

# *Wilderness Sunday*

*(United States Version 1)*

*The Third Sunday  
in  
A Season of Creation*

*This Sunday we worship  
with creation in the wilderness.*

*We worship this Sunday in the wilderness, with the creations and the creatures of the wild. Ideally this worship would take place in a desert area or on rugged terrain. The wilderness can also be experienced in a church building by using bold symbols of the wilds—rugged rocks, tough grasses, and desert life—located at key points throughout the church, including the sanctuary. At the center of the sanctuary a large boulder or rock rises with small rocks around it. This rock can also symbolize Christ as our rock.*

## *Invocation*

Leader: In the name of the Creator/Father, 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.

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

L Christ, we come into your presence  
to worship in this sanctuary called Earth.

**P**    **A planet pulsating with your presence,  
a presence quivering in the forests,  
a presence vibrating in the land,  
a presence pulsating in the wilderness,  
a presence shimmering in the rivers.**

**L**    God, reveal yourself to us in this place,  
and show us your face in all creation.

**P.**    **Holy! Holy! Holy!**  
**The whole earth is filled with Your glory.**

### ***Invocation/Call to Worship***

*(Leaders may call creation to worship from different points in the place of worship.)*

**L**    We invite the wilderness to worship with us:

**P**    **thickets and rugged terrain,  
deep gorges and mountain ranges.**

**L**    We invite the hot sands to celebrate life:

**P**    **to lift their voices to our God  
at the sound of rain on the dust.**

**L**    We invite the flora to sing in the sun:

**P**    **cactus and tumbleweed,  
brush and bristle.**

**L**    We join with the fauna of the wilderness in praising God:

**P**    **lizards and gila monsters,  
rattlesnakes and hovering hawks.**

**L**    We invite the spirits of the wilderness to join us in praise:

**P**    **songs of ancient custodians deep in the rock,  
spirits of life deep in the sand and the hills.**

**L** We celebrate the song of the wilderness!

**P** **Sing, wilds, sing!**

### ***Procession and Song***

*(The children enter the church with symbols of the wilderness, rocks, and tough grasses, along with banners of lizards, snakes, and wild dogs. Images of the wilderness may also be carried. These are paraded around the sanctuary and placed near the large rock at the center of the sanctuary.)*

### ***Refrain/Reflection***

*(After each verse of the refrain we pause to reflect silently on God's close presence in creation, especially in the wilderness. These interludes may include soft music, silence, or sounds of the wild.)*

Be still and feel the presence of God,  
the presence pulsing, pulsing through Earth,  
be still and feel the pulse of God.

*(Interlude)*

Be still and hear the Spirit of God,  
the Spirit breathing, breathing through Earth,  
be still and hear the breath of God.

*(Interlude)*

Be still, behold the glory of God,  
the glory filling, filling this Earth.  
be still, behold the face of God.

Melody: 'Be Still and Know That I Am God  
Words: Norman C Habel

### ***Confession***

*(A small piece of rosemary, a sprig of holly, a leaf, or another plant is given to each*

*worshipper as an aid to remembering.)*

L As we take this in our hands  
we remember and confess:

**P. We remember the wilderness God created,  
the wild places on Earth,  
the worlds of wonder and mystery,  
the spirit of the wilderness.  
We remember the wild worlds  
and the hiding places of our childhood,  
places where we played,  
where we felt the mystery  
of caves, fantasy, and strange creatures.**

L Jesus Christ, from the wilderness hear our cry:

**P We regret that we have become alienated from Earth,  
and have treated this garden  
as a beast to be tamed,  
as a domain to be dominated,  
and as a place to be ruled for our gain.**

L We remember and confess how we have violated and polluted  
the wild places of our garden planet.

*(A chainsaw is carried in, started up for a few seconds, and placed among the  
flora in the sanctuary.)*

**P. We are sorry.  
We have polluted deserts with radioactive waste.  
We have torn holes in the ozone layer.  
We have desecrated sacred sites in the mountains.  
We have destroyed the homes of wild creatures.  
We are sorry. We are sorry.**

### *Absolution*

L Christ hears our confession out of the wildness,  
forgives your sins against the wilderness,  
and calls you now to open your ears and your hearts

to sustain rather than to destroy the wilderness,  
the world God has filled with wonder.

**P Christ, teach us to love Earth as our home  
and all living creatures as our kin.  
Help us to return home to Earth.**

L. I speak for Christ:  
I invite you to come home to Earth,  
and I call you to care for this planet with love,  
to nurture the wilderness as I have nurtured you,  
and to join me in healing creation.

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

L As we come home to Earth,

**P Christ, have mercy.**

L As we seek to love our home,

**P Christ, have mercy.**

L As we seek to care for our kin,

**P Christ, have mercy.**

### *Gloria in Excelsis/Glory to God*

L Glory to God in the highest!

**P And on Earth peace with our kin in creation!**

### *Hymn of Praise*

### *Prayer for the Day*

- P. God, our Creator, whose glory fills our planet, help us to discern your vibrant presence among us and our kin in creation, especially in the mysteries of the forest. Help us to empathize with your creatures who are suffering and to serve you as agents for healing your creation. In the name of Christ, who reconciles and restores all things in creation. Amen.**

## *Readings for the Third Sunday in Creation*

*Old Testament*      Joel 1:8–10,17–20      “The mourning of the wild”

Some may assume that only humans suffer anguish when there is a disaster, whether from nature or war. Joel reminds us that at such times the ground mourns and the creatures of the wild cry out to God.

*Psalms*                  Psalm 18:1–19                  “The wild forces of creation”

The psalmist remembers how God employed the fierce forces of creation to intervene and rescue him.

*Epistle*                  Romans 8:18–27                  “The groaning of creation”

The Gospel message of this text makes it clear that human beings are not alone in waiting for liberation. The whole creation is longing for that day as a mother about to give birth.

*Gospel*                  Matthew 3:13 – 4:1 or Mark 1:9–13      “Jesus in the wild of the wilderness”

When Jesus was baptized, the Spirit that fills all of Earth now fills Christ in a special way. In response, Jesus retires to the wilderness to connect with creation. In Mark’s version, the wild animals and the angels join him.

## *Sermon*

### *Creation Creed*

- P. We believe that God creates all things,  
renews all things, and celebrates all things.**

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

**We believe every creature joins us in praising God.  
We see many suffer with Earth  
because of human crimes against creation.**

**We believe that God became incarnate  
as a part of Earth, Jesus Christ,  
that he lived and breathed and spoke among us,  
suffered and died on a cross,  
for all human beings and for all creation.**

**We believe that the risen Jesus Christ  
fills the whole creation,  
reconciling all things to God,  
renewing all things.**

**We believe the Spirit renews life in creation,  
groans in empathy with every suffering creature,  
and waits with us for the rebirth of the whole creation.**

**We believe that with Christ we will rise  
and with Christ we will celebrate a new creation,  
reconciled, restored, and renewed.**

## *Offertory*

### *Offering Prayer*

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

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

## *Prayers of the People*

### *Creation Prayer*

**Jesus Christ, teach us to empathize 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,  
 groans 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 land, sea, and air.  
 Jesus Christ, teach us to care. Amen.**

## *Passing of the Peace*

## *The Great Thanksgiving*

- L The Creator be with you and all creation.
- P And also with you.**
- L Open your hearts.
- P We open them to our Creator.**
- L Let us give thanks to the Maker of heaven and earth.
- P It is right to join every creature in praising God.**
- L 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.
- You chose human beings  
 to be your servants on Earth,  
 to care for our garden home;  
 you suffered when they desecrated  
 the Earth and its waters and lands.



Your Spirit was 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 the dead  
 to redeem humankind, restore creation,  
 and reconcile all born of Earth and the Spirit.

Your presence is the living power 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.

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

### *The Lord's Prayer*

#### *Words of Institution, followed by this invitation*

In response to the great mystery of this sacred meal we proclaim our faith:

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

**C** 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.

**P** **May we who share these gifts,  
 share Christ with one another  
 and with all our kin.**

### *Hymn/Lamb of God*

**P.** **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.**

### *Distribution (with Song)*

### *Dismissal Blessing*

L. Now may the 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.

### *Candles for our Kin*

*(As worshippers return from the Eucharist they are invited to place a candle in a sand-filled candle stand in memory of one of their kin in the wilderness areas who has become extinct in recent years.)*

## *Thanksgiving*

**P 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 healers of Earth. Amen.**

## *Commission*

**L Christ calls you to be his disciples,  
to serve him with love and compassion,  
to serve Earth by caring for creation,  
especially the wilderness that God has created  
to evoke in us awe and wonder and praise.**

**P We follow our Lord, the crucified Christ,  
we will listen for cries of injustice from Earth,  
we will groan with a creation burdened by our sin.**

**We will follow our Lord, the risen Christ,  
we will be partners with Christ in healing our planet,  
we will join the Wounded Healer as he restores all things.**

**We will care for creation.  
We will nurture the wilderness.  
We will love our kin.  
We will celebrate life.**

## *Blessing*

**L May the God who is above all and through all and in 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 will be reconciled, renewed, and restored,  
through Christ our wounded healer.**

## *Dismissal*

**L Go in peace, serving Christ.**

**P**     **We go in peace,  
serving Christ and loving the Earth.**

### *Recession Hymn*

*(As the children recess from the church with ferns and trees and plants, the wilderness joins us in thanking God.)*