



EARTH DAY

Saturday, April 23, 2011

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The unit you are viewing, Earth Day, is a compact unit. This means that it is not a complete commentary of the Scripture(s) selected for this day on the calendar, nor does it have a full, supporting cultural resource unit and worship unit. Instead, to enliven the imagination of preachers and teachers, we have provided a sermonic outline, songs, suggested books, and suggested articles, links, and videos. For additional information see Earth Day in the archives of the Lectionary for 2008, 2009, and 2010. 2011 is the first year that the African American Lectionary has posted compact units for moments on its liturgical calendar.

The African American Lectionary wants all churches to do a better job of including the disabled/differently abled. When planning Earth Day activities, during all worship services, and in all other church activities, be sure to include persons of all abilities. Allow those who are disabled/differently abled to participate at all stages and in as many ways as possible.

I. Description of the Liturgical Moment: Earth Day

Herbert R. Marbury of Vanderbilt University wrote in the 2009 Earth Day Lectionary Commentary:

On April 22, 1970, Denis Hayes coordinated the first Earth Day, a national network of rallies, garnering the participation of 20 million Americans. By 1991, what began as an American movement had become a worldwide call in 141 countries to corporate interests and governments to work toward the production of clean energy, the elimination of oil spills and toxic waste dumps, and the reversal of global warming. That year, the celebrations calling humankind to live in ways that promote a healthy sustainable environment for all people varied widely from culture to culture. In Gabon, a chain of “talking drums” linked villages while in the United States almost a million people marched on the nation’s capital.

So for more than 40 years there has been a global movement to get each of us to serve as better stewards of Mother Earth. This text is another reminder, another shout-out, another moment of urging the black church and the black community to do more as environmental stewards of our communities.

It is no longer a secret that communities of color around the world have long been used as dumping grounds for all types of toxic hazards. I grew up in San Francisco in the largest black neighborhood in the city. The streets were clean, the lawns were well-kept, and the houses, though small, were cute and quaint by any standard. I loved growing up in this area. It was not until I was an adult that I started to hear about back-ups in neighborhood septic tanks containing substances that scared residents. After the neighborhood activist sprang into action, we learned that a large number of the houses on my block had been built on top of improperly buried gas tanks! Yes, people got sick. Yes, people died, and though no one could say whether the leaking tanks were a factor, the residents knew they were. However, by the time the oil companies were finally placed under legal pressure to do thorough clean-ups and remediation, it was clear that no one had the money to fight to prove linkages between the illnesses and the deaths and the underground gas tanks. Knowing what has happened in so many other poor communities, it’s amazing that this area was cleaned up and that homeowners received financial compensation for inconvenience and damage done to their homes during the clean-up. Unless communities can prove linkages to illnesses people are rarely compensated for environmental harm caused to their communities.

That was a lifetime ago, but there are two memories from that event that remain. First, I clearly remember that no churches stood with the homeowners, although most of them were church folk of long-standing. One preacher, though working in another professional capacity, Reverend Martha Simmons, who had an office in the area doing mediation and arbitration, did stand with the residents. She had been hired by Shell and two other companies, but she refused to support them unless they supported the homeowners. I was a college student then and didn’t take the time to get involved other

than attending a meeting here and there, but unbeknownst to me until years later, that incident made me a community environmentalist.

First, I began by getting my own house in order. I had to recycle, stop using plastics, and learn to conserve whenever I could. Then, I taught my family, friends, and neighbors to do the same. Before I knew it, I was living in a community that took seriously being stewards of the earth. When I moved abroad, to the Mayfair area of England, though it was much more difficult being one of the only African Americans in my immediate neighborhood, I did it all over again. I'm hooked on being an environmental steward. A big lesson that I have learned over the years is that too many of us believe that environmental efforts are acts done by well-known environmental groups or that are done during Earth Day celebrations once a year. Nothing could be further from the truth.

In those instances when the environment is stewarded, it's most often by individuals who just took the time (beginning in their homes and neighborhoods) to daily show respect and stewardship of Mother Earth. In some cases they are able to convince neighbors to join them. This Earth Day it's my hope that individuals will review their own stewardship and determine to do better. If we love bottled water, why not buy ONE filtered bottled and keep using it instead of constantly buying bottled water? Why not carry your own bags to the grocery store? Why not buy only fuel-efficient cars and walk more often? Why not begin an environmental stewardship committee at your church? And if the neighborhood in which your church is located is in good environmental shape, then the rest of your city awaits you. Join forces with others. You are not alone. Others want to be good stewards too, and many are just looking for others to lead and or encourage them. Young people are particularly good foot soldiers for environmental causes. Those under 30 grew up watching the environmental movement unfold in America and around the world.

II. Earth Day: Sermonic Outline

A. Sermonic Text: Psalm 65:9-13 (New Revised Standard Version)

(v. 9) You visit the earth and water it,
you greatly enrich it;
the river of God is full of water;
you provide the people with grain,
for so you have prepared it.

(v. 10) You water its furrows abundantly,
settling its ridges,
softening it with showers,
and blessing its growth.

(v. 11) You crown the year with your bounty;
your wagon tracks overflow with richness.

(v. 12) The pastures of the wilderness overflow,
the hills gird themselves with joy,

(v. 13) the meadows clothe themselves with flocks,
the valleys deck themselves with grain,
they shout and sing together for joy.

B. Possible Titles

- i. Good Stewards or Stupid;
- ii. God Has Blessed the Earth, What Will We Do?; and
- iii. African American Environmentalism

C. Point of Exegetical Inquiry

In *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary*, Walter Brueggemann writes:

The first part of this Psalm (verses 1-4) is an act of praise. The remainder of this Psalm verses 5b-13 is a hymnic for that articulates God's powerful work in the arena of creation. This is the God who establishes, who stills, who makes, who visits, who enriches, who provides, who waters, who crowns. In verses 12-13 the rhetorical pattern is changed, so that the elements of creation—pastures, hills, meadows, valleys—are now the subject and not the object. But the changed rhetorical pattern does not alter the key claim: Yahweh's staggering generosity and power cause creation to "bring forth." This is indeed creation theology which gives thanks for the ordering and blessing of all life. It is this which leads scholars to relate the psalm to the blessings of the harvest. The God of this psalm not only intervenes in the historical processes of oppression, but also governs the reliability of creation, which gives life.¹

III. Introduction

After Adam sinned, God punished man by cursing the ground man farms: "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return" (Gen. 3:17-19). Adam got thistles and thorns for his actions; we are not the first to mess up in a way that impacts the environment. But what happened that allows for the words in today's text? Well, let's examine the text and see.

IV. Moves/Points

Move/Point One – We messed it up and God was still merciful

- a. In Genesis God curses the land;
- b. But God, being merciful, still has consistently brought forth rains to water the earth; and

- c. God has blessed the growth of the earth.

Move/Point Two – We have messed it up again

This psalm shows the earth as creation and not commodity. When we treat the earth as a commodity we profane life.

- a. We repaid God’s mercy by polluting the ozone layer;
- b. We repaid God for her generosity by treating the earth’s natural resources as commodities; and
- c. The earth praises God for creation (vv. 12-13), but what have we done?

Move/Point Three – We can show God our appreciation by being good stewards of all that God has created

- a. Stop wasting water and polluting it;
- b. Stop polluting the ground so that grain will grow; and
- c. Live so that we can shout for joy at the outcome of our good stewardship.

V. Challenge

God’s generosity in supplying the billions of people in the world means of sustenance is a great reason to praise the Creator and sustainer of life. We can pray: “God, this day, we will be intentional about doing better for appreciate your generosity. We will do better by what we buy. We will do better by what we save. We will do better by what we plant. We will do better by the policies for which we advocate and those which we defeat. We will do better by being outspoken advocates for this planet, Mother Earth, which you have been kind enough to lend to us as a place to abide for an interim. Thank you, Lord, for giving us another chance.” Because of this chance we will agree with Fyodor Dostoevsky as he writes in “Love of Creation”:

Love all God’s creation, the whole and every grain of sand in it. Love every leaf, every ray of God’s light. Love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things. Once you perceive it, you will begin to comprehend it better every day. And you will come at last to love the whole words with an all-embracing love.²

VI. Illustration(s)

Charles Haddon Spurgeon wrote many years ago:

There is no place where God is not. God is there in a thousand wonders, upholding rocky barriers, filling the buttercups with their perfume and refreshing the lonely pines with the breath of his mouth. Descend...into the lowest depths of the ocean, where undisturbed water sleeps, and the very sand is motionless in unbroken quiet, but the glory of the Lord is there, revealing its excellence in the silent palace of the sea. Borrow the wings of the morning and fly to the uttermost parts of the sea, but God is there.³

See the Sermon Illustrations section of the African American Lectionary for additional illustrations.

VII. Sounds, Sights, and Colors in This Passage

Sounds: The river of God flowing around the world; grain growing under the ground; ridges settling; ridges being softened by showers; crops growing year-round; hills girding themselves with joy; the meadows and valleys shouting and singing with joy;

Sights: The flow of rivers around the world; grains of all types growing to feed all of the people of the world; polluted rivers and polluted fields; and

Colors: Blue water, muddy water; gold grain, brown grain, plush fields; and empty fields of dark dirt.

VIII. Songs to Accompany This Sermon

A. Hymn(s)

- All Creatures of Our God and King. By Francis of Assisi
- My Heavenly Father Watches over Me.

B. Well-Known Song(s)

- Sing a Praise of Peace. By Patrick Henderson
- Cover the Earth. By Israel Houghton

C. Spiritual(s)

- He's Got the Whole World in His Hand. By Obie Philpot. Sung by Mahalia Jackson
- Deep River.

D. Modern Song(s) (Written between 2005–2010)

- In the Garden. By Kirk Whalum
- Heal the Land. By Darwin Hobbs and Aaron Pearce
- Majesty. By Carnell Murrell

You can review past Lectionary worship units for Earth Day to find additional songs and suggestions for planning a worship service for this liturgical moment.

IX. Videos, Audio, and/or Interactive Media

“Carlton Brown’s Green Lifestyle.” This is an interview of Carlton Brown, a developer of sustainable buildings, who has built green condos in Harlem and has plans to develop sustainable housing in emerging urban markets. Black Enterprise Business Report 2010 Earth Day Special. Online location: <http://www.blackenterprise.com/2008/04/26/bebr-episode-22-power-player-carlton-brown/> accessed 29 January 2011. See Full Spectrum NY’s website for more information about greening inner cities. Online location: <http://www.fullspectrumny.com/index.html> accessed 29 January 2011

Examples of how to celebrate Earth Day in your community

1. Create your own unique celebration. Consider the following examples:

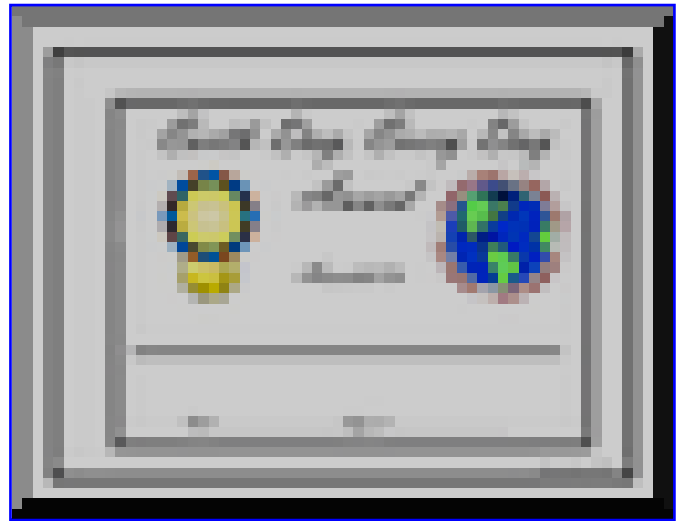
- CBE.Org (Communities for a Better Environment) said this year’s theme is “Green is Good for the Hood.” The unique, distinctly Black and Brown celebration pushes young people and their families to organize to address environmental issues and make healthier food choices. Online location: <http://www.cbecal.org/> accessed 29 January 2011
- Local churches celebrate Earth Day with the community. “East Oakland Hosts second annual ‘Love Yo Mama’ Earth Day.” The Black Hour. 23 April 2010. Online location: <http://theblackhour.blogspot.com/2010/04/east-oakland-hosts-second-annual-love.html> accessed 20 January 2010 accessed 29 January 2011
- Video record the event. Here various participants in East Oakland’s Earth Day celebration explain their commitment to the environment: “Oakland Earth Day Parade/Festival April 24th 2010.” Online location: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kAKaHJi_VKM accessed 29 January 2011

2. Consider establishing urban gardens to promote environmental awareness and supplement the community’s food bank. The following sites support that aim:

- Aquaponics Kijiji Grows: Online location: <http://kijijigrows.com/about/> accessed 29 January 2011

- Get training at “Will Allen’s Growing Power Community Food Center.”
<http://www.growingpower.org/> accessed 29 January 2011. Read more about the Will Allen 2005 Leadership for Change award recipient: Online location:
<http://www.leadershipforchange.org/awardees/awardee.php3?ID=303> accessed 29 January 2011
- “Red, Black and Greens: 10 Essential Plants for Black Gardeners.” The Root. Online location:
<http://www.theroot.com/multimedia/red-black-and-greens-10-essential-plants-black-gardeners>
 accessed 29 January 2011

3. Have Activities for Children in Church. Children ages 3–5 are able to grasp environmental activism concepts quicker than we might imagine, just as they can be taught multiple languages at these ages. Let’s grow the next generation of environmentalists today! Below are images that they can color. Teachers should be prepared to explain each image using videos, puppets, music, and other methods to



drive home the message that we are all “stewards of the earth” and at every age we can play a part. After all students have completed their work, be sure to prepare an **Earth Day Every Day Award** for each child. Tell their parent(s) or guardian(s) to be sure to get the award framed. All images below can be re-sized for your use. Clearer images can be found at <http://www.earthday.org>.

4. Create a Sacred Space. What makes a place sacred? Even amidst the concrete blocks of an inner city, in small towns devastated by unemployment and recession, and in urban sites where otherwise there is no space for peace or calm, a sacred place can be discovered. Are there places that enhance nature, or could they be made more beautiful? If you have no such places, then think about creating one. Anywhere can be a sacred site—it only requires us to see our land as special and we will learn to tread more gently upon it. Online location of The ARC (Alliance of Religions and Conservation): <http://www.arcworld.org/> accessed 29 January 2011

5. Keep up with African American participation in the environmental movement. The American Environmentalist Association (AAEA) is dedicated to protecting the environment; enhancing human, animal, and plant ecologies; promoting the efficient use of natural resources; and increasing African American participation in the environmental movement. Their website (<http://aaenvironment.blogspot.com/>) contains many useful links and articles such as:

- Owens, Williams. “Black Pastor Calls for Fluoridegate Investigations: Cites Disproportionate

Fluoride Risks for African Americans.” Reverend William Owens, President of the Coalition of African American Pastors, is joining a growing chorus of leaders calling for federal and state hearings and investigations into new revelations about risks from drinking fluoridated water. Online location: <http://aaenvironment.blogspot.com/2011/01/black-pastors-calls-for-fluoridegate.html> accessed 29 January 2011

X. Books and Articles to Assist in Preparing Sermons or Bible Studies Related to Earth Day

- Rooted in the Earth: Reclaiming the African American Environmental Heritage. Glave, Dianne D. Brooklyn, NY: Lawrence Hill Books, 2010; and To Love the Wind and the Rain: African Americans and Environmental History. Glave, Dianne D., and Mark Stoll. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005. In both books Glave discloses the little-known history of African American involvement in the environment from Atlantic Ocean explorer Abubakari II to Booker T. Washington, who put emphasis on agriculture at Tuskegee Institute. Glave draws on personal perspectives and oral and recorded histories to detail the ways that the history of Africans in America is rooted in the earth and how the black church has been involved in environmental justice.
- Holy Ground: A Gathering of Voices on Caring for Creation. Moseley, Lyndsay, ed. San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club/Counterpoint, 2009.
- Green Christianity: Five Ways to a Sustainable Future. Wallace, Mark I. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010.
- “The Creation.” By James Weldon Johnson. Online location: http://www.poetry-archive.com/j/the_creation.html accessed 29 January 2011
- Gross, Edie. “Think globally, act locally. Then act globally.” Faith & Leadership. 4 January 2011. Online location: <http://faithandleadership.com/features/articles/think-globally-act-locally-then-act-globally> accessed 29 January 2011

XI. Links to Helpful Websites for Earth Day

- Join or be inspired by the Windsor Initiative Faith Based Coalition’s Guidebook to Creating a Long-term Faith Plan to Protect the Living Planet. It explores seven key areas in which many of the world’s major faith traditions can have huge impact on environmental action through their

own resources, traditions, and beliefs:

- 1. Faith-consistent use of assets**—land, investments, medical facilities, purchasing, and property.
- 2. Education and young people**—in both formal and informal situations—including school buildings and curricula, as well as nature teaching and camps.
- 3. Wisdom**—including theological education and training, as well as rediscovering past teachings and understandings about the natural world from religious texts, and helping people adapt to new situations in areas where climate change makes this necessary.
- 4. Lifestyles**
- 5. Media and advocacy**
- 6. Partnerships and eco-twinning**
- 7. Celebration**

Online location: <http://www.windsor2009.org/Guidelines-Long-Term-Commitment-09-11-24.pdf> accessed 29 January 2011

- The New Psalmist Baptist Church in Baltimore, an African-American church with a congregation of more than 7,000, is developing its new \$41 million church to be energy-efficient and its garden to be a center for teaching people about growing their own food as a means of returning to a simpler lifestyle. It is a member of the Windsor 2009 Faith Commitments. Here is their 7-year plan; Online location: <http://www.arcworld.org/downloads/Christian-NPBC-7YP.pdf> or <http://www.arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectID=497> accessed 29 January 2011

Learn more about New Psalmist Baptist Church's environmental activities and how it determined what level of participation their congregation could manage. As well as their serving as an advisor to major governmental organizations—the United Nations among them, they are helping to craft global environmental policies (this church is the only congregation to serve as an advisor to the United Nations Environment Program), recycling 84 tons of paper in three years and using the proceeds to aid a community in Kenya to obtain clean water sources and educational services, and providing continued support of the needy in Baltimore.

- For more detailed information about the Windsor 2009 Faith Commitments initiative, which has members from many faiths including Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Shinto, Doaist, Sikhs, Hindus, Interfaith, and Eco-congregations, to name a few, visit: <http://www.windsor2009.org/page4.htm> accessed 29 January 2011

XII. Notes for Select Songs

A. Hymn(s)

- All Creatures of Our God and King. By Francis of Assisi. Tune, (LASST UNS ERFREUEN), by Norman Johnson

Location:

African American Heritage Hymnal. Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, 2001. #147

- My Heavenly Father Watches over Me.

Location:

Sung by Ms. Grace, Church of God, Online location:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CY649aFRY0w> accessed 29 January 2011

B. Well-Known Song(s)

- Sing a Praise Of Peace. By Patrick Henderson

Location:

West Angeles COGIC-Little Saints performing “Sing a Praise of Peace.” Online location:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Veq5E1530jM> accessed 28 January 2011

- Cover the Earth. By Israel Houghton

Location:

Cruse Ratcliff, Cindy, and Israel Houghton. Cover the Earth: Lakewood Live. Mobile, AL:

Integrity Media, 2003.

C. Spiritual(s)

- He’s Got the Whole World in His Hand. By Obie Philpot. Sung by Mahalia Jackson

Location:

In this version from a live concert, Europe 1962, Ms. Jackson makes a few special points about religion during the song. Online location:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UEH7jyt1eoo&feature=related> accessed 28 January 2011

- Deep River.

Location:

African American Heritage Hymnal. #605

D. Modern Song(s) (Written between 2005–2010)

- In the Garden. By Kirk Whalum

Location:

Whalum, Kirk, Doc Powell, John Stoddart, Sean McCurley, Lalo Davila, and Marc Harris. Hymns in the Garden. Burbank, CA: Warner Bros. Records, 2005.

- Heal the Land. By Darwin Hobbs and Aaron Pearce

Location:

Hobbs, Darwin. Free. Indianapolis, IN: Tyscot Records, 2008.

- Majesty. By Carnell Murrell

Location:

Cage, Byron. An Invitation to Worship. New York, NY: Zomba Gospel, 2005.

Notes

1. Brueggemann, Walter. The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1984. p. 136.

2. “Love of Creation” by Fyodor Dostoevsky. Online location: <http://www.inspirationpeak.com/cgi-bin/search.cgi?search=Fyodor+Dostoevsky> accessed 12 February 2011

3. “There is No Place Where God Is Not” by Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Online location: <http://www.spurgeon.org/eschat.htm> accessed 12 February 2011. Note that only a section of the poem is included above. See the Spurgeon website for the entire wonderful poem.