



---

# CREATION REORIENTATION

---

Liturgy to Reconcile People and Planet



## Introduction

As the climate warms, sea levels rise, forests are decimated, and numerous species become extinct, there is no denying that humans are more estranged from the rest of the created universe than ever before. As Christian communities, we are called to join God's work of reconciliation and healing throughout the cosmos. Our earth is not just a collection of natural resources for us to steward wisely, but a fellow created-being, a creature in need of healing.

Within the past few years, many works have been released about "greening" a congregation, with subjects like incorporating creation care practices into fellowship hour, planting community gardens, and engaging in eco-justice. However, much of this new information stops at the doors of the sanctuary. While many congregations have begun to celebrate Seasons of Creation, there is usually not a year-round emphasis on everything else God has created. But as we continue to do damage to the Earth and everything that lives on it through our lifestyles and participation in systemic sin, there is a need for creation-centered liturgy.

Worship can be a reorientation, a way to focus us toward our values and toward God's mission of justice throughout the earth. We can begin to pay attention to the needs of fellow created beings as we gather each week. As Gordon Lathrop states, "Sunday after Sunday, our own worldviews are reconstituted, and we are made witnesses to the triune God's engaged care for the beloved, wounded earth."<sup>1</sup>

As witnesses, we remember that we are not just care-takers or stewards. That is part of our vocation as fellow created beings, but we are not creation's saviors. Ultimately, it is God's power that heals and renews the cosmos and continues the creation that God started. Rather than continually asking God to help us to remember the earth, or to give us courage to carry out the effort alone, we can begin to remember God's action and let that give us courage to join in the ongoing work.

Sometimes Lathrop seems to argue that the *ordo* itself already points to all creation, and the solution to our eco-alienation is more teaching about our traditional elements.<sup>2</sup> However, I would argue for an altering of the *ordo* that is more obvious so that even those unfamiliar with the ancient traditions of the liturgy will be drawn into right relationship with everything God has made. Our task as worshiping communities "...is to anticipate and contribute to the promise of ultimate liberation and reconciliation in human communities and with the rest of nature."<sup>3</sup>

To state it even more boldly: "God's love of creation, God's desire to redeem creation, and God's action in reorienting our human relationship with the rest of creation ought to be so present in all we do in worship that they claim our hearts and minds with enthusiasm."<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Ground: A Liturgical Cosmology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009) 135.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>3</sup> James Nash, *Loving Nature: Ecological integrity and the Cristian Responsibility* (Nashville: Abingdon; in cooperation with The Church's Center for Theology and Public Policy, Washington D.C., 1991), 133.

<sup>4</sup> Norman C. Habel, David Rhoads, and H. Paul Santmire, ed., *The Season of Creation: A Preaching Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 20.

To that end, this guide will focus on five guiding principles to reorient every liturgy toward our wounded siblings:

1. Worship reorients us toward all other created beings.
2. Worship draws our attention to the cries of creation.
3. Worship demonstrates the sacramental nature of creation.
4. Worship joins us to the liturgical life of all creation.
5. Worship with creation can happen every week.

### **Worship reorients us toward all other created beings**

Often the central idea of worship is only giving praise to God, but in reality worship is doing much more. In fact, rather than a one-way relationship where we shape worship services, we find that in a way worship shapes us. Paul Santmire states it even more unequivocally when he claims, "...ritual creates and sustains the ideas and values and myths, the power relationships and fears, not the other way around."<sup>5</sup>

Worship has a powerful influence on congregations that often goes unacknowledged. It has the potential to enact great change in the hearts and minds of worshippers as they gather each week, especially if the service is constructed in such a way that allows for such a transformation. In fact, "...when we worship we put ourselves in a position to allow God to give us our bearings, to reorient us, to restore us to our rightful relationships."<sup>6</sup>

Most liturgies already restore right relationships with God and may even point us toward our neighbors, but unfortunately, "...the orientations we have allowed our religious rituals to give us have been almost exclusively interior orientations to the self, a map of the human heart without a macrocosm, without exterior references except to a World Away From Here, "heaven," we may call it."<sup>7</sup>

It is more than past time to update our liturgy so that it also restores us to rightful relationships with all creation and allows us to be shaped into fellow Earth creatures who care for our siblings, all other created beings. As Lathrop would argue, those seeds have already been planted: "The cardinal directions in Christian liturgy are these: toward God, toward each other in the assembly, toward the needy, toward the earth."<sup>8</sup> However, just as a GPS in your car is unhelpful if it doesn't give you turn-by-turn directions, these compass points can be similarly unhelpful without obvious arrows pointing toward their directions.

<sup>5</sup>H. Paul Santmire, *Ritualizing Nature: Renewing Christian Liturgy in a Time of Crisis* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 89.

<sup>6</sup>Habel, Rhoads, and Santmire, *The Season of Creation*, 17.

<sup>7</sup>Lathrop, *Holy Ground*, 58-59.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 63.

The Season of Creation is one way to make those directions more obvious. Beginning in the mid 1990's, congregations all over the world have devoted several weeks to focusing on God the Creator and worshipping with all creation. "The Season of Creation challenges us to reorient our relationship with creation, with the Creator, with Christ, and with the Holy Spirit... We return to see ourselves again as part of the very Earth from which we are made."<sup>9</sup> If we continue this trajectory to encompass all seasons of the church year instead of just four weeks, we can strengthen this reorientation, which is what the founders of the Season of Creation intended.

As we gather each week as communities of faith, we continue to turn back to God and to our neighbor. Now we can turn also to the Earth and the entire universe. As Ben Stewart states, "[Christian worship] is an act that ascribes worth to God, to us, and to the whole environment around us, stretching out to include the entire 'very good' cosmos."<sup>10</sup> Updating our liturgies can communicate how we value the earth and everything on it as we turn toward our hurting created siblings.

### **Worship draws our attention to the cries of creation.**

In the liturgy of the Greek Orthodox Church, there are several places where the presider will say, "Let us attend!"<sup>11</sup> In other words, pay attention! One could go through a worship service in a kind of mental fog, but these words call the congregation to be present and aware as important things happen. In the same way, now that our lives are so isolated from nature, we too could go through life in a kind of fog without fostering any kind of connection with God or our neighbors or the Earth. Liturgy itself already calls out, "Let us attend!" to the poor, to the needy, and to our loving God, but what of the creatures that cry out, or our wounded planet? Just as our worship reminds us to pay attention to the least of those around us as we go forth into the world, it can remind us of our siblings of other species and their concerns.

Similarly, there are several places in the Gospels where Jesus brings healing to those who cannot use their senses – though quite often, it is the disciples who are rebuked for seeing and hearing, yet not understanding. As earth-dwellers, our senses have become numb to the suffering of creation, and often when we do perceive what is going on around our fragile planet, we do not fully understand. The liturgy has a place in helping us regain our senses and our understanding of our place in the cosmos

It allows us to ask questions like, "What if authentic biblical religion and the liturgy that enacts and celebrates that religion really do mean to heal our eyes so that we may see the world itself held into holiness in God?"<sup>12</sup> Eco-liturgy is the mud placed on our eyes, the fingers in our ears

---

<sup>9</sup>Habel, Rhoads, and Santmire, *The Season of Creation*, 5.

<sup>10</sup>Benjamin M. Stewart, *A Watered Garden: Christian Worship and Earth's Ecology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2011), 10.

<sup>11</sup>Liturgical Commission of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, *The Orthodox Liturgy: The Greek Text of the Ecumenical Patriarchate with a translation into English* (Garwood, New Jersey: Graphic Arts Press, 1974), 25, 27, 71.

<sup>12</sup>Lathrop, *Holy Ground*, 4.

as God says, “*epiphatha*” – be opened – so that our senses may perceive what has been there all along: a cosmos in need of healing.

Creation itself is a sign that opens our senses and causes us to pay attention. As we hear the whispering of grasses, smell the saltiness of the ocean, see the beauty of majestic animals, taste the sweetness of honey, and feel snow falling softly on our upturned faces, we are called again to “attend” to creation and reminded of its need of healing. These material signs are a gift from our God who continues to offer tangible reminders to people who easily forget.

According to Martin Luther, God has always graciously condescended to our need for material signs:

For all the sacred accounts give proof that by His superabundant grace, our merciful God always placed some outward and visible sign of His grace alongside the Word, so that men, reminded by the outward sign and work or Sacrament, would believe with greater assurance that God is kind and merciful. . . Thus the church has never been deprived to such an extent of outward signs that it became impossible to know where God could surely be found.”<sup>13</sup>

These signs and opening of our senses point us toward creation and creation’s cries, as well as the ways that God is dwelling in the broken creation.

### **Worship demonstrates the sacramental nature of creation**

As we become aware of how God dwells in the earth that God has declared very good, we also become aware of how the Word comes to the material elements of the cosmos, giving all creation a sacramental nature. While different theologians can argue over the intricacies of sacral versus sacramental, both positions share common ground in that God dwells in, with, and under all the earth, God has made a covenantal promise with all creation, and creation itself is an element containing the presence of God.

Thus: “. . .our transcendent God is not floating loose somewhere beyond, but is bound to creation. In this sense, creation is God’s home, even as we can think of it as our sanctuary. Hence, as we have said, all creation is sacral, not just the eucharistic meal.”<sup>14</sup> While we can easily recognize water, bread and wine as participating in God’s grace, the rest of creation also points to God’s saving love for a broken cosmos. Furthermore, “The god whose presence fills Earth and who suffers with creation is also the God who through Christ is restoring creation and reconciling alienated dimensions of the creation.”<sup>15</sup>

God’s presence fills Heaven and the earth, pointing toward God’s grace through physical signs and symbols. All creation participates in this reorientation toward God’s saving love for the cosmos. This is shown also throughout the year as we celebrate different seasons of the church

---

<sup>13</sup> Martin Luther, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Luther’s Works Volume 1: Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 1-5* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), 248.

<sup>14</sup> Habel, Rhoads, and Santmire, *The Season of Creation*, 45.

<sup>15</sup> Habel, Rhoads, and Santmire, *The Season of Creation*, 39.

year. “So the liturgical year offers what we might call a sacramental approach to the earth’s seasons, approaching the earth’s great cycles as holy signs of Gods’ saving action in history, drawing us into worship alongside the whole living earth.”<sup>16</sup>

Just as Sunday morning helps us see ordinary bread, wine, and water as symbols of God’s expansive love for the entire universe, our worship can help us to realize the natural world is also pointing toward God’s grace. Thus all created things become sacramental, “...because the mystery of divine, self-giving presence is really mediated through the riches of the heavens and the earth. Participating in the glory of God, our whole planet is a beautiful showing forth of divine goodness and generosity.”<sup>17</sup>

### **Worship joins us to the liturgical life of all creation.**

It could be easy to imagine that only humans have a relationship with the Creator, but in fact everything that God has made rejoices in the Lord. Because humanity is relatively new to the planet, we are becoming part of a worship service that is already in progress and has been for eons. “Christian worship has always been an act of joining the wider worship of the whole creation, a liturgy that began long before humans even existed.”<sup>18</sup>

This worship is mentioned throughout the scriptures, in like Psalm 19:1-4:

The heavens declare the glory of God,  
and the sky proclaims its maker’s handiwork.  
One day tells its tale to another,  
and one night imparts knowledge to another.  
Although they have no words or language,  
and their voices are not heard,  
their sound has gone out into all lands  
and their message to the ends of the world,  
where God has pitched a tent for the sun.

Similarly, Psalm 148:1-6 declares:

Halleluia!  
Praise the Lord from the heavens;  
praise God in the heights.  
Praise the Lord all you angels;  
sing praise, all you hosts of heaven.  
Praise the Lord, sun and moon;  
sing praise, all you shining stars.  
Praise the Lord, heaven of heavens,  
and you waters above the heavens.

---

<sup>16</sup>Stewart, *A Watered Garden*, 52.

<sup>17</sup>Elizabeth Johnson “Heaven and Earth Are Filled with Your Glory” in *Finding God in All Things: Essays in Honor of Michael J. Buckley, S.J.* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996), 93.

<sup>18</sup>Stewart, *A Watered Garden*, 18.

Let them praise the name of the Lord,  
who commanded, and they were created,  
who made them stand fast forever and ever  
giving them a law that shall not pass away.

The psalm goes on to assert that sea monsters, fire and hail, mountains, wild beasts, and all people join in the worship of the Lord. This hymn of praise continues whether humans can hear it or not. Thus worship becomes a communal act throughout the entire cosmos rather than a gift only humanity can offer God.

### **Worship with creation can happen every week.**

Reading through the principles, case studies, and guidelines in this study could cause one to think that this guide may be helpful around Earth Day or in a liturgical Season of Creation. However, if we take seriously the depth of humanity's alienation from the rest of the cosmos and the urgency with which we must approach the planetary crises we are facing, these principles should be incorporated each and every week to begin to create the kind of transformation creation cries out for.

Even those responsible for popularizing the Season of Creation in the United States admit that those four weeks are only the beginning of a larger movement. As they say, "A Season of Creation has proven to be valuable in its own right. Yet we also need the Season of Creation to wake us up and show us another way to do worship *all the time*."<sup>19</sup>

Worshippers may object to what could be considered a special interest taking over the liturgical life of a congregation. After all, incorporating all of these principles every single week could seem like pastors and worship leaders are trying to hit their parishioners over the head with their pet project. However, if truly believe that creation cries out for healing and that it is part of our Christian vocation to care for creation, then leaders will do the work to prepare their people for this liturgical revolution.

After all, we do not celebrate four weeks of justice for the oppressed, nor do we wait for one Sunday per year to proclaim God's love. Those compass points are part of our worship practice in the way that eco-worship can and should be. Furthermore, because human beings are also created beings along with the entire cosmos, literally every human concern is a derivative of creation care. Wounded veterans, the poor and oppressed, the sick and dying, and others we pray for each week are all earth creatures in need of healing. If congregations can understand that, "According to the creation story in Genesis 1, this is what we are called to do: love God, love our neighbors, care for creation,"<sup>20</sup> then every worship service can continue to point to our Christian vocation.

### **Final thoughts**

---

<sup>19</sup>Habel, Rhoads, and Santmire, *The Season of Creation*, 4.

<sup>20</sup>Habel, Rhoads, and Santmire, *The Season of Creation*, 19.

The task before ministers, liturgists, and worship leaders is clear: humanity must be reconciled to the rest of the cosmos. As all creation continues to cry out in pain and brokenness due to human activity, our vocation is more urgent than ever before. But as we begin to be returned to our proper place in the cosmos, our senses restored to recognize creation's brokenness, recognizing God dwelling in this very good earth, joining in the worship of the whole universe, and doing those things every week, we will come to perceive and join God's work of healing and salvation for all the cosmos. Finally:

If God created the world as a place in which human life is inextricably woven into the rest of creation, then we need to make the natural world self-consciously an integral part of our worshiping experience. If worship means being restored to our proper place in the world in order to reorient us, to recall who we are, where we have come from, the things upon which we depend, and that for which we are responsible, then worship must be a celebration of all creation and a reorientation of ourselves to our proper place within it.<sup>21</sup>

## **Case Studies**

As a Lutheran worship leader, I draw heavily from the hymnal and liturgical guide published by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. These case studies and the rest of this guide will reference material from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, or the ELW. However, the principles can be applied to other worship sources and resources from other denominations just as easily.

### **Prayers of Intercession**

The prayers of intercession, or the prayers of the people, are a major part of reorienting the congregation toward creation as we intercede on creation's behalf. Gradually, more of creation has been included in these petitions that are provided by the resource Sundays and Seasons (sundaysandseasons.com), so that at least one each week is geared toward the natural world. However, often these petitions subtly reinforce humanity's dominance by praying that creation continue to benefit us and by excluding prayers for God's restoring and healing power and focusing solely on humanity's agency.

For example, prayers asking for blessing upon agriculture, hunting, or fishing are not intercessions on creation's behalf for the sake of creation; they are intercessions that these parts of creation continue to be beneficially exploited by humanity. Similarly, prayers that humankind become better caretakers of this earth on which we live become prayers directed toward human agency as we clean up our own home so that we can continue to live in it.

For instance, look at the creation petition for the fifth Sunday after Epiphany in 2018:

For the earth and all living creatures, for those preparing fields for planting, and for favorable weather, that all of us who care for this life will find voice to help creation thrive, let us pray.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> Habel, Rhoads, and Santmire, *The Season of Creation*, 18.

<sup>22</sup> "Sunday, February 4, 2018: Fifth Sunday after Epiphany/Lectionary 5," Sundays and Seasons, accessed February 14, 2018, <https://members.sundaysandseasons.com/Home/TextsAndResources?date=2018-2&eventDateId=0#texts>.

While the beginning phrase “for the earth and all living creatures” turns us toward other created beings, and the phrase, “help creation thrive,” in a way can draw our attention to the parts of creation that are not thriving, the third and fourth principles are not realized. Since this genre of prayer has continued to be incorporated on most Sundays, it does continue every week. A different prayer could perhaps strengthen our reorientation for this single petition, as would a second petition specifically for human concerns as related to nature. For example:

Indwelling God, the earth is filled with your glory. We pray for the planet and all living creatures, especially creation in need of healing. Bring your power of redemption to the whole cosmos that all may continue to worship you.

And for humans:

God our provider, you have given humankind food and shelter on this earth. Bless those preparing fields for planting and provide favorable weather. Give us strength and courage to join your work of healing our common home.

Not every prayer each week needs to include all of the principles. However, the more principles that are included, the more a congregation can be turned toward the rest of creation. For example, while the prayer for the first Sunday in Lent for 2018 does not address the sacramental nature of creation or the ways creation worships God, it does turn those praying toward creation in a way that includes humankind in creation without placing humanity at the pinnacle:

“We pray for the world. For the well-being of both our own surroundings and of distant places. For favorable weather and sustaining rains. For creatures awakening from hibernation or beginning seasonal migrations. Provide safe habitats and abundant food for all. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer”<sup>23</sup>

One edit to make our place in creation even more clear would be to change “For the well-being of both our own surroundings and of distant places” to “For the well-being of all environments around the globe.”

One of the best prayers for creation in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* can be found in the additional prayers section in the front of the hymnal. The prayer called Creation’s Praise centers creation’s worship and draws humanity into that praise without making the prayer all about humanity. While it might be tempting to read this prayer only on special celebrations, such as Earth Day or a season of creation, parts of this prayer can be adapted and used many times throughout the church year.

“Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ, who in your self-emptying love gathered up and reconciled all creation to the Father. Innumerable galaxies of the heavens worship you. Creatures that grace the earth rejoice in you. All those in the deepest seas bow to you in adoration. As with them we give you praise, grant that we may cherish the earth, our

---

<sup>23</sup>“Sunday, February 18, 2018: First Sunday in Lent,” *Sundays and Seasons*, accessed February 14, 2018, <https://members.sundaysandseasons.com/Home/TextsAndResources/2018-2-18/0#texts>.

home, and live in harmony with this good creation, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.”<sup>24</sup>

### **Eucharistic Prayer**

Another large section of the liturgy that should be subjected to scrutiny and careful choices is the Eucharistic Prayer. There are several different options offered in the ELW, some used more than others. The first one offered is incredibly anthropocentric, to the point where it ignores the rest of creation altogether:

You are indeed holy, almighty and merciful God.  
You are most holy,  
and great is the majesty of your glory.  
You so loved the world that you gave your only Son,  
so that everyone who believes in him may not perish  
but have eternal life.  
We give you thanks for his coming into the world  
to fulfill for us your holy will  
and to accomplish all things for our salvation.  
In the night in which he was betrayed,  
our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks;  
broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:  
Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.  
Do this for the remembrance of me.  
Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks,  
and gave it for all to drink, saying:  
This cup is the new covenant in my blood,  
shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.  
Do this for the remembrance of me.  
For as often as we eat of this bread and drink from this cup,  
we proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.  
**Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.**  
Remembering, therefore, his salutary command,  
his life-giving passion and death, his glorious resurrection and ascension,  
and the promise of his coming again,  
we give thanks to you, O Lord God Almighty,  
not as we ought but as we are able;  
we ask you mercifully to accept our praise and thanksgiving  
and with your Word and Holy Spirit to bless us, your servants,  
and these your own gifts of bread and wine,  
so that we and all who share in the body and blood of Christ  
may be filled with heavenly blessing and grace,  
and, receiving the forgiveness of sin,  
may be formed to live as your holy people

---

<sup>24</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship: Leaders Desk Edition* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 152. (Hereafter cited as ELCA and ELCC, *ELW:LDE*)

and be given our inheritance with all your saints.  
To you, O God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
be all honor and glory in your holy church, now and forever.  
**Amen, amen, amen.**<sup>25</sup>

The phrase, “We give you thanks for his coming into the world to fulfill for us your holy will and to accomplish all things for our salvation,” ignores the redemption of the cosmos and focuses on humanity’s salvation. As it asks, “that we and all who share in the body and blood of Christ may be filled with heavenly blessing and grace, and, receiving the forgiveness of sin, may be formed to live as your holy people,” this prayer’s praise and petitions are all focused on the congregation’s relationship with God to the exclusion of all else. This Eucharistic prayer orients the congregation toward God and the rest of the assembly, but not toward the needy or the rest of creation. It doesn’t acknowledge the cries of creation, admit to the sacramental nature of creation or join us to the liturgical life of creation. This prayer – in some ways the apex of the service – can play a pivotal role in reconciling people to the cosmos if some of these principles are incorporated.

Different liturgical seasons offer slightly more ecological guidance. The Eucharistic prayer offered for the season of Advent and Christmas begins:

Holy One, the beginning and the end, the giver of life:  
Blessed are you for the birth of creation.  
Blessed are you in the darkness and in the light.  
Blessed are you for your promise to your people.  
Blessed are you in the prophets’ hopes and dreams.  
Blessed are you for Mary’s openness to your will.  
Blessed are you for your Son Jesus,  
the Word made flesh.<sup>26</sup>

By adding a blessing for the birth of creation and in darkness and light, this prayer orients us toward other species. However, the line, “Blessed are you for your promise to your people,” ignores God’s covenant with all creation in the Flood Narrative and the way creation also participates in God’s work of redemption.

Another option offered in the ELW is the sixth prayer. It begins:

Holy God, mighty Lord,  
gracious Father:  
endless is your mercy  
and eternal your reign.  
You have filled all creation  
with light and life;

---

<sup>25</sup>ELCA and ELCC, *ELW:LDE*, 194-195.

<sup>26</sup>ELCA and ELCC, *ELW:LDE*, 196.

heaven and earth are full of your glory.<sup>27</sup>

By referencing all creation and declaring that all creation is filled with God's light and life, this prayer both points worshippers toward the cosmos and demonstrates the sacramental nature of creation. This is a good option for a eco-Eucharistic prayer during ordinary time. However, the best option is the seventh prayer in the ELW:

Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal:  
you we praise and glorify, you we worship and adore.  
You formed the earth from chaos;  
you encircled the globe with air;  
you created fire for warmth and light;  
you nourish the lands with water.  
You molded us in your image,  
and with mercy higher than the mountains,  
with grace deeper than the seas,  
you blessed the Israelites and cherished them as your own.  
That also we, estranged and dying,  
might be adopted to live in your Spirit,  
you called to us through the life and death of Jesus.  
In the night in which he was betrayed,  
our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks;  
broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:  
Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.  
Do this for the remembrance of me.  
Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks,  
and gave it for all to drink, saying:  
This cup is the new covenant in my blood,  
shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.  
Do this for the remembrance of me.  
Together as the body of Christ,  
we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes:  
**Christ has died.**  
**Christ is risen.**  
**Christ will come again.**  
With this bread and cup we remember your Son,  
the first-born of your new creation.  
We remember his life lived for others,  
and his death and resurrection, which renews the face of the earth.  
We await his coming,  
when, with the world made perfect through your wisdom,  
all our sins and sorrows will be no more.  
**Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**  
Holy God, holy and merciful one, holy and compassionate,  
send upon us and this meal your Holy Spirit,

---

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 199.

whose breath revives us for life,  
whose fire rouses us to love.  
Enfold in your arms all who share this holy food.  
Nurture in us the fruits of the Spirit,  
that we may be a living tree, sharing your bounty with all the world.  
**Amen. Come, Holy Spirit.**  
Holy and benevolent God,  
receive our praise and petitions,  
as Jesus received the cry of the needy,  
and fill us with your blessing,  
until, needy no longer and bound to you in love,  
we feast forever in the triumph of the Lamb:  
through whom all glory and honor is yours, O God, O Living One,  
with the Holy Spirit, in your holy church, now and forever.  
**Amen.**<sup>28</sup>

The very beginning of this prayer alerts us to the fact that we are not the only ones in relationship with the Creator. By declaring, “You formed the earth from chaos; you encircled the globe with air; you created fire for warmth and light; you nourish the lands with water,” this prayer points us toward the entire cosmos as benefiting from and participating in God’s creative power. We are again reminded of our place as one species of created beings among many.

This prayer also opens our senses to the cries of creation by declaring, “We remember his life lived for others, and his death and resurrection, which renews the face of the earth.” Humans are not the only ones in need of healing and renewal. The entire cosmos cries out in brokenness, and in his resurrection Jesus brings wholeness to all creation.

This prayer could more strongly fulfill the third and fourth principles, but by asserting Jesus is “the first-born of all creation,” it points to the sacramental nature of creation. Jesus is present in all the earth and dwells with all creation. The prayer also alludes to creation’s worship by stating, “You molded us in your image, and with mercy higher than the mountains, with grace deeper than the seas, you blessed the Israelites and cherished them as your own.” However, both of these could be strengthened.

Finally, this Eucharist prayer, or one that is similar, could be prayed every week. It is a bit longer than some congregations are used to, so it could also be shortened to leave the most essential parts. Or different principles could be highlighted each week without necessarily demanding that all be present.

## **Other illustrations**

Everything throughout the liturgy can be evaluated with the five guiding principles and altered to form congregations into witnesses for our fellow created beings. Following is a guide through a

---

<sup>28</sup> ELCA and ELCC, *ELW:LDE*, 200-201.

traditional service from the ELW with various changes to make the creation orientation more obvious.

## **Gathering**

### Confession and Forgiveness

If, as Lathrop says, the cardinal directions in our worship are God, each other, the needy, and creation, the rite of Confession and Forgiveness is sorely lacking in the final aspect. While it may be helpful to add a specific petition for forgiveness from our ecological sins, you may also simply recognize our shortcomings in the first prayer for forgiveness like thus: “We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves; we have not loved all Creation with the love of the Creator.”

### Thanksgiving for Baptism

The Thanksgiving for Baptism is perfect place to bring in language that illustrates the five principles mentioned above. One way to open worshippers’ senses to perceive creation’s cries is through the practice of aspurgung, or flinging water over the congregation. This tangible reminder of baptism can help draw us back into relationship with water. This is also a good point to have children be involved in the service. Another way to bring actual water into the sanctuary is to include prayers for the health of the local rivers, lakes, streams, oceans, or watershed.

The prayers throughout this rite can be adapted to include the gift of water and the way it brings forth life. Lathrop includes this prayer from the *Common Book of Worship* in his discussion of baptism: “At the beginning your Spirit was at work, brooding over the waters of creation’s birth, bringing forth life in all its fullness. Through the gift of water you nourish and sustain all living things. Glory to you forever and ever.”<sup>29</sup>

If you use the traditional Thanksgiving for Baptism in the ELW, you can make small changes like adding all creatures to “Through the waters of the flood you delivered Noah and his family.”<sup>30</sup> There were two of every animal but only eight humans on the ark, yet somehow we only recall God’s saving power toward humanity. In fact, the entire rite should be less human-centered, in recognition of water’s sustaining power for all Creation. It would be appropriate to add a beseeching prayer for the health of nearby waters, or for all water in the globe. “Perhaps even mountains and rivers and seas – even solar systems and galaxies – could enter our prayers. Baptism must not be about saving us from this company, but with this company.”<sup>31</sup>

### Gathering Song

---

<sup>29</sup>“Thanksgiving over the Water”, *Book of Common Worship* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 422. As cited in *Holy Ground* 104.

<sup>30</sup>ELCA and ELCC, *ELW:LDE*, 169.

<sup>31</sup>Lathrop, *Holy Ground*, 113.

As we begin the gathering song, there are several options. All of them preference the well-being of humanity and exclude the rest of creation. Not all songs must be about the entire cosmos, but these songs are expansive, singing for peace for the entire world. If we have already included all human beings, not just the ones in our assembly, denomination, or faith, we might as well include all other species who worship God.

Slight adjustments to the lyrics may easily alter the song and continue to draw us back into relationship with all other created beings. This is easy in some settings where the Kyrie is chanted and thus more adaptable to changing lyrics, or in churches where the songs are printed in the bulletin instead of sung out of a hymnal. If you are a hymnal church and you do decide to permanently change the lyrics, consider printing a small booklet containing the service hymns with the alterations for each hymnal so that visitor may also participate.

### Kyrie

Most of the Kyrie used in the ELW is fine, but the second line is problematic:

“For the peace from above, and for our salvation, let us pray to the Lord.”<sup>32</sup>

The line, “for the peace from above,” continues the earth-Heaven dichotomy that has led many Christians to treat this planet as disposable. If God truly dwells in the earth, if the earth is filled with God’s glory, then God’s peace is present in, with, under, around, and throughout the entire cosmos. It is not just descending from above, but rising from the deeps, and spreading out from each created being. An amendment that could recognize this might sound like:

“For the peace of the Creator, for the well-being of the church of God...”

### Hymn of Praise

The first option for a hymn of praise begins and ends with the phrase, “Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God’s people on earth.”<sup>33</sup> This anthropocentric song ignores the worship that creation is already and constantly engaging in. An adaptation could potentially sound like, “Glory to God in the highest and peace to creation on earth.”

The second option, “This is the Feast,” includes the line, “Worthy is Christ, the Lamb who was slain, whose blood set us free to be people of God.”<sup>34</sup> However, this language obscures the fact that God’s power of redemption is for the entire cosmos, and not just one species. A more accurate and rhythmically similar adaption looks something like, “Worthy is Christ, the Lamb who was slain, whose blood redeems us and all creation.”

## **Word**

### Sermon

---

<sup>32</sup> ELCA and ELCC, *ELW:LDE*, 170.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 173.

Preachers are often willing to preach on creation during a special Season of Creation or Earth Day service, but what about the rest of the year? As part of the *ordo*, sermons continue the work that the beginning of the service has already started. “Preaching means to bring us again to faith and so gift us again with the reoriented view of the world that belongs to the whole liturgy.”<sup>35</sup> While not every sermon has to have creation as its sole focus, there are other ways of bringing in lessons from the Book of Nature. One of the easiest is to include stories of time spent in nature.

For a January term class in seminary, I visited Holden Village – a Lutheran retreat and renewal center in the Cascade Mountains of Washington – to learn how the seasons of the Church were tied to the seasons of creation. Over the course of this class, other students gave presentations about different aspects of the liturgy, especially focusing on the cycle of daily prayer. We explored these topics through mystagogy, using our own experiences, stories, and metaphors to dive deeply into sacramental theology.

Beginning many sessions with prompts and questions like, “Think about your favorite sunrise,” or “What is a memorable scent for you?” allowed us to pull from our own natural experiences to explore theological topics like Gospel canticles and incense. It also demonstrated that almost everyone has cherished and memorable stories of creation that can be told with only a few moments of thought. These stories, of our relationships with creation, can be brought into any sermon as we continue to be reoriented toward our non-human siblings.

Not every sermon must include some sort of personal testimony of a creation experience, but including stories of time in nature throughout the year allows worshipers to continue being reoriented during the preaching event. There are many opportunities for this sort of story – stories of being lost in a wilderness during Lent, stories of new birth or growing things in Easter, stories of things dying through Advent, stories of light and darkness in Christmas and Epiphany, and many more throughout ordinary time.

## **Meal**

The Eucharistic prayer has already been discussed at length, but there are other adaptations that can be made to the rest of the sacrament to strengthen the reorientation toward creation.

### Offering

For example, during the offering, if your community has a garden some of the produce can be brought forward with the bread and wine and money. Similarly, flowers, changing leaves, and other parts of nature’s praise like rocks or shells could also be brought up as a representation of what creation is offering God in praise.

### Communion

As for the actual physical part of the meal, consider offering vegan bread so that those who do not consume animal products can still partake. There are many excellent recipes online to guide you, and many are also gluten-free.

---

<sup>35</sup>Lathrop, *Holy Ground*, 204.

## Conclusion

This guide is not intended to be the definitive answer on how to incorporate love for the earth into the liturgy, but merely the beginning of a conversation. The Holy Spirit will guide each community in their own respective contexts as to how we modify our worship to transform congregations into witnesses for all creation. Lathrop asks, "...does that assembly invite us to see the place on which we meet – and the earth all around the meeting – as holy ground? Do the stories we tell, the meals we eat, the rituals we keep, engage us in caring for the earth with which we live? Or not?"<sup>36</sup>

My hope and prayer for all worshipping communities is that they will be invited to know the place in which they meet – indeed, the entire earth – as holy ground, as they become reconciled to the rest of the created cosmos. As we are reoriented towards creation, sensing creation's cries, being drawn to creation's sacramental nature, joining creation in worship, and doing these things constantly, we will join God's work of healing and salvation for the entire universe.

---

<sup>36</sup>Lathrop, *Holy Ground*, 125.

## **Bibliography**

- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada. *Evangelical Lutheran Worship: Leaders Desk Edition*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006.
- Habel, Norman C., Rhoads, David, and Santmire, H. Paul, ed. *The Season of Creation: A Preaching Commentary*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011.
- Johnson, Elizabeth. "Heaven and Earth Are Filled with Your Glory" in *Finding God in All Things: Essays in Honor of Michael J. Buckley, S.J.* New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996.
- Lathrop Gordon. *Holy Ground: A Liturgical Cosmology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009.
- Liturgical Commission of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America. *The Orthodox Liturgy: The Greek Text of the Ecumenical Patriarchate with a translation into English*. Garwood, New Jersey: Graphic Arts Press, 1974.
- Luther, Martin., ed. Jaroslav Pelikan. *Luther's Works Volume 1: Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 1-5*. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958.
- Nash, James. *Loving Nature: Ecological Integrity and the Christian Responsibility*. Nashville: Abingdon; in cooperation with The Church's Center for Theology and Public Policy, Washington D.C., 1991.
- Santmire, H. Paul. *Ritualizing Nature: Renewing Christian Liturgy in a Time of Crisis*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008.
- Stewart, Benjamin M. *A Watered Garden: Christian Worship and Earth's Ecology*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2011.
- "Sunday, February 4, 2018: Fifth Sunday after Epiphany/Lectionary 5," *Sundays and Seasons*, accessed February 14, 2018, <https://members.sundaysandseasons.com/Home/TextsAndResources?date=2018-2&eventDateId=0#texts>.
- "Sunday, February 18, 2018: First Sunday in Lent," *Sundays and Seasons*, accessed February 14, 2018, <https://members.sundaysandseasons.com/Home/TextsAndResources/2018-2-18/0#texts>.