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CALL TO WORSHIP

In the beginning, and today,
God shapes beauty from chaos.

Today, we respond in praise!

In the beginning, and today, God speaks.

Today, we speak out.

From the beginning, and for all days, God sustains with faithfulness.

Today, we make our commitment.

We gather in the image of the Creator
who is a community of love.

We gather in the name of the Redeemer
who reconciles all of creation.

We gather in the presence of the Life Giver
who inspires new life and renews it.

We gather in the name of God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of the Earth and all its creatures! Praise be to the Holy Trinity! God is sound and life, Creator of the Universe, Source of all life, of whom the angels sing; wondrous Light of all mysteries known or unknown to humankind, and life that lives in all. **Amen.**

(Hildegard of Bingen, 13th Century)

HYMN SF 353: *Jesus is Lord! Creation's Voice Proclaims It*

Jesus is Lord!
Creation's voice proclaims it,
for by his power
each tree and flower was
planned and made.
Jesus is Lord! The universe declares it;
sun, moon and stars in heaven cry:
Jesus is Lord!

*Jesus is Lord! Jesus is Lord!
Praise him with alleluias,
for Jesus is Lord!*

Jesus is Lord!
Yet from his throne eternal
in flesh he came to die in pain on
Calvary's tree.
Jesus is Lord!
From him all life proceeding —
yet gave his life a ransom,
thus setting us free.

*Jesus is Lord! Jesus is Lord!
Praise him with alleluias,
for Jesus is Lord!*

Jesus is Lord ! O'er sin the mighty conqueror,
from death he rose ; and all his foes shall own his name.
Jesus is Lord ! God sends his Holy Spirit
to show by works of power that Jesus is Lord. *Jesus is Lord . . .*

PRAISE

Bless the LORD, O my soul.

Bless the LORD, O my soul.

O LORD my God, you are very great.

You are clothed with honour and majesty,
wrapped in light as with a garment.

**You stretch out the heavens like a tent,
you set the beams of your chambers on the waters,**

you make the clouds your chariot,
you ride on the wings of the wind,

**You set the earth on its foundations,
so that it shall never be shaken.**

You make springs gush forth in the valleys;
they flow between the hills,
giving drink to every wild animal;
the wild asses quench their thirst.

**By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation;
they sing among the branches.**

You cause the grass to grow for the cattle,
and plants for people to use,
to bring forth food from the earth,

O LORD, how manifold are your works!

In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.

May the glory of the LORD endure for ever;

may the LORD rejoice in his works—

I will sing to the LORD as long as I live;

I will sing praise to my God while I have being.

Bless the LORD, O my soul.

Praise the LORD!

Glorious God, the whole of creation proclaims your marvellous work:

Increase in us a capacity to wonder and delight in it,

That heaven's praise may echo in our hearts

And our lives be spent as good stewards of the earth,

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

CONFESSION

We praise you God, for the Earth that sustains life. Through the planetary cycles of days and seasons, renewal and growth, you open your hand to give all creatures our food in the proper time. In your Wisdom you gave a Sabbath for the land to rest. But these days our living pushes the planet beyond its limits. Our demand for growth, and an endless cycle of production and consumption are exhausting our world. The forests are leached, the topsoil erodes, the fields fail, the deserts advance, the seas acidify, the storms intensify. Humans and animals are forced to flee in search of security. We have not allowed the land to observe a Sabbath, and the Earth is struggling to renew.

Creator God, maker of heaven and earth,

We acknowledge our failure to live responsibly as part of your creation.

**We have taken what we want, without considering the consequences;
we have wasted and discarded, without thought for the future.**

**Open our hearts and minds to the signs of our times, to the groaning of creation,
so that we may turn from our greed and lack of vision
and see a world being made anew in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen**

The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. **Amen**

PRAYER

God of all creation,

your goodness and glory shines through everything you have made.

Through the light of faith, help us to see this world, our common home,

not as a resource to dominate and exploit, but as a gift to be cherished by all generations.

Prompted by your Spirit, and in honour and worship of you,

may we be willing to change our ways,

and be passionate about caring for the Earth you call us to take care of.

We ask this in the name of Jesus,

through whom all creation was made and will be renewed. **Amen**

SONG SF 544: *As the Deer Pants for the water*

As the deer pants for the water,
so my soul longs after you.

You alone are my heart's desire
and I long to worship you.

*You alone are my strength, my shield,
to you alone may my spirit yield.*

*You alone are my heart's desire
and I long to worship you.*

I want you more than gold or silver,
only you can satisfy.

You alone are the real joy-giver
and the apple of my eye.

*You alone are my strength, my shield,
to you alone may my spirit yield.*

*You alone are my heart's desire
and I long to worship you.*

You're my friend and you are my brother,
even though you are a king.
I love you more than any other,
so much more than anything.
*You alone are my strength, my shield,
to you alone may my spirit yield.
You alone are my heart's desire
and I long to worship you.*

Martin J. Nystrom (b. 1956)

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READINGS: Genesis 1:1-2:3

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

And God said, 'Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.' So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

And God said, 'Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.' And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, 'Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.' And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

And God said, 'Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.' And it was so. God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

And God said, 'Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.' So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.' And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

And God said, 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.' And it was so. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.'

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.' God said, 'See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.' And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

Colossians 1:15-20

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to

reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

Isaiah 65:17-25

For I am about to create new heavens
and a new earth;

the former things shall not be remembered
or come to mind.

But be glad and rejoice for ever
in what I am creating;

for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy,
and its people as a delight.

I will rejoice in Jerusalem,
and delight in my people;

no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it,
or the cry of distress.

No more shall there be in it
an infant that lives but a few days,
or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;

for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth,
and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.

They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

They shall not build and another inhabit;
they shall not plant and another eat;

for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

They shall not labour in vain,
or bear children for calamity;

for they shall be offspring blessed by the LORD—
and their descendants as well.

Before they call I will answer,
while they are yet speaking I will hear.

The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,
the lion shall eat straw like the ox;
but the serpent—its food shall be dust!

They shall not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain,
says the LORD.

REFLECTION

When people of pagan religions built their temples, they would go to great trouble to ensure it was as beautiful and impressive as possible with the technology they had at their disposal.

Whether in wood or stone they would take a long time to build the walls, level the floor, put a roof on; arrange places to put fire for light and heat; sometimes they might have had to redirect a river or dig a well for a water supply; they would organise places for all that was needed to run the day-to-day economy of the temple with those who worked there and those who brought offerings and worship; they would then go to great trouble to decorate the walls and ceilings with precious stones, gold or paintings; It would be an impressive and beautiful place.

The last act before the new temple could begin to be used would be to place in the centre of the worship area an image of the god that was to be worshipped.

Genesis 1 looks like a poetic description of the creation of a temple for the worship of God. The last act in the building of the temple of creation is to place humankind – male and female - in the centre, the image of God who is to be worshipped.

It means that human beings are made to have the attributes of God. Interestingly, human beings are also the ones who are commissioned to work in the temple as well as being the ones who express their worship of God in whose image we are created.

It is the role that we have in the temple – the way we relate to creation – that has been debated and become contentious.

Twice in the description of the sixth day of creation – the final phase of the making of this place to worship God – twice God says,
'have *dominion* ...'

'... have *dominion* over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.'

'... have *dominion* over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.'
'have *dominion* ...'

As long ago as 1967, medieval historian Lynn White claimed that this text is at the root of the ecological crisis because it gives humanity free reign to see the earth as our possession to exploit for our own material advantage.

It would be a separate debate to talk about how influential that text has been but what we do need to do is draw on other aspects of our tradition - and aspects of our learning that was certainly available in 1967 and probably for at least 100 years before that – we need to draw on our spiritual, theological and biblical resources to show that 'having dominion' is not about exploitation, not about doing as we like

for our own material advantage without thinking either of the rest of the ‘temple’ of creation or of future generations of our own species.

Just starting from Genesis, it is clear from the structure of the chapter 1 that humanity is part of creation – a special part with a special role – but nonetheless *part of creation*. Genesis 2 reinforces that by starting again in an account of creation and starting with *adam* – the man - taken from *adamah* – the earth.

Chapter 2 goes on to explain the ‘have dominion’ phrase: “God put Adam in the garden to till and keep it” (Genesis 2:15).

These are verbs that derive from words that mean ‘serve’ and ‘keep’ – describe a very different kind of ‘dominion’ from the domination that has been human practise for centuries, millennia if not forever.

Perhaps that’s the clue to where it all went pear shaped – or more traditionally perhaps ‘apple shaped’.

We come to Genesis 3 but don’t worry, we’re not going through every chapter of the Bible today.

Genesis 3 has an incident with a piece of fruit where Adam and Eve do not ‘keep’ to the rules that they’ve been given. Much can be said about what’s going on in the eating of the forbidden fruit whether that’s an apple, a pear or whatever. The key thing for us is that it describes a humanity that has ideas above our station and wants to be not simply the image that points towards the God who is to be worshipped, but wants to be that God.

It points us to the fact that the relationship of creature to creator has broken down. Instead of translating ‘dominion’ as ‘serve’ and ‘keep’ and knowing ourselves as part of the creation in worshipping within the temple of which we are a part we have translated it as ‘domination’ and sought a position above and apart from the creation to exploit it for our own material advantage.

That’s all a very long way of saying that humanity has ‘sinned’. We got it wrong, we made a mess of things and now we are reaping the consequences and the whole of creation – including future generations of humanity - is paying the price.

Hmm

So, what’s to be done about it?

There are two lines to take on this one

Let’s start with the easy one to describe even if it’s not easy to accomplish. It what the forthcoming climate conference is about. COP26 in Glasgow in November is part of the process of humanity trying to convince ourselves that there is something we can do once we’ve realised that this is a crisis.

The 3 steps in the humanity focused strand is to realise there’s a crisis; notice that there is still something we can do about it;

take the necessary actions.

Various people express different degrees of confidence that the worst outcomes not only can but will be averted. It's a matter of how much optimism you have and how much faith you place in humanity and our political leaders.

So that's one strand but you'll have noticed that I've carefully avoided using the word hope. I was keeping that word for the second strand which takes into account the God who built this temple and placed us in the centre in his image.

Optimism is a human disposition and people vary to what extent they're 'glass half full' or 'glass half empty' kind of people.

'Hope', by contrast is based in something. We hope for what we know to be coming and Colossians gives us some grounds for hope.

Writing to Christians in Colossae in the mid C1st, Paul describes Jesus Christ as the image of the invisible God and not just the first born of all creation and the agent of creation but also 'the firstborn from the dead'.

So, we might want to ask, 'what's that all about then?'

Keep in mind that Paul had the equivalent of several PhDs in Jewish Scriptural studies and Jewish theology. He knew that the expectation was that at some stage God would bring time to an end and everyone would be raised from the dead – or possibly just the faithful of God's people would be raised from the dead to enjoy life and creation as it was always meant to be.

But even with this background Paul had been convinced, by a personal encounter, that Jesus had been raised from the dead as what he called a 'first fruits' – a kind of advance. And Paul's conclusion, as well as the conclusion of other early Christian writers in what we call the New Testament, was that this was the beginning of the new creation.

Jesus' resurrection meant that it would not be a once for all, clean break moment when the old finished and the new began. Jesus' resurrection meant that the new creation had broken into the old and all that spelt the breakdown of the old could be repaired. All that made a mess of the décor and the structure and the relationships within the temple of creation was being put right.

Paul describes it as God himself intervening in the life and workings of the temple that he created in order to bring about the ultimate in reconciliation. Exactly how it works would take too long to explore today in terms of how the models of worship and relationships among God's people known as Israel was paralleled and applied to all through Jesus.

But essentially that's what Paul is saying happened.

In Jesus 'all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.'

The image of God, the first born of creation, the first born from the dead reconciled all things through his death and inaugurated the new creation by his resurrection.

That gives us hope.

And it's not as though there weren't any clues to this being God's intention.

Isaiah's vision in chapter 65 is of the new heavens and the new earth. There are other OT visions of this which are picked up in the ultimate vision of the new creation at the end of Revelation but this one is helpful to us today as we look for grounds for hope in a crisis that threatens the whole ecosystem of this temple built for the worship of God that we call creation.

Isaiah's vision has numerous references to restored relationships within creation based upon justice and abundance and life and health.

It gives us hope because it is a vision of humanity holding all together. It is a role we know we are equipped for because we have the gifts and intelligence either to hurt and destroy in domination or to be the focus of all the enables the whole creation to be glad and rejoice, to live and to thrive.

The final point to note is that of the two strands that I've described – the human focused strand and the one that sees God's actions and promises – it is not a question of either or.

It is not simply a case of saying that if God wants something we don't have to worry because he'll sort it out. Prayer, it has been said before, is a dangerous activity because very often God asks us to be part of the answer to our prayers.

We don't have to put our complete faith in human leaders to get this one right; God's promises do give us hope; but for that hope to be fulfilled we do have to play our part.

We have the gifts and intelligence to hurt and destroy through our exploitation of the abundance of creation as we seek our own material interests as we relate to the creation in domination.

The same gifts and intelligence also enable us to choose to be part of the new creation, restoring the relationships of peace and justice so that creation will be renewed in joy and gladness to live and to thrive. **Amen**

AN ACT OF COMMITMENT FOR THE CARE OF CREATION

'While all creatures stand in expectation, what will be the result of our liberty?'

(Thomas Traherne)

As the whole of creation looks with eager longing for the redemption of humankind, let us pledge ourselves anew to serve our Creator God, the Father who is the maker of all things, the Son through whom all things are made, and the Holy Spirit, the giver of life, who renews the face of the earth.

**Lord of life and giver of hope,
we pledge ourselves to care for creation,
to reduce our waste,
to live sustainably,
and to value the rich diversity of life.
May your wisdom guide us, that life in all its forms may flourish,
and may we be faithful in voicing creation's praise.
May the commitment we have made this day be matched by our faithful living.
Amen**

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Version of - THE LORD'S PRAYER

Parent of Soil and Sky

May our praise reveal your beauty

May your encircling love bear fruit

As sun, rain and snow empower creation

Provide for life, all that sustains,

Free us from stubborn arrogance, and all it brings:

that we enable change for fellow creatures

Save us in the midst of what our kind has brought about:

deliver life from evil

For the seasons, the cycles and the power of life are yours

Now, and through all endings.

Let it be so!

HYMN SF 82: *O Lord My God (How Great Thou Art)*

O Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder
consider all the works thy hand hath made,
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,
thy power throughout the universe displayed :
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee :
how great thou art, how great thou art !
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee :
how great thou art, how great thou art !

When through the woods and forest glades I wander
and hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees ;
when I look down from lofty mountain grandeur,
and hear the brook, and feel the gentle breeze :
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee :

And when I think that God, his Son not sparing,
sent him to die, I scarce can take it in
that on the cross, my burden gladly bearing,
he bled and died to take away my sin :

Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee :

When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation
and take me home — what joy shall fill my heart ;
then shall I bow in humble adoration,
and there proclaim : my God, how great thou art :

Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee :

Stuart K. Hine (1899–1989)

vv. 1, 2, 4 based on *O store Gud* 1885 by

Carl Gustaf Boberg (1859–1940)

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Performed by: Ruth and Joy Everingham

BLESSING

May God who established the dance of creation,
Who marvelled at the lilies of the field,
Who transforms chaos to order,
Lead us to transform our lives and the Church to reflect God's glory in creation.

Amen

May God the Holy Spirit, who hovered over the waters of creation and formed the world from chaos, form us in the likeness of Christ and renew the face of the earth;
and the blessing of God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer
be among us and remain with us and those we love
and all for whom we pray today and always. **Amen**