

Good Friday - Earth Day

April 22, 2011

This service honours both Good Friday and Earth Day, which fall on the same day in 2011. It was developed by the Rev. Bruce Sanguin.

The service is without a formal sermon, but each movement includes a brief reflection that the presider(s) may want to read. The Silent Reflection after each reflection should last through the symbolic action that follows and then for one more minute. The symbolic actions include Stripping of the Sanctuary and Draping of the Sanctuary. The worship team will appoint two or more people to execute these movements.

Hymn suggestions are included, but the worship team may want to select other hymns and songs that are also appropriate to the mood and flow of the service.

Materials

- large potted plants (symbolic of trees and forests)
- large pitcher of water and the congregation's baptismal font
- large globe (or photo of planet earth mounted on an easel) set visibly before worshippers
- large wooden cross
- 2 dark purple or black cloths to drape over globe and cross
- large live flower and large dead flower

Optional resources

- Lyrics to *The Beautiful Creatures*: www.metrolyrics.com/beautiful-creatures-lyrics-bruce-cockburn.html%20%5D
- Species at risk in Canada: www.sararegistry.gc.ca/species/schedules_e.cfm?id=1
- Oceanic Dead Zones: http://disc.sci.gsfc.nasa.gov/oceancolor/additional/science-focus/ocean-color/science_focus.shtml/dead_zones.shtml

Hymn suggestions

- *Voices United* 137, 143, 145, 153
- *More Voices* 78, 143, 162

Service

Those portions of the service printed in **bold** are spoken by the whole congregation. At the points marked *, those who are able are invited to stand.

THE PEOPLE GATHER

Words of Welcome

This service imagines the story of Jesus' crucifixion through the lens of ecological destruction. In our state of spiritual foolishness we enact violence against our one Earth community, human and other-than-human. Virtually every planetary biosystem is under stress, and many species are facing extinction. When we imagine the Earth as the body of Christ, we realize ecological degradation is a 21st-century crucifixion.

Call to Worship

One: Gather, friends of the Christ, to hear the story and offer one another support.

All: We turn now toward the cross, to witness and contemplate our capacity for foolishness and violence.

One: Let not your hearts be troubled; neither let them be afraid.

All: Even in the valley of the shadow of death, our God is with us.

* Good Friday Hymn

Opening Prayer (*unison*)

**O Holy One,
be with us in this dark hour,
as we face our collective shadow.**

**We do not do the things that make for peace,
but rather do the very things that lead to violence.
We are slow to shed our ignorance,
and quick to justify our foolishness.**

**Our planet joins our lament,
the souls of the extinct animals,
and the soon-to-be gone, forever,
cry out this day with the Christ:
"Why have you forsaken me?"**

**The poor, the left-behinds, the humble ones
living in ghettos from Rio de Janeiro to Calcutta to Africa
to the forgotten reservations of our own nation,
cry out this day, along with the Christ:
"Why have you forsaken me?"**

**May this story break our hearts,
our minds, and our spirits wide open.
Help us to die with the Christ
that we might also be raised with him,
and with all creation,
and discover our true nature,**

**one with God,
and one with Earth.
Amen.**

THE PASSION NARRATIVE

Reading 1

John 18:1–11 Betrayal and arrest

Deforestation

Trees, rainforests, and jungles are the lungs of our one Earth community. Slowly we are awakening to the central role they play in the regulation of our biosphere. While the rate of deforestation is decreasing across the planet, in Africa and South America it is still on the rise. To be in right relationship with our forests is to see them as more than a resource for our use—rather a vital and sacred link of our very life.

Silent Reflection

Stripping of the Sanctuary

(“Forest” of large plants is processed slowly out of the sanctuary.)

Reading 2

John 18:15–27 Denial of Christ

Our Oceans

All life began in our oceans. Oceans cover 71 percent of Earth’s surface. The phytoplankton of the oceans provide most of Earth’s oxygen. Massive oceanic dead zones caused by agricultural fertilizer run-off are interrupting their natural processes, causing a net depletion in oxygen for sea creatures. Our denial of radical connection to Earth threatens our present living and our children’s future. For the Christian this attitude is a denial of incarnation—of God’s Spirit becoming flesh and dwelling among us.

Silent Reflection

Stripping of the Sanctuary

(Water of life is poured slowly into the font or large basin, which is then removed from the sanctuary.)

Reading 3

John 18:27–38a Facing the truth

Extinction

According to the late Fr. Thomas Berry, we are living through the sixth great extinction in Earth’s five billion year history. But this extinction, unlike the others, is caused primarily by the human species.

In the passion narrative, Jesus stands beaten and sentenced to execution before the political authorities. Pilate’s question seems abstract and cruel when the “truth” he seeks is

staring him in the face. As Jesus stands before Pilate and the powers who refuse to take responsibility, Jesus' vulnerability is a symbol of the vulnerability of all other-than-human species standing before us. We are now both the judges and the jury determining the fate of Earth. Will we acknowledge that truth of our role in the extinction now staring us in the face?

Silent Reflection

"The Beautiful Creatures" (Bruce Cockburn) or other appropriate solo/anthem

Reading 4

John 18: 38b–19:16 A time to decide

Allegiance

What is being asked of us at this juncture of Earth's history is to make a choice. It is the same choice as that of the crowd: Barabbas or Jesus, life or death. Our choice is either our keeping our unsustainable lifestyles and the indignity of a degraded planet, or taking a more modest place in the intricate and sacred web of life.

Silent Reflection

Stripping of the Sanctuary

(The dead flower and the live flower are processed from the sanctuary.)

Reading 5

John 19:17–30 Christ Crucified

Silent Reflection

Sanctuary Draping

(The cross is slowly draped with cloth, and then the globe is slowly draped; an image of Earth as sacred Body of Christ is projected on a screen.)

***Hymn**

"O Sacred Head" (VU 145)

OUR RESPONSE

Prayer of Hope

One:

We tune our ears to the wisdom of Earth.
It is deep prayer, this listening to her cries,
as Spirit sighs,
too deep for words.

All:

**Unborn generations call to us from the future:
what did you do when the planet
could no longer bear your foolishness
and began to break?**

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One:

The growl of the grizzly—
caught in the crosshairs
of trophy hunters and policy makers—
is a plea for the rights
of all the disappearing ones.

All:

**We listen for the bawl of the caribou
asking us for room enough to roam
and arsenic-free water to drink.**

One:

The cardinal's whistle,
once joy's message,
is now a haunting lament
for the dwindling chorus of songbirds.

All:

**The living organism we call topsoil
clears its thin, chemically-burnt voice,
and speaks out for the tiny creatures
teeming within its dark body.**

One:

Mother Ocean beckons us to return
to her womb,
that we might be born anew
and know our salty tears to be hers.

All:

**The willow drops her loving arms
around our shoulders and brushes us with grace,
whispering that it's not too late.
It falls to us, Wisdom's pupils,
to turn this dirge into a dance of the cosmos.**

**Let those with ears to hear
rise up
and be the resurrected body of Christ.
Amen.**

✠ We leave in silence

(Prayers in this service are taken from *If Darwin Prayed: Prayers for Evolutionary Mystics*,
with permission of Bruce Sanguin: www.ifdarwinprayed.com.)