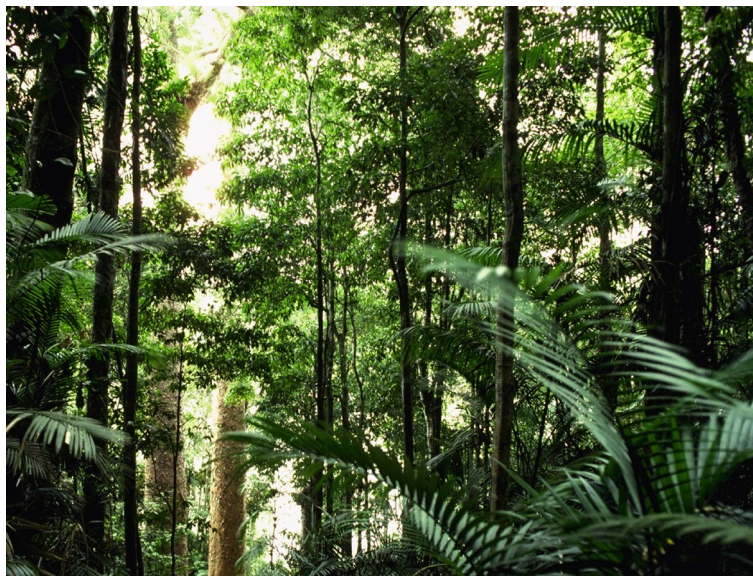


*First Sunday in the Season of Creation*  
(Australian Version 1: Narrative Liturgy)

## **Forest Sunday**

*We worship with creation in a forest*



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

# *A Narrative Liturgy*

At key points in the liturgy the biblical basis for the text of the liturgy is explained to enrich the worship experience of all.

## *FOREST SUNDAY*

*Welcome!*

*This Sunday we worship in the forest. We celebrate among the living trees, ferns and forest life in our sanctuary. We also celebrate the tree of life at the centre of our sanctuary, a tree that symbolises Christ!*

### *Gathering/Invocation*

The opening *Invocation* affirms that God, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is the source of life in all creation. The response of the people is based on the famous cry in Isaiah 6, also called the *Sanctus*. According to the cherubim (in Isaiah 6:3), the whole Earth is 'filled' with God's glory! And the glory of God, in many places in the Old Testament, is the visible presence of God. That glory settled on Mount Sinai and then 'filled' the tabernacle. Isaiah says this presence of God 'fills' the whole Earth. If Earth is 'filled' with God's presence, as the tabernacle of old was, then Earth is a sanctuary, a sacred place for us to worship! So, in the season of Creation we worship in the midst of creation.

Leader        In the name of the Creator, the fountain of life,  
                  the name of Christ, the pulse of life,  
                  and 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 to into your presence today  
                  to worship in this sanctuary called Earth,

P              **A planet filled with your presence,**  
                  **quivering in the forests,**  
                  **vibrating in the land,**  
                  **pulsating in the wilderness,**  
                  **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!**  
**Earth is filled with God's presence.**

### *Procession and Song*

*We join in song with the children as they enter the church holding ferns and trees and banners celebrating forest life. We celebrate with them as they hold their symbols aloft and place them in the forest sanctuary.*

### *Call to Worship*

In the *Call to Worship* we follow the lead of the psalm writers (Psalms 96 and 148), who recognise that living creatures rejoice in their Creator and who call upon all parts of creation to praise God. So in this season of Creation we not only thank God for creation but also invite parts of creation to join us in praising and thanking God. Like the psalm writers, we worship with the parts of creation around us that we know and love.

*We celebrate with creation as worship leaders, from different points in the church, call creatures of the forest to worship with us.*

L1 We invite the forests to worship with us:

**P Mountain ash and eucalypts,  
quivering ferns and glistening moss!**

L2 We quiver with the trees as they shake before God:  
When tempests and tornadoes hit,  
And raging winds invade the forest.

L1 We invite tall trees to celebrate life:

**P Huon pines and ironbark,  
tall timber where lizards and lichen find their home!**

L2 We invite the forest night-life to sing:

**P Green tree frogs and timid moths,  
ancient owls and swirling bats!**

L1 We join with the fauna of the forest in praising God:

**P Lyrebirds and black cockatoos,  
platypuses, pythons and butterflies!**

L2 We celebrate the song of the forest!

**P Sing, forest, sing!**

L1 We invite you to name forest creatures  
to join us in worship.

*We name, silently or aloud, other creatures or parts of the forest and invite them to join us in worship.*

L2 We celebrate the song of the forest!

**P Sing, forest, sing!**

### *Remembering*

In anticipation of *The Confession* of our sins we remember that we are all, like Adam and other living creatures, created from Earth (Genesis 2). That makes all creatures our kin. But we have become alienated from Earth. This rite is designed to help stir within us the primal connection we have with Earth. Earth is also the home God has given us to love.

*We use rosemary, eucalyptus leaves or some other fragrant symbol to assist us to stir our memories.*

L Take the fragrant symbol you received at the door, rub it between your fingers and share with the person next to you rich childhood memories of the forest, the bush or a special tree.

L We remember the first garden,  
when God planted a forest of trees.

**P. We remember the gardens  
and the forests of our childhood,  
the places where we played in the past,  
when we felt close to Earth and to trees.**

L We remember and rejoice.

**P Thank you, God, for trees,  
for forests filled with mysteries!**

## *Confession*

In the past we have tended to confess only our personal sins against God and one another. In the season of Creation we also acknowledge the sins we have committed against creation, both individually and collectively as human beings. Our sins have hurt both creation and our kin in creation. The very first sin our human parents committed affected the ground (Genesis 3:17). Our greed and selfishness still bring hurt and harm to many parts of creation.

L As I hold this symbol aloft,  
we remember and confess  
that we have become alienated from Earth  
and that we have violated the forests in our garden planet.

*A symbol of our destruction of forests is held high above the flora in the sanctuary. This symbol may be a chainsaw or some other symbol meaningful to the community.*

**P We are sorry.  
We have been thoughtless and greedy.  
We have ignored the destruction of our forests,  
the death of old-growth giants  
and species breathing their last.**

L We are sorry.

**P We are sorry. We are sorry.**

## *Absolution*

*The Absolution* is here the word from Jesus Christ, freeing us from our sins against specific parts of creation. Christ also frees us to come home and bond with Earth again. As we come home, we ask Christ to have mercy on us, and we pray for peace with all creation.

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

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

L I speak for Christ:  
I free you to come home to Earth  
by rejoicing in the forest.

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

### *Christ Have Mercy*

- L As we come home to Earth,  
P **Lord, have mercy.**
- L As we seek to love our home,  
P **Christ, have mercy.**
- L As we seek to care for our planet,  
P **Lord, have mercy.**

### *Glory to God*

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

### *Prayer for the Day*

In our prayers we not only ask God to give us the sensitivity of the psalm writers to discern God's presence in creation and to rejoice with creation but we also ask God to help us be like the prophets who heard the cries of creation. Joel heard the land mourning, the cattle groaning and the wild animals crying out in pain (Joel 1:10–19).

- P. **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 empathise with your forest creatures who are suffering. Lift our spirits to rejoice with the forest and all the creatures of the forest. In the name of Christ, who reconciles and renews all things in creation. Amen.**

### *Readings for the First Sunday in Creation*

The *Readings* for a given Sunday in the season of Creation revolve around the theme for the day and connect with the theme of the series in a given year. The Old Testament texts focus especially on a distinctive aspect of God creating through Word, Spirit or Wisdom or on a dimension of creation itself. The New Testament texts highlight the gospel and reveal the connection between Christ and creation.

**Old Testament:** Genesis 2:4b–22 'Born of Earth and the Spirit'

God creates humans from Earth and the Spirit and plants a forest garden to be a home for them with the rest of their kin in creation.

***Psalm:*** Psalm 139:13–16 ‘Born from the womb of Earth’

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

***Epistle:*** Acts 17:22–28 ‘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.

***Gospel:*** John 3:1–16 ‘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.

***Children’s Address:*** ‘*A Secret in the Forest*’  
*told by a storyteller or by means of a puppet*

***Children’s Prayer:*** Thank you, God, for making forests that send out oxygen into the air so that we can breathe. Amen.

### ***Children’s Song***

### ***Affirmation of Faith***

The *Affirmation of Faith* is like an ancient creed. It draws together in a succinct way the essentials of faith for a creation liturgy. The following outline highlights one or two key texts that support these essentials.

Line 1 is based on Genesis 1, John 1 and other texts where God creates.

Line 2 is based on Psalm 104:30,31, where God renews creation through the Spirit and is invited by the psalm writer to rejoice in creation.

Lines 3–5 are based on Isaiah 6:3 and Genesis 2, discussed above (Old Testament Reading).

Lines 6–8 are based on John 1:14. To become flesh is to become a piece of creation, a being made from air, water, soil and those parts of Earth God used to make Adam. Jesus Christ became part of Earth.

Lines 9–11 summarise the Good News that Jesus lived and died for all.

Lines 12–15 affirm that Jesus not only rose from the dead but also became the cosmic Christ who reconciles all things to God and fills the cosmos, as Paul tells is in Ephesians 1:3–10,23 and Colossians 1:15–20.

Lines 16–20 recognise the role of the Holy Spirit in renewing creation (Psalm 104:30) and in groaning with a suffering creation while we wait

for the rebirth and liberation of creation, as Paul says in Romans 8:18–27.

Lines 21 and 22 highlight that we who die and rise with Christ (1 Corinthians 15) will celebrate a new creation with Christ (Revelation 21:1–4; 22:1–5).

**L** Let us affirm our faith together.

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

**Men** We believe Earth is a sanctuary,  
a sacred planet filled with God's presence,  
a home for us to share with our kin.

**Women** We believe that God became flesh and blood,  
became a piece of Earth,  
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.

**Men** We believe that the risen Jesus  
is the Christ at the core of creation,  
reconciling all things to God,  
renewing all creation and filling the cosmos.

**Together** We believe the Holy renews life in creation,  
groans in empathy with a suffering creation  
and waits with us for the rebirth of creation.  
We believe that with Christ we will rise  
and with Christ we will celebrate a new creation.

### *Passing the Peace*

**L** Let us share the peace of the Lord with one another.

**P** The peace of the Lord be with you.

### *Song*

### *Sermon or Reflection*



## *The Offering*

**L** 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 signs of our concern for those in need, including our fellow creatures on planet Earth.

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

## *Prayers of the People*

*We thank God for a wondrous creation. We celebrate with all our kin. We pray for all those in need. We name them now. We close with the following prayer.*

### *Creation Prayer*

**Jesus Christ, teach us to empathise 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 salt plains, the winds.**

**Jesus Christ, make our souls sensitive to the songs of our kin,  
songs of celebration from the sea, the land and the air.**

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

### *Lord's Prayer*

## *The Great Thanksgiving*

In *The Great Thanksgiving* prayer we join with all living things and with all creation in saying thanks before we eat at the Lord's table. Those things for which we say thanks include the Word and the Spirit, which continue to create the fullness of life around us and in us. We especially give thanks for the presence of the cosmic Christ in this planet, at our sacred meal and in the bread and wine we consume.

**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 our Creator.

P **It is right to join creation in thanking 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.

Your Spirit is the life impulse in all things,  
renewing the barren and healing the wounded,  
groaning in anticipation of a new creation,  
stirring a 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, renew creation,  
and affirm 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,  
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  
are full of your presence  
and glorify your name. Amen.**

## *Words of Institution*

### *Invitation*

Having called upon all creation to join us in thanking God for all things, including this meal, we are conscious of our kin in creation as we eat together. We are also aware that Christ, the Lamb of God, who is with us in this meal, is the one who has taken away the sin of the world—both the sin against God and the sin against Earth. One way of highlighting a consciousness of our kin is to light a candle in memory of an extinct species as we leave the meal.

**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 all our kin.**

### *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*

### *Distribution Songs*

### *Candles for our Kin*

*As we return from the Lord's table we light a candle and place it in the sand-filled candle-stand in memory of departed loved ones or one of our kin in the forests who has become extinct.*

## *Dismissal Blessing*

One of the great traditions of the Christian church is that we receive not only forgiveness through this sacred meal (Matthew 26:28) but also healing. The Christ who forgives also heals. In the season of Creation we pray that the healing blessing imparted to us through this meal may empower us to bring healing to the groaning and wounded Earth where we live.

L 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.

## *Thanksgiving*

L Let us give thanks for this meal.

**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 agents of healing for Earth. Amen.**

## *Sending Out*

We close our worship with a mission to go forth as disciples of Christ to serve him by caring for creation. That commission was first given to Adam in the garden. His mission was to 'serve and preserve' the Earth from which he was made (Genesis 2:15). Later Jesus calls his disciples to go into the whole world and proclaim the good news to all creation (Mark 16:15). Humans have a mission to preserve God's good creation. It is appropriate that this closing commission, therefore, is followed by an Earth ministry, where worshippers find ways of preserving our planet.

L Christ calls you to be his disciples,  
to serve him with love and compassion  
and to serve Earth by caring for creation.  
Hold again the fragrant symbol in your hands  
as you go forth to serve.

**P We will remember the forest!  
We will groan with creation!  
We will sing with the trees!**

L Will you care for creation?

**P We will care for creation!  
We will nurture the forests!  
We will celebrate life!**

## *Blessing*

L 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  
and the impulse of Christ within you.

Go in peace,  
serving Christ and loving Earth!

**P We go in peace,  
serving Christ  
and tending Earth!**

## *Recession and Song*

*We join with the children in a song of joy as they process from the church with their plants and banners. We join with the psalm writer who says, 'All the trees of the forest sing for joy' Psalm 96:12.*