



SUSTAINABLE SEPTEMBER 2021

Earth, Sea & Sky

The Earth and its Soil

A Service for Sustainable September – 5 September, 2021

GATHERING

As the service begins, pass a number of smaller bowls of soil around the congregation. Don't offer any commentary other than the invitation to pass the bowls around. Include enough bowls so that this part of the service does not become drawn out. Once everyone has had a chance to interact with the bowls, have them brought forward.

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our first Sunday of Sustainable September. Today we focus on the earth and its soils

Soil may not be as visually striking as a green forest or appear as vital as fresh water, but plain-looking soil is a natural resource just as essential to sustaining life on Earth. Soil provides nutrients, water and minerals to plants and trees, stores carbon and is home to billions of insects, small animals, bacteria and many other micro-organisms. The multiple roles of soils often go unnoticed. Soils don't have a voice, and few people speak out for them. They are our silent ally in food production. The scriptures speak of soil cooperating with God in creation as God calls upon the earth to bring forth all forms of vegetation and animals. The scriptures further acknowledge humanity's intimate connection with earth as humans too are formed from the humus, from soil.

We have gathered recognising our place within this amazingly diverse and bountiful planet and we reflect on how we live as members of our planet's ecosystem. What does it mean for us as followers of Jesus who calls us to paths of justice and compassion? How do we use, or abuse, the resources and produce of the world and the impact that may have upon those who we share this planet with?

CALL TO WORSHIP AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF FIRST PEOPLES

Pour the soil from the smaller bowls into the larger, central location.

We gather in thanksgiving for soil which works with God in the act of creation and which teams with life and sustains life. We give thanks for the fruit of the earth which nurtures and sustains us.

We give thanks for soil which sustains and nurtures us.

We acknowledge we are intimately connected with soil and have a responsibility to care for soil as the soil cares for us.

***With the soil and with all creation we give praise
to God in whom the universe was born and
who is present in and through all creation.***

Aboriginal song sticks or a similar symbol of the First Peoples may be placed next to the large bowl.

We gather in acknowledgement of the (name of local People), the first inhabitants (or traditional owners/custodians) of this place who dwelt here and cared for it of old.

***We gather attentive to their wisdom of living in
harmony with the land and in commitment to
the ongoing journey of reconciliation between
indigenous and non-indigenous Australians.***

The Christ Candle is lit.

We gather as a people of God looking to Christ, the divine Word and Wisdom in whom all things in heaven and on Earth have their being and in whom all things are reconciled.

***And the Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us,
we have seen his glory, the glory of a Father's only son.***

The Christ Candle is placed into the bowl of soil.

SONG **Together in Song** 137 'For the beauty of the earth'
 Together in Song 100 'All creatures of our God and King'
(vv1,2,4 & 7)
 Together in Song 130 'We plough the field and scatter'

A CONVERSATION

Invite members of the congregation to reflect briefly on their thoughts and experience of soil. Are they gardeners who regularly get their hands in the soil or can they remember ever eating soil? Are any from a farming background? Invite members to share their thoughts with their neighbours

PRAYER

To you, God who sang the universe into being
And cradles all creation within yourself
God who became flesh, born as one of us
Offering yourself for creation's redemption
God who pours life and vision within our souls
And who is present in and through all creation

***To you O God
Be all praise and glory
Throughout earth
And in this place where we are gathered.***





Today we gather in celebration of soil. This complex part of our planet which we walk over, grow our food from and yet so often take for granted

***We celebrate the microbes, vegetable matter,
clay and rock particles
And give thanks for soil which is so vital for life.***

We come in lament and confession
For not only have we taken soil for granted
We have distanced ourselves from soil and covered it over
We've overused it and drained it of nutrients
And drained poisons upon it

***Forgive us our negligence and destructive practices
Forgive us that while soil sustains
us, we often disregard soil.***

Guide us our God to paths of living
Which are attentive to the needs of all living creatures
And nurturing towards the planet.

Amen.

ASSURANCE

God has given us this earth to care for and delight in.
In Christ we can be made whole.
Christ offers us a new way forward.

Thanks be to God.

READINGS

Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23
James 2: 1-10, 14-17
Mark 7: 24-37

REFLECTION

SONG **Together in Song** 697 'Make love happen'
Together in Song 587 'Fold to your heart your sister and your
brother'

OFFERING

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

*As an alternative way of praying, you are invited to make a 'prayer soup'.
You will need a selection of chopped vegetables and cooked pulses
(canned chickpeas, beans etc.), a 2L jug of water, salt. Place these in bowls
on the table around the candle, and within reach of people to use them.
Also have one large soup pot.*

Leader: We come now to a time of prayers for others.
As you think of others, I invite you to come and place
a spoon of lentils, chick peas or vegetables into the pot.
You may say the prayer out loud or in silence.

(time of offering prayers)

Leader: To all that has already been offered in our prayers today, we now add grains of salt.
Salt represents our tears for others.
It also reminds us of our call to discipleship, that we would be 'the salt of the earth' for the world.
(The leader or another adds a spoon of salt.)

Leader: We now add the water of life. Water that has been cycling in our ecosystem since the beginning, with Moses in the parting of the sea, with John the Baptist and Jesus in their baptisms, with us as we have travelled through life.
(The leader or another pours in water.)

We give thanks for the soup of life and pray for the nourishment of the earth and its peoples.

(At the end of the service, cook up the soup and share it together)

OR

*A Uniting Church in Australia Prayer
'For The Sake Of The Planet'*

*Creator God,
breath and source of life,
in love you called the world into being
and in grace you made us and call us your children.
We stand in awe of the wonder of your creation:
its beauty and wildness;
complexity and power;
resilience and fragility.*

*God of life,
you call us to be participants in the web and
wellspring of life:
to be nurtured by the planet;
to be nurturing of the planet;
to cherish the world and all that lives.
But we have failed and creation groans under our weight.*

*God of grace,
forgive us in our brokenness:
when we have taken too much from the earth;
when we have not spoken out
against greed and destruction;
when we have allowed our most vulnerable neighbours
to be harmed.
We seek courage and forgiveness to be made whole.*

*God of love,
we pray for those people, communities and nations
already suffering the devastating effects of climate change;*





*and we pray for the diversity of life on earth,
so much of it already threatened by our actions.*

*God of hope,
we pray for the world's leaders
Bless them with wisdom and creativity,
and a shared vision of hope for all creation.
May they find the determination
to take strong action against climate change,
and the political will to act together for the common good.*

*Creator God,
we pray for us all,
that we might restore our relationships with each other
and work together to heal the earth.
Renew us in your grace
for the sake of your creation. Amen.*

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SONG **Together in Song 674** 'Inspired by love and anger'

BLESSING

We are blessed with the diversity and uniqueness of creation,
the beauty and mystery of life
As you leave now and go out into this new day
May you know God's love and healing energy
to enable you to work and live in newness of life
For the glory of God's creation
Amen

And now, we go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
In the name of Christ.
Amen

BLESSING SONG

***The peace of the earth be with you,
the peace of the heavens too;
the peace of the rivers be with you,
the peace of the oceans too.
Deep peace falling over you,
God's peace growing in you.***

Words: Guatemalan traditional
trans. Christine Carson

From **There is One Among Us: Shorter songs for worship.**
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*Some prayers have been adapted from the Uniting Justice Australia resources for
World Environment Day 2015, 'Caring for the Planet's precious soils.'*

Our actions speak louder than our words

James 2: 1-10, 14-17.

Sustainable September Reflection Week 1 - 5 September 2021

by Rev Gordon Scantlebury

As I travel through life I see more and more that it is the way people are prepared to live that matters more than all our beliefs or good intentions. As James in his letter reminds us, it is not enough to simply pray for the person you see who is hungry, for instance, , but then fail to share your food with that person.

The apostle Paul tells us that our 'salvation', - our relationship with God is one based on faith and not on superficially trying to win God's favour through our doing a myriad of good deeds or rituals. That is true! We embrace our relationship with God through faith in Christ. Yet it is the tenor of our lives that shows just how real and deep that faith truly is. Here, the pragmatism of James comes into play. All the faith in the world and all our best intentions will prove meaningless if they are not also backed up by the way we would live our lives.

Two examples of the dislocation there can be between intent and actions have been highlighted recently in Western Australia. Our state government has stated it is concerned about Climate Change and wanting to reduce 'greenhouse emissions'. Yet it has simultaneously given the go-ahead for a massive new natural gas field to be exploited. The carbon emissions from that single field will dwarf all our other efforts throughout Australia to contain carbon, making the government's intentions meaningless.

In a different department the state government has said it supports wildlife conservation and biodiversity. The recent, arguably criminal fire-bombing of the Perup forest, with the destruction of one of the last remaining colonies of the rare numbat (our state emblem!) shows however that animal conservation isn't really a priority. "By their works ye shall know them".

In this month of Sustainable September we focus on our relationship with our wider environment. A key challenge for us today is the extent we would put our hopes for the environment into real action. The great majority of people in our society would say they 'care' about the environment, climate change or animal extinctions and the like, but how readily do we then put our concern into meaningful action? Do we let our beliefs also effect how much we would drive our cars, what purchases we would make, how much meat we would eat, or what luxury we would do without? Do we give priority for the life of our planet, not merely in our words, but in our lifestyles? That is the key challenge from our scripture today.





In Proverbs it says, “those who are generous are blessed, they share their bread with the poor”. We all have a sense of what generosity can mean in our human society, but can we also live generously with the earth and its creatures? Generosity involves giving of what we have for the sake of another, and doing so willingly. Can we give up some of our wealth and self-interest for the sake of the life around us? And can we do this with more than just our kind words and prayers? Let our lives live out the fullness of the faith we proclaim, in Jesus’ name. Amen.