

# WITNESSING TO THE RESURRECTION: CARING FOR GOD'S CREATION

APRIL 22, 2001, FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER  
EARTH DAY

## W O R S H I P   R E S O U R C E S

### 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.  
Through Christ God was pleased to reconcile all things,  
whether on Earth or in heaven.

### 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 Abounds with God's Free Grace

# S E R M O N   N O T E S :

## 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

### 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: 5). "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. Christiaan 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. Christiaan 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 also 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.)

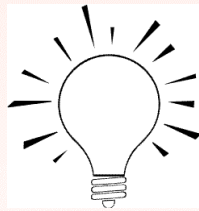
Many congregations have responded to the call to reconcile and restore all creation. Some exceptional examples include:

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.)

2. Solana Beach Presbyterian Church, near San Diego, received one of six "2000 Energy Star for Congregations Awards" from the US EPA. Following an energy audit, the congregation invested in energy-saving measures, including new lighting fixtures and energy-efficient light bulbs. The Solana Beach Church witnesses to Christ's redeeming power every time they turn on the lights!



(For information on how to save energy in your congregation's facilities call 1-800-288-1346.)

We cannot, by our own efforts, "save the earth." Only God, who is the Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer of all creation, can do that. But we can join God in that good work. In our homes, at our places of work, in our times of recreation, and in our congregations, we can begin to model the kind of love and care for the Earth that God has for us and for all creation.

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We would appreciate your help. If you plan to use any of the materials in this resource, please e-mail us at [ecojustice@nccusa.org](mailto:ecojustice@nccusa.org); fax us at 212-870-2265; phone us at 212-870-2386 or write us at Eco-Justice Working Group, National Council of Churches, 475 Riverside Dr., New York, NY 10115. Your comments and suggestions would also be helpful.

**For additional environmental justice materials, go to [www.webofcreation.org](http://www.webofcreation.org)**

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*Witnessing to the Resurrection:  
Caring for God's Creation*

*Earth Day Sunday 2001*

National Council of Churches  
**Eco-Justice Working Group**  
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New York, NY 10115