn from surviving Native Americans about honoring the land God created?

2nd Sunday of Creation (A) – Land & Prairie Sunday

From *Living Beyond the End of the World* by Margaret Swedish: "Creation is not here for us, but rather that we are of it, part of its magnificent expression. The human it turns out, is not the reason why all this has happened. We are neither the beginning nor the end. Rather, we are right in the midst of the process of creation; it brings us into being and takes us back again; we are of it, within it; it unfolds through and around us. Much came before; much will come after." (p. 147)

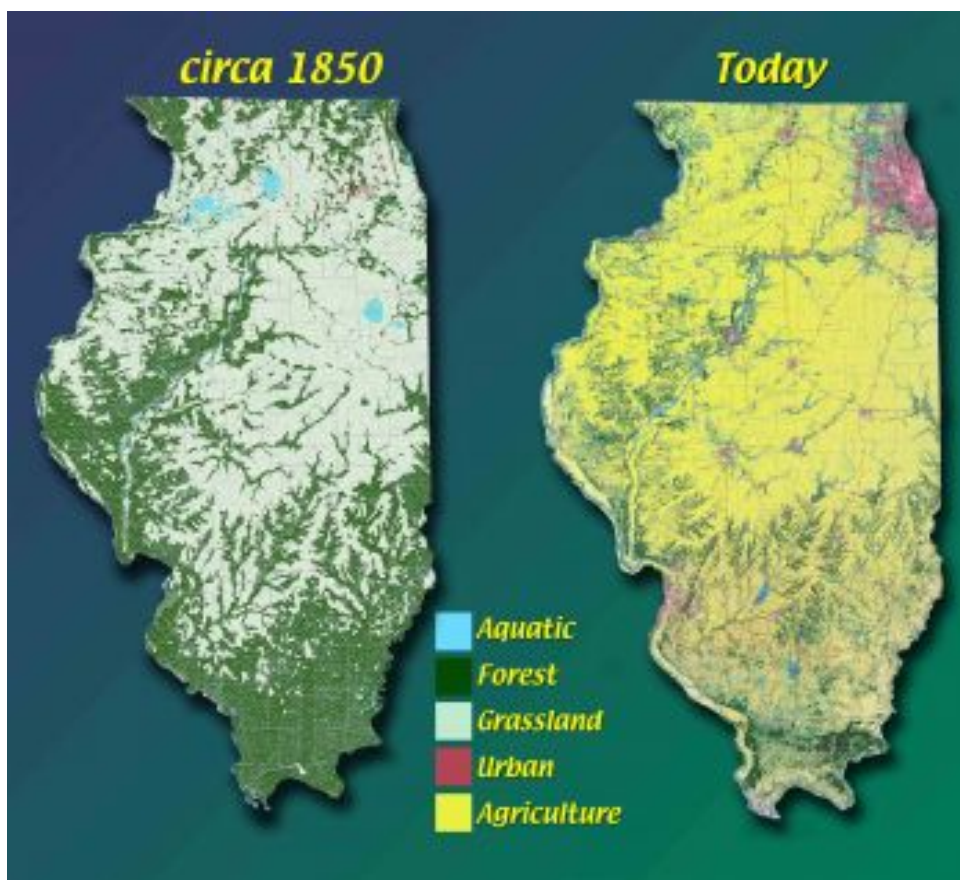
Discuss the types of plants we use in the chancel - artificial flowers, cut flowers, or potted plants - and why we choose which type.

Psalm 139 is the beginning of prayer. Darkness, quietness, breath. It is the essence of meditation. Invite the congregation to sit in quietness, perhaps remove shoes and feel the ground beneath their feet, simply being. No words are necessary. Simply existing in the presence of God is enough.

150 years ago in New Windsor, Illinois, before Calvary Lutheran Church's sanctuary was completely built, the people worshipped in the unfinished building. They used nail kegs and wooden planks instead of pews, and the windows were not yet installed. With the fresh air flowing through the sanctuary, they sang "How

Lovely is Thy Temple, Lord." Where did your congregation worship before your current building was formed? When have you worshipped outside?

Christ is there in places and among the people when ecological suffering happens, including fires, hurricanes, oil spills, tornados. What is the most current ecological tragedy? How can we be the Church when these situations happen? What can we do together to respond?



The landscape of Illinois has changed greatly over the past 160 years. Contrast the land cover on the maps of 1850 and today.

Illinois has lost over 90% of its wetlands, 99% of prairies and 80% of forests.

"The wealth of the tall grass prairie was its undoing."

- John Madson

Source of map and statistics above - <https://www.inhs.illinois.edu/outreach/habitats/>

2nd Sunday of Creation (A) – Land & Prairie Sunday

Land & Prairie Sunday Hymn Suggestions	Gathering	Song of Day	Offering/Communion	Sending
Now the Green Blade Rises – ELW 379	X			
As the Grains of Wheat – ELW 465			X	
God Extends an Invitation – ELW 486			X	
Lord, Let My Heart Be Good Soil – ELW 512		X		
The Lord Now Sends Us Forth – ELW 538				X
For the Fruit of All Creation – ELW 679	X	X		
God Whose Farm is All Creation – ELW 734			X	
Mothering God, You Gave Me Birth – ELW 735			X	
Touch the Earth Lightly – ELW 739	X	X		X
Let All Things Now Living – ELW 881	X			X
Celebrate the Land – HAB1 #10	X			X
Wise Up! Wise up you Christians! – HAB3 #8		X		X

Ideas for Children's Sermons

- Bring in a pot of moist soil. Have kids smell it and ask then what it reminds them of. Talk about all the things that live in the soil (worms, insects, microbes...) How are they our neighbors in God's Creation?
- Bring in a microscope (or magnifying glass) and dirt samples. Have the kids share what they see in the dirt as it is magnified (can ask same questions as above idea)
- Have the congregation bring in plants or seeds and do a blessing of the plants
- Have farmers and gardeners bring in soil and seeds bless them before planting season

Prayer of the Day

Gracious God, sculptor of the land, we in our brokenness have damaged your Earth. Restore our relationship with the land, as Christ heals all of Creation. In the name of Christ the Redeemer who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. **Amen.**

Being a Good Neighbor

Ideas for Service Projects for Land & Prairie Sunday

- Have a congregation clean-up day out at LOMC or a local park
- Look into prairie planting, a pollinator garden or butterfly garden
- Start a community garden
- Learn about composting practices

Get Up & Go

Places in and around the NIS to visit in relation to Land & Prairie Sunday

- Visit the Nachusa Grasslands, Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie, or some other restored prairie land (for prairies in Illinois - <https://www.dnr.illinois.gov/education/Pages/ILPrairies.aspx>)
- Take a sculpting class
- Visit a farm and ask about caring for the soil
- Research what native tribes lived on the land before European settlers drove them out. Here's an interactive map: <https://native-land.ca/>. What can we learn from surviving Native Americans about honoring the land God created?

3rd Sunday of Creation (A) – Wilderness Sunday

1st Reading - Joel 1:1-12; 17-20

The prophet Joel urges the people to lament the destruction of the land, to be awake to the plight that is upon them. Joel calls to Israel and to us today to mourn the destruction of the Earth.

¹The word of the LORD that came to Joel son of Pethuel:

²Hear this, O elders,
give ear, all inhabitants of the land!
Has such a thing happened in your days, or in the days of your ancestors?

³Tell your children of it,
and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation.

⁴What the cutting locust left, the swarming locust has eaten. What the swarming locust left, the hopping locust has eaten, and what the hopping locust left, the destroying locust has eaten.

⁵Wake up, you drunkards, and weep; and wail, all you wine-drinkers, over the sweet wine, for it is cut off from your mouth.

⁶For a nation has invaded my land, powerful and innumerable; its teeth are lions' teeth, and it has the fangs of a lioness.

⁷It has laid waste my vines, and splintered my fig trees; it has stripped off their bark and thrown it down; their branches have turned white.

⁸Lament like a virgin dressed in sackcloth for the husband of her youth.

⁹The grain offering and the drink offering are cut off from the house of the LORD. The priests mourn, the ministers of the LORD.

¹⁰The fields are devastated, the ground mourns; for the grain is destroyed, the wine dries up, the oil fails.

¹¹Be dismayed, you farmers, wail, you vinedressers, over the wheat and the barley; for the crops of the field are ruined.

¹²The vine withers, the fig tree droops. Pomegranate, palm, and

apple — all the trees of the field are dried up; surely, joy withers away among the people.

¹⁷The seed shrivels under the clods, the storehouses are desolate; the granaries are ruined because the grain has failed.

¹⁸How the animals groan! The herds of cattle wander about because there is no pasture for them; even the flocks of sheep are dazed.

¹⁹To you, O LORD, I cry. For fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and flames have burned all the trees of the field.

²⁰Even the wild animals cry to you because the watercourses are dried up, and fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness.

Psalm 65:1-13

¹ You are to be praised, O God, in Zion; to you shall vows be fulfilled.

² **To you, the one who answers prayer, to you all flesh shall come.**

³ Our sins are stronger than we are, but you blot out our transgressions.

⁴ **Happy are they whom you choose and draw to your courts to dwell there! They will be satisfied by the beauty of your house, by the holiness of your temple.**

⁵ Awesome things will you show us in your righteousness, O God of our salvation, O hope of all the ends of the earth and of the oceans far away.

⁶ **You make firm the mountains by your power; you are girded about with might.**



Even the wild animals cry to you because the watercourses are dried up...

...and fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness.

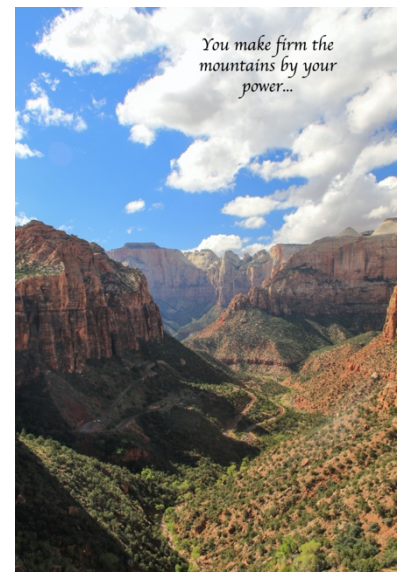
Wilderness Sunday
Season of Creation 3
Year A

Joel 1:1-2; 17-20

Psalm 65:1-13

Romans 8:18-27

Matthew 3:13-4:2



You make firm the mountains by your power...

3rd Sunday of Creation (A) – Wilderness Sunday

⁷ You still the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, and the clamor of the peoples.

⁸ **Those who dwell at the ends of the earth will tremble at your marvelous signs; you make the dawn and the dusk to sing for joy.**

⁹ You visit the earth and water it abundantly; you make it very plenteous; the river of God is full of water. You prepare the grain, for so you provide for the earth.

¹⁰ **You drench the furrows and smooth out the ridges; with heavy rain you soften the ground and bless its increase.**

¹¹ You crown the year with your goodness, and your paths overflow with plenty.

¹² **May the fields of the wilderness be rich for grazing, and the hills be clothed with joy.**

¹³ May the meadows cover themselves with flocks, and the valleys cloak themselves with grain; let them shout for joy and sing.

Romans 8:18-27

Creation and humanity each experience suffering as a result of sin. Yet, Paul proclaims, each wait with hope for a day of renewal and harmony with each other.

¹⁸I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. ¹⁹For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; ²⁰for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; ²³and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption,

the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

²⁶Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. ²⁷And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Matthew 3:13-4:2

Matthew shows us that Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness. The Spirit continues to call us today into wilderness spaces.

¹³Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" ¹⁵But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. ¹⁶And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. ¹⁷And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

¹Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ²He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished.

**Wilderness Sunday
Season of Creation 3
Year A**

Joel 1:1-2; 17-20

Psalms 65:1-13

Romans 8:18-27

Matthew 3:13-4:2



Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness...

3rd Sunday of Creation (A) – Wilderness Sunday

The image of the “cutting locusts” (Joel 1:4) can refer to actual locusts or stand as a metaphor for invading armies that have stripped the land. What are the locusts we encounter today? They might be invasive species enabled by a warming climate. Or rapacious industries that invade the land and use up, cut down, or destroy all resources such as forests, mountains, streams, rivers, fertile soil.

The plague referenced in Joel would seem to indicate a current plague the people were experiencing. At the same time, it draws our minds back to Egypt and the 8th plague. What plagues the wilderness today?

Today, “nations” (Joel 1:6) are colonialism and neoliberal global corporations that lay waste to the land and its people. Imagine this lament in the mouths of Native Americans watching Europeans moving like a horde of locusts across the wilderness, decimating their tribes and their land.

It’s important to note where Joel goes next after this lament – to a call for repentance and prayer starting at 1:13 – 2:27.

Psalm 65 views Creation not as an object, but as a subject capable of being joyful in the presence of God. This idea of Earth praising its Creator is something I contemplated with a group of seminary students as we hiked through Blanton Forest Natural Land Preserve in Kentucky. We had been thinking about the question, “Who is my neighbor?” throughout our immersion course to Appalachia. As we stood in the forest communing with the

congregation of rhododendrons, ferns, huckleberries, and the mists of the mountain, we realized that Creation indeed praises God in its own way.

When we protect the mountains and trees, the waters and toadstools, the soil and stones, we enable Creation to join us in praise of the Creator. “They shout and sing together for joy” (Psalm 65:13). But when we destroy them through processes like mountain top removal for coal mining, or clear cutting for commercial “development,” we deprive God of worship. We also deprive ourselves of the opportunity to worship within the sanctuary of Earth itself.

When I hear Paul say that Creation is groaning, I am taken back to our parsonage when we lived in Indiana. A mining company in its research found coal in the fields nearby. The promise was that once the ore was recovered, they would put everything back the way it was. The strip mining began. The blasting started. The farmland was decimated. The promised renewal was not fully what was promised. Today, the topsoil is not nearly as rich as it was, and probably won’t be for another hundred years. The whole experience was traumatic. It tore families apart, where some were for the mine some against. Some received payment from the mining company some did not. But in the end, the Earth is groaning the loudest.

When we apply an ecofeminist hermeneutic to Romans 8, it is worrisome that Paul equates Creation with a

Seeds from the texts *“Quotes” and Comments*

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Joel 1:1-2; 17-20

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travailing woman because it leads to many questions. By whom is she impregnated and was it with her consent? With what has she been impregnated? Who will serve as Creation’s mid-wife? Does she travail alone? Is Creation to be imaged simply as a feminized vehicle for the male god’s summoning of the androcentric human race? Is Earth only a vessel to receive humanity and give birth to a “new creation” which, in turn, requires her own sacrifice?

From an ecofeminist perspective, Creation in Romans 8 appears to be subject to patriarchal domination and the sins of the “male” children of God who have transgressed her, raped her, and left her to give birth without any assistance or concern for her future. And as Catherine Keller reminds us, “No birth is assured.” Further, women sometimes die in childbirth. Given the state of Earth with her waters poisoned, body drilled, and mountains cut away by extreme energy extraction, not to mention the massive extinctions of so many

3rd Sunday of Creation (A) – Wilderness Sunday

of her other-than-human children, and her rising “fever” of climate change, we cannot help but wonder if Earth is destined for this same fate.

Romans 8 may be seen as a call for Christians and others to live into their role as Children of God, so longed for by Creation. Indeed, our work to resist and protest those powers and principalities that violate Creation and God’s Children has never been more needed and urgent than this time on Earth.

Jumping off from Matthew, one could go into the temptation of Jesus and ask the question,

“how we are tempted in the wilderness?”

Why does Jesus go to the wilderness? Jesus made an intentional effort to explore what it means to live in exile. He experienced it by intentionally going into the wilderness. Why would someone choose this? Because it is this exile which drives one to compassion. (You were slaves in Egypt...)

Remember in Matthew, Jesus is tempted in the wilderness to turn stone to bread (satisfy our appetite), put God to the test (destroy ourselves), and gain power (by worshiping Satan). Those

same temptations exist in the wilderness today.

Jesus fasts in the wilderness. What are some ways we can fast in our life (fast from over-consumption, over-spending, over-developing)?

Fasting is brought up in Joel 1:14 as well, why is fasting linked with wilderness?

Jesus went into the wilderness, where he had to rely on God. In Luke 10 Jesus sends out the 70 into the wilderness with very little, building their faith by having to rely on what God would provide.

How can we help our congregations understand “wilderness”? Bill McKibben argues that “pure ‘nature’ no longer exists - all of the Earth’s space, be it city or so-called wilderness, is now ‘managed’ space that bears the imprint of human shaping.” (*The End of Nature*, 102)

I define wilderness as places where human beings do not live. Even with that more limited definition compared to McKibben’s, there are very few places left that fit this definition.

There are examples of wilderness in which humans have and do live. The Native Americans lived in many of the places in North America that we call wilderness to this day. There are aboriginals living in the Amazon wilderness still today. The definition of wilderness does not necessarily need to exclude humanity. Perhaps the difference is with the manner in which human

beings abide in wild places. The Native Americans lived *within* the wild places whereas today we live *upon* these same places.

Do we really want to destroy the remaining wildernesses just so we can drive bigger cars and have more shopping malls (satisfying our appetites)? Eradicating species by eradicating their habitat so we can house our ever-expanding species? Which in turn leads to an imbalance in the Earth that leads to droughts, floods, wildfires, etc. (destroying ourselves)? When we destroy the wilderness for our own power, we worship the very opposite of God – Satanic power that promises to give us the world, but, in fact, fools us into consuming ourselves to death.

Margaret Swedish references Joel in her vision: “all around this country,

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Matthew 3:13-4:2

pastoral workers, teachers, religious leaders . . . parents, cultural workers come together wherever they are - in churches, schools, community centers, neighborhood organizations, around the family dinner table, on radio and TV talk shows - to ‘sound the trumpet,’ to ‘proclaim a solemn assembly,’ to ‘call the people together, assemble the elders, gather the children, even the

3rd Sunday of Creation (A) – Wilderness Sunday

infants at the breast' (Joel 2:15-16) to talk about our planetary crisis, how it came about and what we need to do. I have this fantasy that we come together to proclaim a fast, not a fast of repentance and mourning, of punishment and sin, of miserable faces and growling stomachs that make us feel good in the moment but change little in regard to our predicament. Rather, this would be a permanent fast from a way of life that has compromised our spirits and the biosphere in which we live and move and have our being, a fast from our overconsumption, our credit-card bills, our wasteful lifestyles. We proclaim the fast of the loaves and fishes, one that involves a scaling down to a simplicity in which it is possible to feel our bodies again as part of the Earth, to feel our spirits alive and vibrant, part of this great act of creation begun fourteen

billion years ago." (*Living Beyond the End of the World*, 201)

On a youth group trip to the Boundary Waters on the Minnesota/Canada border, I experienced the fullness of the night sky for the first time. Yet with all the wonder of the universe in front of us, my friends and I spent the nights counting human satellites quietly soaring overhead. How do wilderness spaces open us to the full awe of God, and what human-made distractions disrupt our full awareness of that same awe?

On a January camping trip in Austin Texas, I trekked across the camp through brambles, over dry creeks, and up loose rock trails to spend the night star-gazing in the camp's open-topped ranger tower. When I finally made it, sleeping bag and pillow in hand; I

climbed the steps. As I reached the top, the stars shined so bright, it felt like a gift. I spent the next hour enraptured in a sense of awe at the beauty of the heavens arrayed before my eyes. After shivering to sleep, the morning was better yet, the cold air and moist warm earth brought forth a fog that lingered on the top of the trees, so from that 50-foot-tall tower, all I could see for miles were sundrenched golden cloud-topped trees in every direction. The wilderness: the journey, the waiting, and the morning all showed forth God's Glory.

As I read these texts, I remembered the Boy Scout outdoor code – "As an American, I will do my best to be clean in my outdoor manners. Be careful with fire. Be considerate in the outdoors. Be conservation minded." How does this get us thinking about wilderness Sunday?

Ideas for Children's Sermons

- Richard Louv's *The Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder* has great ideas for helping children connect with the wilderness – even in their own backyard. Easily translated to Christian education experiences in the church.
- Lutheran ecotheologian Kiara Jorgenson (in a paper presented at AAR/SBL): stated that "ecological vocation" is a practical antidote to nature-deficit disorder. She draws on Lutheran doctrine of vocation and explores what it means to abide with and within Creation. Jorgenson points to the mystical experiences in nature during early years of childhood as deeply spiritual encounters. Exposure to nature is a first principle for childhood development. Exposure to nature enhances spiritual experiences for children, knowing they're not alone, that realities exist beyond their own. She argues for the spiritual necessity of nature; if we separate them from Creation, we separate them from the Creator.
- How can the church give children access to the spaces of nature? How can we nurture the relationship between the spiritual and natural that wants to awaken within each child? How can we engender humility in the midst of wonder? Ideas include outdoor ministries (church camp), Sunday School classes outside, Confirmation retreats in the wilderness, church camping retreats.
- *City Dog, Country Frog* by Mo Willems, Hyperion Books for Children, 2010. In this story, a dog visits the countryside and learns from a frog how to enjoy being in the wilderness. He then later shares this joy

3rd Sunday of Creation (A) – Wilderness Sunday

Wilderness Sunday Hymn Suggestions	Gathering	Song of Day	Offering/Communion	Sending
Let the Whole Creation Cry – ELW 876	X			X
Creating God, Your Fingers Trace – ELW 684	X		X	X
For the Beauty of the Earth – ELW 879	X		X	X
Come, Ye Disconsolate – ELW 607		X		
When Pain of the World Surrounds Us – ELW 704		X		
All People That on Earth do Dwell – ELW 883	X			
God the Sculptor of the Mountains – ELW 736	X			X
Praise the Spirit in Creation – WOV 682	X			X
Father, We Thank You – WOV 704			X	
Amid the World's Bleak Wilderness – LBW 378			X	
Out of the Wilderness – W&P 115		X		
Creator God, You Made the Earth – SOG 4	X	X	X	x
Hear this Earth Mourning – HAB1 #11		X	X	
The Cosmic Christ – HAB1 #16		X		X
I'm an Earth Being – HAB3 #3	X			x

Prayer of the Day

Merciful God, you made the wilderness teeming with living creatures, thriving plants, and spacious habitats. Free us from our destructive ambitions. Stir us to respect and protect your wild places, caring for all that you have made, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

Being a Good Neighbor

Ideas for Service Projects for Wilderness Sunday

- Clean up an abandoned lot.
- Contact your local wild animal rescue and see what needs they have for blankets or beds and host a crafting day!

Other Ideas

Host a presentation of photographs from someone who has been to a wilderness place (i.e. Grand Canyon, desert, mountain, volcanos) to share their stories of the experience. Use the song suggested below as part of devotions.

Sing "For the Healing of Creation" as part of a devotion prior to or following a time of study or other activity. From *Singing Our Prayer Holden Prayer around the Cross*, Augsburg Fortress, 2010.

Ask the congregation for letters about their wilderness experiences and decorate the narthex, sanctuary, fellowship hall with a wall of wilderness stories that people had

Get Up & Go

Places in and around the NIS to visit in relation to Wilderness Sunday

- What are the organizations near your congregation whose mission it is to protect the wild lands?
- Bring someone from a natural lands trust to talk about their work.
- Visit a wild animal rescue and discover what it takes to restore an animal to a wild place.
- Go visit a wilderness area such as a forest or prairie preserve.
- Take a walk in your neighborhood, or your favorite park, or in a natural setting, and carry a bag with you. Pick up every piece of trash you find. With each piece you place in the bag, offer a prayer for the person who dropped it. Pray for their eyes to be opened, their hearts to be changed, and their habits to reflect an attitude of peace with Earth.
- Go camping! Help plan a camping trip with your congregation. Pick a weekend in the summer where folks can enjoy walking, playing, eating in, and worshipping within a local state park or campground.

4th Sunday of Creation (A) – River & Stream Sunday

1st Lesson – Ezekiel 47:1-12

Ezekiel offers a vision of a river flowing from God's temple. This river is flowing with life which nourishes, heals, and renews.

¹Then he brought me back to the entrance of the temple; there, water was flowing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east); and the water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar. ²Then he brought me out by way of the north gate, and led me around on the outside to the outer gate that faces toward the east; and the water was coming out on the south side.

³Going on eastward with a cord in his hand, the man measured one thousand cubits, and then led me through the water; and it was ankle-deep. ⁴Again he measured one thousand, and led me through the water; and it was knee-deep. Again he measured one thousand, and led me through the water; and it was up to the waist. ⁵Again he measured one thousand, and it was a river that I could not cross, for the water had risen; it was deep enough to swim in, a river that could not be crossed. ⁶He said to me, "Mortal, have you seen this?"

Then he led me back along the bank of the river. ⁷As I came back, I saw on the bank of the river a great many trees on the one side and on the other. ⁸He said to me, "This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the

Arabah; and when it enters the sea, the sea of stagnant waters, the water will become fresh. ⁹Wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish, once these waters reach there. It will become fresh; and everything will live where the river goes. ¹⁰People will stand fishing beside the sea from En-ge-di to En-eglaim; it will be a place for the spreading of nets; its fish will be of a great many kinds, like the fish of the Great Sea. ¹¹But its swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they are to be left for salt. ¹²On the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing."

Psalm 104:25-33

²⁵ Yonder is the sea, great and wide, with its swarms too many to number, living things both small and great.

²⁶ **There go the ships to and fro, and Leviathan, which you made for the sport of it.**

²⁷ All of them look to you to give them their food in due season.

²⁸ **You give it to them; they gather it; you open your hand, and they are filled with good things.**

²⁹ When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust.

River & Stream Sunday
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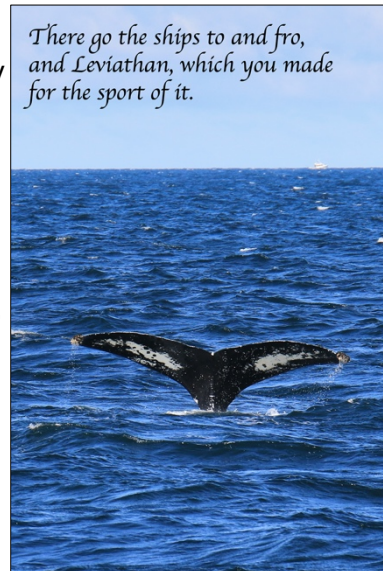
Ezekiel 47:1-12

Psalm 104:25-33

Revelation 22:1-5

John 7:37-38

*There go the ships to and fro,
and Leviathan, which you made
for the sport of it.*



"Wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms shall live..."

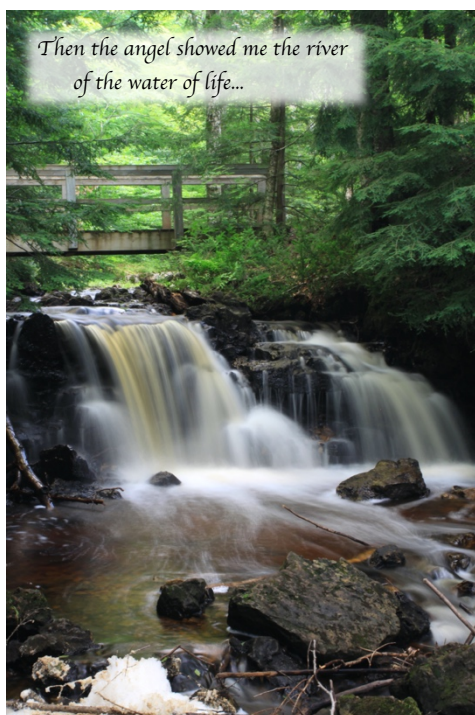
4th Sunday of Creation (A) – River & Stream Sunday

³⁰ **You send forth your Spirit, and they are created; and so you renew the face of the earth.**

³¹ May the glory of the Lord endure forever; O Lord, rejoice in all your works.

³² **You look at the earth and it trembles; you touch the mountains and they smoke.**

³³ I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will praise my God while I have my being.



Revelation 22:1-5

The river of life flows from the throne of God, feeding the tree of life for the healing of the nations.

¹Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ²through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. ³Nothing accursed will be found there anymore. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; ⁴they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

John 7:37-38

At the Festival of Booths, Jesus proclaims that he pours out living water to the believers.

³⁷On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, ³⁸and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'"

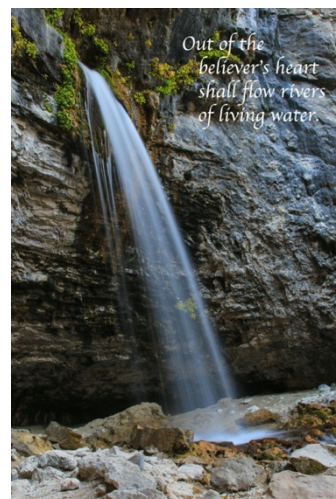
River & Stream Sunday
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Ezekiel 47:1-12

Psalms 104:25-33

Revelation 22:1-5

John 7:37-38



4th Sunday of Creation (A) – River & Stream Sunday

The first thirty-five chapters of Ezekiel recount the judgment against Israel. They worshiped other gods in the Temple, abused the power invested in them, squandered the blessings they had received. Had God abandoned them? No. They had driven God out of the temple with idol worship by way of their own greed, arrogance, and violence. And now it seemed as if their river had dried up, and all that remained were the stagnant waters of hopelessness. If the Earth is God's temple, in what ways have we defiled God's temple?

There is a connection between the exiles of Israel and our own experience of exile within this planet. Their story is our story. What we need is what the people of Israel needed. We need a vision. We need a reminder that the future is in God's hands and that all is not lost, that there is hope and that hope does indeed spring eternal. Ezekiel had that vision.

In chapter 47, Ezekiel sees the river. The river flowed out from the Temple, and on either side were trees that never wilted and produced abundant fruit. The waters were clean and clear and fresh, filled with healthy fish. People gathered there to draw life from the river, because, as it says in verse 9, "everything will live where the river goes." It wasn't a geographical river like the Nile or the Jordan. This was God's river. And the message that Ezekiel's vision held was that God's river can bring new life.

While it may be true that Ezekiel's river is metaphorical rather than geographical, can it also be that he is offering of

vision of what God wants rivers of the world to be like now? Even if this were a literal vision of what is to come in the eschatology, don't we pray, "Thy kingdom come, on Earth as it is in heaven"?

As Ronald J. Allen notes, "The river of life flows through the middle of the city so the water is available to all. Water is not distributed according to one's place in the social pyramid." (*I Will Tell You the Mystery: A Commentary for Preaching from the Book of Revelation*, Ronald J. Allen [Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019], 214.)

Revelation 22 presents a vision of the crystal-clear waters flowing from God's throne. What are ways in which people are living into this vision now? Sharing stories of faith communities working to create sources of clean water, or protesting the pollution of water, or cleaning up local streams or rivers and even the ocean itself, can help people understand God's intention for this Earth and all communities.

At the center of the Throne of God – in the very nucleus of God's realm – is the Lamb, meaning Jesus, the crucified one. The cross concentrates everything that is wrong with this world. All the sin, all the violence, all the corruption, all the war, all the hunger, all the inequality and racism and sexism and classism – it all converges here. But God takes this symbol of death and pulls it inside out, transforming it into the symbol for new life.

Seeds from the texts "Quotes" and Comments

River & Stream Sunday
Season of Creation 4
Year A

Ezekiel 47:1-12

Psalms 104:25-33

Revelation 22:1-5

John 7:37-38

The river of living water is Jesus' outpouring of the Spirit on believers.

Consider also reading or referencing John 19:31-34. You want to see the throne of God? Then you have to focus your eyes on the cross, because the Lamb is the throne of God! Do you remember what happened when Jesus' side was pierced? Blood and water flowed from his side. Communion and baptism: the body of Christ and the river of life flowing from the throne of God.

In John 7, Jesus proclaims he is the living water. The Greek tells us that the water comes out of "the belly" (NRSV says out of the heart) and then in the crucifixion, it is the living blood and water that comes from Jesus' very side for the life of the world.

"I like the idea of using the image of Jesus as the living water on River and Stream Sunday because flowing water is living water."

4th Sunday of Creation (A) – River & Stream Sunday

Consider asking these questions:

1. What is the name of your local watershed?
2. What is the closest body of water to your church?
3. What is the biggest source of water pollution in your area?
4. What is the role of the church in protecting the waters of Creation in which we baptize?

Revelation 22 is a beautiful vision of the river, trees, and humans living as God intended. The sermon can bring together both faith and science by explaining what research has revealed about the healing nature of trees. Trees release a chemical called phytoncides to keep themselves healthy, and when we breathe them into our bodies, they trigger the production of special white blood cells that strengthen the body's immune system. This means that a regular practice of walking among trees is truly healing. In fact, the Japanese have a term for this "forest therapy" called *shinrin yoku*, or "forest bathing."

A local example in the Northern Illinois Synod of someone tackling the problem: Chad Pregracke from Living Lands and Waters works with volunteers to clean up the Mississippi River. Website: www.livinglandsandwaters.org

Our health is dependent on the health of trees and the ecosystems that support them. The preacher can suggest that Revelation's imagery supports a multi-faith ecological effort to plant, tend, protect, and preserve trees, forests, and the land and water they – and we – need to survive.

"I was thinking about the Pebble Mine in Bristol Bay, Alaska, as I was struggling with a rock mine in my local community. Do they need to work this quarry out of necessity or is it exploitation? What does it mean that we need/want the metals that come out of that mine for our electronics and more in place of destroying the sockeye salmon?"

"I also remember the Grand Coulee Dam in the 1950's that was created for hydroelectric power and moving barges up and down the river. The result was also that the Chinook Salmon are now completely gone out of the river. They can no longer go upriver to spawn."

Changing the flow of the Chicago River was a move to suit human needs and has had disastrous consequences. The people realized that they were putting human and industrial waste into the Chicago River and then flowing into Lake Michigan where it was getting drawn into the drinking supply causing a health crisis. So, city leaders decided to change the flow of the river, sending their wastes downstream to other cities. These entities sued and the night before it went to court the dam was blown up, making the change irreversible.

"When we talk about water, I can't help but to recall the song from the Disney movie, Pocahontas, "Just Around the River Bend." *What I love most about rivers is you can't step in the same river twice; the water's always changing, always flowing.*

Fruits for Preaching *Stories, Anecdotes and Citations*

River & Stream Sunday
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Ezekiel 47:1-12

Psalms 104:25-33

Revelation 22:1-5

John 7:37-38

"All the water that ever was, is all the water that there ever will be. It is a closed system that cycles. It is humbling for me to think that the water that I baptize with could have been present at the very baptism of Jesus, in the well of the Samaritan woman, that healed Naaman, that parted to let the Israelites pass to freedom, and might water our fields, gardens, and orchards this year. Water is used for God's sacred purposes of life."

Show the American Family commercial of two guys on a boat cleaning up the river just a little bit at a time. We don't have to only take on big tasks but every small effort counts. <https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=American+Family+commercial+guys+cleaning+up+the+river&view=detail&mid=BB091A55DB160116B579BB091A55DB160116B579&FORM=VIRE>

Consider the Flint Michigan water crisis which began in 2014, and continued beyond, as an illustration of what happens when we do not steward the water entrusted to us.

4th Sunday of Creation (A) – River & Stream Sunday

“My experience is that water is probably one area of the care of Creation about which both liberal and conservative can find common values. We all care about the water our families drink.”

Consider making the connecting point on this fourth Sunday in the Season of Creation series: The river flows through the forests, the land, and the wilderness. This is the unifying aspect of all these spaces. They all need fresh flowing water, in different quantities, to bring and sustain life.

“The satellite images of rivers and streams look like veins and arteries of the Earth. Just like our vessels carry life throughout our body, these rivers and streams carry life to Earth. Sadly, in a tragic irony, we so often make our water ways carry toxins throughout our lands.”

“It greatly pains me to know that farm fertilizers, animal waste, and sewage enter the tributaries that feed into the Mississippi, carrying toxins into the Gulf of Mexico. The dead zone in the Gulf is 6,000-7,000 square miles.”

It’s important not to just point to the negative things that are happening in Creation, but to also highlight what people, communities, and churches are doing about the problems to clean up, restore, and care for the natural world.

“There are positive stories of people cleaning up the Pacific garbage patch, polluted inland waters, and in response to environmental disasters.”

“I think our rivers and streams are sources of great hope. I remember when I was a kid that the Illinois River was filthy dirty and you would not be caught dead (or maybe you would be) eating any of the fish out of it. But now, after decades of concerted effort by communities and governments, the waters of the Illinois River, though not perfect, are much cleaner. In fact, two well-known Walleye tournaments are held there each year.”

Staggering Statistics about Water

- Less than 1% of the world’s water is drinkable (worldatlas.com)
- It takes a drop of water 90 days to go from head waters of the Mississippi to go to the Gulf of Mexico.
- Water use in the U.S. – 8% is used for domestic; 33% used for agriculture; 59% used for industry. (usbr.gov)
- A staggering 844 million people live without access to clean water. That’s roughly 1 in 10 people on Earth, or about twice the population of the United States. (<https://lifewater.org/blog/world-water-day-2018/>)

The Current Water Crisis:

1. 100 million families are stuck in a cycle of poverty and disease because they don’t have access to safe water.
2. More people die from unsafe water than from all forms of violence, including war.
3. 2.4 billion people, 1 in 3, lack access to a toilet.
4. Water-borne diseases kill more children under the age of five than malaria, measles, and HIV/AIDS – combined.
5. In developing countries, as much as 80% of illnesses are linked to poor water and sanitation conditions.
6. Women and girls spend up to 6 hours each day walking to get water for their families.
7. The average distance that women in Africa and Asia walk to collect water is 3.7 miles. That is 19,500 steps, every day, just to get water that is making them sick.
8. 443 million school days are lost each year due to water-related diseases.
9. Time spent gathering water around the world translates to \$24 billion in lost economic benefits each year, furthering the cycle of poverty.
10. **Every dollar invested in safe water and improved hygiene and sanitation results in eight dollars of increased economic activity.**

(<https://lifewater.org/blog/world-water-day-2018/>)

4th Sunday of Creation (A) – River & Stream Sunday

River & Stream Sunday Hymn Suggestions	Gathering	Song of Day	Offering/Communion	Sending
Shall We Gather at the River – ELW 423	X			
This is the Spirit's Entry Now – ELW 448	X			
Baptized and Set Free – ELW 453		X	X	
Crashing Waters at Creation – ELW 455		X		
Waterlife – ELW 457		X		
Let Streams of Living Justice – ELW 710		X		X
Let Justice Flow Like Streams – ELW 717		X		X
Precious Lord, Take My Hand – ELW 773			X	
When Peace Like a River – ELW 785			X	X
Song of the Waters – HAB1 #4	X			X
I'm an Earth Being – HAB3 #3	X			X

Prayer of the Day

Jesus, our living water, the river of God that flows from your throne also flows through our local waterways (*name local rivers like Rock, Fox, Illinois, Mississippi*). Bless these waters and guide our efforts to keep them healthy. Washed in your promise, lead us to live into our baptismal vocation; through you, and the Parent of all Creation, with the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Get Up & Go

Places in and Around the NIS to visit in relation to River & Stream Sunday

- Host a “Remembrance of Baptism” party at a nearby pond, lake, river or even a pool.
- Go to Dubuque, IA to the National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium.
- Go to the headwaters of a local river or to the mouth of a local river and bless the waters. (i.e. Rock River meets the Mississippi in Rock Island, Kishwaukee River headwaters are near Woodstock, or South Branch headwaters near Shabbona)
- Plan a canoe trip down the Rock River or other local river. If possible, use LOMC resources.
- Go to the Discovery Museum in Rockford, IL to play at the water table to learn about flow of water.
- Participate in an ELCA Walk for Water program through an ELCA Hunger ministry.

Ideas for Children’s Sermons

- Have the children dip their fingers in the font to remember their baptism.
- Bring in a terrarium to talk about how water is found in water and steam, showing the closed network of water, and compare with how the water of the world is that same concept. All the water of the world is already here, and there will never be more water added into the system.
- Read the book “Water Come Down” by Walter Wangerin, Jr.
- Bring in river rocks and talk about how the river flowing over the rock forms them and their stripes, let the kids take them home.

Being a Good Neighbor

Ideas for Service Projects for River & Stream Sunday

- Find a clean river project to be a part of. Or start a clean river project.
- Research and learn about Riparian Zones at local farms or near other local creeks, streams and rivers.
- Learn how to create a rain garden and consider making one for the church property. Demonstrate easy-to-build home versions for members to use in their own homes.

Other Ideas

Popular music you may want to use in worship or as sermon illustrations:

- *The River* by Garth Brooks
- *The River of Dreams* by Billy Joel
- *Wide River* by Steve Miller Band

The Team



Front Row: Robert Franek, Jamie Gallagher, Scott Ralston, Jeff Schlesinger. Back Row: Leah Schade, Jes Bakken, Julie Monnard, Elizabeth Martin, Carol Soderholm. (Not pictured – Karyn Kost, Paul Soderholm.)

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Additional Resources

1. Habel, Rhoads and Santmire, eds. *The Season of Creation: A Preaching Commentary*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011.
2. <http://www.letallcreationpraise.org/season-of-creation>
3. <https://seasonofcreation.com>
4. <http://www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org>
5. <http://www.bibleandecology.org>
6. <http://www.webofcreation.org>

Helping the Cause

If you found this resource helpful please forward comments and suggestions to photo.pastor1965@gmail.com. To help assure that resources might be developed for years B and C, please consider a free will offering to help the cause. Make checks payable to “First Lutheran Church” and put “Season of Creation Retreat” in the memo line. Mail them to First Lutheran Church, 240 Hardanger Gate, Lee, IL 60530.

Be On Next Year’s Team

We are seeking collaborative and creative people who would like to be part of the team to create a resource for year B of Season of Creation. Team members will be required to participate in a Zoom meeting in November or December, attend the retreat in January or early February, and pledge to conduct Season of Creation in their own congregation.

If you are interested, please drop a note via either email or snail mail to:

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