

***First Sunday in the Season of Creation***  
*(United States Version 2)*

***Forest Sunday***  
*We worship with creation in a forest.*



*“All the trees of the forest sing for joy.” Psalm 96:12*

## GATHERING IN GOD'S NAME

1. *This Sunday we worship in the forest. Ideally this would take place out of doors in an actual forest or dense thicket. A forest can be experienced, however, within a church building by locating living trees, ferns, and other forest plants throughout the church, including the sanctuary. At the center of the sanctuary or near the Lord's Table, a large tree may be placed to represent the tree of life.*
2. *A psalm, hymn, or anthem may be sung when the presiding ministers enter or after the greeting.*
3. *An **Invocation** such as the one that follows may be said before or after the greeting.*

In the name of the Creator, the fountain of life,  
in the name of Christ, the pulse of life,  
and in the name of the Spirit, the breath of life. Amen.

**Holy! Holy! Holy! Earth is filled with God's presence.**

4. ***The Greeting.** The presiding minister greets the people in these or other suitable words.*

The Lord of life be with you.  
**And also with you.**

5. *These or similar responses are used.*

Christ, we gather in your name  
to worship in this sanctuary called Earth,  
**a planet filled with your presence,**  
**quivering in the forests,**  
**vibrating in the land,**  
**pulsating in the wilderness,**  
**shimmering in the rivers.**

God, reveal yourself to us in this place,  
and show us your face in all creation.  
**Holy! Holy! Holy! Earth is filled with God's presence.**

6. ***An Invitation.** In these or similar words, the minister or members of the congregation may invite creatures of the forest to worship.*

We invite the forests to worship with us:  
**mountain ash and vibrant maples, quivering ferns and glistening moss!**

We invite tall trees to celebrate life:  
**jackpines and oaks, tall trees where lizards and lichen find their home!**

We invite the forest to sing in the night:  
**green tree frogs and timid moths, owls and swirling bats!**

We join with the fauna of the forest in praising God:  
**redwinged blackbirds and hummingbirds, creeping things and butterflies.**

We celebrate the song of the forest!  
**Sing, forest, sing!**

We invite you to name forest creatures to join us in worship.

*The names of other creatures or parts of the forest may be added by members of the congregation.*

We celebrate the song of the forest!  
**Sing, forest, sing!**

7. *A hymn or song may follow that celebrates creation, especially the world of the forest. Children or other members of the congregation may enter the church with ferns and trees and living plants as the forest joins in celebration. Banners with representations of forest life may also be used. The flora may be held aloft and placed beneath the tree near the Lord's Table.*

### CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

8. ***A Remembering.** A small piece of rosemary, a sprig of holly, a leaf, or another plant, a symbol of remembrance, may be given to the people as a reminder of our past connection with creation.*

As we take this plant in our hands we remember the forests where we have worked and played.

**O God, we thank you for the beauty of creation and the gift of trees.**

We remember and confess how we have violated and polluted the forests in our garden planet.

**Christ, crucified on a tree, hear our cry.**

We regret that we have forgotten Earth and treated this garden planet as a beast to be tamed and as a place to be ruled.

**Christ, the hope of all creation, we lament our failings.**

9. ***A Confession.** A symbol of our rampant felling of forests may be held high above the flora in the sanctuary. This symbol may be a loud chainsaw or some other symbol meaningful to the local community.*

We have ignored the distant sounds in the forest, the sound of chainsaws clearing for greed and gain, the sound of old forest giants falling forever, the sound of rare species breathing their last.

**Christ, the source of all life, we are sorry. We are sorry.**

10. ***The Absolution.** The people may sit/stand in silence or they may name aloud sins against the forests. The presiding minister declares the absolution.*

Christ hears your confession from the cross and forgives your sins against the forest.

**Christ, teach us to love Earth as our home. Help us to return home to Earth.**

I speak for Christ: I invite you to come home to Earth, and I call you to tend this planet with love.

**Shalom! Shalom! We are coming home!**

*11. The Kyrie. The minister may add the Kyrie Eleison*

As we come home to Earth,  
**Christ, have mercy.**

As we seek to love our home,  
**Christ, have mercy.**

As we seek to care for our planet,  
**Christ, have mercy.**

*12. The Gloria in Excelsis, a suitable hymn of praise, or the following invocation may be said or sung.*

Glory to God in the highest!  
**And on Earth peace with all creation!**

*13. The Collect of the Day. The presiding minister may say*

Let us pray.

*The community may pray silently. The following collect is said or sung.*

God, our Creator, whose glory fills our planet, help us to discern your vibrant presence among us, especially in the mysteries of the forest. Help us to stand in solidarity with your forest creatures who are suffering and serve you as agents for healing our garden planet. We ask this in the name of Christ, who reconciles and renews all things in creation. Amen.

**THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD**

*14. All may sit for the first three readings for the First Sunday in Creation, and rise for the Gospel.*

*15. A reading from Genesis chapter 2 verses 4b to 22  
"Born of Earth and the Spirit"*

*God creates humans from Earth and the Spirit and plants a forest garden to be a home with the rest of their kin in creation. After each reading the reader may say,*

This is the word of the Lord.  
**Thanks be to God.**

*16. Psalm 139 verses 13 to 16 may be said or sung.*

“Born from the womb of Earth”

The psalmist confesses that he/she was created by God in a wondrous way (like Adam) deep in the womb of Earth.

17. *A reading from the Acts of the Apostles chapter 17 verses 22 to 28.*

“Born to search for God”

In his famous sermon about the ‘Unknown God,’ Paul claims that God created all humans with the same breath and inner impulse to search for God’s presence.

18. *The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John chapter 3 verses 1 to 16*

**Glory to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

“Born of water and the Spirit”

*Jesus invites Nicodemus to go beyond being born of Earth and the Spirit (like Adam) to also be born of ‘water and the Spirit’ in Christ.*

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

19. *A Children’s Address: A hymn or song suitable for children may follow.*

20. *The Affirmation of Faith. The Apostles’ Creed or the Nicene Creed may be said here or after the sermon, or this Affirmation of Faith may be used.*

God creates all things,  
renews all things, and celebrates all things.  
**This we believe.**

Earth is a sanctuary,  
a sacred planet filled with God’s presence,  
a home for us to share with all creatures.  
**This we believe.**

God became incarnate,  
a part of Earth, like Adam,  
a human being called Jesus Christ,  
who lived and breathed and spoke among us,  
suffered and died on a cross  
for all human beings and for all creation.  
**This we believe.**

The risen Jesus  
is the Christ at the center of creation,  
reconciling all things to God,  
renewing all creation, and filling the cosmos.  
**This we believe.**

The Spirit renews life in creation,  
groans in empathy with a suffering creation,  
and waits with us for the rebirth of all creation.

**This we believe.**

**We believe that with Christ we will rise  
and with Christ we will celebrate a new creation.**

*21. A Sermon. This may be followed by a time of congregational reflection involving questions and discussion and mutual encouragement. The sermon may be followed by a hymn that reflects the message of the sermon.*

### **THE PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

*22. The Prayers. One or more members of the congregation may lead the people in prayer. The prayers conclude with the following prayer or another suitable prayer.*

**Jesus Christ, teach us to be at one with Earth.**

**Make our spirits sensitive to the cries of creation,  
cries for justice from the hills and the trees.**

**Jesus Christ, make our faith sensitive to the groans of the Spirit from the deserts,  
the plains, and the winds.**

**Jesus Christ, make our souls sensitive to the call of our kin, species in pain calling  
from the land, the sea, and the air.**

**Christ, teach us to care. Amen.**

*23. A hymn or song may be sung.*

### **THE GREETING OF PEACE**

Christ has reconciled us to God in one body by the cross.

**We meet in Christ's name and share God's peace.**

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

**And also with you.**

*24. The Greeting of Peace may be shared by the people, after which the gifts of the people are brought to the Lord's Table. They may be presented in silence, or a suitable prayer, such as the one that follows, may be used.*

God, our Creator, through your love you have given us these gifts to share. Accept our offerings as an expression of our deep thanks and as a sign of our concern for those in need, including our fellow creatures on planet Earth.

**With all creation, we bless our Creator.**

### **THE GREAT THANKSGIVING**

*25 A Prayer of Thanksgiving. The presiding minister takes the bread and wine for the communion, places them on the Lord's Table, and says the following or another Prayer of Thanksgiving.*

The Creator be with you and all creation.  
**And also with you.**

Open your hearts.  
**We open them to our Creator.**

Let us give thanks to the Maker of heaven and earth.  
**It is right to join creation in thanking God.**

It is right to give you thanks, loving Creator. Your word is the impulse for all things to be, for space, stars and stardust to appear, for Earth to emerge from the deep, for life to be born of Earth, and for humans to be born of Earth and the Spirit.

Your Spirit is the life impulse in all things, restoring the broken and healing the wounded, groaning in anticipation of a new creation, stirring with new life born of water and the Spirit.

You chose to be born a human being, to become a part of Earth, to suffer, die and rise from death to redeem humankind, to renew creation, and to reconcile all born of Earth and the Spirit.

Your presence is the living impulse in all things, the Christ deep among us, filling Earth—land, sea, and air; filling every element and place; filling the grain and the grape we share with you this day.

Therefore with angels and archangels, saints and sinners, ancient voices in the forest, high voices from the sky, deep voices from the sea, and the whole company of creation, we proclaim your presence among us.

**Holy, holy, holy, God of all life,  
earth and sea and sky are full of your presence  
and glorify your name. Amen.**

26. ***The Consecration.** The presiding minister says a prayer of consecration, words of institution, or other suitable prayer.*
27. ***The Lord's Prayer,** if not already used, may be said here or after the communion.*

#### **THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD AND THE COMMUNION**

28. ***The Invitation.** The presiding minister breaks the bread. The following invitation may be said.*

Come, for all things are now ready.  
Come to the table with all your kin and share with all in need:  
the gift of healing for those in pain,  
the gift of forgiveness for those in sin,  
the gift of assurance for those in doubt,  
and the gift of hope for those in tears.  
**May we who share these gifts  
also share Christ with one another**

**and with all our kin.**

29. *During the communion, psalms, hymns, or anthems may be sung including -*

**Lamb of God, who takes away all sin against God,  
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God, who takes away all sin against Earth,  
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God, who takes away all sin from the world,  
receive our prayer.**

30. ***The Distribution.** The people receive the Holy Communion. As the people return to their places they may light a candle in memory of departed loved ones or one of their kin in the forests who has become extinct.*

### **THE SENDING OUT OF GOD'S PEOPLE**

31. *The presiding minister says*

Let us give thanks for this meal.

*The people say the following prayer or another suitable prayer.*

**We thank you, Christ, for the meal we have celebrated with you, and we pray that through your body and blood we may be healed and become agents of healing for Earth. Amen.**

32. ***The Commission.** The members of the Earth care or Earth ministry team may announce practical plans for Earth care sponsored by the congregation. The congregation may be commissioned for ministry to the forests.*

Christ calls you to be his disciples,  
to serve him with love and compassion,  
to serve Earth by caring for creation,  
honoring the forests that God has planted  
to provide breath for all things living.

**We will follow our Lord, the crucified Christ,  
listening for cries of injustice from Earth,  
groaning with a creation burdened by our sins.**

**We will follow our Lord, the risen Christ,  
to become partners with Christ in healing our planet,  
renewing woods, forests, and all things.**

**We will care for creation,  
nurturing the forests, loving our kin,  
and celebrating life.**



33. *A hymn of praise may be sung here or after the dismissal. The forest joins us in thanking God, as the psalmist says: "All the trees of the forest sing for joy" Psalm 96:12.*

34. ***The Blessing.** The presiding minister says this or other appropriate blessing.*

Now may the penetrating power of Christ's body and blood reach deep into your heart, your mind, and your body to heal your wounds and through you to bring healing to Earth, in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

*or*

May the Spirit of God, who is above all and in all and through all,  
fill you with the knowledge of God's presence in Earth,  
the pulsing of Christ through Earth,  
and the dream of the Spirit  
that all things will be reconciled and renewed,  
through Christ, our Wounded Healer. **Amen.**

35. *The president or other minister may say*  
Go in peace, serving Christ and loving creation!  
**We go in peace, serving Christ and tending the Earth.**