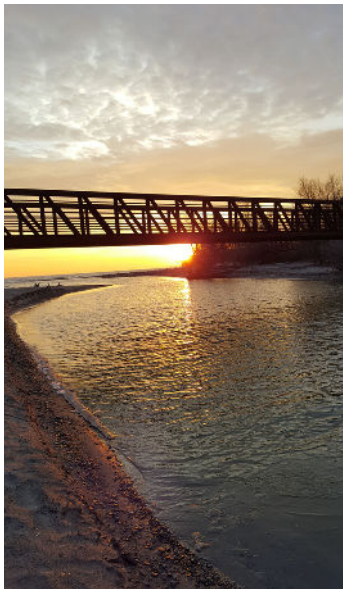
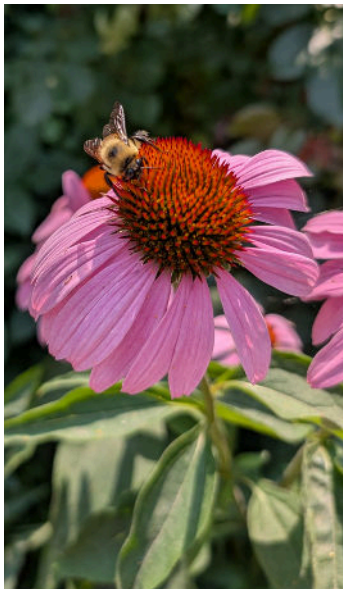


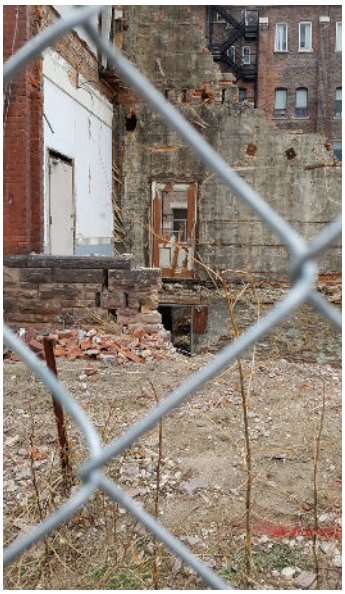


Reflection on Easter, Earth Day and the Season of Creation

Some years, it happens that Easter and Earth Day nearly coincide. You may wonder how time can be found in the busy and joyful celebration of Easter to mark Earth Day, or even whether Earth Day is important enough to warrant attention during the Easter season. Likewise, the Season of Creation which falls months later (from September first to October fourth) can feel too busy to pause and reflect on our place in God's creation. Yet in both (and all!) times of the liturgical year, remembering the importance of caring for this world that God loves is something all Christians are called to do!

The church has long held that the tomb standing empty on that first Easter morning did not simply signal God making all things new for humans alone, but for all creation. Christ, after all, saw fit to walk this earth before his death and resurrection; to be embodied, to feel sand and mud between his toes and taste the fruits creation brought forth. Scripture, additionally, is full of references to the love God has for the earth and its bounty. Indeed, God's longest speech in the Bible comes in three chapters at the end of the book of Job, where God describes the earth and all of creation in minute, loving detail to Job, who has questioned God's wisdom and goodness. The answer God gives shows that from the blade of grass never touched by humans, to the raven's hungry young, to the goat giving birth, (Job 38: 25-27 and 41; 39:1-4) God knows and cares about all creation. God cares about the earth.

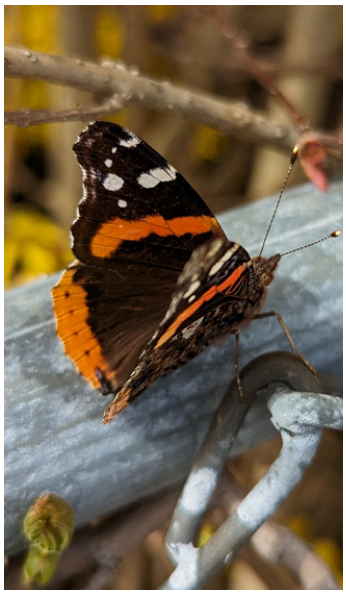
God's words to Job are especially important to remember today because the earth is struggling. Pollution mars its air and waters and the soil by which it brings forth fruit. Unchecked economic development and lack of care or protections have wrought environmental devastation and a changing climate at an increasingly alarming rate. Earth Day has become an international, global event not primarily to celebrate in gratitude for creation that is, but to focus efforts to protect creation under threat.



Likewise, the Season of Creation focuses extended attention on protecting God's creation, and recognizing its goodness, as God stated in Genesis. The Season of Creation falls during harvest season when we focus on the fruits we have grown and on preparing for the more difficult winter months of scarcity. Yet these hard winter months lead each year to Easter, the most joyful celebration in the Christian calendar—which comes directly on the heels of the two most difficult days in the Church year: Good Friday and Holy Saturday. On these two days, it seemed all hope was lost. We know that it wasn't, for we stand after the first Easter Sunday, but imagine how Jesus' disciples must have felt that Saturday evening following the crucifixion. Just when they had lost hope, Christ beat the bonds of death and returned again to walk the earth he loved, among the people he loved and died for.

We are not Christ, who could break death and thereby redeem the world. But we are called to be like Christ, to continue his work to the best of our ability. Is not part of that the work of loving, caring for, and protecting the earth that God made a point of showing God's knowledge of and love for? In that spirit—in the joy of Easter, and responding to the call to love and work to renew the earth as God did too, we pray:

Creator God,
Your own son's death brought brightest light
as Christ was raised to make all right
and with his love the earth renew;
please grant us grace to do so too.
Amen



Resources for Thought and Further Study

The World Communion of Reformed Churches' 2004 Accra Confession is an excellent resource for reflecting on faithful care of the earth as part of Christian witness and a good place to start exploring Christian responses to the issues Earth Day and the Season of Creation raise. Take some time to read or review the Confession (online at https://wcrc.eu/about/accra-confession/about/). If you would like, the following study questions can be used for reflection. Feel free to pick 2 or 3 that speak to you.

1. What language in the Confession sticks out to you—are there things you think the Accra Confession contributes to Christian witness in the world?

2. The Confession affirms that "global economic justice is essential to the integrity of our faith in God and our discipleship as Christians." (Paragraph 16) Do you agree? Why or why not?

3. The Confession reminds us that "God calls for just relationships with all creation" (Paragraph 24) and that God gives preference to the poor, abused or exploited. Can creation itself be abused and exploited? What might it look like to work in service of God, when God is understood as the God of the poor, exploited or abused?

4. The Confession states, "we reject any church practice or teaching which excludes the poor and care for creation in its mission." (Paragraph 29) Can you think of any such practices or teachings in your church? If you can, what are some ways to change them?

5. The unity of the body of Christ has always been an important goal and challenge for the church. The Accra Confession argues there is a strong connection between unity and justice (Paragraph 31). With that in mind, what do you think working for unity would look like in your local context? In the broader context?

6. Consider an economic justice or ecological issue you think you or your church could respond to. What are some groups—from the ecumenical community, the community of other faiths, or civic movements—that you or your congregation might develop relationships to work with to address it?

More creation care information and resources can be found on the church's Ecological Justice page of the Social Action Hub at presbyterian.ca/justice/social-action/ecological-justice/

Call and Response Prayer: Earth Day or the Season of Creation

The following prayer may be freely used for worship or reflection. Endnotes with Bible passages are provided for those who wish further Scriptural study.

Creator God, maker of heaven and earth,

We see with wonder the world and all that is in it; the air, the waters, the land, plants, and animals. [i]

We perceive creation's goodness, and your love for all the earth. In so doing, we also perceive how we have failed to love creation as you have shown.

Please forgive us for when we have failed to show love for all your creation.

You know when even the mountain goat gives birth, or the raven's young go hungry. [ii] Yet we confess we have contributed to hunger in creation around us: to drought and famine, animals endangered through destruction of their habitat, and plants that can no longer find nutrients in over-farmed or polluted soil. We hear creation groan [iii] and we realize we are part of its suffering.

Please forgive us for when we have been careless in our consumption and destructive in our habits.

The Psalmist too tells us that the earth is yours, and all that is in it, [iv] but those of us with means have often dominated the land and all who depend on it, acting as though creation is ours to dispose of as we will. We have often not acted as faithful caretakers. To increase our profit or to avoid sacrifice or inconvenience, we have often attempted to thwart those working for ecological justice, trying to serve you faithfully by caring for the earth you love.

You call us to justice and service to you; help us understand what is needed and give us the will to pursue the work to which we are called.

Gracious God, when your son, Jesus, spoke of knowing a tree by the fruit it produces, he reminded us that our words and actions show what is in our innermost heart. [v]

Transform our hearts and minds to be filled with love for you and respect for your creation, and to act with loving care and just action toward what you loved first.

All this we pray in Jesus' name,

Amen

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[i] Genesis 1; [ii] Job 39:1–4 and 38:41; [iii] Romans 8:22; [iv] Psalm 24; [v] Luke 6:43–45