# Worship Planning

# Creation Time in the Season of Pentecost

## What Is Creation Saying to Us?

# First Sunday, Year B: Speak for Me!

Texts (non-lectionary): Genesis 11:1–9; Psalm: 148; Romans 12:3–7; Mark 7: 24–30

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### Gathering

Call to Worship

As the sun endures, and the moon glows,

**changing days speak of God’s glory.**

As the rainbow arcs through grey clouds,

**colours speak of God’s glory.**

As Earth provides sustaining food,

**harvest speaks of God’s glory.**

As people gather to praise God’s name,

**we speak of God’s glory.**

Amen, Amen, and Hallelujah!

#### Hymn of Praise

“All Creatures of Our God and King” (*Voices United* 217)

#### Prayer of Confession

God, creation sings of your glory and speaks of your goodness:

from picturesque countryside to reaching skyscrapers,

from untamed wild lands to cookie-cutter suburbs,

from spacious ocean beaches to crowded city streets:

wherever we are, there creation speaks.

Forgive us when we fail to join creation in her continual song of praise.

Forgive us when, overcome with pride,

we forget that creation is not ours to shape or mould;

it is yours, and we are a part of it.

Forgive us when we abuse, defile, and strike Earth

with our greed, selfishness, and ambition.

Forgive us when we attack what we are charged to love,

and fail to face the stinging reality of our actions and

thus sow hardship for future generations to reap.

Forgive us, God, for all the ways we have failed to sing your praises with all of creation.

Amen.

#### Assurance of Grace

God’s grace is a soothing and healing balm

that we can never earn or deserve.

It relieves pains, heals stings,

and frees us to sing God’s praises joyfully.

Receive the blessed assurance of God’s grace!

#### Children’s Time

*Seeking Diversity:*

*Make a terrarium to share with the children* (*or the children might make them in Sunday school to give to those who are shut-in*)*. Explain how a terrarium is an example of a small ecosystem—a closed environment. Everything in the bottle has a purpose, and everything helps the other parts in the bottle to grow. For instance, if there was no water, the soil could not create food for the plant roots. An ecosystem shows us the importance of diversity: the system only works because there are a variety of different elements working together to create something beautiful.*

*Show a few examples of other glass gardens to illustrate this point. In one jar put only water, sand, or stones; in another put only flowers. Discuss why these jars are not sustainable. Creation explains for us the importance of diversity.*

*Similarly, when explaining Christian community to people, Paul expressed a need for diversity. He explained that as followers of Jesus we are many, with many different gifts and tasks, but we are also one in purpose. We are united as God’s people. We are part of the same ecosystem!*

#### Children’s Hymn

“We Are Many, We Are One” (*Theme song for Sounding the Bamboo. Check the Internet.*)

### Listening

#### Scripture Readings

Hebrew Scripture: Genesis 11:1–9

Psalm: 148

Epistle: Romans 12:3–7

#### Gradual Hymn

 “God Says” (*More Voices* 172)

Gospel: Mark 7:24–30

#### Sermon Suggestion

Homogeny is sexy. Not really, but humans seem to be attracted to it: suburbs, popular music, the cool kids in the cafeteria. At certain points in our lives, many of us seem hardwired with a desire to fit in with the group in power. When The United Church of Canada was formed in 1925, our founders had the dream to Christianize the social order by creating a homogenized Protestant Canada. To help others fit in with the English-speaking, White, Protestant culture, the church set out to erase and “correct” all that was different from this majority. Hindsight continues to show us how passionate longings for homogeny can lead to deplorable acts. Although we continue to learn how deceptively dangerous our attraction to homogeny can be, it is hard to imagine alternatives. How can we be united while celebrating our differences? How can we reach our collective goals without becoming a collective unit?

The answer lies in creation.

Creation speaks to us, teaching us the importance of diversity. Ecosystems, gene pools, and flower arrangements are all clear messages of God’s desire and our need for diversity in creation. Homogeny in creation leads to extinction, but diversity leads to new life and growth. Today’s scripture lessons reinforce what creation shows us.

The First Testament reading demonstrates that people can reach impossible heights working as one people with one language. God scatters the people and their languages, not because they have reached great heights without God’s assistance, but because they could reach even greater heights with God’s aid. God does not intend for us to be one people with one language; that is too easy. God scatters the people to ensure that we are many. The story of the Tower of Babel affirms that God’s creation is meant to be diverse, even though we may fight against it.

Jesus explains in today’s Gospel reading that his ministry is intended to be primarily for the Jewish people: “Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs” (the children being the Jewish people and the dogs being a racial slur for the Gentiles) (verse 27). Jesus has fallen into the trap of homogeneity by separating the children from the dogs. The grace in this passage comes from the Syrophoenician woman who challenges Jesus. Jesus, transformed by this encounter, possibly changes the course of his ministry to include both Jewish and Gentile peoples.

The epistle speaks of the dichotomy that these scripture passages have been exploring: “We though many are one in Christ.” It is hard work being united while affirming our diversity. But if we keep listening to creation, we hear our call to be diverse, to celebrate that diversity, and to live and work together as one. Imagine the possibilities!

#### Hymn of Faith

“When Hands Reach out Beyond Divides” (*More Voices* 169)

or “Creating God, Your Fingers Trace” (*Voices United* 265)

### Responding

#### Introduction to Offering

Because we have been given ears to hear the complexity of creation,

because we have been given minds to discern the complexity of God’s grace,

because we have been given hearts to feel the complexity of God’s love,

let us respond by giving as best we can to our generous God.

#### Presentation Hymn

“We Cannot Own the Sunlit Sky” (*More Voices* 143)

#### Prayer of Dedication

Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer,

Holy Mystery who is wholly love,

we dedicate these gifts for the healing of your creation.

May we be good stewards of these riches that you have entrusted to us. Amen.

#### Prayers of the People

God, (*insert different names of God in languages present in the congregation*)

in the gift of creation you speak for us.

The weed protruding through the sidewalk crack

speaks of your grace,

that with you the unexpected should be expected,

the impossible made possible.

We pray for those who are without hope (*name people and situations*).

May we hear you speak in the disobedient wildflower,

a reminder that your tenacious hope grows in seemingly hopeless places.

The plastic bag blowing in the wind

speaks of your word to the lonely.

We pray for those who feel discarded and rejected by society (*name people and situations*).

May we hear you speak in the gentle wind that lifts up and carries what others have long since forgotten.

The horrific powers of the sea

speak of your majesty and mystery:

we cannot control the waters which build up and tear down.

We pray for the many gifts of nature that we cannot understand (*name specific situations*).

And we pray for those who have been affected by natural disasters (*names and places*).

May we hear you speak in the awesomeness of the elements

as we ask for our own protection.

The colours dancing at the break of dawn

speak of your beauty and our gratitude,

that we are enhanced and transformed

by the diversity of colours that touch every part of our lives.

We give thanks for (*name specific celebrations*).

We give thanks for this church community

and ask that you bless the individual gifts

that you have generously scattered within each of us.

The beauty of creation gives voice to these and all of our prayers.

Amen.

#### Lord’s Prayer

#### Closing Hymn

“We Have This Ministry” (*Voices United* 510)

#### Commissioning and Benediction

Friends, in all you do, listen carefully

for the songs of creation,

and sing them boldly to all.

May the grace of God,

the love of Jesus, and

the abiding friendship of the Holy Spirit,

holy diversity within holy unity,

go with you all

now and always,

Amen.