



Caring for Creation

A Service for Children's Sunday, November 19, 2006

by David Kai

In keeping with the United Church mission theme for 2006-2007, *Living in Right Relationship with Creation*, this service invites us and will inspire us to care for creation as a Christian community. Feel free to adapt or to use only portions of these service materials. If you are using this service for Children's Sunday, use Option E.

Preparation

- * Invite all ages to be readers. Reader parts (e.g. R1, R2) may be subdivided to accommodate more readers. Strive to achieve an intergenerational mix of worship leaders. Encourage all ages to participate in the service in other ways too.
- * Gather props for the Litany of Confession (see page 48).
- * Invite people to bring "rain-makers" to use during "Celebrating the Rain." You might also make the construction of "rain-makers" an activity prior to the service. Or creating rain-makers might be a work station for children before and during the first part of the service.
- * You may wish to get a head start on forming a "Creation Care Club" (see Option B).
- * Gather water symbols for Option C.
- * For Option D insert slips of paper in the bulletins and have pencils and pens available for the "Pledge for Creation." The slips of paper might carry the heading "My pledge for creation" and be illustrated by children prior to the service.

Call to Worship

- One:** This is the day that our God has made.
Many: We will rejoice and be glad in it!
One: This is the world that our God has made.
Many: We will rejoice and take care of it!
One: We are the children that our God has made!
All: Let us worship God together!

Hymn

"This is the day" (*Voices United* 412)

Creation Litany

(from *Genesis 1 and 2*, focusing on aspects of creation related to water)

R1: In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth,

All: ...and the Spirit of God was moving over the water.

R2: God commanded, "Let the water below the sky come together so that the land will appear,"



R1: ...and God named the land "Earth," and named the water "Sea,"

All: ...and God was pleased.

R2: Then God commanded, "Let the water be filled with many kinds of living beings...."

R1: So God created all kinds of creatures that live in the water,

All: ...and God was pleased.

R2: Then God planted a garden in Eden. A stream flowed in Eden and watered the garden; beyond Eden it divided into four rivers.

R1: Then God placed the human in the Garden of Eden to care for it and guard it.

All: And it was all very good!

R2: Let us join in a hymn which celebrates creation and the first garden.

Hymn

"Morning has broken" (VU 409)

A Litany of Confession

(Actions and props are optional. Props might include: asphalt sealer bucket, clear garbage bag of recyclable materials, large model car, water hose.)

R1: God, our Creator, we are called to "live with respect in creation," but we confess that we have not always done well in caring for your world. You have given us the beautiful garden of Earth to care for,

R2: ...and we keep paving it over to make more parking lots.



All: Forgive us, Creator God.

(A participant brings in an empty or simulated container of asphalt topping, places it on the chancel, and stands behind it.)

R1: We have figured out ways to recycle and conserve the world's resources,

R2: But we complain that it is too hard and too messy to sort out items for recycling and composting.

All: Forgive us, Creator God.

(A participant brings a clear garbage bag full of recyclable materials, places it on the chancel, and stands behind it.)

R1: We use automobiles when we could easily cycle, run, or walk,

R2: ...and add to global warming and the pollution of our air.

All: Forgive us, Creator God.

(A participant brings up a large scale model car, places it on the chancel, and stands behind it.)

R1: We waste water by letting taps run and drip, and by over-watering our lawns,

R2: ...and pollute our water with chemical spills and runoff.

All: Forgive us, Creator God.

(A participant brings in a coiled water hose, places it on the chancel, and stands behind it.)

R1: We have bright, beautiful, and creative children in our midst.

R2: And we ask them to be quiet and do things the way they've always been done.

(A child comes forward and stands in the midst of the other items.)

All: Holy God, forgive us for the ways that we have spoiled your creation. Help us to make a fresh start for the good of your world and for the sake of future generations that will live in it. Amen.

(The participants stay in place until the Words of Assurance are read.)

Optional Solo

"Big Yellow Taxi" by Joni Mitchell *(Use the first verse, the second verse referring to trees, and the verse referring to DDT.)*

Other songs that might be used here or elsewhere in the service include:

“Take, take off your shoes” by Jim Manley

“Pollution” by Tom Lehrer (for a humorous/satirical point of view)

“Spirit of God in the clear running water” by Miriam Therese

“Joy is like the rain” by the Medical Mission Sisters

“The earth and all who breathe” (VU 295)

Words of Assurance

(from Psalm 51:10, Hebrews 10:22, the lection for the day)

R1: Confessing our sins to God is a lot like cleaning out our homes and taking out the garbage.

R2: We know that God can take out what is polluted in our lives and give us a clean heart and fill us with a new and right spirit.

R1: The book of Hebrews tells us that we can “come near to God with a sincere heart and a sure faith, with hearts that have been purified from a guilty conscience and with bodies washed with clean water.”

R2: Through God’s love in Christ we are made clean and forgiven.

All: Thanks be to God.

(Participants leave the chancel, removing the garbage bag and other props.)

Listening for God’s Word

The following are appropriate scripture readings to use with this theme. Questions for reflection are included that could form the basis of a theme conversation. Select as many as are appropriate for your situation or substitute different readings.

Exodus 17: 1-7

Moses brings drinking water from a rock.

In what ways has God provided water for us? In what ways is this miraculous?

Isaiah 24:4-6

The earth dries up and withers.... The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants.

In what ways is our care of the earth a faith issue? What happens to our connection with God when we mistreat the earth?

John 4: 5-14

Jesus offers living water.

In what ways is living water/faith as essential to us as regular water?

For those using the lectionary for this Sunday, the passages are:

1 Samuel 1:4-20

Hannah, Eli, and the birth of Samuel.

or Daniel 12:1-3

Judgment in the end times.

1 Samuel 2:1-10

Hannah's prayer.

or Psalm 16

Confidence, security in God.

Hebrews 10:11-25

Cleansed from sin by Christ.

Mark 13:1-8

Signs of the end times.

Lections and “Caring for Creation”

The Daniel and Mark readings regarding end times and judgment might be linked to the danger that we are quickly approaching an environmental “end-time.” However, take care to present a message that contains hope and not one that promotes only fear.

The Hebrews passage regarding cleansing from sin might be used to address the question of whether we can cleanse the environmental sins that have been committed against the earth.

The passages from 1 Samuel in which Hannah prays for the birth of a child might be used to give thanks for children and the richness they add to life.



Responding to God's Word

Option A: Celebrating the Rain

This activity will simulate the sound of a rainstorm, one of the key ways in which God brings water to us and to the land. You might rehearse this with a smaller group beforehand. Ask the children to come forward and sit where they can see the leader. Children can bring forward their "rain-makers." The leader could be a child or youth, and should be visible to the whole congregation. The leader explains that they will be simulating the sounds of a rainstorm by making their own noises, and the group and congregation are to follow the leader's actions. The leader begins the following cycle of actions, which build in volume and then decrease:

- * rubbing palms together, gradually speeding up
- * snapping fingers, gradually growing louder
- * slapping thighs, gradually growing louder
- * stamping feet on floor
- * slapping thighs, gradually growing softer
- * snapping fingers, gradually growing softer
- * rubbing palms together, gradually slowing down to a stop

Those with rain-makers add their sounds according to the general volume of the other actions.

After the rain simulation, engage the congregation in questions such as: Why is the rain so important? Do they remember a time in their community when there was very little rain? What was the effect on the community? Have they heard about areas of the world that have suffered from drought and famine? How has your church or the church as a whole responded?

You might stress that our neglect of the environment is leading to changes in the world's climate, to drought in some areas, and to too much rain in others. Be sensitive to the fact that too much water can be as problematic as too little.

(Note: the song, "Joy is like the rain" by the Medical Mission Sisters would be a good fit here.)

Option B: Creation Care Club

Introduce the idea of forming a "Creation Care Club" (or make up another name). Members of the

club pledge to carry out actions that will help the environment. They could meet regularly to share news of actions taken, or a review of the club's actions could be integrated into the conversation with the children in worship or in Sunday school gathering times. Sample activities that focus on issues around water include:

- a) Prevent pesticide/herbicide use by controlling dandelions and other broad-leafed weeds by digging them out or using household vinegar sprayed on the leaves (boiled-down vinegar is more effective; search the Internet for more details). Organize teams to patrol the church grounds or to travel to different homes to control weeds.
- b) Invite members to be part of a "drip patrol" to identify leaking/dripping faucets and toilets in the church and at home and bring them to the attention of the owners.



- c) Plant trees which help to hold soil, prevent runoff, cleanse the environment, and moderate temperatures.
- d) Create convenient "doggie bags" for pet owners.
- e) Promote water conservation by encouraging shorter showers and less wastage while brushing teeth, washing hands, etc.

Other projects might include a creek clean up, litter collection on church property and neighbourhood, or responding to the "One-Tonne Challenge." If you have already formed a club, report on what activities have already been undertaken.



Option C: Water Symbols

(The symbols might include: large, clear water jug with water, basin with towel, baptismal font, or bowl from the font, clear drinking glass, shallow bowl with small toy boat, fishbowl with fish. Position the symbols across the chancel or on a low table that is low enough for a child to pour water at that level. Or participants might hold the symbols.)

(Participants bring the symbols to the chancel and stand behind them; two people stand behind the font. One person comes forward with the jug of water. The readers stand behind the symbols, or the readers might stand to the side at a lectern.)

R1: Water is important to us in so many different ways. We give thanks to God who is the maker of all things, the source of life, and the source of water.



R2: Water is needed for cleaning. Our parents often tell us to wash our hands before eating. Washing our hands with soap and water helps to kill germs and keep us healthy and happy.

(The person holding the water jug pours water into the basin and over the hands of the child standing behind the basin, who then dries their hands with the towel.)

R3: Water is needed for baptism. Baptism shows that we are a part of a community that is cleansed and forgiven by God.

(The person with the water jug pours water into the font. One person dips fingers into the font and puts a few drops of water on the other's forehead.)

R4: Water is needed for drinking. Our bodies are about 60 percent water, and we need to take in about two litres of water each day. We also need water to make up the many different drinks that we enjoy so much.



(Water is poured into the glass; person takes a sip from the glass.)

R5: Water is needed for fun and recreation. We swim, splash, dive, and play in the water.

(Water is poured into the bowl so that the boat floats; person moves the boat in the water.)



R6: Water, clean water is needed by all the living creatures that live in our oceans, lakes, and rivers.

(Additional water is poured into the fish bowl; if there is a real fish in the bowl, distilled or de-chlorinated water should be used. Person holds up the bowl to observe the fish.)



R1: We give thanks to God for the gift of water.

All: May we use that gift gratefully and wisely.

Option D: Pledge for Creation

Invite the congregation to use the slips of paper provided in the bulletins to write down or draw a picture of one way that they will act in order to help God's creation. Collect the slips during the offering, perhaps in separate baskets; the worship leader will select some of the Pledges of Action to be read during the Prayers of the People.

Option E: Celebrate Children

Use the texts from 1 Samuel, perhaps inviting a new mother to read, dramatically, Hannah's prayer of



thanksgiving. (1 Samuel 2:1-10) Tell the birth dates and stories of the oldest and youngest members of the congregation. (*Invite them to sit in the chancel if possible.*) Celebrate birth and new life by inviting the children to hand out cupcakes with a single birthday candle to each person. Sing “Happy Birthday” and give thanks that God remembers us by putting children in our midst.

Hymn

“Come, let us sing” (VU 222)
(see also the list below)

Offering

(Another solo is sung during the offering. See suggestions under “Optional Solo,” pages 48-49.)

Offertory Prayer

Holy God, Creator of all, we thank you for all the gifts that you have given us. With thankful hearts we offer our gifts for the care of your creation and the healing of your world. Use our gifts and bless all that they may touch. We ask in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Prayers of the People

(Include thanks for Pledges of Action received in the offering, naming some.)

The Lord’s Prayer

Hymn

“You shall go out with joy” (Isaiah 55) (VU p.884)
(see also the list below)

Commissioning and Benediction

Let us go from here as a people committed to care for all of God’s creation.

And may the blessing of God the Creator, of Christ the Creative Word, and of the Spirit, who brooded over the waters of creation, be with us now and always. Amen.

Other “Creation” Hymns

- “For the beauty of the earth” (VU 226)
- “God of the sparrow” (VU 229)
- “Joyful, joyful” (VU 232)
- “O Lord my God” (How great thou art) (VU 238)
- “Let all things now living” (VU 242)
- “Praise to God” (VU 243)
- “Long before the night” (VU 282)
- Also, VU 291 to 312

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One Pledge of Action might be to recycle all materials used in your church.