

Call to Worship (Psalm 19:1-4)

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge.
They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them.
Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

Hymn: Come, You Thankful People Come (*Singing the Faith*, #123)

Henry Francis Lyte (1793-1847)

1. Come, you thankful people, come,
raise the song of harvest home!
Fruit and crops are gathered in
safe before the storms begin:
God our maker will provide
for our needs to be supplied;
come, with all his people, come,
raise the song of harvest home!
2. All the world is God's own field,
harvests for his praise to yield;
wheat and weeds together sown
here for joy or sorrow grown:
first the blade and then the ear,
then the full corn shall appear—
Lord of harvest, grant that we
wholesome grain and pure may be.

Scripture: Genesis 1:26-31, 2:15

Prayer (St. Basil the Great, 330-379)

O God, enlarge within us the sense of fellowship with all living things, our brothers the animals to whom thou gavest the earth as their home in common with us. We remember with shame that in the past we have exercised the high dominion of man with ruthless cruelty so that the voice of the earth, which should have gone up to thee in song, has been a groan of travail. May we realize that they live not for us alone but for themselves and for thee, and that they love the sweetness of life. Amen.

Reflection

God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. Creation is beautiful; the earth, the planets, the universe are so wonderfully made. Our annual Harvest Festival is a reminder for us each year to give thanks for the earth, and that when we work the land, it yields so many crops. And so, we come today bringing our gratitude and praise. While this time of pandemic has been a terrible time, there have been blessings that have come through it. The pace of life for many of us has slowed down and we have been able to appreciate nature more, whether from daily exercise, or just looking out of our own windows.

That word *dominion* in Genesis 1:28 has been interpreted in two different ways. One interpretation is that creation was made for human beings and that we have a right to dominate and exploit creation for our own wants and needs. The other interpretation, and the one that I understand is that, the Hebrew word for dominion does not mean “to dominate” or “to exploit” but rather means “to take responsibility for,” as a ruler would be responsible to assure the well-being of those in their realm. In Genesis 2:15, God said: *The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.* A closer translation is “to serve and to preserve” the land, which places human beings not in a hierarchical position over creation but in a position of service to it. Taking care of creation is *our* job and it is the first job named for people in scripture. Being stewards of creation is foundational to what it means to be human.

At the height of the pandemic, the earth was able to breathe for a while. With fewer cars on the roads and planes in the sky, the reduction in air and water pollution was dramatic, especially in some of the most polluted areas of the world. The air became cleaner and mountains could be seen once more from polluted cities. Animals enjoyed new room to roam. With less cars came less roadkill which was great for toads, hedgehogs and many other creatures. Turtles and other animals that lay eggs on beaches had a better chance of survival. We could hear the birds and they benefitted from quieter surrounds making it easier for them to communicate and the habitats of ground-nesting birds were not trampled by dogs and humans.

Plants benefitted from a lack of cars and CO2 emissions. This was a timely reminder of our impact on the earth and that our actions can make a difference. Let us cherish this place, our world, our home, and work and care together for God's Creation. *God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.*

None of us can do everything, but individually and as churches, we can pick one thing and then do that really well. *So, what specific things are you going to do? Take some time to think about what we individually and collectively can do here in this upcoming year for eco-justice and to be better stewards and caretakers of the world.*

Prayers of Intercession (Carol Meyer)

Most gracious God, we come before you to pray for the wellbeing of the planet. You alone know the full extent of the destruction we have wrought to your beautiful handiwork, and what needs to be done to remedy it. We pray for the people around the globe who suffer because of environmental damage. We pray for the defenseless creatures harmed or made extinct by our selfishness and ignorance. We pray for the oceans, air, mountains, plants, and soil, that life and health may again pulse in them. We pray that we humans have a change of heart and stop harming the planet. Pour out your Holy Spirit on us that we may have the passion and wisdom to work effectively to restore your creation. Guide us in our personal, congregation, and community efforts. Give us strength to continue on with this work when it is difficult and requires sacrifice. Bless the Earth and all its life in every way.

We pray for ourselves – *in a moment of quiet hold before God what is on your heart today.*

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who taught us to pray saying: *Our Father ...*

Offering (Tanya Marcovna Barnett)

You are invited at this time to remember your local church and to give generously of your time, treasure and talent. You might also consider giving a thanksgiving gift for Harvest by making a donation to a local food pantry like FIND Ipswich or to All We Can (the Methodist Relief & Development Agency) Harvest Appeal.

All good gifts come from you, dear God, and you reveal glimpses of your grace through them. Thank you for inviting us to be partners with you in caring for your creation. We offer these gifts now, knowing that they come first from you, then from other members of your family of creation, then from us. Bless these symbols of our awareness that we depend upon you and your creation for all that we call "ours." Please accept these gifts and our desire to be your partners. In Your name. Amen.

Hymn: For the Fruits of All Creation (*Singing the Faith*, #124)

Fred Pratt Green (1903-2000), © 1970, Stainer & Bell

For the fruits of all creation, thanks be to God;
for the gifts to every nation, thanks be to God;
for the ploughing, sowing, reaping, silent growth while we are sleeping,
future needs in earth's safe-keeping, thanks be to God.

In the just reward of labour, God's will is done;
in the help we give our neighbour, God's will is done;
in our world-wide task of caring for the hungry and despairing,
in the harvests we are sharing, God's will is done.

Blessing

We go now giving thanks for the harvest and to take care of God's Creation.
And may God the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer be with us all, now and always. Amen.