# Worship Planning

# Creation Time in the Season of Pentecost

## What Is Creation Saying to Us?

# First Sunday, Year A: Delight in Me!

Texts (non-lectionary): Psalm 148, Isaiah 55:12–56:2, Revelation 22:1–5

By Ralph Carl Wushke

Call to Worship (Excerpts of Psalm 148)

Praise the Lord from the earth,

you sea monsters and all deeps,

fire and hail, snow and frost,

stormy wind fulfilling his command!

Mountains and all hills,

fruit trees and all cedars!

**Wild animals and all cattle,**

**creeping things and flying birds!**

Kings of the earth and all peoples,

princes and all rulers of the earth!

Young men and women alike,

old and young together!

ONE: Let them praise the name of the Lord!

#### Opening Prayer

O Spirit, you hear our sighs and groans,

the sadness that weighs us down

when our lives are heavy

and the world is in pain.

Inspire us by the delights of your creation.

Lift our hearts like the wind in the trees,

the birds that soar, and the ascending hills. Amen.

#### Hymn of Praise

“Spirit Dancing” (*Voices United* 388)

or “Earth and All Star” (*Voices United* 888)

#### Children’s Moment

*Goal: to convey a sense of delight and wonder in nature.*

*If possible, share a picture of a male and female cardinal with the children and describe the mating season of just such a pair. Cardinals are common in southern Ontario, Quebec, and Nova Scotia, but because of their striking beauty the cardinal is a bird many people will recognize. Cardinals are becoming more numerous in urban areas, and it’s not uncommon for there to be a pair in many city neighbourhoods. One of the most delightful and amusing things to watch and listen to is the cardinals’ mating ritual. Every spring for several weeks beginning in April or May, the male cardinal will perch on the top branch of a tree and sing his distinctive mating call. The female will be in a nearby tree answering his call with her equally distinctive song. They can go back and forth for hours, and after a few days, their back and forth singing becomes familiar to everyone, even those who are a little less attentive. To a human observer it seems like the female is making the male woo her and that he is trying to convince her to build a nest with him. The interesting thing is that since cardinals are territorial, he will most likely be the only available partner in the neighbourhood, and she is likely the same female he built a nest with the previous spring, since cardinal couples are known to stay together and live for a long time. Nevertheless they play out their little mating game for several weeks to the delight of local residents, and with luck, by fall there will be up to four juvenile cardinals eating berries and seeds from birdfeeders and fruit trees in the neighbourhood.*

*Moment of Prayer with children*

Creator of every living thing, we give you thanks for all the beautiful birds. Help us to look up, listen, and see them every day. Amen.

#### Prayer of Confession

O Author of the Universe:

how often in the midst of our busyness,

our getting and spending,

our planning and delivering,

we find ourselves tired and listless.

We have lost a sense of joy in your presence

and gratitude for the simple beauty of Earth.

Remove the dullness of our minds,

and awaken us again to delight in you throughout creation. Amen.

#### Assurance of Pardon

Behold: there is a new heaven, a new earth

and a new city, where the river of life flows,

where the tree of life bears fruit in every season.

This heaven, this city, this river, this tree are a vision

of your life reborn, restored, and renewed.

Thanks be to God!

#### Sermon Suggestions

*Since this might be the first sermon of a series in Creation Time, it is an opportunity to “explain” our Creation Time in the Season of Pentecost. Many Christians all around the world are observing related themes because this is the reformation that is needed in churches and spiritual communities in our time. While the compelling question for the Protestant Reformer, Martin Luther, half a millennium ago was “How can I find a gracious God?” one could ask if the compelling question of our time is not “How can we find hope in the face of this creation?”*

*A case can be made that all our other crises: the wars over oil, the Middle East, human rights violations and ecological desecration directly related to resource extraction in Africa and Latin America, the marginalization of Aboriginal peoples, post-colonialism in general, including the occupation of Palestine, can be seen through the lens of a perversely distorted relationship with the environment. And one source of hope for a harmonious resolution of those entanglements is a new Earth eco-spirituality and eco-theology: a new Reformation!*

*One could call to mind the 350.org campaign popularized in the lead up to the 2009 UN Conference on Climate Change in Copenhagen. It is kind of hard to remember that the 350 stood for 350 ppm of CO2 as the safe upper limit for the sustainability of life on the planet as we’ve known it, as the sad truth is that 350 ppm was surpassed in 2008! Bill McKibben, the man who started the 350.org campaign, spells earth with two a’s in his book* Eaarth: A Survivor’s Guide(*Toronto: Knopf Canada, 2010*) *because the planet where we have been comfortable and which has sustained the innumerable species and natural wonders we love is actually* ***gone****. A new heaven and a new earth have been created, and while they are as apocalyptic as those of the Revelation according to John, they are not nearly so positive.*

*And our “repairs” may not be adequate for birthing a new EAARTH with God.*

*“Delight in Me!” our theme for this day suggests that wonder in the face of creation is both a way to experience grace—the antidote to despair in the face of McKibben’s message—and a way to inspire us to see that the Earth herself is also our hope.*

*The texts for this Sunday celebrate God’s participation in creation in various contexts. For the psalmist this is sheer exultation. For Isaiah and St. John the Divine these passages are contrasted to the sorrow of exile or the apocalyptic fear of early Christians, respectively. Do those sorrows and fears have something in common with our climate fears?*

*How do we experience this delight in creation? And why don’t we experience it more with time? One of the ways to do so is to draw on the insights of ecology.*

*In* The Tao of Liberation: Exploring the Ecology of Transformation (*New York: Maryknoll, 2009*), *Canadian eco-theologians Mark Hathaway and Brazilian Leonardo Boff point to deep ecology, as developed by Arne Naess, as a way to experience a more than transient delight in creation. Deep ecology invites us to re-imagine ourselves in a way that transcends the distorted view of ourselves—as machine-like bodies driven by brain—that emerged with the Enlightenment and the rise of the Industrial Revolution. Deep ecology would have us recognize humans as one part of the web of life. Ironically, capitalism and Information and Communication Technologies* (*ICTs*) *have developed their own psychologies of connectedness. People with cell phones and other mobility devices are often unable to get through a meal or a meeting without checking their phone. Could this need for connectedness be replaced with a sense of connection with the eco-sphere that is neither a fleeting delight nor a passing interest? It would require a commitment to mindfulness of ourselves as* ***part*** *of the ecology, rather than beings* ***surrounded*** *by an environment.*

*Here are some possible images of this delight. First, can we imagine our body/mind/soul selves as ecological systems, rather than as machines directed by a brain? As Hathaway and Boff point out, roughly half of our body weight is made up of other than human organisms, all of which come together in one great symbiotic colony. Colonies of diverse micro-organisms, like yeast and bacteria, each of them self-directed yet working in concert with each other, enable us to survive. And the body is constantly renewing itself: the pancreas replaces all of its cells every day, and the brain replaces all of its protein material every month, without losing unique structure and purpose. That is a cause for awe!*

*Second, can we imagine our living, inhabited body/planets being without the psychological and physical boundaries we so often assume they have?* (*Time to rethink “get out of my space.”*) *We are actually very porous and permeable. The constant exchange of food, air, water, and microorganisms make us “living” in ways we don’t usually imagine. Explore the potential of mindfulness exercises. While climate change makes us fear for the future of humanity on a macro level, is one response to become more aware of our dependence on earth at a micro level by conversion to a sense of our earthiness and permeability?*

*Another approach would be to lift up an example of delight in creation in art, such as the mystical communion with creation in the paintings of German Romantic artist Caspar David Friedrich* (*1774-1840*)*. In his work, the landscape is not just the bluing and graying of a background* (*Renaissance painting*)*, nor the objective focus of a still life* (*Dutch Masters*)*. Rather there is a dialogue between human life and emotions, the sacred and nature held in dramatic tension. See http://www.caspardavidfriedrich.org/.*

*The Psalmist, Isaiah, and John speak not only of the connectedness of all creation, but also delight in this interdependence. To all who seek healing and hopeful paths in an unfamiliar and changed Eaarth, the gift of today is delight in communion with Earth and mindfulness of that unity.*

*A possible conclusion would be to quote the words from Brook Medicine Eagle’s “Hey Ney Yana”* (More Voices *217*).

#### Hymn of Faith

“Many and Great, O God, Are Your Works” (*Voices United* 308)

#### Prayer of Thanksgiving and Supplication

***Prayer of the Directions***

(*Invite people to face each of the directions in turn.*)

**Spirit of the East,** direction of the rising sun, delight us with a spirit that is open to the new and those who are new among us today, friends and guests. Spirit of the East in the wind and the rising sun, be present now within each of us and among us—calling us to work with others, to seek Truth, and to struggle for justice, moving us to create beauty and stirring us to compassion.

**Spirit of the South**, spirit of learning and lament, growth, and reflection, open our hearts and minds to the voices of the south, voices from places of climate injustice and rising tides: from the surface of the ocean and the depths of the sea: plants, fish, seabirds, shell-fish, and humans cry out, “Save!”

All around the world, from Congo to Guatemala, from Gaza to Canada, lament arises from every heart joining the heart of all that is, crying out, “Save!” Hear us as we name the places and peoples that cry out today (*places and peoples*). Save us from despair, and give us hope, O Spirit of the South!

**Spirit of the West,** direction of the setting sun, harvest, and seasons of maturity and accomplishment, open our hearts and minds to a sense of awe and gratitude for the capacity we have to learn, to grow, to plan, and to change with the seasons of our lives. We give thanks for students of every age returning to schools of all kinds. Bless teachers and learners all together.

**Spirit of the North**, direction of wisdom and ancestors, teach us that all seasons of our lives come to an end even as new ones begin. As our community takes up the weekly tasks of fall and winter, we know that care reaches out from this circle. Let us name those among and around us for whom we have a particular concern at this time (*names*).

Holy Wisdom, hold us in community and care that we may hold the Earth in community and care. Amen.

#### Hymn of Departure

“I See a New Heaven” (*Voices United* 713)

#### Commissioning for Mission

Go from this place,

let your anxious worries cease.

May the lilies of the field and birds of the air

inspire you to see God in all you do.

*Or* sing either “Hey Ney Yana” (*More* *Voices* 217) or “Isaiah 55 – You Shall Go Out with Joy” (*Voices United* 884).

#### Benediction

May the blessing of Jesus,

who announced God’s righteousness,

of the Creator, who fills Earth with beauty,

and of the Spirit, who nurtures awe,

bless, inspire, and empower you. Amen.

#### Suggestions for Visual Display

*Delight and wonder at creation might be exemplified in a collection of houseplants.* (*Maybe someone in the congregation would share their houseplants.*) *For example, climbers* (*like ivy or pothos*)*, a jade plant, a Boston fern, an asparagus fern, a prayer plant, a shamrock, a variety of cacti, a staghorn fern, and a crown of thorns elegantly arranged together would evoke awe at the diversity of the plant kingdom in this small selection alone, taking in the ranges of colours, shapes, sizes, moisture needs, and retention capacities.*