

Forest Sunday

(United States Version 1)

The First Sunday in A Season of Creation

This Sunday we worship with creation in a forest.

Ideally this would take place out of doors in an actual forest or thicket of trees. A forest can be experienced 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, a tree may be placed to represent the tree of life.

Invocation

Leader 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.

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

L We invite tall trees to celebrate life:
**P to lift green leaves in the breeze
and sing their oxygen into the air.**

L We call to the forest to sing in the night:
**P green tree frogs and timid moths,
butterflies and swirling bats!**

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

L We celebrate the song of the forest!
P Sing, forest, sing!

Procession and Song

(The children process into the church with ferns and trees and living plants; the forest joins us in celebration. The flora are held aloft and placed around the tree of life 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 forest. These interludes may include soft music, silence, or sounds of the forest.)

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 first garden,
where God planted a forest of trees.
We remember with awe and wonder
the gift of this planet blessed with trees.
We remember the gardens
and the forests of our childhood,
the places where we played in the past
when we felt close to Earth, to trees
and to our kin born of Earth.**

L Christ, crucified on a tree, 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 forests in 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 ignored the distant sounds in the forest,
the sound of chainsaws clearing for greed and gain,
the sound of those old forest giants falling forever,
the sound of rare species breathing their last.
We are sorry. We are sorry.**

Absolution

- L Christ hears your confession from the cross,
forgives your sins against the forest,
and calls you now to open your ears and your hearts
to serve and to protect rather than to destroy our forests,
the trees God has planted for life and 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 forest 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 First Sunday in 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 with the rest of their kin in creation.

Psalm Psalm 139:13–16 “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.

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.

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, to restore creation,
and to 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 forests who have 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 agents of healing for 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 forests that God has planted
to provide breath for all living things.

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 forests.
We will love our kin.
We will celebrate life.

Blessing

L May the God who is above 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 forest joins us in thanking God.)