WITNESSING TO THE RESURRECTION:
CARING FOR GOD’S CREATION
APRIL 22, 2001, FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER
EARTH DAY

WORSHIP RESOURCES

Call to Worship (based on Colossians 1:15, 18-20)

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
Christ is risen indeed!
Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.
Christ is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead.
In Christ the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

Opening Prayer

Eternal God, your Son Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life for all creation;
In Christ's rising from the grave, you broke the power of death and condemned death itself to die.
Fill your church with the power that flows from the Spirit of the risen Christ,
that it may signal the beginning of a renewed creation, risen to new life with Christ,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.

Litany of Confession (based on Hosea 4: 1-3)

Merciful God,
in your gracious presence we confess our sin and the sin of this world.
Although Christ is risen from the grave and has shattered the power of death, we are still held captive by fear and doubt.
We hold on to suspicions and jealousies that set neighbor against neighbor and nation against nation.
There is no loyalty or faithfulness, and no knowledge of God in the land.
We have neglected the poor and the hungry.
In our pursuit of the “good life” we have gone along with injustice; we have ignored the cries of the oppressed.
Swearing, stealing, lying, murder and adultery break out; bloodshed follows bloodshed.
We pursue profits and pleasures that harm the land and pollute the waters.
We have squandered the Earth’s gifts on technologies of destruction.
The land mourns, and all who live in it languish; together with the wild animals and the birds of the air, even the fish of the sea are perishing.
Have mercy on us, O God.
Help us to trust your power to change our lives and make us new,
that we and all your creatures may know the joy of life abundant,
given through Jesus Christ, the risen Lord.

**Assurance of God’s Love** (based on Hosea 2: 18-20)
I will make for you a covenant on that day, says the Lord, and I will take you for my own in faithfulness.
I will make for you a covenant with the wild animals, the birds of the air, the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety. I will take you for my own forever; I will take you for my own in righteousness and justice, in steadfast love and mercy.

**Intercessory Prayer**
Creator God, you make all things and weave them together in an intricate tapestry of life.
Teach us to respect the fragile balance of life and to care for the gifts of your creation.
Guide by your wisdom those who have power and authority, that, by the decisions they make, life may be cherished and a good and fruitful Earth may continue to show your glory and sing your praises.
Almighty God,
you have called us to tend and keep the garden of your creation.
Give us wisdom and reverence for all your plants and animals who share this planet with us and whose lives make possible our own.
Help us to remember that they too love the sweetness of life and join with us in giving you praise.

**Sending Forth**
Go now, believing in God the Creator Spirit, who moved upon the face of the deep at the beginning of creation, who created all that is and who spoke through the prophets.
Go, trusting in Jesus Christ, in whom God’s Spirit was poured in the fullness of time, in whom the whole creation is restored and who promised that the Spirit would come to empower faithful witness to the mighty love of God.
Go forth in the power of the Holy Spirit to witness to God’s love in Christ, to proclaim with words and deeds the good news of love and hope for all the world.

**Suggested Hymns**
All Creatures of Our God and King; Alleluia, Alleluia! Give Thanks to the Risen Lord; Because You Live, O Christ; Christ Is Alive!; Let All Things Now Living; O Sons and Daughters, Let Us Sing!; The World Ablounds with God’s Free Grace

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**SERMON NOTES:**

**WITNESSING TO THE RESURRECTION: CARING FOR GOD’S CREATION**

Scripture makes significant claims about God’s creation: God created it; God calls human beings to the task of stewardship; human sinfulness has hurt creation; God heals what human beings have broken; God calls people of faith to participate in God’s redemption of creation. The Bible provides us with a theological drama in five acts:

**Act I: The Earth is the Lord’s! (Psalm 24: 1)**

Creation is the handiwork of a loving God who saw all that was made and pronounced it “very good.” God delights in creation and creation delights in praising the creator. “Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!” (Psalm 150: 6)

**Act II: Called to a ministry of care**

God has given humankind a special responsibility to care for creation. Genesis 2:15 says the Lord God took the human and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and to keep it. A form of the Hebrew verb “shamar,” meaning “to keep,” is also used in the Aaronic blessing with which we sometimes conclude our worship services: “May the Lord bless you and keep you” (Numbers 6:24). We are to nurture, sustain and care for creation the way God nurtures, sustains and cares for us.

**Act III: The land mourns**

Our relationship with God, with each other and with creation are all part of the same fabric. Pull any one thread and the whole piece begins to unravel. Human selfishness, ignorance, fear and mistrust have ecological consequences. The Bible is not hesitant to make connections between human sinfulness and the degradation of creation. “The Earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant” (Isaiah 24: 6). “There is no faithfulness or loyalty, and no knowledge of God in the land . . . Therefore the land mourns . . . even the fish of the sea are perishing” (Hosea 4: 1-3).

**Act IV: God enters creation to redeem it**

God became incarnate in Jesus Christ, became part of the “stuff” of creation to heal and restore the relationships broken by human sinfulness. “God was in Christ reconciling the world” (2 Co. 5: 19). An early hymn praises Jesus Christ, the firstborn of creation, the firstborn from the dead, through whom God was pleased to reconcile all things, whether on Earth or in heaven (Colossians 1: 15-20).
The resurrection of Jesus Christ, God’s great victory over sin and death, is a pledge and sign not only of our resurrection, but also of God's promised redemption of all creation. “The resurrection of Christ is not an intrapsychic event; rather it appeals to the Christian’s solidarity with the stuff of creation that God has destined for resurrection glory.” (J. Christian Beker, Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought, Augsburg Fortress, 1980.)

**Act V: Witnessing to the resurrection**

Christians are called to witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In our words and actions we are called to reflect the love of the one whose victory over sin and death was a victory for the whole of creation. “The church is not an elite body, separated from a doomed world,” writes New Testament scholar, J. Christian Beker, “but a community placed in the midst of the cosmic community of creation. Its task is not merely to win souls but to bear the burdens of a creation, to which it not only belongs but to which it must also bear witness . . . . The vocation of the church is not self-preservation for eternal life, but service to the created world in the sure hope of the world’s transformation at the time of God’s final triumph.” (Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought, Augsburg Fortress, 1980.)

Many congregations have responded to the call to reconcile and restore all creation. Some exceptional examples include:

1. Confronted with the growing evidence that climate change is real and that human activity is the primary cause, Trinity Episcopal Church in Iowa City, Iowa, hosted a Lenten study on a Liturgy of Creation with speakers on global warming and a “global warming tour” of Iowa churches in advance of the presidential caucuses in 2000. Church members have also participated in letter and postcard campaigns, writing to their state and federal officials on global warming.

(For more information on faith-based responses to global warming call 1-888-9CLIMATE.)