

• CHAPTER 4 •

WORSHIP

Good News for All Creation



Trinity Lutheran Church, Mason City, Iowa



Outdoor Worship at St. James Lutheran Church, Mason City, Iowa

Worship provides valuable time and place to honor God, the Creator. Worship practices can become more sustainable, provides an opportunity to celebrate creation, and can promote a deeper connection to the earth. This section includes resources for sermons, liturgy, prayers, as well as ideas for services to integrate sustainability into the life of your congregation.

Greening Worship

Outdoor Worship Service

Hosting an outdoor worship service is a great way to connect the congregation with the beauty of God's creation. It can also be a very inviting ministry to welcome new faces to the congregation!

Greening Interns Kristi Holmberg and Callie Mabry experienced two models of outdoor services during their participation in many congregations' worship during their internship this summer:

St. James Lutheran Church in Mason City, Iowa holds outdoor worship services every Sunday morning during the summer. They have a permanent outdoor wooden platform for the altar and lectern on the lawn next to the church and a shed where they keep folding chairs. All they have to carry outside each week are the sound system, the electric keyboard and folding chairs. People who attend these services are also welcome to bring their own chairs or blankets to sit on.

Trinity Lutheran Church in Mason City, Iowa also holds an outdoor worship service every Sunday. They have the sound system and altar set up on a concrete sidewalk in the courtyard of the church, and microphone and lectern for the preacher on the grass closer to the congregation. They have a landscaping and pavement redesign project in the works to make a new venue for these services. There is a blanket on the grass toward the front for the children's sermon.

Based on our observations from these successful services, other churches that wish to try holding worship outdoors, either as a one-time or seasonal event should keep the following in mind:

- * Having an outdoor worship service can help reduce the need for air conditioning in the sanctuary on Sundays
- * It is important to have a good, powerful sound system so that the congregation can hear the service

- * Place the altar, lectern, music stands, etc. on a stable surface such as a sidewalk or platform so that they do not fall over
- * Talk to neighbors to make sure that sound and crowds on church property will not be a disturbance
- * Make sure the weather is decent so that people are comfortable
- * Have magnets or clothespins on music stands to prevent music from blowing away

Consider contacting Trinity and St. James Lutheran for more information about what they have discovered in their process of establishing outdoor worship.

Bike/Walk to Church Sunday

Encourage alternative transportation to church by having a bike/walk to church Sunday! Pick a Sunday well in advance and begin promoting the event in the bulletin and church newsletter. Give people in the congregation incentives to bike, walk or even carpool to church. Recognize people who used alternative transportation during worship or fellowship hour. Provide snacks and juice to participants when they arrive. Seek out gift certificate donations for participants to go out to breakfast or ice cream. Consider even asking cycling enthusiasts in your congregation if they would be willing to offer free bike tune ups.

Bring Your Own Coffee Mug to Church Sunday

Many churches struggle with the issue of disposable cup waste from their fellowship hours. In some congregations this problem could be solved by using the church's china dishes and washing them, although finding volunteers to do this task can be difficult. As one step in reducing the amount of waste from coffee hour, promote an event one Sunday where people bring their own reusable mug to church and then take it home to wash it. Consider giving away stickers to participants for people to put on reusable coffee mugs and water bottles.

Resources:

Iowa Interfaith Power and Light

http://www.iowaip.org/spiritual_resources.html

A list of liturgies, scripture, hymns, sermon ideas, prayers, and more with creation/environmental themes.

Green Faith

<http://greenfaith.org/resource-center/spirit/greenworship-resource/christian-resource-1/christian-resource>

Links to websites, books and journal articles about incorporating environmental stewardship into worship and a list of five tips for “greening” worship.

Earth Prayers from Around the World: 365 Prayers, Poems and Invocations for Honoring the Earth

<http://www.harpercollins.com/book/index.aspx?isbn=9780062507464>

A book of prayers with Creation themes that can be used in worship.

Liturgy for EarthKeeping

[http://www.dakotaroadmusic.com/index.php?](http://www.dakotaroadmusic.com/index.php?p=product&id=1196&parent=15)

[p=product&id=1196&parent=15](http://www.dakotaroadmusic.com/index.php?p=product&id=1196&parent=15)

This liturgy was commissioned by Luther College Ministries

Seasons of Creation Preaching Commentary

<http://store.augsburgfortress.org/store/productgroup/410/The-Season-of-Creation>

A book available for purchase that describes how to integrate creation into worship as a season of the church.



Outdoor Worship at St. James Lutheran Church, Mason City, Iowa

• Sermon 1 •

I Lift My Eyes

Written by Callie Mabry

Scripture: Genesis 2:4-25, Psalm 121, Mark 12:28-3

St. James Lutheran Church, Mason City, Iowa

July 1st, 2012

The summer campfire crackled, the sparks flew out of the fire pit and the smoke rose up to the night sky where it could no longer be seen. A group of enthusiastic camp counselors wearing fleece jackets, hiking boots, and bandanas stood behind the fire, playing guitars and softly singing. In the forest clearing where my fellow eleven-year-olds and I were attending worship at Sky Ranch Lutheran camp, a song rang out with the words of Psalm 121, “I lift my eyes up to the mountain, where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, maker of heaven and earth.” I vividly remember looking up, past the tall pines, to the peaks of the mountains which pointed to the sky and the heavens beyond. And this incredibly homesick camper remembers feeling relieved, looking up at the mountains, to see not only the beauty of God’s creation, but a reminder of Him, higher than the mountain peaks, stronger than the wind, and more infinite than the stars. I felt very secure being reminded that God is our source of help and strength.

As a native of Colorado, I had spent a great deal of time in the mountains when I was young, even before I can remember. But singing Psalm 121 at church camp was the first time that I consciously made the connection between the beauty of nature and the creating hand of God. I have always vividly remembered this moment when my love of the environment intersected with my love of God. Since that time, I have often enjoyed praying or meditating while being in nature. There is something about nature that calls me to a place of wonder, awe and peace, and encourages conversation with God.



Colorado Mountains

In Decorah, where I currently live, the landscape is hilly rather than mountainous. I think it is interesting then, that Psalm 121 is translated either as looking up to the “mountains” or the “hills.” I have learned in my time living away from home that the beauty of God’s creation is everywhere! Whenever I am biking next to the river, hiking through the woods, or looking at the beautiful autumn colors, I am in constant awe of the beauty and complexity of creation. I can look up to the tall limestone bluffs up past the trees to the sky, and be reminded that God is my maker and source of strength.

When was a time that you felt a connection to the presence of God in nature? Perhaps it was when you were little and woke up early to see the

sunrise. Or maybe it was when you were going through a difficult time and you found peace by walking through your flower garden. Possibly you think about the magnificence of God's creation every day when you are out working on your farm. Or perhaps you have never really looked at nature this way before.

And here we are, worshiping outside at St. James this morning. What a wonderful ministry. If you have never really viewed this service as an opportunity to connect with God in the presence of creation, I encourage you to do so. We can hear the songs of the birds, and see the green grass and the trees and the sky and the clouds, all reminders of the second chapter of Genesis, when God created the heavens and the earth; the streams, the ground, the plants and the first human.

From the beginning, nature and humans are fundamentally connected. God forms the first man out of the dust of the earth and instructs him to tend and keep the garden. God entrusts him with the responsibility of naming "all the livestock, the birds in the sky, and all the wild animals." Adam helps God manage life in the garden.

Genesis 2 shows what the relationship between humans and the earth ought to be. In the same way that Adam was instructed to tend and keep the garden, God calls us to be good stewards of creation. You may be familiar with the term "steward" from an economic perspective, as someone who is a good manager of finances. But the words economy and ecology are both derived from the Greek word for steward, *oikonomos*. Thus a steward not only takes care of finances but also of the natural resources. Yes, being a steward implies use, but it implies wise use and good management of God's blessings.

Let's put it another way. In the student kitchen of the dorm I lived in this past year, there was a community fridge. As you can imagine, a fridge shared by over three hundred college students was a repugnant mess! Pickles and chip dip from someone's Super Bowl party sat next to a half opened bottle of Gatorade; there was a Tupperware full of mold, pink frosting from decorating cookies and an unidentified green liquid on the shelf. My fellow students and I were not good stewards of the resources that had been given to us by the college. We wasted food and destroyed the cleanliness of community property. Since no one owned or was directly responsible for the fridge, no one took the

extra effort to clean it up. What we have here is a classic example of what is called the Tragedy of the Commons.

The Tragedy of the Commons is the idea that people will maximize their personal gain even if it causes harm to the shared, limited community resource. The community resource in this case is the cleanliness and space available in the fridge. It is in all of our best interests to keep the fridge clean so that our food is safe and we can find things easily. However, no individual person wants to take extra time out of their busy lives and risk an upset stomach to purge the rotten leftovers and decontaminate the shelves.

The Tragedy of the Commons is at the root of many environmental problems, including overfishing, deforestation, and pollution. It is in the earth community's interest to keep the oceans full of diverse species, the forests full of trees and animals, and the air free of pollution. But it is in each individual's interest to fish as often as possible, cut down trees and not replant them, and emit toxic substances into the atmosphere in the process of producing goods. Some economists say that the solution is to privatize resources so that there is a sense of ownership and respect. That may be true. But is it feasible to privatize the ocean, an entire ecosystem, or the air?

As a community of faith, we have the obligation to love our neighbors as ourselves, and therefore the sacred responsibility to not cause damage to resources that we all share. We remember the words of Jesus in Mark 12:28-31, when a teacher of the law asks Jesus what the most important commandment is. Jesus answers, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." The second is this: "Love your neighbor as yourself." There is no commandment greater than these."

We have a commitment to look beyond our selfish needs now, to the needs of our children's and grandchildren's generations. We also have a reverence for God's creation, drawing from the words of Genesis. More than anything, communities of faith have the power to overcome the Tragedy of the Commons and environmental crises.

Communities of faith have historically been some of the most significant players in bringing about change and organizing for a cause. I think back to July 2006 when my youth group went on a trip to New Orleans to help rebuild

after Hurricane Katrina. When we were walking around the Ninth Ward and the French Quarter, it was very striking to see group after group after group of youth and adults in brightly colored matching t shirts that said “United Methodist,” “Baptist,” “Habitat for Humanity,” “Lutheran,” “Episcopal,” “Presbyterian,” and so on. We saw communities of faith coming together to respond to a crisis.

In the same way, the Lutheran Churches in the United States responded to the devastation in Europe after World War II by shipping food and supply kits to countries hardest hit by the war. Their efforts expanded into the Lutheran World Relief organization that is now in thirty-five countries and works toward addressing the roots of poverty and disease.

In fact, out of Lutheran World Relief has come the ELCA Malaria Campaign. The church has created a structured response to a serious problem and has achieved substantial results. We don’t have to look any further than this community to see that St. James has already contributed to this cause, with the confirmation students selling Malaria net corsages, collecting money on Super bowl Sunday, and the Vacation Bible School Children raising money and awareness this week. Churches can create a similar response to address environmental issues. Churches have the opportunity to mobilize people to act against environmental problems. And they should, because God’s beautiful and wondrous creation is at stake!

With environmental problems ranging from water pollution to loss of biodiversity to soil erosion to climate change, we all could be miserably depressed and frustrated. In fact, this year after taking biology I became very disheartened learning about damage to ecosystems, and after studying environmental politics I became very cynical about ways that we could make change within the political system.

But I am also finding hope in an unexpected way: in the sense of community I am encountering during this internship. In meeting with pastors and Sunday School superintendents, lay leaders and energy auditors, custodians and congregation members. It is so encouraging to be invited to nine congregations, to work with communities who are interested and care about God’s creation!

Barbara Kingsolver, in her commencement address on “How to be Hopeful,” affirms that “The magic is in community. [...]” She says, “You can be as earnest and ridiculous as you need to be, if you don’t attempt it in isolation. The ridiculously earnest are known to travel in groups. And they are known to change the world.”¹²

So where do we begin to change the world? It starts with changing a light bulb; it continues with learning about the type of electricity that powers the light bulb and seeking to find cleaner, renewable sources of energy. It starts with recycling a piece of paper, it continues with studying the reason the paper is being used in the first place and seeking to reduce its use. It starts with fixing the seal around the door; it continues with an energy audit and adding more insulation. It starts with making St. James Lutheran an even more environmentally friendly facility and continues with you emulating those practices in your home.

We should celebrate steps we have already taken to care for God’s creation and our neighbors, but we must balance that with moving forward to bigger changes. We find support and joy in community, especially in our communities of faith, knowing that others are walking along side us as we encounter the challenges of making change in our lives. And most importantly, we find strength in God: “My help comes from the Lord, maker of heaven and earth.”

May God the creator remind us to “lift our eyes up to the hills” to see his majesty and magnificence in creation; may God the forgiver absolve us for using too many resources without regard for our neighbors; may God the consoler comfort those who are disproportionately and unjustly affected by environmental problems, may God the sustainer give us hope in the face of despair, and may God the empowerer give all of us here St. James Lutheran Church the strength to act in community. Amen.

Sermon 2

Seeds of Hope

Written by Kristi Holmberg

Scripture: Micah 6, Romans 12:1-2, Luke 8:1-15

Trinity Lutheran Church, Mason City, IA

July 14-15, 2012

The African sun hit my face as beads of sweat dripped from my forehead. I could hear waves crashing, the boom of a megaphone, and the shrill cries of schoolchildren as they lined up in rows on the sand. I had arrived at an event called “Africa Roars” where 2000 children came to the beach to form a lion with their bodies and take an aerial photo. The event was one among many advocacy events organized by non-profits in Durban, South Africa, during the United Nations convention on climate change. In December 2011, I joined Christian youth from around the world for the Youth for Eco-Justice program—to learn about the link between socio-economic and environmental injustice in the context of climate change. While world leaders were negotiating at the Convention Center only a few blocks away, I arrived at South Beach with friends from my program to advocate for eco-justice.

As the 2-weeks quickly came to an end, many were skeptical that *any* solutions would be produced from the negotiations. Delegates were accused of stalling, but the people on the beach were determined to roar for action; to not let hope die in Africa—one of the continents most impacted by climate change. In my training, I learned that as sea levels rise, storm cells intensify, and droughts worsen due to increasing carbon emissions, climate change has a disproportionate impact on the world’s most vulnerable people: the poor, women, children, and people of color. As I joined the children at the beach that day I realized that youth have an even stronger stake in the issue than the leaders a few blocks away. If we continue “business as usual” future

generations might inherit the costs of our unsustainable consumption patterns. I learned that climate change is not just an environmental problem, but also a socio-economic and intergenerational justice issue that needs to be solved.

What led me, a 21-year old college student, to South Africa? Eco-justice was hardly in my vocabulary 2 years ago. I am not an expert on climate change. But I do feel called to take responsibility for the problem. I feel called to follow the path towards sustainable-living and advocate in solidarity with the world’s most vulnerable people.

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I first learned about climate change in a religion seminar fall of 2010. I often left class with tense shoulders and a pounding headache, feeling burdened with despair. I didn’t know how I could change society, let alone myself. I tried to save myself from disappointment and humiliation by feeding the cycle of cynicism and flirting with apathy. I could not imagine taking a stand on such a controversial and complex issue.

But I vividly remember standing in the door of my professor’s office at the end of the semester. I said: “This needs to be more than a class”. I was struck with an eagerness to *do something* with the seed of knowledge that had been planted in me.

But, I did not know then, what would make this seed grow.

In the past, I had often approached the New Year with a naïve sense of optimism. *This is the year I am going to change everything about myself that I don’t like!* I would make a long list of do’s and don’ts. But by the end of January, I had forgotten my list. I had failed. So the resolution was abandoned until next year when I tried again. And soon after, I stopped trying. I stopped seeking transformation because my fear of failure choked my naïve hope.

But in 2011 I found another way to do resolutions. Instead of making a list, you pick one word to inspire your year. You don’t *do* anything, you just *be*

with the word. So on January 1st, 2011, I chose hope, not thinking much of it at the time. At the time I did not know how important that word would become as I continued research on climate change the next summer. After weeks of reading about climate change, I was attending a conference when a panelist asked us to describe a time when we hit the wall. I went up to the man after, broke down in tears, and told him I was staring at it. He told me, “You need to find hope and joy to sustain you or you won’t be able to continue on this path...”

When I returned to Decorah, I continued to search for an answer to my research question: *What does it mean to follow Jesus today in the context of global climate change?* I began interviewing people who demonstrate sustainable lifestyles, and for the first time in awhile I found hope--in raspberries, windmills, electric lawn mowers, and solar panels. In my conversations with real people, I started *seeing* a new way to live. And I continued to *choose* hope, even when there was no reason for it. This choice--to choose the “not yet”-- pulled me forward, beyond my fear of failure, to the end of the year.

It was not until Christmas Eve, after I returned from South Africa, that I learned why hope was worth choosing. I was sitting on the pew of my aunt’s church when she preached, “Do not be afraid. For in Christ there is freedom from hopelessness, despair, and fear itself. Joy becomes a *choice* we can make. Light triumphs over the darkness. That is the hope of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

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2011 was one of the most transformational years of my life. I went from knowing almost nothing about an issue, to letting it change the way I live. But it did not happen overnight. No one converted me nor taught me “the truth.” Instead, a seed was planted and I began a process—one that called me to faithfulness, not perfection. Hope was not the natural choice. I had to wrestle with despair in order to understand why hope was worth defending. I was transformed, by the renewing of my mind.

This is the process that following Jesus invites me to. A life of faith invites us to live with intention, to cultivate discipline, and to be a living sacrifice. But this sacrifice is not self-denial, guilt nor shame. Instead, it is “giving up” the fear of failure, and trusting in the promise of the resurrection,

the hope of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is sustaining, transforming Christian discipleship.

Discipline is at the root of discipleship. The daily action and lifestyle choices in this process are central to a growing relationship with God. In the Gospels, Jesus did not give his disciples a 10-step program. He beckoned them to “Come and See” and to “Follow”. He told stories to illuminate a vision for the kingdom of God. This kingdom blessed the poor, liberated the oppressed, and healed the broken. This vision was unconventional, radical, even, in the face of the Roman Empire. And today as the world’s most vulnerable people are disproportionately impacted by climate change, the Gospel can show us a new reality. It can show us how to love God, our neighbor, and the earth. This new way of seeing can lead to new ways of thinking and ultimately new ways of being. It is this process that invites you and me to follow—and even stumble—on the messy, yet satisfying path towards sustainable-living.

But what prevents us from following this path? The Parable of the Sower shows us the obstacles along the way. It warns us: If we follow the patterns of this world our seeds of hope might get trampled by the status quo. If we build our lives on rocky soil, our seeds of hope might die because they are not rooted in God. Without good soil, our passion for justice is likely to wither away. Sustainability would just be a fad; a false joy that would hardly sustain or transform us. And if we allow the thorns of worry to choke us, or if we let money and pleasure distract us, we might not mature into the people God calls us to be. But if we follow Jesus with an open heart, who knows where we will go, and how much growth we will yield?

It was this path that led me to get on a plane by myself and travel 10,000 miles to South Africa. Before leaving, I could not have known how this risk would yield growth, how I would never be the same upon my return.

Even when I was sitting in the sand in Durban I could not see the bigger picture. I was skeptical about the chaos of 2000 people gathered on the beach. The sweat on my brow dripped into my squinting eyes. I could only see the children in front of me—not the lion, being captured by the helicopter hovering overhead. Later that evening I was shocked to see the image: clearly, the face of a lion. In that moment and since South Africa, this human mosaic continues to cultivate the seed of hope that was planted in me at the beginning

of that year. It invites me to collaborate with others in collective action. For without the connections between each person, the image would be blurry, the message less defined, and the impact less powerful.

When I came back from South Africa and started planning my follow-up project, I was terrified, and tempted to control my plan with a tight fist. My mentor reminded me to be open; to let it evolve. He said, “You can never fully know the impact of your actions, but only plant seeds and hope for the best.” It was this wisdom that led me to join others in staging a 3-week climate justice campaign and organizing 150 people from my own community for an Earth Day celebration. It was this wisdom that led me to risk both failure *and* transformation. While the lion was particular to Africa, the Iowan landscape inspired **our** vision for a sustainable and just future. We formed a tree with our bodies on the Library Lawn to advocate for “the future we want”. This tree shows me what it means to follow Jesus today. This tree plants the seeds of social change, letting go of the outcomes, and yet, yielding common good upon Human Mosaic Earth Day Celebration, Luther College, Decorah, Iowa, April 22nd, 2012 common ground.



© Emily Temte/Luther College

Human Mosaic Earth Day Celebration, Luther College,
Decorah, Iowa, April 22nd, 2012

This is the same common ground that is shared in an Inter-church gardening project my co-intern and I are organizing this summer in Decorah. A few times a week, Callie and I show up at the garden with volunteers. We weed and water beets, beans, and potatoes for our neighborhood food pantries. We repeat rhythms—bending, squatting, pulling, and tossing, yet we are unable to control the conditions of drought or downpour. We tend and keep, not knowing whose lips will touch the fruit of our actions; not certain our seeds will grow. And we get messy. It’s impossible to leave the garden without dust or dirt on our hands and feet. Sweat drips on our foreheads. Again, we are reminded that even if we cannot see the fruit of our actions when our hands are covered in soil or sand, our acts of faith yield a crop that is “a hundred times more than was sown”. Together, as body of Christ, we are planting the seed of the word of God, and cultivating hope—not a naïve but a persevering hope—in the context of global climate change.

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May God show us the ways to grow in good soil, to be a living sacrifice, and be transformed by the renewing of our minds. May we remember-- this is all God requires of us:

To do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God. Amen.