# More than Care for Creation Earth Sunday, April 27, 2025

## Earth Week

The whole church is invited to participate in [Together for the Love of Creation third annual Earth Week](https://united-church.ca/news/together-love-creation-earth-week-2025) being held April 20–27, 2025. With Earth Sunday falling on the second Sunday of Earth week (April 27) since April 20 is Easter, this service is an opportunity to celebrate the ways communities of faith have and can continue to act, learn, and pray for climate justice. Creatively adapt these ideas for your context.

In this Centennial year, let’s involve more than 100 communities in Earth Week. In the past, events have included Earth Sunday services, [Faithful Climate Conversations](https://fortheloveofcreation.ca/engagement/), Earth Day Concerts, Faithful Footprint Retrofit tours, public lectures on climate justice, a People’s Parade for Life, a Resurrect Your Bike event, meeting with a politician, a Wild Church Service, a prayer hike, a forest bathing walk, planting trees and gardens, and more.

You can also find more prayers, reflections, and related spiritual practices in the United Church Lenten devotional [*Act/Fast: Spiritual Practices for a Climate in Crisis*](https://ucrdstore.ca/products/act-fast-spiritual-practices-for-a-climate-in-crisis). More information about United Church Climate efforts can be found on the United Church’s [Climate Change webpage](https://united-church.ca/social-action/justice-initiatives/climate-change).

This Earth Sunday Service has been prepared by Rev. Dr. Jessica Hetherington, a United Church minister and Eco-theologian. To find more inspiration, you can sign up for her [Faith. Climate Crisis. Action newsletter](https://jessicahetherington.substack.com/) and learn more on her [website](https://www.jessicahetherington.ca/).

## Introduction to the Service

In the church we have long spoken about the need to “care for creation” and “creation care”. However, while the need to take climate action and work for Earth healing is vital, this language has tended to keep human beings feeling separate from and outside of the wider natural world and so led to a failure to make the radical changes that are necessary in our lifestyles and actions.

Humans are in fact part of the wider natural world, which exists in its own relationship with God. If we are to be effective in responding to the climate and ecological crisis, we must recognize that we exist as part of God’s whole creation, and thereby be transformed in our actions and in our relationship with the rest of the natural world.

## Prepare

For the sermon, you will need to research the local watershed (see below). If you are feeling creative, you can bring elements of what you learn—a map of the watershed, pictures of local flora and fauna, etc., into the sanctuary.

Review the [interactive map](https://fortheloveofcreation.ca/earth-week-2025/) of the events being organized across Canada. Add your Earth Sunday service as an event. What events are happening online or nearby that you could invite your community of faith to participate in? What events inspire you to draw attention to during your service or in advance of Earth Week? How can you hold this common effort in prayer during the service?

## Land Acknowledgement

## Lighting of Christ Candle

## Call to Worship

Say among the nations, God reigns.  
**Let the heavens be glad and Earth rejoice!**God is coming to transform the world.  
**God will redeem the world with righteousness and truth.**So let us worship God with praise and honour.  
**We will offer God our gratitude for all that God has done.**

## Opening Prayer

Gracious and loving God

who made all the world,

we come before you this morning

in worship and praise,

in longing and anticipation.

We wait to receive your Word broken open,

and in so doing, to be broken open, ourselves.

Incarnate God,

please ready us now,

so that it is you we know,

and not our own selves projected onto you.

Holy Spirit,

empower us now,

to enter fully into worship,

and to leave, later, transformed

and ready to live out your Love and Wisdom.

In the name of Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray, saying…

## The Prayer that Jesus Taught

Opening Hymn*VU 296 This is God’s Wondrous World* OR

*VU 409 Morning Has Broken*

## Children’s Time

* Option 1: Talk to the children about the local watershed. Show them a map of the watershed; describe how where we live is directly influenced by how the water flows. Talk about some of the species that depend upon the watershed and its health, and which ones are at risk. Encourage the children to get involved in a shoreline or other area for cleanup (you could arrange this in advance with some parents or local community organization). Hand out a garbage bag and pair of gloves to each child.
* Option 2: Read the book *Grandad’s Prayers of the Earth* by Douglas Wood. Have a conversation with the kids about how all of God’s creation praises and prays to God. Ask them: Have they ever heard nature praying? What does it sound like? Knowing that all of nature praises God, how might that change how we treat the natural world around us?

Hymn*VU 884 You Shall Go Out with Joy* OR

*VU 291 All Things Bright and Beautiful*

## Prayer for Reconciliation and Assurance of God’s Love

**God of promise and purpose,**

**You set before us a dream of your new heaven and Earth,**

**And we recognize that it calls for transformation.**

**But we confess that we don’t want transformation;**

**We want easy fixes.**

**We want the change, but not to do the changing.**

**Forgive us, O God,**

**For asking for change but not being willing to do the work.**

**Forgive us for accepting the status quo, and for our roles in holding it up.**

**Forgive our ways of thinking and acting that avoid transformation.**

**Create in us hearts made new by your mercy and love,**

**and move us to work toward your vision of a new heaven and Earth. AMEN.**

## Assurance of God’s Love

In the kin-dom of God, all are loved for who they are, not what they do;  
In the kin-dom of God, all are forgiven for what they do, and don’t;  
In the kin-dom of God, all are welcomed and fed by God's grace and hope.  
**Forgiven, loved, sent forth—we are not far from the kin-dom of God!  
Thanks be to God. AMEN.**

## Anthem/Ministry of Music

## Scripture Readings

*Genesis 1:1–28*

*Psalm 65 (VU 782)*

*Mark 4:37–41*

Sermon *More Than Care for Creation* (see below)

Hymn*MV 30 It’s a Song of Praise to the Maker* OR

*VU 571 Eternal Ruler of the Ceaseless Round*

## Offertory

***Invitation***

***Offertory Hymn*** *MV 181 Lord, Your Hands Have Formed (v. 1 and 2)*

***Prayer of Dedication***

## Prayers of the People

Creator and creating God,   
you give life to life!  
From the beginning you have moved over the deep,  
your wind rushing, your breath filling.  
As creatures of the Earth we rejoice in life  
using our breath, our being  
to raise this hymn of praise:  
Hallelujah to the sun’s hot passion  
embracing the ground’s great shoulders.  
Hallelujahs for the growth from seed to plant  
greening the earth; its fruit—beauty and food!  
Hallelujahs for generations of life  
tumbling one after another.   
Life creeping, swimming, flying, running,   
below, above, upon, within.   
All the world sings, calls, signals, speaks   
praise to God whose glory grows in all that breathes!

Knowing your power, knowing your love for us, we pray:   
We pray for our neighbours, those we know,    
and those who we don’t,   
those who are local and those who are global,   
those who are human and those who are flora and fauna.

We pray for all those who are victims of cruel laws and petty laws,   
those who’re subjected to prejudice   
denied opportunities, excluded, pushed to margins.

We pray for the landless and homeless,   
the refugee and evicted, those struggling against fascism    
and all the ways that tyranny and injustice are lived out in the world.

We pray for the overworked and the underpaid,   
for those in dangerous work and those in compassionate work,   
for those who long to work but are denied the opportunity.

We pray for God’s whole creation,    
The more-than-human world in all its mighty wonder, tender fragility,   
the broken and the beautiful,   
the damaged and the healing,    
for the crises that confront us in the climate and ecological crisis.

We pray for those who lie close to our hearts   
those whom we worry about, those whom we miss,   
those who carry disproportionate burdens at this time,   
those named in the silence of our hearts… (moment of silence)

Fill us, enliven us, Creator and creating God,   
to be ambassadors of life abundant,   
to be transformed and so transform the world,   
to be healed and bring about healing    
for all the Earth.

We pray all of this in the name of your Son Jesus. AMEN.

Closing Hymn*MV 150 Spirit God, Be Our Breath* OR

*VU 368 Holy Spirit, Truth Divine* OR

*VU 325 Christ is Made the Sure Foundation*

## Commissioning and Benediction

Go out into the world now,

To transform and be transformed.

To take climate action and work for Earth healing.

Remember that we are all part of God’s good creation,

and that we are not alone,

but are imbedded in a world full of grandeur and mystery.

And in that world God is with us:

our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer,

this day, and forever more. AMEN.

## More Than Care for Creation: Sermon Outline

### Sermon Preparation

Determine which watershed your congregation is located in (your people might be located in more than one, depending upon where the watershed lines fall). To do this, you will need to do some research by opening a browser and putting in a search such as “What watershed is [name of town] in?” When you’ve found your local watershed, determine a few of its key features: What are the major waterways and other features of that watershed? What is its Indigenous name? How much of the watershed is buried under pavement? What are some local species that live in that watershed? Which ones are under threat/endangered? You will want to have some specific examples to use in your sermon. If you are preaching to a diverse context (for example, online with people from many places), use the example of the watershed you are in, and invite them to do the research of their own place. Either way, invite the people to later look up information about the watershed as part of their prayer practice.

### Sermon

Today is Earth Sunday and this week is Together for the Love of Creation Earth Week (April 20–27) where people of faith across the country pray, learn, and act for climate justice. Our service today is part of this larger effort.

The watersheds and the world they shape through the movement of water are God’s good creation. God calls all that God has created good, very good, in our creation story this morning. Yet despite being part of God’s good creation, watersheds are under threat everywhere in the world due to human activity.

We have been talking about the climate and ecological crisis for years now in The United Church of Canada, echoing the concern that exists among Canadians and those around the world. Within the church, we’ve been calling for the need to “care for creation,” recognizing the human and Christian responsibility to care for the natural world.

Yet while we’ve been talking about it for decades, and doing some things to create changes, those changes haven’t been enough. Global heating is continuing out of control. While the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change encouraged the global community to limit global heating to 1.5 C° to avoid an irreversible tipping point, scientists now agree that it’s *too late* to stop the Earth from heating up 1.5°. Our rampant consumerism and the greed of corporations and billionaires have placed us on a direct path to global climate catastrophe. What we need now is a dramatic transformation in everything that we do—what and how we consume, how we heat our homes and travel, and how we factor in the needs of those living in poverty and vulnerable, too. We need this in order to prevent things from becoming evenworse than they are headed, to relieve as much suffering as possible, here and elsewhere.

To do this, we need to move beyond “care for creation,” into a transforming relationship between ourselves and the rest of the natural world, and into a total transformation of how we live on the planet.

If we’re going to be able to transform in this way, then we also need a transformation in our worldview. One of the causes of the climate and ecological crisis has been a worldview that sees human beings as separate from and superior to the rest of the natural world. Within our Christian tradition, that has been reflected in our interpretations of the first creation story that we heard this morning. We have assumed God made all of this for *us*. We have assumed that *we* are the point of God’s creation. We have assumed that the natural world is a backdrop for the human drama that plays out in our lives as people of faith, and that we are free to use it as we see fit.

All of this has come from the first creation story *as we’ve interpreted it.* Yet, elsewhere in our scriptures there is another interpretation possible. In the psalm we read, David sings of God’s incredible creation. Elsewhere in the psalms, creation worships and praises God (cf. Psalms 19, 104, 148). In the book of Job, God reminds Job that God didn’t create the world for him; that God’s creation and what God is up to is not all about us. And in our Gospel reading today, we hear that the wind and the sea obey Jesus; the wind and sea are their own subjective realities, in their own relationship with God, separate from what human beings are up to.

Our language of the need to “care for creation” has emerged from the language of dominion that is soaked through the Genesis reading. It has been part of the effort to soften the language of dominion and instead consider wise stewardship of the natural world. Yet, this language, both of dominion *and* stewardship, is highly problematic, and is no longer tenable in light of the magnitude of the climate and ecological crisis. Today, this passage, where it calls for humans to have dominion over the Earth, could be considered a “text of terror,”[[1]](#footnote-2) for the ways in which it has been used as an excuse to use and abuse the natural world for human gain.

The language of “care for creation” is language that still sees human beings as somehow outside of and separate from the rest of the natural world. Yet as we learn when we study our watersheds, and as science in general has taught us, human beings have emerged and evolved as part of an incredibly complex Earth system. We are neither separate from nor superior to the rest of God’s creation. Where our faith has interpreted it as such, we have been wrong*.* And, given the scope and scale of the climate and ecological crisis, the language of “care for creation” is simply insufficient for what we are called to do. God does not call us to care for creation; God does not call us to stewardship of the Earth, however wise or gentle, no matter what language our ancestors in faith used in writing down our ancient stories. Instead, *God calls us to full transformation of how we live today—*how much we consume, what we eat, how we get around, how we build community, and so much more.

We are called to more than “care for creation”; we are called to take action—radical climate action—and work for Earth healing, that transforms us and the world. And we are called to do this with all faith and without fear. The crisis is not unlike the storm that Jesus’ disciples were feeling that day: “A great gale rose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped” (Mark 4.37).

Yet Jesus said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” In the face of the storm of the climate and ecological crisis, we are called to take action. We are called to have faith and no fear. And we are called to *more than care* for creation, and into a transformation of all that we do, and who we are, within and as part of the wider natural world.

1. This comes from the work of feminist biblical scholar Phyllis Trible. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)