

Worship in a box 2020

Uniting Earth

unitingearth.org.au

Connection

Pastor Ray Minniecon

Introduction

Pastor Ray Minniecon, from the Uniting Aboriginal and Island Christian Congress encourages us to think of all God's creatures as family.

He also encourages us to reflect on the relationship between first and second peoples in Australia, and wonders whether we should stick to saying "Creator" instead of "God" to emphasise God's nature. He invites us "back to the beginning," to remember the goodness of creation, and to remember that salvation is something for God's whole earth, not just our individual souls.

This liturgy assumes that you are participating online in some form, but is easily adapted for use in a physically gathered group. Sentences in italics are comments to the worship leader.

The liturgy is designed so that you can pick it up and run with it straight out of the box, clicking on the video links as you get to them. If you have more time for preparation, of course, feel free to edit, adapt, and use whatever parts you find helpful.

Call to worship Psalm 104:1, 14-24

Bless the LORD, O my soul.

O LORD my God, you are very great.
You are clothed with honor and majesty,
You cause the grass to grow for the cattle,
and plants for people to use
to bring forth food from the earth,
and wine to gladden the human heart,
oil to make the face shine,
and bread to strengthen the human heart.

The trees of the LORD are watered abundantly,
the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.
In them the birds build their nests;
the stork has its home in the fir trees.
The high mountains are for the wild goats;
the rocks are a refuge for the coney.
You have made the moon to mark the seasons;
the sun knows its time for setting.

You make darkness, and it is night,
when all the animals of the forest come creeping out.
The young lions roar for their prey,
seeking their food from God.
When the sun rises, they withdraw
and lie down in their dens.
People go out to their work
and to their labor until the evening.

O LORD, how manifold are your works!
In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.

Welcome

Let's renew our relationship with our Creator. With our created brothers and sisters here on our Mother. Let's hear the Spirit's voice through the voice of this Land and its ancient custodians.

Let's go back to the beginning, and remember the goodness of creation.

Opening prayer and acknowledgment

God who walked amongst the Garden's creatures in the cool of the evening, and who moves amongst us still.

God who breathes life into countless bacteria, fungi, plants and animals.

God who holds dear the smallest and largest, the majestic and the humble, the simplest and most complex of creatures.

God who rejoices in the intricacies of ecosystems, symphonies of life woven together into a vibrant whole

You are welcome here.

We give thanks for your presence here within and among us.

God of the adam, the earth creature,

Remind the church of the wisdom of the traditional custodians of this place, the ⁱ _____ people*, whose ancestors lived here in relationship with God through law, custom and ceremonyⁱⁱ for millennia before Jesus was born. May the second peoples of Australia be open to their wisdom, and active in their struggle for a voice, and for justice for themselves and the land.

(* or, if this prayer is being read by a traditional custodian, "Remind the church of our wisdom, handed down from our ancestors, the _____ people, who lived here...")

Remind us of the goodness of Earth, and of your desire for the reconciliation and renewal of the whole creation, not just us humans.

Inspire us through prayer and reflection and scripture and song to walk the way of Jesus together, seeking life and light and salvation together, and sharing it with your world.

Song ideas

If you are online, singing is difficult. You may prefer to say the words as a prayer/poem together.

TIS 181: Come, O God of all the Earth

TIS 715: Everything that has breath

TIS 668: Touch the Earth lightly

Either- All ages talk

Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3O-sYYtmnvg>

Or- Sharing: Memories of plants

"Plants are not like us. They are different in critical and fundamental ways. As I catalog the differences between plants and animals, the horizon stretches out before me faster than I can travel and forces me to acknowledge that perhaps I was destined to study plants for decades only in order to more fully appreciate that they are beings we can never truly understand.

Only when we begin to grasp this deep otherness can we be sure we are no longer projecting ourselves onto plants. Finally we can begin to recognize what is actually happening.

Our world is falling apart quietly. Human civilization has reduced the plant, a four-million-year-old life form, into three things: food, medicine, and wood..."

- Hope Jahraen <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/plants>

Give people a few minutes to share their favourite plant, or memory of an encounter with plants, in the chat box, or in break-out rooms

Bible Reading: Genesis 1:1-2:3 selected

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ²Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

³And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. ⁴God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

²⁶Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals,^[a] and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

²⁷So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

²⁸God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

²⁹Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. ³⁰And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so.

³¹God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.

Genesis 2

¹⁵The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. ¹⁶And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."

¹⁸The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

¹⁹Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. ²⁰So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam^[a] no suitable helper was found.

Sermon/reflection- video

Ray's short reflection (8mins)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=svqmCYRiFj8>

A longer version, which includes a thought provoking reflection on the book of Job and its parallels to Aboriginal experience (13 mins):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AhRJ0FeG7zA>

Confession and assurance

We are kin with all creation, yet many of us are so often estranged.

Many of us are estranged from each other: families, communities, First and Second peoples of this land.

We have eyes to see and ears to hear, but so often the voice of Creation, and of its custodians here in Australia, is drowned out.

The wisdom of this world of wealth and consumption prevails over the wisdom of those who have lived here for millennia. Those who have known cultural crucifixion.

May those who think that they are immune from the unravelling of the intricate webs of life on our mother Earth, have their eyes opened to the truth.

Return the prodigals to their rightful place alongside the elder child.

In the silence, may we hear you.
With our eyes closed, may we see you.

A time of silence

Video song idea:

Former UCA president Andrew Dutney sings a song of lament, and hope, for the earth. "Ashes to ashes"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fEADcdtjZzM>

Here then these challenging words of assurance, in these words of Jesus...

Reading Luke 12:22-34

Jesus said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?^[a] If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin;^[b] yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, strive for his^[c] kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Song/poem

TIS 175: Did you ever see a kookaburra laugh?

Or All God's critters (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j1KGhlfvLpc>)

Discussion questions

Discussing ideas makes them much more likely to be remembered, and lead to action, rather than just hearing them in a sermon.

Depending on your gathering size, you might want to use the chat box, or breakout groups, to help everyone have a chance to contribute. You might want to pick just one question.

1. Does Ray's overall message match the way you see our relationship with Creation?
2. Ray talks of other creatures as family. Other metaphors see humans as neighbor, steward, lord, servant, co-creator and so on. Which do you most connect with?
3. Ray prefers "Creator" to "God," what name for God is most important to you?
4. How does this congregation show its care for creation?
5. How would you characterize the relationship between First Nation people and subsequent arrivals in your community?

6. What does it mean that Jesus opening, “Do not worry,” closes with, “sell your possessions... for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also?”

Prayers of the people

A video suggestion you might like to include:

An intercessory prayer prepared for the 2013 Synod of the Uniting Church. This time it is God interceding *to humanity, through the voices of Louis Armstrong and David Attenborough.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o1yBAYC7SwE>

Otherwise, or afterwards, a time of open prayer where people can share their concerns, hopefully inspired by the reflection and subsequent discussion.

Take Action (James 2:14-17)

We are encouraging congregation and members to switch to renewable power sources. A quick and easy way for people without panels it to switch to a green power provider. www.unitingearthweb.org.au/archives/make-the-switch.

Commissioning

Let’s open our eyes to see, and our ears to hear...

The goodness of creation.

The voice of the Earth

The message of Australia’s first people

The Spirit which broods over creation, in whom we live and move and have our being.

The gospel of the one who walked this Earth, healing divisions, offering abundant life, and a kin-dom on which to set our hearts, so that we need not worry.

Blessing

May the grace of Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and always.

Amen.

Song/poem

TIS 755: You shall go out with joy

ⁱ If you are unsure, have a look at <http://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/articles/aiatsis-map-indigenous-australia>

ⁱⁱ From the preamble to the UCA constitution, <https://assembly.uca.org.au/resources/covenanting/item/668-the-revised-preamble>