

Worship in Celebration of Creation

In Recognition of Earth Day

McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago IL

Prelude: Sounds of Nature

Musical Call to Worship: For the Earth Forever Turning

Welcome & Call to Worship (Tatiana Valdez)

Come, let us dwell in God's shelter.
Let us dwell in God's work of art.
Come, because the Earth is the Lord's,
And God's Earth is our home.
We live in God's World; we are not alone.
We share this life with the heavens and the earth,
With the waters and the land,
With trees and grasses,
With fish, birds, and animals,
With minerals and creatures of every form,
And with all our brothers and sisters.
God is good and everything God makes is good.
God is love and everything God makes is love's fruit.
Let us worship God!

***Passing of the Peace**

Prayer for Illumination (Alan Jenkins)

You are the living God who sustains all life in continually unfolding ways. And now may we open our ears to your continually unfolding Word. You speak to us in new and vital and imperative ways. With all the power you have given us, let us be silent and open to listening . . . for nourishment, comfort, for challenge and new focus. Amen.

Genesis 2:4b-15

Job 12:7-10

Psalms 148

Hallelujah!
Praise God from the heavens; praise God from the heights!
Praise God, all you angels;
Praise God, all you multitudes in heaven!

*Praise God, sun and moon; praise God, all you shining stars!
Praise God, you highest heavens,
And you waters above the heavens!*

Let them praise the name of the Most High,
For God commanded and they were created.
God established them forever and ever;
God fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.

*Praise God from the earth,
You sea monsters and all deeps,
Fire and hail, snow and frost,
Stormy wind fulfilling God's command!*

Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars!
Wild animals and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds!
*Sovereigns of the earth and all peoples,
Royalty and all rulers of the earth!
Young men and women alike, old and young together!*

Let them praise the name of God,
For God's name alone is exalted;
God's glory is above earth and heaven.
*God has raised up a horn for God's people,
Praise for all the faithful,
For the people of Israel who are close to God.
Hallelujah!*

***Hymn: All Creatures of Our God and King #455**

Dialogue: Letter to All the People

Attributed to Chief Seattle (Read by Allen Brimer; Statistics: Alan Jenkins)

"The President in Washington sends word that he wishes to buy our land. But how can you buy or sell the sky, the land? The idea is strange to us. If we do not own the freshness of the air or the sparkle of the water, then how can you buy them? Every part of this Earth is sacred to my people; every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every meadow, every humming insect. All are holy in the memory and experience of my people. We know the sap that courses through the trees as we know the blood that courses through our veins. We are a part of the Earth, and it is part of us. The perfumed flowers are our sisters. The bear, the deer, the great eagle: these are our brothers. The rocky crests, the juices in the meadow, the body heat of the pony, and the man all belong to the same family."

Two and a quarter centuries have passed and our orientation toward God's sacred land has only become more sinful. Taking into account all of the productive land it takes to support our consumptive habits, we exploit an average of 12 hectares per person... while at the same time, those living in abject poverty in Bangladesh survive off of six tenths of a hectare.

"The shining water that moves from the streams and rivers is not just water but the blood of our ancestors. If we sell you our land, you must remember that it is sacred. Each ghostly reflection in the lakes tells of memories in the life of my people. The water's murmur is the voice of my

father's father. The rivers are our brothers. They quench our thirst. They carry our canoes and feed our children. So you must give to the rivers the kindness you would give to any brother." *Only seven one hundredths of one percent of our nation's rivers have we protected under the 1973 Wild and Scenic River Act. But our underground aquifers, upon which our modern economy is founded, is a more frightening story. Sixty percent of these and all aquifers the world over are now contaminated. Note that it takes an estimated one thousand four hundred years for an aquifer to fully replenish itself.*

"If we sell you our land remember that the air is precious to us, that the air shares its spirit with all of the life it supports. The wind that gave our grandfather his first breath also receives his last sigh. The wind also gives our children the spirit of life. So if we sell you our land, you must keep it apart and sacred as a place where men can go and taste the wind that is sweetened by the meadow flowers."

Despite gains in air pollution laws, today urban youth in Los Angeles have only 70% of their average lung capacity. Chicago's population travels over 50 billion vehicle miles each year - our main cause of air pollution. The Austin community on Chicago's West Side alone had more asthma deaths in 1995 (9) than four of the five collar counties (Dupage, Kane, McHenry and Will).

"Will you teach your children what we have taught our children: that the Earth is our mother? What befalls the Earth, befalls all the sons of the Earth. This we know: the Earth does not belong to man; man belongs to the Earth. All things are connected like the blood that unites us all. Man did not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand of it. Whatever he does to the Earth, he does to himself.

"One thing we know: our God is also your God. The Earth is precious to him, and to harm the Earth is to heap contempt on its creator."

Not only do we continue to heap contempt upon our Mother of all life, despite all of our religiosity and hope for the coming reign of God, but we also heap millions of pounds of Carbon Dioxide and other global warming gases into the air. Temperatures and ocean levels have already risen, while our fellow aquatic life forms experience rapid extinction. At this rate, more than 80 million South and South East Asians will be forced from their land as the sea level rises. Yet we continue to bank developing larger parking lots, not on improving mass rapid transit.

"Your destiny is a mystery to us. What will happen when the buffalo are all slaughtered? The wild horses tamed? What will happen when the secret corners of the forest are heavy with the scent of men and the view of the ripe hills is blotted by talking wires? Where will the thicket be? Gone. Where will the eagle be? Gone. And what is it to say good-bye to the swift pony and the hunt? The end of living and the beginning of survival!

"When the last red man has vanished and his memory is but the shadow of a cloud moving across the prairie, will these shores and forests still be here? Will there be any of the spirit of my people left?"

We never knew the Spirit was connected to other life forms. We as spiritual people stand aside as the Arctic national Wildlife Refuge goes up for sale. Our vice-president announced yesterday our government's intention to increase exploration and consumption of oil, gas and coal. Conservation and alternative energy sources, already technologically available, are not on their radar screen, . . . nor are they on ours.

"We love this Earth as a newborn loves its mother's heartbeat. So if we sell you our land, love it as we have loved it. Care for it as we have cared for it. Hold in your memory the land as it is when you receive it. Preserve the land for all children and love it as God loves us all. As we are part of the land, you too are a part of the land. As the Earth is precious to us, so is it precious to you.

"One thing we know: there is only one God. No man, be he red man or white man, can be apart. We are brothers after all."

Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Pardon (Allen Brimer)

From Hosea 4:1-3 There is no loyalty or faithfulness, and no knowledge of God in the land. Swearing, stealing, lying, murder and adultery break out; bloodshed follows bloodshed. The land mourns, and all who live in it languish; together with the wild animals and the birds of the air, even the fish of the sea are perishing.

Prayer: Merciful God, in your gracious presence we confess our sin and the sin of this world. Although Christ is risen from the grave and has shattered the power of death, we are still held captive by fear and doubt. We hold on to suspicions and jealousies that set neighbor against neighbor and nation against nation. We have neglected the poor and the hungry. In our pursuit of the "good life" we have gone along with injustice; we have ignored the cries of the oppressed. We pursue profits and pleasures that harm the land and pollute the waters. We have squandered the Earth's gifts on technologies of destruction. Have mercy on us, O God. Help us to trust your power to change our lives and make us new, that we and all your creatures may know the joy of life abundant, given through Jesus Christ, the risen Lord.

***Hymn: Song at the Center**

Matthew 25:31-46

[Sermon: Finding Our Place \(Carolyn Bush\)](#)

Restoration of Creation Story by. Rev. Lawrence Shu Neba

Twenty years ago, Cameroon, along the coast of W. Africa, had a rich tropical evergreen forest that provided shelter for animals and birds of all kinds and enriched the fertility of the Cameroonian soils. In the last fifteen years, this forest is almost extinct due to the indiscriminate deforestation by foreign timber companies in agreement with the Cameroon government. The result of this is that dry winds from the Sahara Desert find their way easily to the south, causing drought, the effect of which animal and human-life has been at stake. Cameroon that used to be a great exporter of food crops in the whole of Central Africa is now experiencing food insufficiency for its local population. Ten years ago, the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, in an effort to prevent drought, started an annual event of tree planting every last Sunday of May to the first Sunday in June. Every Presbyterian is committed to do so every year. With this exercise at least 400,000 trees are planted every year in a way to "rebirth" the creation destroyed by irresponsible human beings.

Prayers of the People

Eucharist (Rev. Linda Wygant)

Leader: The Lord be with you.

Response: And also with you.

Leader: Lift up your hearts.

Response: We lift them to the Lord.

Leader: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

Response: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Leader: Holy God, creator of heaven and earth, with joy we praise you...

...who forever sing to the glory of your name:

Response: Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,

Heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

Leader: We give you thanks, merciful and compassionate God, ...

...that our lives may proclaim the one crucified and risen.

Great is the mystery of faith:

Response: Christ has died,

Christ is risen,

Christ will come again.

Leader: Gracious God, pour out your Holy Spirit upon us...

...All glory and honor are yours, almighty God, now and forever.

Response: Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Breaking of the Bread

Communion of the People

Prayer after Communion

***Hymn: Our Calling is Clear**

***Charge & Benediction**

***Choral Response**

Postlude

The worship space was set up in a circular pattern around a large round table, with aisles running down each of the four compass directions. To begin with, the table was set with a solid cloth cover with a bowl of water at the center of four rolled up cloth streamers. As each river was described during the reading of the Genesis creation story, one of the streamers was unrolled. After all four rivers were unfurled, four persons placed items of creation (feathers, stones, plants, coral, etc.) on the table. At four points during the dialogue between the letter of Chief Seattle and current statistics, a strip of netting was placed over these objects in one of the four compass directions. After the Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Pardon, the piece of netting corresponding to the direction of each verse of "Song at the Center" was removed from the table. Linda Wygant conceived this symbolic arrangement. The names of persons who put together the various pieces of this service are listed next to the parts they created.