# Season of Creation Theme Service

# The Seasons: Eros and a Right Relation with Earth

*by Ralph Carl Wushke*

*Eros is a powerful but underused lens by which we can gain some insight into right relation with earth and all creation. The cycles of the seasons are can be seen as reflections of eros, and the creation stories of Genesis and the Song of Songs are imbued of divine and human eros in dynamic interplay. This service is suggested in four “seasonal movements”: Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter. It is worth noting that many worship services have a linear pattern rather than a circular pattern. Using the seasons as a motif gives a service a different feeling, but nevertheless moves us through the familiar sequence of a Western-rite liturgy.*

Suggestions for Visual Display: *This might be an occasion to use a Medicine Wheel as a visual image, since in addition to the four directions and four elements (earth, air, fire, and water) the quadrants are also often associated with the four seasons and the four life stages. Another image might be that of that of humanity as infant, teenager, adult, and elderly. Alternatively newborns and adults in nature might be suitable, e.g., birds feeding their young, a baby elephant and mother elephant. Large pictures of the four seasons would also be suitable, or examples of natural elements from each season: seed, sprout, full plant, fruit.*

# SPRING

## Call to Worship

*(antiphonal reading based on Genesis 2 and the Song of Songs 8, NRSV)*

And the Lord God planted a Garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed.

**Who is that coming up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?**

It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.

**Under the apple tree I awakened you; there your mother bore you. There she who bore you was in labor.**

This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken.

**Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is strong as death, passion as fierce as the grave.**

## Opening Prayer

**O Holy Spirit, open our hearts and minds to eros: the powerful love energy that infuses our relationships, as a way to relate with creation. Earth cries out from our betrayal of the mutual relationship that God intends. Our hearts sigh at the desolation we have wrought. Help us reimagine ourselves as Lover and Beloved with earth, throughout the changing seasons of the year and our lives. May the story of the Garden and our seasonal songs call us into a deeper relationship of commitment and covenant with earth and Creator. Amen.**

## Hymn of Praise

“Now the Green Blade Rises” (*Voices United* 186)

## Prayer of Confession

**Creator God, we know that love is the foundation of creation and all life, your love and ours. We know that all things are possible with love—that the least becomes the most important, the last becomes the first.**

**Yet we also know that we do not always love, especially in our attitudes toward earth. We are quick to pave over an empty lot, to build inexpensive homes on precious fertile lands, to use products that are not easily recycled and to fill our dumps. We waste water and paper from your trees. We want the biggest or the best or the newest when we already have all we need.** *(silent confession)*

**Creator God, forgive us. Help us to show—more actively—our love for our earth, your earth, your precious creation. Amen.**

## Assurance of Pardon

Friends, in the goodness of the original Garden, love was born; in the surprise of an Easter garden, love was reborn. May this love be born in our hearts, minds, and bodies again this day. Amen.

## Children’s Moment

Take an image of growth and/or birth from any part of nature, and invite children into a conversation about it in connection with eros as the life force. For example, a picture or bouquet of sunflowers could be used. Did you know that sunflowers turn to face the rising sun in the east every morning, and follow the sun’s journey all the day long, by ending with their faces to the sunset? That attraction to the sun, the energy in the sunflower, might be called eros.

Another image might be that of seed, any kind of seed, planted, or one might say “sleeping,” in the ground. By some miracle the germ in the seed feels the call of the sun, and sends its tiny seed shoot out of the ground toward the sun, and a root into the ground for moisture and nutrients.

There is a miraculous energy at work in the way these plants are drawn to the sun. The same miraculous energy is at work in our bodies when we wake up and want to get up and play, or after school when we run to our parents for hug. This energy is a gift of God, and one word for it is eros, which is another way of saying “love.”

# SUMMER

## Alternate Hymn of Praise

“It’s a Song of Praise to the Maker” (*More Voices* 30)

## Scripture

Genesis 2:4*b*—3:24

## Sermon Suggestions

A possible opening for a sermon is a description of the moment of a birth, be it a baby born to proud parents in a hospital or home birth, or a birth in a barn as a farmer experiences lambing or calving season, or even a birth in the wild, as expression of the eros: the power of God that infuses and brings life to birth out of love.

Explore the second Genesis creation accounts in conjunction with the Song of Songs. Be sensitive to creeping heterosexism and keep in mind that some scholars have suggested that the lover and the beloved in the Song of Songs can be read as having the same gender.

The second creation account (Genesis 2:4*b*—3:24) as a recent commentator suggests, could have its roots in an oral tradition of a rite of passage story told at the time of puberty, effectively bridging the transition from adolescence to adulthood for both sexes. (Michael Carden, “Genesis/Bereshit,” *The Queer Bible Commentary*, ed. Guest et al [London: SCM Press, 2006], 29). As such it can be seen as offering a positive contribution to our understanding of eros, rather than a vector of sin and shame.

Explore eros as an overlooked or avoided image in our relationship and with earth. Traditionally we have been taught that there were three kinds of love: philia, eros, and agape, with the lowest form being eros and highest agape. We have been taught that agape is better than eros, and that eros, as the power that relates to sexual desire, needs to be controlled.

A number of authors have reclaimed various aspects of eros in relation to power, justice, and right relation, including Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, 1982), Audre Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* by Audre Lorde (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984), and Carter Heyward in *Touching Our Strength: The Erotic As Power and the Love of God* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989).

For Rita Nakashima Brock and Parker Palmer (*Saving Paradise: How Christianity Exchanged Love of this World for Crucifixion and Empire* [Boston: Beacon Press, 2008]), eros is the way the soul responds with delight and pleasure at beauty. This response creates an urge toward right relationship with God, and toward justice, courage, prudence, and charity. Eros is at work from Genesis through the prophets and the psalmists to the resurrection of Jesus. Eros in the original Garden, and eros to restore the Easter Garden, combine to provide the dominant image of the resurrection for the first six centuries of Christianity, say Brock and Parker.

Explore reimagining our relationship with earth from one of dominion to one of eros. With the rich images of eros, young lovers (Song of Songs) and the cycles of life in the unfolding seasons, imagine what it means for us as humans to participate in a “lover/beloved” relationship with earth. How do we humans “long for her” and what does she long for on our behalf. If earth is our beloved, what kind of lover does she hope we will be? What are the ethical implications of being in such relationship with earth?

## Hymn of Faith

“Spirit Dancing” (*Voices United* 388)

# AUTUMN

*(Offering and a communion celebration may be part of the “Autumn” movement.)*

## Offertory Hymn

“Sing to the Lord of the Harvest” (*Voices United* 519)

## Prayer of Thanksgiving and Supplication: A Prayer of the Directions & the Seasons

*(The congregation may be invited to face each direction for this prayer.)*

O Spirit of the East, to which we turn, grateful for sunrise, birth, and resurrection; open us fully to the possibilities of new birth and transformation, within ourselves, our communities, and our planet. Give us the courage to sow seeds and plant trees for generations yet to come. Help us celebrate the joy of every kind of birth, as miracle and promise.

O Spirit of the South, thanks be to you for the warm winds of summer nurturing growth: fill us with a youthful vibrancy and optimism that we may sustain hope for a loving relationship with earth and all her creatures. Keep us in solidarity with peoples and places of the global South, especially places and particular struggles we name at this time…. Set our hearts afire for an indivisible justice.

O Spirit of the West, for your many-hued sunsets and life-giving rain clouds, we give you thanks. Grant us the steady hand of adulthood. Nurture us for the journeys we face from day to day and bless the place we call home. Help us to care for the sick, the frail, and those in any special need, whom we name at time…. May our care and concern work together for human healing and the mending of a broken world.

O Spirit of the North, home of winter winds, and the season of dark anticipation, we thank you for the majesty of polar bears and snow owls, of dancing Northern Lights and of the fish and seals that sustain life there. Fill us with the wisdom of Elders that we may know when and how to speak, for the sake of earth and all her inhabitants. Comfort the elderly who are dying or bereaved, and take away our fear of death, that in returning to earth we may also see promise of resurrection.

Amen.

# WINTER

## Hymn of Departure

“Lo, How a Rose E’er Blooming” (*Voices United* 8)

*or* “When the Wind of Winter Blows” (*More Voices* 71)

## Commissioning for Mission

Let us go from this place and into the garden of lives, open to that divine eros that calls forth and regenerates life out of love.

## Benediction

May the God of Resurrection renew you; may the Spirit of Wisdom inspire you; may the Creator of all strengthen you for the journey.

*Ralph Carl Wushke serves in two half-time positions in Toronto: pastor at Bathurst Street United Church and Ecumenical Chaplain at U of T. He is working on a D.Min. in eco-theology, ritual, and transformation in his spare time.*